



accept the highest enlightenment. The Dharma-kara, points out that salvation is not just for himself. Jodo Shinshu, as the way to enlightenment must include others, or else there can be no meaning to the Vow.

Amida's Primal Vow does not discriminate between the young and old, good and evil, ... the rich and poor, Japanese and American, Black and White, gay and straight. ... if it doesn't include them ... there can be no meaning to Amida's salvation.

It is within Amida's Primal Vow we become aware of the intimate interconnectedness with others. To truly realize this interdependence, one can only manifest a profound sense of responsibility for our fellow human beings.

As a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist our goal is to awaken to this spiritual truth of interdependency and equality. If one truly awakens to the reality of Amida's Primal Vow, one cannot help but share the awareness and joy derived from the teachings.

In the Tannisho it is written that Shinran said, "All beings have been fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth and death. When I attain Buddhahood in the next birth, each and everyone will be saved." In other words we are all karmic bound, our lives our interconnected. Why then would we want to see our friends, relatives or neighbors whose sexual orientation is different, be mistreated and not be allowed the same rights that many of us enjoy?

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# Jodo Shinshu and Same Gender Marriage

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## *Amida's Primal Vow*

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the young and old, good  
and evil, ... the rich and poor,  
Japanese and American,  
Black and White,  
gay and straight.*

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*"If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma."*

Much of our social morals and ethical values are based on Judeo-Christian principles. Many of our beliefs that influence our opinion regarding social issues, such as abortion, stem cell research, euthanasia, evolution, global warming, racial equality and of course, sexual orientation have been determined by ancient scriptures that really do not address these issues realistically. Current issues have become much too complex to be addressed by simple black and white answers.

As Buddhists our primary concern is our own personal awakening to the spiritual truth of wisdom and compassion. In Buddhism we are taught that there are no black and white answers concerning ethical/moral issues that apply to everyone and to all situations. As Buddhists we are taught to think for ourselves and respond accordingly based upon our own spiritual insights. The teachings are not demagogic nor do they dictate what is ethically/morally right and wrong. Shakyamuni Buddha said that he himself was only a teacher ... simply someone who shows the way. He did not insist that he had any right to enforce on others what they should do.

A Buddhist does not discuss issues of right and wrong, nor should we be judgmental of others.

Buddha encouraged people to be reflective and find truth for themselves... even it meant disregarding the teachings. Shakyamuni Buddha said, "Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observations and analyses, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it".

Social issues that were accepted to be right and true for one generation, in time change. For example, not too long ago, racial discrimination was an accepted part of American society. When African-Americans and ethnic minorities and those sympathetic to their cause began to express opposition to discrimination, there was a great deal of resistance. It took many years for people's view to change. Yet now, racial social norms that were taken for granted only a few decades ago, such as the illegality of

inter-racial marriages or segregation, seem unacceptable today.

Within our teachings of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism there are no doctrinal grounds that exist that prohibits neutral-gender marriage. Within the Compassionate Light of Amida Buddha all beings are equally embraced.

The opening reading is the 18th Vow or the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha. The compassionate Vow of Amida Buddha refers to the story in the Larger Pure Land Sutra. Within the Pure Land tradition, as well as all Mahayana Buddhism, the Bodhisattva is the major symbol of compassion. It was out of compassion for all suffering beings that the Bodhisattva Dharmakara established the Forty-eight Vows and became Amida Buddha. Of the Forty-eight Vows the Eighteenth Vow became the most important to Pure Land Buddhists, since it promised Birth into Amida's Pure Land for those "sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves aspiring to be Born in my land and saying my Name perhaps even ten times".

However, many of us find it difficult to accept this cosmological story, which took place several kalpas ago. For myself, my understanding of the Dharmakara story is that it represents the deepest aspirations of the human heart that some day all of us will be free of suffering. Amida is a symbol of reality and points to our interdependence to all things and the need to share with others.

When the Dharmakara made his Vows he said: If, when he becomes Buddha, all beings do not experience the same realization, then he would not