



The Answer

真如淨土



Q & A for Shinshu Buddhists

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The following excerpts are from "An Outline of Buddhism" (1954), a pamphlet written by Rev. Kenryu T. Tsuji while he was a minister of the Buddhist Churches of Canada. Rev. Tsuji went on to serve as Bishop of the Buddhist Churches of America and later as minister in residence at Ekoji in Virginia. I have capitalized and underlined the words that I have found particularly interesting. In the original text the words are not depicted as such.

What is Jodo Shinshu?

The literal translation of Jodo Shin Shu is the True Pure Land Religion. There are ten branches of which the two major ones are commonly called Nishi Hongwanji and Higashi Honganji. Their true names are Homba Hongwanji and Otaniha Hongwanji respectively. There are no marked doctrinal differences between these two branches; the difference is in their historical development. In the rituals there is a slight difference such as in the chanting of the sutras.

All the Buddhist churches in Canada and the majority of the Shin Shu churches in the United States formally belong to the Nishi or Homba Hongwanji branch but in practice, especially in Canada, no clear cut distinction is made because the membership includes those who originally belonged to the other branches of Shin Shu or other schools of Buddhism such as Zen and Shingon. Though the membership of the first generation Japanese is inter-denominational in these churches, the teachings of Shinran occupy the most important place.

1. Life of Shinran
Shinran Shonin (Shonin means holy

man) was born at Hino near Kyoto, Japan, on May 21st, 1173.

He lost his father when he was four and later at the age of nine, he lost his mother. These two tragic experiences had a great influence on the mind of the boy and he decided to enter the priesthood. He entered a monastery and studied under the guidance of Jichin, chief abbot of that monastery. Nearly a year later he went to Hieizan or Mount Hiei, center of Buddhist learning at that time.

For twenty years he studied there. His high moral qualities and excellent scholastic record were so outstanding that he could have easily been appointed to the head of all the temples on Hiei. However, he declined the position for he was not in search of fame or position. He was earnestly searching for spiritual insight.

This he was able to gain after giving up his studies on Mount Hiei and after entering the monastery of Honen, who was teaching a way of SALVATION THROUGH FAITH IN THE POWER OF AMIDA BUDDHA. Shinran's life, thereafter, became a calm and peaceful life regardless of his conditions. He constantly recited the Nembutsu – Namu Amida Butsu – as an expression of deep gratitude for the Compassionate Heart of Amida.

Shinran Shonin realized that here was a teaching that enabled the ordinary man to lead a true Buddhist life without shutting himself up in a monastery. Acting on the advice of Honen, Shinran married Princess Tamahi.

The Buddhist priesthood was in an

uproar. Here was a priest who taught salvation in the power of Amida, which was contrary to the recognized religious traditions of the day – salvation through moral and mental discipline. Furthermore, he had violated the priestly code by taking upon himself a wife.

Both Shinran and Honen were banished from Kyoto.

After many years in exile, Shinran finally settled at Inada, Hitachi Province, in 1217. Here at the age of 45, he wrote his most famous work, "Kyo Gyo Shin Sho" – Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment. This book, considered the most important of Shinran's writing, laid the doctrinal foundation of Jodo Shin Shu.

He spent twenty-five years of his life in the provincial countries. In 1232 when he was 60, he turned his footsteps to Kyoto, arriving there in 1235.

Here he remained until his passing on January 16th, 1262, writing and preaching to the countless followers who came to hear the Teachings of the Nembutsu.

2. Sacred Scriptures

Larger Sukhavati Vyuha Sutra – (Sutra of Infinite Life) (Daimuryoju kyo) 2 volumes.

In this sutra is recorded the discourses delivered by Shakyamuni at the Mount of Holy Vulture in Rajagrha.

Shakyamuni speaks of Hozo Bosatsu (Bodhisattva Dharmakara) who makes 48 vows, all of them for the benefit of all sentient beings. For a countless num-

ber of years, Hozo Bosatsu meditates and works for a realization (sic) of a Buddha Land perfect in every sense, where all beings can be reborn. He becomes Amida Buddha – the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life .

Amitayur Dhyana Sutra (Kanmuryoju kyo) 1 volume.

The Buddha teaches to Queen Vaidehi, who is thrown in jail by her own son. Shakyamuni teaches that for those in the depths of suffering and sorrow, only Faith in the Compassion of Amida can save her. While the Larger Sukhavati Vyuhā Sutra teaches the ideal of rebirth into the Pure Land through Faith, the Amitayur Dhyana Sutra shows a practical application of that ideal by an individual, Queen Vaidehi, who finds salvation through Faith.

Smaller Sukhavati Vyuhā Sutra (Amida Kyo) 1 volume.

This sutra is a summary of the larger sutra. It speaks of the indescribable beauty of the Pure Land and extols the virtues of Amida.

3. The Religious Significance of Hozo Bosatsu and the Forty-Eight Vows

As stated above the Larger Sukhavati Vyuhā Sutra tells the story of Hozo Bosatsu who made 48 vows and meditated and worked for countless years to fulfill all the vows. OF THE 48 VOWS, THE EIGHTEENTH VOW IS MOST IMPORTANT FOR IT IS IN THIS VOW THAT HOZO BOSATSU ASPIRES FOR THE UNIVERSAL SALVATION OF BEINGS. It reads, "Upon my attainment of Buddhahood, if sentient beings in the ten quarters, who have sincerity of heart, hold faith, and wish to be born in my land, repeating My Name perhaps up to ten times, would not be born therein, then may I not obtain the Great Enlightenment." Upon the fulfillment of all the 48 vows, Hozo Bosatsu became Amida Buddha.

Amida Buddha is a manifestation of the Truth of Universe in human form while His vows, especially the eighteenth, are an active merciful and loving expression of His Great Compassion.

