



and seriously then internalize this information to be transformed, I think not. I believe we need to share and question, because only then are we able to understand the true meaning of the Nembutsu as taught by Shinran Shonin.

*Can you Compare Jodo Shinshu and Christianity?*

## JODO-SHINSHU TEACHINGS AS COMPARED TO CHRISTIANITY

**Human Nature:** Christians regard humans as deeply sinful (original sin and acquired sin) while Jodo-Shinshu regard humans as foolish (bambu). Both religions see human nature as self-centered, and assert that almost all people are unable to change their nature fundamentally through their own efforts.

**The Ultimate:** In Christianity God is ultimate, while it is Amida Buddha in Jodo-Shinshu. Both God and Amida represent spiritual power that lies outside our human capabilities. Both also have qualities that are diametrically opposed to the "sinful" Christians and "foolish" Jodo-Shinshu Buddhists.

God is the all powerful supernatural being who is the Maker, Lord and Father. Amida has none of the same characteristics, but is the "spiritual power" that we experience as understanding and caring in our lives.

Both teachings find humans to be incapable of realizing their spiritual goal by pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps. Because of our sinful or foolish nature respectively, nothing we do can liberate us. So, no works or disciplines are required. Instead, our spiritual resolution relies on power beyond the self: God's grace in Christianity and the Other Power in Jodo-Shinshu.

**Human Imperfection:** Christian sin implies a failure to keep one's promise with God by not living in accordance with his will. The focus is on one's relationship to God. In contrast, foolishness (bambu) in Jodo Shinshu stems from being awakened by the Buddha's wisdom. The focus is the realization of one's inability to overcome one's self-centered attachments through one's own power. So, they differ in the reasons why humans are believed to be imperfect.

There is a subtle difference in the way

we relate to the transcendent spiritual source. Christians maintain an ongoing personal relationship with God who exists independently from humans and the world. This relationship is maintained largely through prayers, sacraments and contemplation. In contrast, Jodo-Shinshu Buddhists do not regard Amida as a divine being with whom they maintain an ongoing relationship. They realize their essential oneness with Amida in their oral recitation, for Amida is none other than the Name, "Namo Amida Butsu"

This article is also found at this web address: <http://nembutsu.blogspot.com/>  
*An Interesting Perspective of Faith & Practice, Nien Fo.*

(Dharmavidya, inspired by Honen Shonin's Ichimai Kishomon)

For those with the karmic affinity with Amitabha Buddha, wishing to practice a religious life in truly simple faith, freeing themselves of sophistication and attachment to all forms of cleverness, the method of opening oneself to Amitabha's grace is the practice of Nien Fo with body, speech and mind, particularly verbal recitation of "Namo Amida Bu". This is not something done as a form of meditation, nor is it based on study, understanding and wisdom, or the revelation of deep meaning. Deep meaning is indeed there for the nembutsu is a window through which the whole universe of Buddha's teaching can be perceived in all its depth, but none of this is either necessary or even helpful to success in the practice. Rather such study cultivates secondary faculties to be held separate from the mind of practice itself.

The primary practice requires only one essential; realise that you are a totally foolish being who understands nothing, but who can with complete trust recite "Namo Amida Bu"; know that this will generate re-birth in the Pure land, without even knowing what rebirth in the Pure Land truly is. This is the practice for ignorant beings and ignorance is essential for its accomplishment. This practice automatically encompasses the three minds and the mind of contrition as a fourth. To pursue something more profound or more sophisticated, or to have a theory, or to think that understanding will yield greater enlightenment than this

is to be misled and to fall back into self-power whereby the whole practice is spoiled. However wise, learned or skilled you may be, set it aside and be the foolish being completely in the performance of the practice. Nothing else is required and anything else is too much. Faith and practice cannot be differentiated.

The Buddha-body is delineated by the precepts. How deficient we are in comparison! By our daily difficulty in the preceptual life, we awaken to the presence of the myriad karmic obstacles without which we would already perceive the land of love and bliss, we would be as the vow-body of Buddha. Thus we know in experience that we are foolish beings of wayward passion. This knowledge of our condition is part of the essential basis when it gives rise to contrition. Thus all obstacles become impediments to faith unless we experience contrition and letting go. Saving grace, as was made clear by Shan Tao's dream and advice to Tao Cho, only comes through the sange-mon.

If you can perform the practice in this simple minded way, Amida will receive you and you may fear for nothing since all is completely assured. Dwelling in this settled faith you may then use your secondary faculties, your knowledge and skills and accumulated experience, as tools for helping all sentient beings. But do not then think that anything of relevance to your own salvation is thereby accomplished, nor that you are making something of yourself. Whatever merit there may be in your actions of this kind, immediately and totally dedicate it to the benefit of others, that they may enter the Pure Land and that you yourself may not be encumbered by consciousness of virtue which will only contaminate the practice. As Honen says, "without pedantic airs, fervently recite the Name."

This article is found at this web address, 16 November 2005: <http://nembutsu.blogspot.com/liturg/>

*A Final Note:*

I have been busy with many things but still wanted to get a meaningful issue out. I hope this issue generates questions and with the end of Summer focus on the start of Dharma School. Take good care. NAMO AMIDA BUTSU