



The Answer
 善 巧 答 案
 Q & A for Shinshu Buddhists



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

In this issue I will continue with basic information from various sources. I will quote the source with each question or questions asked and answered.

How are we born into Pure Land?

In order to be born in the Pure Land, people should indeed make the necessary vow and carry out the practice themselves.

However, Bodhisattva Dharmakara has made the Vow and carried out the Practice for us. The effect he has achieved is made available to us. This is beyond the law of cause-and-effect in the worldly as well as the supra mundane sense. Shan-tao praised Amida's Vow as, an extraordinary Universal Vow.

Amida has fulfilled the Vow and Practice in place of all beings, wishing to save, first of all, those sinking in the ocean of birth-and-death and then to extend salvation to the virtuous. He resolved that if a single sentient being escaped salvation his compassionate Vow would not be fulfilled. When he fulfilled the Vow and Practice for the sake of each and every sentient being, his Enlightenment was accomplished and the birth of ordinary people in the Pure Land was achieved. In the Vow, Amida declared that he would not enter Enlightenment if there was any point in space where his wonderful Name was not heard. We do hear the Name, Amida, and so we should realize that our birth in the Pure Land has already been achieved.

In this case, 'TO HEAR' DOES NOT MEAN LISTENING TO THE NAME INATTENTIVELY. IT MEANS HARBOURING NO DOUBTS AS WE HEAR THE

WONDERFUL WORKING OF OTHER-POWER IN THE ORIGINAL VOW.

In hearing the Name, the power to hear it has been achieved by virtue of the Original Vow. It is entirely due to Other-Power. Even if Amida has accomplished our birth in the Pure Land, how could we realize it without hearing the Name which has been revealed by the fulfillment of the Vow? Suppose someone hears Amida's Name and worships a representation of him but does not realize that the Name signifies his accomplishment of our birth in the Pure Land and does not take the representation to be the embodiment of Enlightenment. This Enlightenment the Bodhisattva Dharmakara attained by fulfilling the Vow that he would not attain Enlightenment unless all living beings were ferried to the Pure Land. Then such a person neither truly hears the Name nor truly worships Amida.

Excerpt from ANJIN KETSUJO SHO/ On the Attainment of True Faith. [author unknown - 13-14th Century, Japan] Translated by Eizo TANAKA. I feel that the use of "worship" is not a word I would use. I feel that "revere" or "true entrustment of" would be better.

Can you explain Other-Power vs. Self-Power?

Other-power and Self-power: A Parable

There is a parable of the sun to distinguish Other-Power from self-power: to seek birth in the Pure Land with self-power is like trying to see things in the dark with our own eyes. This is clearly an impossibility. Our eyes catch the sunlight, and see the objects which are reflected in it. This is due to the power of the sun. However, even if there is

sunlight, which is the 'cause' of the act of seeing, those who were born blind cannot see objects. Again, even if our eyes, which act as a 'condition' for seeing things, are not blind, we cannot see objects in the dark. Only when the 'cause' which is the sun and the 'condition' which is the eyes are united, does the act of seeing become possible.

In the same way, our Pure Land birth, which is a matter of the greatest importance, comes about when we receive the merit of the Original Vow with the thought of taking refuge in Amida. The mind-and-heart of taking refuge in Amida is like the eyes, and the embracing Light (of Amida's compassion) is like the sun. 'Namu' is to take refuge, and is like the eyes; 'Amida Butsu', the Enlightenment-body in which the Universal Vow of Other-Power is accomplished, is like the sun. Therefore, as far as receiving the merit of the Original Vow goes, when those who have a stock of merit from previous lives' take refuge, ('Namu'), in Amida and say 'Amida Butsu' all the merit of thousands of practices and good acts as numerous as the sand-grains of the River Ganges are fulfilled in them at the first utterance of that six-character Name (na-mu-a-mi-da-but-su).

For this reason, we should not seek any other merit of goodness.

Excerpt from ANJIN KETSUJO SHO/On the Attainment of True Faith, as translated by Eizo TANAKA, published in the BOSTON SHINSHU NEWS, Volume 1, Number 3 – Autumn 1998.

A Slice in Time, a Personal Note, Obon 1997:

The Many Faces of Obon: U.S. Style. 1

Today is 28 May 1997, 9:30 A.M. in South San Gabriel, California. My name is Ray Fukumoto and a member of the Los Angeles Homba Hongwanji Betsuin. About 2 or 3 weeks ago, Rev. Nobuo Miyaji asked me to write a short piece on Obon in America. After Rev. Miyaji explained to me what was expected in the article, I agreed. I immediately thought about it, explored an approach and even discussed it with my Dharma School Class (I teach the 11th grade through College) but as usual I ended up procrastinating. Rev. Miyaji called me this morning and reminded me that he needed very soon. So, as you can see I am writing it right now.

It is interesting that in the United States, at least where we live, most of us Japanese-American Jodo Shinshu Buddhists do not think of Obon as a religious holiday. For one, we do not get a day off for Obon and if asked most could not give an explanation why we observe Obon. The only thing we associate with Obon, in the religious sense, is that it is always held at the Temple, and that they have Obon services commemorating the members and friends that have passed away.