4. Primal Vow and Nembutsu

The main object of all sentient beings is "Ten mei kai go" which means to turn

from illusion and attain Enlightenment. All Buddhist schools of thought embrace this same goal of Enlightenment but differ in their method of attainment. In the SCHOOLS THAT EMPHASIZE MEDITATION MAN MUST MEDITATE AND PURIFY HIS MIND UNTIL IT BECOMES PURE AS THE MIND OF THE BUDDHA. In the SCHOOL THAT CONSIDERS PRACTICE AND GOOD WORKS TO BE THE PRIMARY TASK, MAN MUST ACCUMULATE MERITS THROUGH GOOD DEEDS AND BRING THEM TO PERFECTION. In both of these methods MAN MUST INCREASE HIS STOCK OF MERITS BY HIS OWN POWER UNTIL HE REACHES BUDDHAHOOD.

The PRIMAL VOW OF AMIDA, on the other hand, is primarily concerned not with those who have the capacity to meditate and practice but with (FOR) THOSE WHOSE ABILITIES ARE SO FINITE AND WEAK THAT THEY CAN NEVER HOPE TO ATTAIN BUDDHAHOOD. It was just for such beings that Amida, realizing the sad plight of man, made the forty-eight vows and especially the all compassionate eighteenth or Primal Vow. However, HIS MEDITATION AND PRACTICE WOULD HAVE BEEN INDEED FUTILE IF THE GOODNESS, resulting from His compassionate work, DID NOT SOMEHOW REACH THE HEARTS OF ALL SENTIENT BEINGS. AMIDA, THEREFORE, PUT THE ENTIRE RESULTS OF HIS LABOR OF LOVE INTO THE SACRED NAME – NAMU AMIDA BUTSU. Thus, this Nembutsu is the embodiment of purity, truth, goodness, beauty, wisdom and peace; in other words it embodies all the highest values and qualities both conceivable and inconceivable, which Amida was able to perfect in His infinitely long period of meditation and practice.

To communicate with all sentient beings He grants this Name as a gift to all sentient beings, freely and equally. SENTIENT BEINGS IN EVERY CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE HEAR HIS NAME AND ACCEPT IT WITH A SIMPLE, TRUSTING HEART – THE HEART OF FAITH. Amida's heart and the hearts of all beings become one and identified. THIS FACT IS THE TRUE ASSURANCE OF OUR SALVATION AND REBIRTH INTO THE PURE LAND OR OJODO.

Why is it that a man who has Faith does not become enlightened in this life? The answer lies in the nature of man. He is still in his earthly body, subject to physical and mental limitations. So long as he is a relative and imperfect being, he can never become an absolute Buddha, perfect in every respect. It is, therefore, that the assurance of Buddhahood is given in this life and the actual attainment of Buddhahood is realized in the Pure Land. In the Creed we read, "We rely upon Amida Buddha with our whole heart for the Enlightenment in the life to come".

THE RECITATION OF THE NEMBUTSU – NAMU AMIDA BUTSU (I PLACE MY FAITH IN AMIDA BUDDHA) IS AN OUTWARD VERBAL EXPRESSION OF THANKSGIVING AND GRATITUDE FOR SALVATION ASSURED. This thanksgiving and gratitude for Amida's Compassion becomes a vital spiritual force in the lives of all who follow the Nembutsu.

5. Jiriki and Tariki

Jiriki means self-power and Tariki means Other Power. While Jiriki is the finite power of man, Tariki is the infinite Power of Amida's Compassion and Wisdom.

SALVATION IN JODO SHINSHU IS THROUGH THE GRACE OF AMIDA BUDDHA; THUS IT IS KNOWN AS "SALVATION THROUGH ABSOLUTE OTHER POWER."

A Final Thought on Near Death Experiences.

I read this account of a near death experience and I just had to share it. His thoughts paralleled mine when I almost died in a car accident in 1993 and a motorcycle accident in 1969. Even though our thoughts were different, the spirit of the incident seemed very similar. My cognizant thought in my second encounter with a near death, was, "Oh, xxxx! I am going to die!" in the next instant it was over. In my first encounter with death (age 24), as I was flying through the air as I separated from my motorcycle, was only to marvel at the way I was somersaulting through the air, with no thoughts of death. I survived each with minimal injury. "TRUTH AS SUCH." Send questions, take care.

NAMO AMIDA BUTSU

Parachutist releases video of near-death fall



Tue Feb 13, 9:05 AM ET

A New Zealand parachutist who survived a fall of 15,000 feet after his chute failed to open has released amazing footage of his near-death plummet filmed by a camera attached to his helmet.

"Everyone says your life flashes before you eyes but for me...it didn't really happen," Michael Holmes told British television station ITN in an interview accompanying his video.

"I was just frustrated that this was the way I was gonna die and that was it," he said.

Holmes, 25, made headlines around the world after surviving the fall during a routine jump over New Zealand's Lake Taupo on December 13, 2006. A camera attached to his helmet captured his plummet, which was aired in New Zealand on Monday.

At 4,000 feet Holmes discovered his main parachute would not open. The reserve also did not work properly.

Holmes' camera shows him checking his altitude meter as he struggles to turn over onto his back to see what the problem is.

In the final seconds of his fall, Holmes waves goodbye and yells "bye," before the chilling image of his shadow growing larger beneath him fills the screen. The screen then goes black.

A thorn bush broke Holmes' fall.

A second camera attached to a fellow parachutist also captured the fall and what happened after Holmes landed. It shows Holmes, looking like a ragdoll spinning wildly, plummeting toward the lake.

When parachutist Jonathan King located Holmes, conscious and breathing, in the bush, he could be heard frantically asked him: "You ok?"

"No," Holmes answers.

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