



The Answer

真如法界



Q @ A for Shinshu Buddhists

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On the Attainment of True Faith [author unknown - c. 13-14th c.? Japan] Translated by Eizo TANAKA. ANJIN KETSUJO SHO for further information on this work, please access: <http://web.mit.edu/stclair/www/aqs.html>

What is the Original Vow?

Shin Buddhists should first of all understand how the Original Vow was made. Amida's Great Vow is made up of 48 constituent vows of which the Eighteenth is the most fundamental, the other forty-seven having been intended to reinforce our faith in the Eighteenth. Shan-tao sets out this vow in the Ojo Raisan as follows:

"If, when I have become a Buddha, sentient beings throughout the ten directions who say my Name at least ten times are not born in the Pure Land, may I not enter that Perfect Enlightenment of Buddhahood."

This means that if every living being throughout the ten directions is born in the Pure Land, having fulfilled the vow necessary for birth and its attendant practices (gan-gyo), he would become a Buddha but if any fail to be so born then he would not enter that Perfect Enlightenment.

Here the question may arise: "If it is the case that Amida's Perfect Enlightenment depends solely on whether we are born in the Pure Land, how is it that Amida has already entered Perfect Enlightenment, even though not every living being throughout the ten directions has yet been so born? This I cannot understand."

It is to be noted, however, that Amida has already accomplished our Pure Land birth by fulfilling for each of us our vow and its attendant practices. As the requirement of the vow and practices has been fulfilled, thereby securing Pure Land birth

for every living being throughout the ten directions, Amida has thus consummated the "Perfect Enlightenment of the **Namuamidabutsu**" in which those to be saved (ki) and Amida himself (ho) are one.

Therefore, there is no Pure Land birth of any ordinary living being apart from Amida's Perfect Enlightenment. Amida entered Perfect Enlightenment when the Pure Land birth of every living being was accomplished, and thereby Amida's Perfect Enlightenment and our Pure Land birth were achieved simultaneously.

This birth of every living being was accomplished at the hands of Amida but, as each one of us comes to realize it at different times, some attained birth in the Pure Land in the past, some are attaining it now and some will attain it in the future. Although within these three categories of time each of us has to have his own moment for attaining birth, there is nothing for us to add to the absolute consummation Amida achieved on behalf of all living beings at the moment of his Perfect Enlightenment. It can be compared to the sun which, once having risen, dispels the darkness everywhere, and to the moon that rises in the sky and casts its image on the waters everywhere at the same moment. The moon casts its image on the waters whenever it rises, and also the sun never fails to dispel the darkness when it rises. Therefore just ask whether the sun has risen or not. We need not argue whether the darkness has cleared up or not. We might as well ask whether Amida has already attained Enlightenment or not, instead of arguing whether ordinary beings will be born in the Pure Land or not.

Amida, when he was the Bodhisattva Dharmakara, vowed that he would not enter Buddhahood unless all living be-

ings attained Pure Land birth and he has been a Buddha now for ten kalpas'. We have been vainly repeating the round of mortality without realizing that Amida has already brought it to an end for us by establishing our birth in the Pure Land.

It says in the Hanju-san:

"Therefore we should feel very ashamed about it for Shakyamuni Buddha is indeed our loving parent'."

The two characters 'zan' and 'gi' are interpreted as 'to feel ashamed before heaven' and 'to feel ashamed before the world.' They are also interpreted as 'to feel ashamed in oneself' and 'to feel ashamed in front of others'. What ought we to feel so very ashamed about? We should feel ashamed at our stupidity in taking no notice of Amida who, for an incalculable number of kalpas, laboured for our sake to fulfill his Vows and Practices, and at our being deaf to Shakyamuni who appeared in the world time and time again, even 8,000 times from 500 dust-mote kalpas' ago, to let us know about Amida's wonderful Vows.

It may well be that, in following Mahayana and Hinayana paths and practices, we discover that, although excellent in their doctrine, they do not work for us and we cannot keep on with them. The completion and fruition of Other-Power Vows and Practices, however, have been achieved by Amida Buddha, and their merits turned over, to us who lack goodness. Amida endows those merits even on those who abuse the Dharma or who have no seeds of Buddhahood in them or those who will be born during the 100-year period after the Dharma is in ruins.

(The Hanju-san) tells us also that we should feel thoroughly ashamed of the fact that we have never attended to or believed

the Dharma that Shakyamuni Buddha spoke from his heart. There is no place in the entire trichiliocosm, not one even small enough for a poppy seed to enter, in which Shakyamuni Buddha has not offered up his body and his life. In order that we who do not trust in Other-Power might come to have true Faith, the Buddha has performed all kinds of difficult and long-suffering practices to approach us and amass merits and virtues for us. Hence the Hanju-san says we should be very ashamed that we pay no heed to this vast and magnanimous will of the Buddha.

To make this point clear (the Hanju-san) goes on to say: "Shakyamuni uses various expedients to awaken this unsurpassed Faith within us."

Unsurpassed Faith refers to the Threefold Faith' of Other-Power. Again, it says:

"There are many teachings, providing a variety of expedients."

This means that there are different scriptures for the benefit of different kinds of people.

