



The Answer

Howa Shinshu

Q & A for Shinshu Buddhists



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This is a special edition of The Answer reporting on my first Howa in Japan. The introduction by Rimban Nobuo Miyaji to Rev. Issei Fujiwara who is the Jyushoku or Head Priest of the Houzoubou, Buddhist temple in Fukuyama City, Hiroshima (Bingo), Japan made this possible. The connections made through Miyaji Sensei also led me to be introduced to Rev. Eiken Kobai who is a retired professor of Soai University (Osaka) and a Jodo Shinshu scholar. Apparently, Kobai Sensei heard about me through my correspondences with Paul Roberts. This led to Kobai Sensei asking Fujiwara Sensei if he knew me, that led to his contacting Miyaji Sensei. All this eventually led to my being asked to be the speaker at Houzoubou's Eitaikyo Hoyo.

To bring everyone up to date on what has been happening in my life over this past year, I will give a short list of events leading up to the Eitaikyo Hoyo at Houzoubou.

List of Events:

1. December 2008, Nehanye speaker at Fresno Betsuin
2. January 2009, received a letter of acknowledgement from Ogui Socho, regarding my request for a letter of introduction to Chuo Bukkyo Gakuin (Chubutsu)
3. February 2009, received a letter of acknowledgement and letter of introduction to Chubutsu from Ogui Socho who also emailed Kiribayashi Bucho (Hongwanji International Center [HIC]-Chief) clearing the way for me to go to school and being able to rent a room at the HIC
4. March 2009, took the entrance examination for school and passed
5. March 2009, returned home then applied for and received a Nikkei Jin Visa
6. April 2009, started school
7. September 2009, received Tokudo



8. March 2010, graduated Chubutsu, and received Kyoshi (see picture above)
9. April 2010, returned home to do my taxes. Howa at Fresno Betsuin, met with many friends and supporters. Especially the LA Betsuin BWA (Fujinkai)
10. May 2010, seminar and Howa at Venice Hongwanji Buddhist Temple on the Tokudo and Kyoshi experience. Returned to Kyoto to seek a position as a priest in Kyoto Japan. Attended my first Hoji with Rev. Senmo Yamamoto (Jyushoku-Head Priest) of Ganshouji, Kyoto, Japan (see picture below)



11. June 2010, met with Eiken Kobai Sensei, retired professor Soai University, and

with Fujiwara Sensei. Gave my first Howa at the Houzoubou Eitaikyo Hoyo

Howa at Houzoubou, Hiroshima:

I was contacted by Miyaji Sensei saying that a friend of his, Rev. Fujiwara, wanted to talk with me. Rev. Miyaji's friend is the Jyushoku or head priest of Houzoubou a temple found in Fukuyama City, Bingo, Hiroshima. After exchanging emails with Fujiwara Sensei, I met him and his wife at the HIC on 11 March 2010. I had a very interesting time telling him about myself and why I am here. He also told me about his relationship with Eiken Kobai Sensei who has been conducting lectures on Jodo Shinshu at his temple for over 10 years. We met for about an hour. He feels as I do regarding the need to express the Joy of the Nembutsu to the Monto or followers of Jodo Shinshu. I welcomed the words of Fujiwara Sensei and his wife.

Thus, I began preparing for the Eitaikyo Hoyo in June. I was originally planning to speak about the Joy of Jodo Shinshu, but,

