



# The Answer

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## Q @ A for Shinshu Buddhists

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FOR QUESTIONS, COMMENTS OR CONTRIBUTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT: fukumotodsgn@earthlink.net or sensei@vhbt.org

This issue will cover a statement/question that was asked by Steven Sharp from Venice Hongwanji Buddisht Temple, in regards to the question, "What does a Change of Heart mean in Shin Buddhism?" See Vol. 1 Issue 4. I have asked Rev. John Iwohara to answer/comment on Steven's statement.

*Does the Amida influence our actions?*

[1] When faith in Amida has been awakened, we will realize that our life flows harmoniously with Amida, endlessly and timelessly. There occurs a change in our attitude towards all things. Rather than everything being centered around ourselves, our lives become centered around Amida. We become nothing and everything is in the Other Power ~ Amida's power. We realize that Amida is making us reflect. This is all higher consciousness, higher awareness changing our whole attitude towards life. Our former way of thinking that "I am doing," changes completely to the realization that "I am being allowed to do whatever it is that I am doing." Similarly, "I live" becomes "Amida makes me live."/"I think" becomes "Amida makes me think."/"I act" becomes "Amida makes me act."/"I speak" becomes "Amida makes me speak."

[2] As I have stated at the beginning, I have questions regarding some of the points made by the answer to this question. How can the Amida allow me to do anything? How does the Amida make me live, think, act, speak? Does this absolve me of responsibility for my actions because the Amida has deemed to control my actions? Further, if I am being "manipulated"

do I realize it or do I simply live my life normally? What do you think? As for me, sometimes I am not sure what to believe. What I believe surfaces in all of us is DOUBT.

[3] I'm not quite sure that Amida makes anyone do anything, though. I've always thought of Amida as being all knowing, but by no means all powerful. I don't think he can make me do anything, but I think that his teachings can influence my decisions.

I have been asked to comment on the above passage and comments received. [1] is the original answer quoted from the reference material for the question, "What does a Change of Heart mean in Shin Buddhism?" [2] is the original comment to the answer by Ray Fukumoto found in Vol. 1 Issue 4 and [3] is a comment/letter that was received by "The Answer." Although I agree that the original source material [1] overstates the case and unnecessarily makes us sound like automatons, and I'm not sure that "awakening faith" is the best way to describe what happens (this expression can, for example, suggest that faith is something that lies dormant in us), but a change in our attitude does, I believe, occur. Because there are two separate issues being discussed (one is on doubt, and the other on how the Vow may directly or indirectly control or influence one's life), I will focus on the latter and will wait to discuss the first topic of doubt at a different time assuming that there is interest.

Although in my understanding of Jodo Shinshu the negation of my "corrupt karma" (zaigo, akugo) is never as-

sumed, this corrupt karma is, at the same time, transcended because of the Primal Vow. In answering the question of whether or not Amida Buddha "makes me" do anything, however, let me quote a passage that might seem to answer the question in the affirmative. The passage can be found in the Chapter on Practice in the section where Shinran Shonin talks about the Six Character Name of Na Mo A Mi Da Butsu. He begins by stating that the first two characters Namo has the meaning of taking refuge (kimyo). He concludes by saying: "Thus, kimyo is the command of the Primal Vow calling to and summoning us" (CWS, p. 38, highlight added).

Later in the same chapter, however, Shinran Shonin helps us to understand the meaning of "command." This is taken from the section that introduces the Shoshin Nembutsu-ge. "The bodhisattva takes refuge in the Buddha, just as filial children obey their parents and loyal retainers follow their rulers, with their behavior not self-centered and their acts always according with reason. Since the bodhisattva is aware of the Buddha's benevolence and responds in gratitude to the Buddha's virtue, he naturally addresses the Buddha first. Moreover, Vasubandhu's aspiration is not undertaken lightly." (CWS, p. 68)

This behavior is not "self-centered" and is in accord with "reason." In other words, we follow because the Buddha's Vow is reliable. This is the same for filial children following their parents and loyal retainers following their rulers. They follow because the parent and

ruler is deemed reliable.