It is difficult for any ordinary person to come upon Other Power Faith. Nevertheless, when we have experienced how hard self-power practices are, we come to see how easy are Other Power practices and, when we hear of the strenuous demands of the Holy Path, we begin to trust ourselves to the easy way of the Pure Land.

Despite the fact that our Pure Land birth has already been accomplished by Amida, misled by wayward desires, we have for numberless ages repeated the round of mortality, and thus we have not believingly accepted the wonderful wisdom of Amida. The taking refuge in Amida of each living being in the past, present and future, in fact, means that each one turns to the here-and-now, once-and-for-all consummation of Amida's Perfect Enlightenment (Shogaku no ichinen). The thought of reciting the Name and remembering Amida by each sentient being throughout the ten directions partakes of that same Perfect Enlightenment of Amida. There is not a single living being's remembrance or recitation of Amida's Name that stays with the practitioner.

His Name embodies the whole of Enlightenment because it is Amida's Practice to fulfill the Great Vow and it is not separate from Amida himself (myo-tai fu-ni). Since his Name is the embodiment of Enlightenment, it constitutes the basis for birth in the Pure Land for every being throughout the ten directions and, because it constitutes

the basis for our birth in the Pure Land, there is no vow or practice left that has not been perfected for us.

In the Gengi-Bun Shan-tao says therefore:

"Ten repetitions of the Buddha's Name mentioned in the Meditation Sutra contain ten vows and ten practices. How?

'Namu' means 'rely on'; it also has the meaning of 'aspiring (to birth) and wishing to transfer (the merit of the practices for attaining birth)'. 'Amida Butsu' constitutes the practices (required to accomplish birth). For this reason, whoever repeats the Name will surely be born in the Pure Land."

The fact that repetitions of the Name, made by the lower class of the lower grade of aspirants who are unable to think of Amida (on their death-bed), completely fulfill the vows and practices, demonstrates that vows and practices are not to be undertaken by us human beings. The vows and practices needed to ensure birth in the Pure Land for us ordinary people have already been fulfilled by the Bodhisattva Dharmakara's Vow which took him five kalpas to establish, and his Practices which extended for innumerable kalpas.

Realization that Amida has completed the Vow and Practices is called 'the Three Minds' or 'the Threefold Faith' or simply 'the Faith'. '**Namamidabutsu**' is the verbal reverberation of Amida Buddha's fulfillment of ordinary beings' vows and practices in the Name. Therefore, the realization does not stay in our mind and heart: it returns to the original source, Buddha's Vow. The Name doesn't remain in us but goes straight to the Great Vow. This means that putting Pure Land teaching into effect lies solely in understanding the Eighteenth Vow to the full.

Shan-tao, too, says (in the jōzen-gi):

"In the Larger Sutra the forty-eight Vows are set out solely to make it clear that those beings who repeat the Name exclusively are assured of birth in the Pure Land." Amida has perfected virtues as innumerable as the sand grains of the Ganges. For such as us - the ignorant and those whose thoughts are uncontrolled - his Pure Land represents supreme delight and so it is called 'The Land of Utmost Bliss'.

It would be a great pity if anyone who believes in Amida's Vow and says his Name should take the name to be the virtuous name of a Buddha who resides outside of himself and should think that by virtue of

his earnest repetition of the Name he will be born in the Pure Land. If only the firm belief arises in us that **Namamidabutsu** represents the accomplishment of our birth in the Pure Land, our birth there is confirmed at the instant we say it because Amida Buddha himself constitutes the practices required for our birth. When we hear the Name we should take it for our assurance of birth and that it is one with his Enlightenment. Even though we have doubts about Amida's having perfected his Enlightenment, we should have no doubts at all about whether our own birth has been accomplished. If one single being were to remain unsaved, Amida would never have entered Enlightenment. To realize that this is so is truly to understand the Eighteenth Vow.

The Hanju-san, Gengi-Bun and Jōzen-gi are works written by Shan-tao (Zendo), a renowned Chinese Pureland Scholar and one of the 7 Jōdo Shinshu Masters. "Trichiliocosm" From Rigpa Wiki: Trichiliocosm (Tib. stong gsum). Following ancient Indian cosmology, the Buddhist Abhidharma literature explains that there is an infinite number of worlds. Each world has at its center a Mount Meru surrounded by seven oceans and seven rings of golden mountains separating them. Outside are the four continents and eight subcontinents (two out at sea, left and right of each of the continents). We humans live on the southern continent called "Jambudvīpa". This entire world is then surrounded by the outer iron mountains. One thousand of such worlds constitute a thousandfold world system. A thousand of these makes up a second-order thousandfold world system. Then, when multiplied a thousand times further, this makes a third-order world system or 'trichiliocosm', a universe of a billion worlds.

A Final Thought:

On a Sunday at Venice Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, a rare occurrence happened. Several young Buddhist under 30, came to learn and share their understanding of Jōdo Shinshu. For them to give up their time and sit and listen for hours upon hours, impressed and moved me. It was a joy. The spirit of sharing the Buddha Dharma is alive and well at Venice Hongwanji Buddhist Temple.

The ANJIN KETSU JO SHO was one of the references that Rennyō Shōnin used during his time. I too, find it a memorable work which has helped me understand Jōdo Shinshu all that much better, please send questions. NAMO AMIDA BUTSU