



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 present thoughts and excerpts from: *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist* - by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, [1957, copyright not renewed]. This is a study of Buddhist mysticism, contrasted and compared with Christian mysticism, particularly the writings of Meister Eckhart. Suzuki explores Buddhist and Christian concepts of infinity, eternity and the transmigration of souls. For further reading of this book, visit: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/mcb/index.htm>

What is the ultimate goal of the teaching of the Pure Land Buddhism?

THE ULTIMATE goal of the teaching of the Pure Land is to understand the meaning of "Nembutsu," whereby its followers will be admitted into the Pure Land. In the Nembutsu, contradictions dissolve and are reconciled in "the steadfastness of faith."

Nembutsu literally means "to think of Buddha." Nen (nien in Chinese and smriti in Sanskrit) is "to keep in memory." In Shin however it is more than a mere remembering of Buddha, it is thinking his Name, holding it in mind. The Name consists of six characters or syllables: *na-mu-a-mi-da-buts(u)* in Japanese pronunciation and *nan-wu-o-mi-to-fo* in Chinese. In actuality, the Name contains more than Buddha's name, for *Namu* is added to it. *Namu* is *namas* (or *namo*) in Sanskrit and means "adoration" or "salutation." The Name therefore is "Adoration for Amida Buddha," and this is made to stand for Amida's "Name."

The interpretation the Shin people give to the "Namu-amida-butsu" is more than literal though not at all mystical or esoteric.

It is in fact philosophical. When Amida is regarded as the object of adoration, he is separated from the devotee standing all by himself. But when *Namu* is added to the Name the whole thing acquires a new meaning because it now symbolizes the unification of Amida and the devotee, wherein the duality no longer exists. This however does not indicate that the devotee is lost or absorbed in Amida so that his individuality is no longer tenable as such. The unity is there as "Namu" plus "Amidabutsu," but the *Namu* (ki) has not vanished. It is there as if it were not there. This ambivalence is the mystery of the Nembutsu. In Shin terms it is the oneness of the ki and the ho, and the mystery is called the incomprehensibility of Buddha-wisdom (Buddhajñā). The Shin teachings revolve around this axis of incomprehensibility (*fushigi* in Japanese, *acintya* in Sanskrit).

Now we see that the Nembutsu, or the Myogo, or the "Namu-amida-butsu" is at the center of the Shin faith. When this is experienced, the devotee has the "steadfastness of faith," even before he is in actuality ushered into the Pure Land. For the Pure Land is no more an event after death, it is right in this *sahalokadhatu*, the world of particulars. According to Saichi, he goes to the Pure Land as if it were the next-door house and comes back at his pleasure to his own.

*I am a happy man, indeed!
I visit the Pure Land as often as I like:
I'm there and I'm back,
I'm there and I'm back,
I'm there and I'm back,
"Namu-amida-butsu! Namu-amida-butsu!"*

When Saichi is in the Pure Land, "there" stands for this world; and when he is in

this world, "there" is the Pure Land; he is back and forth between here and there. The fact is that he sees no distinction between the two. Often he goes further than this:

*How happy I am!
"Namu-amida-butsu!"
I am the Land of Bliss,
I am Oya-sama.
"Namu-amida-butsu! Namu-amida-butsu!"*

*Shining in glory is Buddha's Pure Land,
And this is my Pure Land!
"Namu-amida-butsu! Namu-amida-butsu!"*

*O Saichi, where is your Land of Bliss?
My Land of Bliss is right here.
Where is the line of division
Between this world and the Land of Bliss?
The eye is the line of division.*

To Saichi "Oya-sama" or "Oya" not only means Amida himself but frequently personifies the "Namu-amida-butsu." To him, sometimes, these three are the same thing: Amida as Oya-sama, the My g ("Namu-amida-butsu"), and Saichi.

*When I worship thee, O Buddha,
This is a Buddha worshipping another Buddha.
And it is thou who makest this fact known to me, O Buddha!
For this favor Saichi is most grateful.*

When we go through these lines endlessly flowing out of Saichi's inner experiences of the "Namu-amida-butsu" as the symbol of the oneness of the ki and the ho, we feel something infinitely alluring in the life of this simple-minded geta-maker in the remote parts of the Far Eastern country. Eckhart is tremendous, Zen is almost unapproachable, but Saichi is so homely that one feels like visiting his

workshop and watching those shavings drop off the block of wood.

*O Saichi, what makes you work?
I work by the "Namu-amida-butsu."
"Namu-amida-butsu! Namu-amida-butsu!"*

*How grateful I feel!
Everything I do in this world-
My daily work for livelihood-
This is all transferred into building up the
Pure Land.*

*I work in this world in company with all
Buddhas,
I work in this world in company with all
Bodhisattvas;
Protected by Oya-sama I am here;
I know many who have preceded me
along this path.
I am sporting in the midst of the Namu-
amida-butsu.
How happy I am with the favor!
"Namu-amida-butsu!"*

To see Saichi work in the company of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who fill up the whole universe must be a most wonderfully inspiring sight. A scene transferred from the Pure Land! Compared with this, Eckhart appears to be still harboring something of this-worldliness. In Saichi all things come out of the mystery of the "Namu-amida-butsu" in which there is no distinction between "rapturous moments" and "love for one's neighbors."

