

FOR QUESTIONS, COMMENTS OR CONTRIBUTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT: fukumotodsgn@earthlink.net or sensei@vhbt.org

In this issue I will continue with basic information from various sources. I will quote the source with each question or questions asked and answered.

What is the essence of our teaching? Nembutsu (Reciting "Namo Amida Butsu").

Reciting the Nembutsu means saying, "Namo Amida Butsu" with our mouths. As already related, when the "name of Amida Buddha" (myogo) of Namo Amida Butsu fulfilled in the 17th Vow reaches our hearts, it becomes shinjin, and what comes out of our mouths is the Nembutsu. Accordingly, that Nembutsu is the Nembutsu given to us by the Buddha. In his Shozo-matsu Wasan, the Venerable Master wrote:

How shameless
And unrepentant I am!
But because the virtue of Amida's
Name
Pervades the ten directions,
It reaches even
My false and insincere heart.

Here the Venerable Master expresses his understanding that since Amida Buddha's salvation takes the form of his Name and reaches us in that form, the Nembutsu that we recite with our mouths is really the Buddha's calling voice to us. He informs us followers of Jodo-Shinshu that, "Our voice calling the Buddha is (at the same time) the voice of the Buddha calling us." The Venerable Master also says that "listening," reciting the Nembutsu and placing our hands together in gassho, are all activities due to "Buddha-centered power." Accordingly, "The ears with which we hear, the mouths with which we recite,

and the hands that we placed together in gassho, are all due to the 'marvelously mysterious' power of Amida Buddha's Vow."

Since shinjin is the cause of our birth in the Pure Land, we use the phrase, "shinjin is the true cause" (shinjin shoin) in our Jodo-Shinshu teaching, and since recitation of the Nembutsu is how we express our gratitude for (our cause of birth being determined), we use the phrase, "reciting (the Name) in gratitude" (shomyo ho-on). That is the essence of our teaching.

From Eiken Kobai Sensei's: Shin Buddhism Study Center. Heading: Understanding Jodo Shinshu. For more inforamtion, visit: http://www.trueshinbuddhism.com/content/view/33/53/

What is Gratitude in the Jodo Shinshu Tradition?

In case you missed it, here it is again, "in our Jodo-Shinshu teaching, and since recitation of the Nembutsu is how we express our gratitude for (our cause of birth being determined), we use the phrase, "reciting (the Name) in gratitude" (shomyo ho-on)." This, I believe is the true meaning of Gratitude in our Jodo Shinshu tradition. Kobai Sensei has put it in simple terms, so that even I can explain it with ease.

What we have been given as an explanation for the word Gratitude, I believe has been tainted with Christian undertones of thanksgivings for what we have (now) and not for our Salvation from the world of ignorance.

If this is confusing, please read the above question again and try again.

Amida & tattoos: An Essay by Emilo Kariya, Venice Hongwanji Buadhist Temple.

Recently, I've been thinking about getting a tattoo. Tattoos used to have a bad image. However, what used to be negatively associated with biker gangs, drunken sailors, and yakuza is now becoming more accepted as an art form and an expression of identity. Even people like me, a public school teacher, are getting tattoos now.

I don't think I'll actually go through with getting a tattoo, it looks painful and I'm too chicken, but I have given it a lot of thought. If I were to put permanent ink on my body, what would it be?

Nemuri Nezumi (Sleeping Mouse). If I were to get a tattoo, I would get a picture of a sleeping mouse either on a lotus or surrounded by lotus. For those of you who are familiar with the Nemuri Neko (Sleeping Cat) of Nikko, it would look kind of like that. The mouse is me, born in the year of the rat in 1972. It is sleeping for two basic reasons: (1) I love to sleep (my favorite pastime) and (2) it represents the peace I get from the Amida Buddha's vow.



Peace, Lotus, and Amida's Vow The Amida Buddha vowed to save all sentient beings. In this case, "save" means to awaken to the truth and become a buddha, free from suffering. I would like to say that I could save myself, without anyone's help, but I am a mere muggle. I do not have the selfdiscipline, nor the time and money to devote myself to it. Self Power wouldn't work for me. Everyday I wade through muddy waters, distracted by making a living and surviving as a teacher in LA. I can't focus on becoming a Buddha, following the Eightfold Path and the Six Paramitas, every moment of the day. I'm too human. I couldn't do it despite trying to be the best I can be. This is why I find peace in Amida's vow. I am comfortable in knowing that I can be in muddy waters now, but that I will be assured salvation later. The lotus represents this belief in the tattoo. A lotus grows in muddy pond water but still manages to bloom beautifully above the water. The lotus also flowers with its seeds already fully developed inside,

like the potential Buddha in me. This is why my tattoo mouse can sleep so peacefully surrounded by lotus.

Jodo Shinshu Buddhism is the sect of Buddhism that advocates belief in Other Power (salvation through Amida's vow) as opposed to Self Power. Jodo Shinshu is the right path to Enlightenment for me. It's a good fit. I feel happiness and reassurance knowing that the Amida Buddha has my back. In fact, maybe that's where I should place my permanent expression of gratitude to Amida's wisdom and compassion... in the form of a sleeping mouse surrounded by lotus. A tattoo is forever. Jodo Shinshu forever.

Namo Amida Butsu (I take refuge in the Amida Buddha).

Again what is Gratitude in the Jodo Shinshu Tradition? Plus a final note.

In case you re-read the question on gratitude in Jodo Shinshu, Emily gave a great answer in case you were still confused. Thank you Emily for sharing your taste of the Nembustsu with us.

Emily is the present Superintendant for the Venice Hongwanji Dharma School and main stay at Venice. This essay has many metaphors in it, if you have a question on it, please send me the question and maybe I can ask Emily to follow up on her essay with an answer/ commentary that we can all share.

Again I have found some spiritual solace in the Sunday Comics. I saw this in the Sunday Comics and had to share. It illustrates the wonderment and awe I have of Truth as is, the universe as seen by the Hubble telescope. I think what I read on the occurrence is this, the time period was 10 days and 128 shots. This is so mind boggling that our minds can not comprehend the implications nor grasp the significance of it (I think). To me this is the Amida looking at me and telling me this is Truth as is, deal with it! And I do. Check out the last panel and write to me what you think.

NAMO AMIDA BUTSU



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