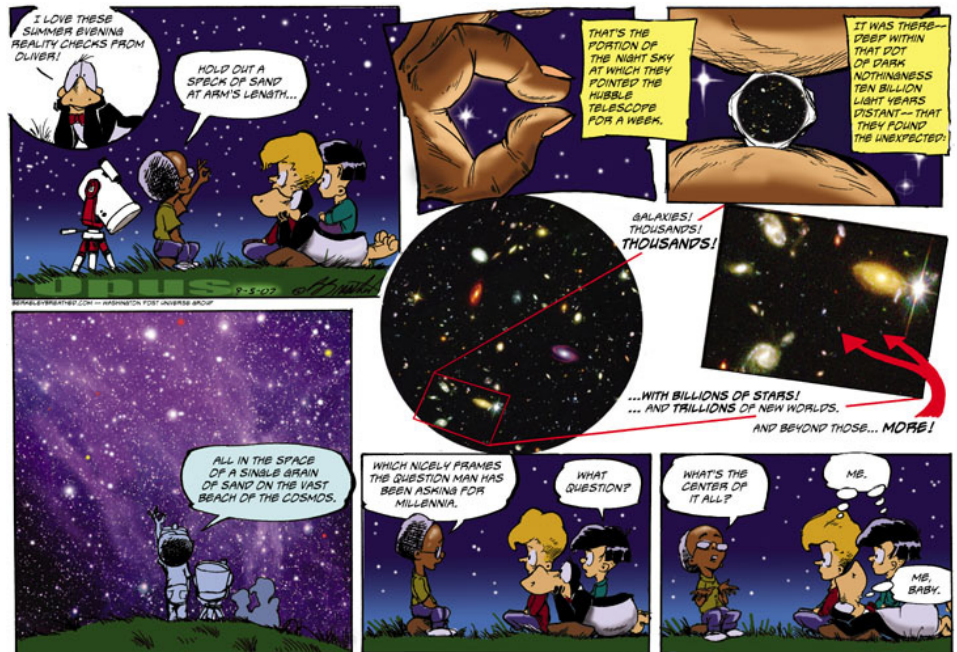
after Miyaji Sensei suggested that I combine this with the BCA temple experience. I decided to follow Sensei's suggestion.

I asked my wife Elaine to send pictures of our wedding 35 years ago held at the LA Betsuin, last year's Obon, and any other photos she could think of. I also discovered that I had many things on my computer that I had forgotten about like the photos from the 2008 Sake Tasting event hosted by the Venice Hongwanji YABA, and photos from the Saishin Dojo summer children's program. I also found other images from the internet and began preparing my presentation for the Houzoubou Monto. The Gosandai or scriptural passage that I choose to read was suggested by Rev. John Iwohara: The Kouso (Pure Land Masters) Wasan #39. This passage forms the core of my message.

Through the benefit of the unhindered light,
We realize shinjin of vast, majestic virtues,
And the ice of our blind passions necessarily melts,
Immediately becoming water of enlightenment.

Although I thought the Monto would understand the Wasan passage, I was informed by the Jyushoku that they probably did not. Lesson learned. Reading and explaining the passage is very important. I should have explained what I felt, or how the Light of Amida Buddha, which covers the 10 directions (everywhere including the unimaginable), enters each and everyone of us. As we realize the Shinjin received has already entered us, the Bonno or blind passions are naturally changed by the Wisdom and Compassion of the Amida Buddha. Through this transformation we call out the Name that saves, Namo Amida Butsu, and we immediately realize our Settlement (Anjin) and rebirth in the Pure Land is already established; we thus express our Gratitude to the Amida Buddha for saving us from the world of ignorance. I should explain this further, but there is no room and I did not do this for the Monto at Houzoubou (email me for more info).

Fujiwara Sensei felt that if I had presented the Deep Field image of the Hubble Telescope (For more about the Hubble Telescope please see Vol. 2, Issue 8 of the Answer. Above is a reprint of the Opus comic strip that covers the topic) at this time, and my reasons for showing it, that this would have had a bigger impact with the Monto. But, I didn't. Fact of the matter



is that I had so much to say that I didn't know where to start, so I just started with a self-introduction of who I am and why I came to Japan.

What I explained in my presentation is that the only goal I have now is to share my Joy of having received the Light of Amida Buddha with all I encounter. Not so much the doctrine, unless asked, but the Joy. The Joy that is realized by me brings settlement to all because of the Amida Buddha's Vow to save ALL sentient beings. This Joy of True Faith (Shinjin, also called Anjin) that we have all received, but may not be aware of, is the cause of our birth in the Pure Land. Because of this, we use the phrase, "Shinjin is the True Cause" of our birth in the Pure Land (Shinjin Shoin). Further, since recitation of the Nembutsu is how we express our gratitude at being saved we use the phrase, "reciting (the Name) in gratitude" (Shomyo Ho-on). That is the essence of our teaching. I added this because this was the essence of my conversation with Eiken Kobai Sensei the day before the Howa. Unfortunately, this Joy that we receive, in many cases, is not expressed by many Shinshu Priests during Howa or the Dharma Message.

Now, regarding my Howa, what I wanted to convey was the way we BCA Monto, what we normally refer to as members, express our Jodo Shinshu values at the temple. At the LA Betsuin, and many of the temples (at least in Southern District) in BCA, we do not consider the temple as just a place of sadness or pain as many do in Japan. Temples are often associated with what they call "Funeral Business."