There is another aspect in Saichi's life which makes him come close to that of a Zen-man. For he sometimes rises above the "Namu-amida-butsu," above the oneness of the ki and ho, above the ambivalence of wretchedness and gratefulness, of misery and joy. He is "indifferent," "nonchalant," "detached," or "disinterested" as if he came directly out of his "is-ness" in all nakedness, in the "sono-mama-ness" of things.

*Perfectly indifferent I am!
No joy, no gratefulness!
Yet no grief over the absence of gratefulness.*

*"O Saichi, such as you are,
Are you grateful to Amida?"
"No particular feelings I have,
However much I listen [to the sermons];
And this for no reason."*

At all events, Saichi was one of the deepest Shin followers, one who really experienced the mystery of the oneness of the

ki and ho as symbolized in the "Namu-amida-butsu." He lived it every moment of his life, beyond all logical absurdities and semantic impossibilities.

*O Saichi, I am the most fortunate person!
I am altogether free from woes of all kind,
Not at all troubled with anything of the
world.
Nor do I even recite the "Namu-amida-
butsu!"
I'm saved by your mercifulness [O Amida-
san!]
How pleased I feel for your favor!
"Namu-amida-butsu!"*

*While walking along the mountain path,
how I enjoy smoking!
I sit by the roadside for awhile, I take out
the pipe in peace and
with no trouble beclouding the mind.
But let us go home now, we have been
out long enough, let us go home now.
How light my steps are as they move
homeway!
My thoughts are filled with a return trip to
Amida's country.
"Namu-amida-butsu, Namu-amida-butsu!"*

Who is Meister Eckhart?

For more information on Meister Eckhart and why D.T. Suzuki includes this Christian Mystic of past, please go to Meister Eckhart and Buddhism at this website:

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/mcb/mcb03.htm>

More information on Meister Eckhart can be found on this website by the Eckhart Society:

<http://www.eckhartsociety.org/meister.htm>

The Eckhart Society says this of Eckhart von Hochheim - Meister Eckhart (c. 1260 - 1327/8) is one of the great Christian mystics. He was born near Erfurt in Thuringia and in his distinguished career became a Parisian Professor of Theology and took a leading pastoral and organizational role in the Dominican Order.

In the language of the Christian tradition Eckhart expounds the eternal mysteries in a style that is fresh and original in the best sense. Through the vividness of his use of imagery (alluding to the mysteries of the spark of the soul, the Abyss, the desert, the birth of the Word in the heart, etc.) Eckhart paradoxically directs us to

that which lies beyond image.

The depth and universality of Eckhart's teaching has drawn seekers of truth Christian and non-Christian alike. His radical and penetrating insight makes him a natural point of reference for a genuinely ecumenical understanding.

Who is D. T. Suzuki?

Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (October 18, 1870 – July 22, 1966) was a famous Japanese author of books and essays on Buddhism, Zen and Shin that were instrumental in spreading interest in both Zen and Shin (and Far Eastern philosophy in general) to the West. Suzuki was also a prolific translator of Chinese, Japanese, and Sanskrit literature.

In his later years, he began to explore the Jodo Shinshu faith of his mother's upbringing, and gave guest lectures on Jodo Shinshu Buddhism at the Buddhist Churches of America. D.T. Suzuki also produced an incomplete English translation of the Kyogyoshinsho, the magnum opus of Shinran, founder of the Jodo Shinshu school. However, Suzuki did not attempt to popularize the Shin doctrine in the West, as he believed Zen was better suited to the Western preference for Eastern mysticism[citation needed], though he is quoted as saying that Jodo Shinshu Buddhism is the "most remarkable development of Mahayana Buddhism ever achieved in East Asia." Suzuki also took an interest in Christian mysticism and in some of the most significant mystics of the West, for example, Meister Eckhart, whom he compared with the Jodo Shinshu followers called Myokonin. Suzuki was among the first to bring research on the Myokonin to audiences outside Japan as well.

A final Thought?

Here we are in the month of March and still no questions. The piece by D.T. Suzuki is interesting since most associate him with Zen. But as you see by his latest writings, he acknowledged that Shinshu is the highest development of Mahayana Buddhism. He cited that Zen was more suited for Western understanding, I disagree. If we had masterful communicators in the Shin Community with a return to the doctrine of Shinran Shonin, I feel that Jodo Shinshu CAN be the best for the West. NAMO AMIDA BUTSU