Although the Chapter on practice focuses on practice (and therefore emphasizes the activity of the Buddha to be reliable), having someone obey this command is necessary for the command to have any meaning. In other words, it also requires the response by those who experience the reliability of the Buddha. At this point, it becomes an issue of faith. As an article of faith, the "command" is found in our aspiration for birth in the Pure Land. Here, Shinran Shonin writes: "Finally, 'aspire for birth' is the command of the tathagata calling to and summoning the multitudes of beings. That is, true and real entrusting is the essence of aspiration for birth." (CWS, p. 103)

How does this translate to everyday life? Shinran Shonin in one of his letters writes: "In people who have long heard the Buddha's Name and said the nembutsu, surely there are signs of rejecting the evil of this world and signs of their desire to cast off the evil in themselves. When people first begin to hear the Buddha's Vow, they wonder, having become thoroughly aware of the karmic evil in their hearts and minds, how they will ever attain birth as they are. To such people we teach that since we are possessed of blind passions, the Buddha receives us without judging whether our hearts are good or bad.

When, upon hearing this, a person's trust in the Buddha grows deeper, he or she comes to abhor such a self and to lament continued existence in birth-and-death; and such a person then joyfully says the Name of Amida Buddha deeply entrusting himself to the Vow. That people seek to stop doing wrong as the heart moves them, although earlier they gave thought to such things and committed them as their minds dictated, is surely a sign of having rejected this world." (CWS, Pp. 553-554)

Although it is probably true that saying "I live" becomes "Amida makes me live."/"I think" becomes "Amida makes me think."/"I act" becomes "Amida makes me act."/"I speak" becomes "Amida makes me speak" is overstated; we are, nonetheless, moved by the truth. We are moved, transformed because of a new "world-view" that is

no longer centered on the self. Just as the ocean can be said to be made of drops of water, when we see the ocean is the drop of water still just a drop of water? Doesn't the ocean transform the drop of water into becoming the ocean? If, on the other hand, we wish to maintain the drop of water, can we really see the ocean?

I hope this provides insights into Steven's thoughts on this issue. If you would like to further explore this question, please send in your inquires.

*A question from Paul Roberts?*

Here is a question that was asked me by Paul Roberts, a friend in the Dharma and someone whom I respect a great deal. ([www.shinuglyblog.com/blog/?p=83](http://www.shinuglyblog.com/blog/?p=83))

Here is what he asked: I had questions about the message you were trying to send in the cartoons. I wasn't sure exactly what your point was in including them.

Not that they weren't clever. They reminded me of Ambrose Bierce's classic work, THE DEVIL'S DICTIONARY. If you never read it, it'd online, and you'll see what I mean. Like the cartoonist, Bierce used sarcasm to point to the foibles of the human condition by creating new definitions of common terms. And of course, a lot of his definitions revolve around religion and religious issues.

But this is a subtle and oblique way of making one's point. Many (most?) just won't get it, especially in context of the Dharma.

Answer: First I wanted to thank you

for this question. To be honest about it, I was not sure why I included the 2 attachments. I just "felt" that there was a good reason why I should include the two words "truth" and "deceit" as presented in the comic strip, and just did it. However since you asked, here is my answer. I feel that the words as illustrated in the comic strip provided entertainment and thought provoking statements into certain aspects of those 2 words. My hope was that the kids would read deeply into what the words could mean, and consider what those words would mean to different people and people of different faiths.

I was also trying to show that to hold to ones beliefs without disguise, and to simply accept ourselves as we are is the true path to happiness. I guess this is a circuitous way of saying that I think the comics show that we tend to bend the truth for our own conveniences, and that only when one trusts in the "TRUTH" as it is, will we be settled. I believe that this "TRUTH" is the Amida and the Amida is all that is needed.

*A Final Note:*

This week, I have lost 2 friends. Rev. Join Kihara and Mits Sakaniwa. Rev. Kihara was an inspiration for many in his passion and commitment to our Jodo Shinshu faith. Mits was a good friend who helped shape the JA sports scene in Los Angeles and a faithful supporter of the Los Angeles Betsuin. They will both be missed but never gone from our hearts. As they lived and though physically gone, they help guide us to the TRUTH that is Amida.

NAMO AMIDA BUTSU





