



# The Answer

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## Q @ A for Shinshu Buddhists



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Instead of quoting passages from a reference, this issue starts with a conversation I had with a friend this past weekend (26Jul08) at the WLA Buddhist Temple Obon. The conversation and correspondences ended with the question:

*Do We Proselytize in Jodo Shinshu Buddhism?*

I believe that Shin Buddhist do not proselytize. The Merriam-Webster website defines the word PROSELYTIZE as:

intransitive verb 1 : to induce someone to convert to one's faith 2 : to recruit someone to join one's party, institution, or cause transitive verb : to recruit or convert especially to a new faith, institution, or cause

By that definition, we do not PROSELYTIZE our Faith. How then are we to maintain or grow Jodo Shinshu in America? During our 109 year history in the United States, it seems as if we have lost membership during each of those 109 years. Throughout these 109 years we have been told to just listen to the Dharma with no other directive. Is this really all we do? Just listen? To answer that, I will share recent email correspondences I have had on this topic. Names have been removed for privacy reasons.

The conversation and correspondences began initially Saturday night at the WLA Obon, with a Dharma School teacher friend I had not seen for several years. As usual I ramble about many things regarding Jodo Shinshu and this conversation began with my saying that I am helping to develop a curriculum for Venice's Dharma School. At the same time I asked if I may send copies of the Answer, and the answer was yes. I copied a friend who requested further

clarification about my disdain for the phrase, "Just Listen to the Dharma." These are the correspondences that were borne of this chance sharing. The original letters have been edited.

"Thank you for the attachments. I will continue to enjoy contemplating your impressions. Will you be publishing "Answer" as a book in the near future?" ANSWER: "No, these are just scratches to my itches. When I read something or see something I have a compelling need to share these with others (really, whoever will listen). I feel that Shin Buddhists have been misled to believe that all we have to do is to listen deeply. What bogus thinking. How can we verify our understanding if it is not shared (as in Japanese Ajiwai, to share our taste of the Nembutsu)? I feel very strongly that in order to truly propagate our Faith we need to express our Joy to all who will listen. Anyway, no I will not put these into a book, these are more a discovery of materials and the sharing of these discoveries. Then I add my spin or commentary. Take good care and thanks again for appreciating the Answer."

I copied this correspondence to a friend and this was his RESPONSE: "Although I may have poisoned the pool a little by suggesting that I disagree with your statement about all one has to do is listen deeply, please tell me why you think just listening is a bogus or mistaken (incomplete) idea in Jodo Shinshu?"

ANSWER: "It is my peculiar perspective that draws me to that conclusion. To listen deeply means what? What if you don't understand what you are listening to? To listen deeply is not an easy thing to do. It is like asking us to walk the path of sages. How can we accomplish this

without responding with the heart, BODY and mind? To listen deeply with understanding implies that you understand what is being said. As for me, I choose to take another path where sharing becomes a dominate feature for understanding. If you can put your ego aside for a moment, then you express your questions, open yourself up to criticism and share the taste that you have acquired. Because of this Settlement in my life I want to express these words of Joy and Faith to all who would listen.

To me, the sharing of this Joy is an expression of our Faith. If you just listen and do not share, where is the Joy in that? I also believe that this sharing does not mean that you must speak, for as in some individuals, I believe it is possible to share this Joy by action and not words. But it is not just deep listening, it is Deep Faith. To listen is wonderful but to listen ONLY, can foster doubt. Maybe I have been corrupted by the televangelists of the world, I can just hear them now, "Just put your hands on the TV and feel the warmth of my sincerity." I feel that True Faith is a compelling feature of Shinshu in that it makes us want to share this Joy with all who would listen, by words or action. This is why I feel it is bogus. I feel it is a suppression of the Joy of the Nembutsu. If one is truly moved by the Nembutsu, don't you think that they would want to share this Joy? The Nembutsu is active and alive. How can we contain it by simply listening and not sharing.

Over the years, one of the models I have seen and admired is Miyaji Wajo. He shared not only his taste and knowledge, but his whole being. I felt this power emanating from this physically small person that was overwhelming. I saw

this same compelling persona when talking with Kakehashi Wajo, and Tokunaga Wajo. It is a Joy of sharing and of receiving. If this were not the case, we would all be like Siddhartha (Herman Hesse's Siddhartha). One who chooses to be enlightened in a static condition as opposed to the Gautama Buddha who chose to share the Buddha Dharma. I believe this is the model that creates a community of understanding where one opens up heart, body and mind. To share the taste because of Joy, be it through words or actions. And although I think I can understand Shinran Shonin's the, "for me and me alone" phrase, if this was the definitive case why would he feel compelled to share the knowledge with all who would hear him? Why did Rennyō Shonin feel compelled to share his understanding? I believe it is because of the Joy that the Amida brings to each and everyone of us. We become like a cup that is overflowing with the Joy of the Nembutsu. We need to share this Joy.