Therefore, temples are not often associated with fun things like school graduations, and weddings. Programs such as Saishin Dojo, Oseibo Taikai, or gatherings such as Halloween are not often found at the Japan temple. What I presented to the Houzoubou Monto is the Joy that I experienced in the USA as a Jodo Shinshu temple member.

Maybe this was unfair, but what I showed were the smiles and joy shown on the faces of the American (LA Betsuin and others) Monto. As I wrote earlier, the Japanese associate the temple with suffering or pain. The joyous parts usually do not fit their paradigm for what a temple is. This is something I feel very strongly about our American Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Temples: our paradigm includes all facets of life.

We have fun things like Halloween or fun type of fund raising events like the Sake Tasting of Venice. We do things like host parties, and have Pot Luck Dinners. We share our experiences both good and bad. We support our friends and family in the temple context. The services, the "required events" such as Obon, and fund raisers, and the "optional events" like the parties for profit and fun, are all things we do at the temple.

One OF THE MOST IMPORTANT things that we do, one that is almost never observed in Japan, is attending the services as a family. I explained that Elaine and I have attended services over the years as a family with Kelly and Brady. We enrolled our kids in Dharma School as babies. Our family is not alone in this. We share this



same experience with many who attend and have attended the temple over the history of the American Monto.

As an example, I presented Kelly (Fukamoto), Lina (Okita), Leanne (Saita) and Denise (Nakamura) as an example of many who grew up together at the temple and remain fast friends today. The picture that I showed at the Howa shows the girls as Brownies and then as they are today, dancing at our (LA Betsuin) Obon. I also showed them helping out at the Dharma School Teacher's booth (2009 Obon).

The Howa also included the many differences in our understanding of Jodo Shinshu versus Japan. Whereas in Japan the fundamental element in our religion is faith, In BCA, although the elements of faith are there, the emphasis is not on Faith in "Other-Power" or Tariki. Our belief system is mixed strongly with elements of traditional Buddhism. This is not a bad thing, but it is not the most important element in Jodo Shinshu, which is the Nembutsu and what it means or the expression of Gratitude to the Amida Buddha for having saved us from the world of Ignorance. This understanding of Gratitude is what I feel here in Japan and is what I said to the Houzoubou Monto. I also told the Monto that although the understanding may be different, the Joy of the Nembutsu is the same in the BCA; it is the Joy that is received from the Amida Buddha.

The LA Betsuin, WLA Buddhist Temple and Venice Buddhist Temple were the primary temples presented. The Joyful images presented well exemplifies the attitude of volunteerism in BCA. Most participate in the activities at first as a requirement, but as bonding occurs through working and being together, most end up volunteering for more than just the requirements of the obligation. This is the spirit of "Ondobo Ondogyo" that surfaces in our BCA



Monto: the Joy of sharing our taste of the Nembutsu together, be it during difficult times or good times.

I ended this portion by saying that in BCA, the Joy, apparent or not, is what connects the BCA Monto: Scouts, BWA, ABA, Jr. YBA, YABA, Taiko, Obon, Parties, etc. The BCA temple experience is more like being at a 2nd home rather than a temple. It is a safe haven. The temple is not just for

funerals (as in Japan) but includes other life experiences involving fun and joy. This is my perception of our BCA experience.

The Face of Amida Buddha

I concluded my talk by mentioning what I feel is the equivalent of seeing the face of Amida Buddha (See Opus comic). The face of Amida, to me, is the image from the Hubble Telescope's Deep Field, 15 January 1996. This image literally blew my mind when I saw it. The incomprehension of this image was too much. To see that which exists but without comprehension was to see that which is incomprehensible. The obvious Light of the unseen Galaxies is there, but even more pervasive is the vastness of the dark space. To me both are indications of the Light of Amida Buddha. The light of the 10 directions shining on us all. The Merit or Kudoku that Shinran Shonin saw in Biwako (the fresh water sea next to Kyoto), I saw in the Deep Field image. The True and Real substance of the Amida Buddha, is just that: incomprehensible. Amida Buddha was telling me to stop looking out and just return to enjoy this moment, this very moment, the most important moment of all. This is the face of Amida Buddha the Infinite and Unimaginable Face of Truth. To me here lies the Vast Storehouse that is the Virtuous Merit or Kudoku that is the Other-Power, the Amida Buddha.