We do not view Obon as a singular event, but rather a season spanning

from late June through mid August. Because of the many temples in the Southern District of BCA, the Temples schedule their Obon festivals to minimize impact with each other. I mention this because to me the Obon season has become one not of religious observation, but one based on fund raising and money making (out of necessity).

The many faces of Obon can be summed up by using our senses. The smell of Chicken Teriyaki (The Fubokai has the best in Southern District) wafting through the air means work, virtually non stop work from Friday afternoon of our Obon weekend to late Sunday night. For others it may be a food booth, game booth or a plant sale or a cultural exhibition. This translates in to a lot of work. Many of us see Obon only in terms of work and not of joy. The good side of this work is that we buy the food and are able to remember Obon through our taste. The taste can be your favorite udon, sushi, snow cones, beef teriyaki, hot dogs or chili. Truly a wonderful time to eat, a wonderful way to experience Obon.

The sounds of the Taiko or Bon Odori music, children laughing the clatter of getas are for me the joyous parts of Obon. People are attracted to these sounds because of the fun and joy they

represent. A time to express your feelings of belonging to the Sangha and of happiness. Along with these sounds are the sights of Obon, with everyone dressed up in yukatas, happis, getas or just as you are. To see the dances and performances are all the things we associate with Obon. This is especially true if you are visiting another Temple's Obon festivities, because there you can simply enjoy, with no work.

All these things are what Obon is to many of us. Fund raising has become a way of life for all the Temples, unfortunately, superceding the religious aspects of Obon. The dancing, smells, sights and sounds have seem to have become ancillary activities to raising money. As terrible as that sounds, Obon is also a time when we are working or dance practicing together fostering a closeness and friendship with the Temple Sangha and the Buddha-Dharma. It is during these times that I am most mindful of the Onembutsu and grateful for being able to participate in the Temple activities with my family and friends. One day I hope we will be able to observe Obon only as a religious activity, but until that time I am happy just to participate as a member of the Los Angeles Homba Hongwanji Betsuin.

Written for MIDO SAN magazine (for Rev. Kadono in Osaka, Japan), Summer 1997.

As you can see with the passage of time and learning, our understanding can and will change, but what I wrote then was not bad.

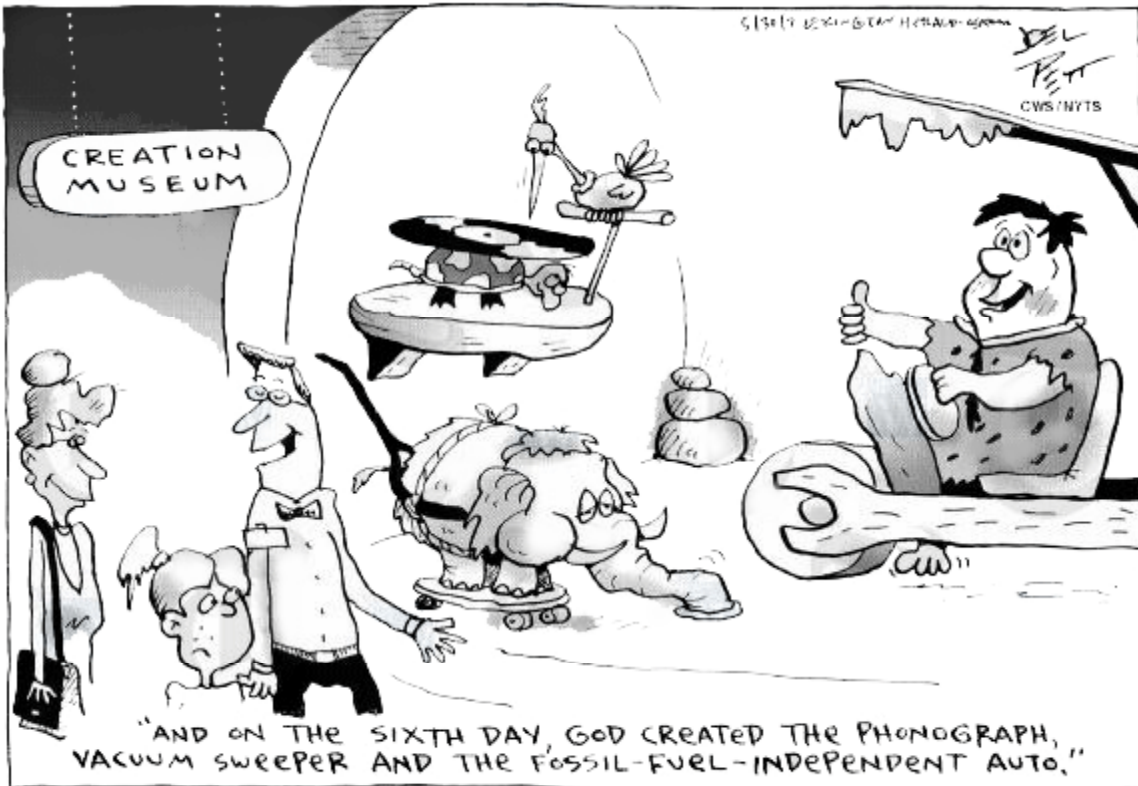
Another Cartoon Editorial!

I saw this in the newspaper and I just could not resist sharing with everyone.

I am still waiting for questions, and have a great Summer Vacation.

Namo Amida Butsu

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