



# The Answer

真如法界



## Q @ A for Shinshu Buddhists

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Since the previous issue was so long, I decided to add excerpts from a book printed in the 1980's, titled "Well, Almost Everything You Always Wanted to know About Jodo-Shinshu." It was written by the ministers from the LA Betsuin (Nishi), Rimban Mohri, the Revs. Umezumi, Hamada, Oda and Rev. Masao Kodani from Senshin. The S.D.D.S.T.L., under special projects, sponsored the publication of the book.

### *Can Science Replace Religion?*

Some people believe that if science continues to advance, there will be no need for religion. They look with wonder at the progress of science and technology, and feel that the time will come when everything will be capable of being understood in scientific terms. Such people find it easy to conclude that since even the finest instruments are unable to detect it, there cannot be a Buddha or a world of reality—the Pure Land.

This point of view can quickly be shown to be false. Those who believe that science can explain everything still have the problems of stubborn parents, disobedient children, or that they do not enjoy their work. Science will not help our indignation when we hear about things such things as *apartheid* or the inhumanity of the atomic bomb. All these problems are outside the area of science.

It is possible for science and religion to encroach on the sphere of the other. Vladimir Horowitz may be the world's greatest pianist and Hulk Hogan, the greatest wrestler. They are both in the same entertainment business, but it

would be meaningless to put them in competition to determine to determine who is greater.

Our lives are based on religious consciousness—the world of the heart. Have you ever been tormented by the law of gravity or the law that governs the refraction of light? Suffering arises because our joy and anger, our grief and pleasure, have no connection with science. A true scientist is very much aware of this.

*A scientist who believes science is all there is, is not a first-rate scientist.*

Hideaki Yukawa  
(Nobel prize winner in physics)

It is correct to say that something does not exist simply because it cannot be seen with our eyes and cannot be measured with the most precise instruments? Can we say that love does not exist because it cannot be measured?

Absolutely not.

When love is present, it results in actions that can be seen, and moves those who see those actions.

The Buddha, the Buddha's desire (his vow to cause our birth in the Pure Land) and the Buddha's world (the Pure Land) cannot be seen with human eyes, but they exist. They exist in my heart. They are expressed in my "faith" that moves me, and this cannot be seen, but have great influence.

The characters in children's cartoons on television make use of the most advanced sort of technology. A rocket ship is as commonplace a device as an automobile is today. Every convenience is available by merely pushing a button.

But the most-used devices in these cartoons are atomic-ray guns to fight super-human monsters and other enemies.

In these cartoons with their far-out characters, good is clearly pitted against evil. They symbolically demonstrate that even in the most scientifically-advanced society we can conceive, hostility, injustice, anxiety and all the problems that confront us today will still be with us. If anything, they will be magnified because of technological advances; rather than a pistol bullet, an atomic explosion. The fact that we will be dead in either case is small consolation.

This is indeed something we must all ponder.

### *What is meant by, therefore "Faith" is required?*

"It is quite possible to live without faith. I am proof of that. I live a life which no one can point an accusing finger at. This being the case why do I have to have faith?"

That's a good question. A good question deserves a good answer. However, rather than a crushing logical refutation to this question, the Buddha told a simple easy-to-understand story:

*Once there was a hawk. During the fall months it captured insects and frogs, and hid them in preparation for winter. Since this hawk was not very intelligent, it used a cloud as a landmark to locate the hiding place. "If I come to this tree located under that round-shaped cloud," it thought, "I will be able to find my store of food for the winter."*

*When winter came, the hawk went looking for the cloud under which it thought,*

its store was located. Since clouds do not stay in one place, the hawk could not find its store and went hungry."

Do you understand what the Buddha meant with the story?

His point was that our life will be a failure if we base it on something that is impermanent.

But it seems as if everything we rely on in life is impermanent and changes:

- Our Physical Body-it becomes ill and injured. It becomes old and senile.
- Our Wealth-it may increase, but it may also decrease.
- Our Family-unfortunately the members of a family collectively suffer the same fate as our bodies individually.

### *What is the heart of the Buddha?*

In Jodo Shinshu, the only Buddha we have "faith" in and worship, is Amida, "the Buddha of limitless wisdom and compassion."

When we are bathed in the light of limitless wisdom, the state or condition of our heart described in the previous section becomes clear, which really means that Amida Buddha's compassionate rays are shining on us now.

If the blind fish of Carlsbad Caverns were exposed to light for as long as they have been deprived of it, their atrophied eyes would begin to function again. Similarly, only through continuous exposure to the light of limitless wisdom will the atrophied eyes of our heart begin to see.

When Amida Buddha calls us, he does so by name. The name he calls us by, is "evil and ignorant being full of base desires." He cannot call us using the term "good person."

We will never understand Amida Bud-

dha's teaching unless we say, "That's me he is referring to!" in response to Amida Buddha's calling. Otherwise, we will think he is referring to someone else, and his teaching will pass over our heads. But our egotistically-colored glasses make it difficult for us to accept this form of reference to ourselves. We will discuss what it means to be "evil" in the next section.

"True. That is what I am like." *Shinjin* (the "mind of faith or "the true mind") is nodding our head in agreement to Amida Buddha's calling. When we hear the truth of Amida Buddha's call, it is natural for us to let it act in our life. We are then relieved of making any effort to bring about our own enlightenment, resulting in "peace of mind" (*anjin*), the highest level of attainment for us followers of Jodo Shinshu.

The term "mind of faith" is often misunderstood. We may resolve, "All right, I will have faith," and feel that making this effort will result in "the mind of faith." But this sort of "faith" is only a hardening of our ego, and is just another name for perverseness.

Since it was an unenlightened person (*bombu*) who made the resolve to "have faith," that "faith" can be broken very easily. Then we say, "I went out of my way to have faith, but nothing happened." Or we may have faith that borders on madness, in that it flies in the face of reason.

"Faith" in the Nembutsu is not like "faith" which is a hardening of the ego. Rather, it is a breaking down of the ego by the strength of wisdom that is limitless, and a path that we follow to continually grow. That is why, although Shinran Shonin used the character "faith" (*shin*), he indicated that it was to be read, "true mind"

(*makoto no kokoro*).

Here, let us introduce a man who met Amida Buddha's Primal Vow in a dramatic way.

Genza Ashikaga lived in the village of Aoya in Tottori Prefecture in Japan. One summer morning when he was 30 years of age, Genza led his horse to gather grass in the mountain. After gathering and bundling the grass, while loading on the horse's back the grass he could not carry on his own back, Genza's heart was suddenly struck open.

In his own words, "Suddenly, I was led to understand."

What was it that Genza was led to understand?

The grass he gathered is his karma, and that karma is too heavy for Genza to carry alone. But the horse (Amida Buddha) is more than willing to carry that which Genza is unable to carry. The horse eats the grass it carries on its back and becomes a horse; Amida Buddha carries Genza's karma, and consuming it, becomes Amida Buddha.

Genza's view of the world changed completely. From that moment until his death in the late 1920's at the age of 88, he lived a full life. He survived two fires on his home, the insanity and subsequent death of a child, yet he was never discouraged and was always helping his neighbors.

### *A final Thought?*

In the Spirit of the Holidays, greet all with Merry Christmas or Season's Greetings, which ever you prefer. Just share your Joy of our Shinshu teachings and that I believe is the greatest gift giving we can give and an expression of our Shinshu Gratitude. **NAMO AMIDA BUTSU**