I guess this is just my peculiar perspective because I have a need to share and receive. I am very selfish in that in my sharing, I find that I actually receive more than I give. I receive the Joy of sharing and learning from others and from myself. A dynamic condition where life becomes real and even with my short comings, life is wonderful because the Amida has Graced not only me, but all of us with the Name that Saves, Namo Amida Butsu.

Anyway, this is why I feel that just listening is bogus. Not so much bogus in that it is wrong for those listening, but wrong in that it never allows the expression of the Joy one receives when sharing this beautiful "Diamond" called the Nembutsu. Take care.

RESPONSE: "It just so happened that at today's morning service we are at section 66 of the *shinkan*. we are at the section where Shinran Shonin quotes Zendo Dai-shi and mentions that the true heart/mind (shin-shin) is the "enduring" mind (that's the translation found in CWS [Collected Works of Shinran], but the Japanese is *sozoku-shin* or the 'heart that continues'). Although I have been approaching this section with the point of view of *yaku-but-su* (I'm deliberately using doctrinal terms) or 'from the Buddha perspective' (i.e., the action of the agent is assumed to be the Buddha only) it is possible to interpret the same section from the point of view of

*yaku-shujo* (i.e., the action of the agent is assumed to be the *shujo*, sentient being or individual person). From this point of view *sozoku-shin* could be what you are describing. Although there is a third perspective or half Buddha-half sentient being, it's difficult to choose a perspective (although choose you must...you can choose both, or all three, just not at the same time). The reason for this is because there are phrases that are more closely aligned with the *yaku shujo* perspective such as "mind that aspires for Buddhahood." Amida Buddha, already a Buddha does not need to aspire to be a Buddha. Although this can be qualified and still be consistent with the *yaku butsu* perspective: see section 50, p. 107. CWS is "true and real Shinjin is unfailingly accompanied by saying the Name. Saying the Name, however, is not necessarily accompanied by Shinjin that is the power of the Vow." I would translate it (this is rough, but) as: "true and real Shinjin absolutely fulfills the Name. The Name does not necessarily fulfill the Shinjin that is of the power of the Vow." This allows for a *yaku butsu* perspective because one can argue that Amida Buddha is in a constant state of "becoming" whenever Shinjin is received). Others like "the mind to save sentient beings" is more easily aligned with *yaku butsu* (although if you were to take a *yaku shujo* point of view, it would add credibility to your argument).

Although I don't necessarily disagree with what you say, I also don't necessarily fully agree with your emphasis. Given your dominant feature, what does it mean for Rennyō Shonin to emphasize (go sho no) *ichi daiji* then? Is it to share or is it to receive?"

ANSWER: Thank you for your perspectives and sharing. I only wish I had the book knowledge that you have so that I too may share and fully understand your words. In time I hope to better understand your words, until then, in my own naïve way, I see things only as far as my experiences allows. I am not as well read as I would like to be, I am however definitive in my feelings towards Settlement and Salvation. No matter which way you slice it, it is not of my doing. I share this understanding with all who will listen. I do see your perspective about Rennyō Shonin's passage, I believe this: Rennyō Shonin, even as he writes about the greatest matter of the afterlife and rebirth, and how we must greatly entrust

ourselves to the Amida for Salvation, must have felt what a Joyous occasion to share this and talk about it. If you remember in the twice a month meetings letter (Gobunsho), he laments that the Monto is only imbibing in the refreshments and not even once talking about the Nembutsu. I think he structures things so that the environment to share is created as one breaks bread. He did not say he was sorry because they were sitting around contemplating the Nembutsu, rather he lamented the socialization without Sharing of the Nembutsu. Again, this is just my perspective and it requires no agreement or disagreement. To me this is just how I have internalized all that I have learned plus my personality. I take to sharing naturally because it is in my nature to do so. And in that undertaking, I tend to favor and am attracted to communication as a mean of transmitting Faith. It is definitely not the only way, but it is a way that assures the message is being received and understood.

What do you think? Would this be interesting in the Answer? The question, "How do we propagate Jodo Shinsu in the United States?" Or more importantly, how do we learn Jodo Shinshu in order to share it? Oh well, take care.

### *A Final Thought:*

We can conjure images, but what do we really know about them? Not much. The Amida is apparent and Omnipresent, yet is so far beyond our comprehension as to be Magical by some. The Infinite Life and Light, the Infinite Love and Compassion, to simply bask in the Grace is enough for me to want to share this wondrous Joy I feel.

This is my own personal belief, but I do not believe most of us aspire to be a Buddha. It is hard for me to understand what a Buddha really is. I suspect it is because I am still human that I can only imagine with conjecture. Being human limits my understanding to the experiences that I have and am familiar with. Being a Buddha is not one of them. Therefore, for me, I only seek settlement and joy for the time I have, no more no less. The sharing I feel compelled to do is based on this Joy the Amida has gifted me, and my need to share this gifted Joy with any who would listen. By entrusting myself to the Vow, I feel I am settled, but even if I am not, I know for sure I will be. This is my Joy. NAMO AMIDA BUTSU