



The Answer

真如法界



Q & A for Shinshu Buddhists

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This issue will continue with excerpts regarding Truth Value and Utility Value, from MAHAYANA BUDDHISM: AN APPROACH TO ITS ESSENCE by Yoshifumi Ueda, Pure Land Publications, Los Angeles, CA copyright 1989.

What is the difference between Utility & Truth Values?

Utility value is that which is meaningful for people that which enriches and enhances human life. We find utility value in material things, interpersonal relationships, political ideologies, the arts, literature, etc. Truth value, in contrast, focuses on the ultimate end, the elemental meaning, of human life. Rather than being concerned with the usefulness of people or things or ideas to satisfy human needs, truth value brings to light the reality and import of human existence.

Many approach religion for its utility value, believing it provides worldly benefits, material prosperity, faith healing, and divine protection. Others believe religion brings peace of mind, uplifts moral character, provides solace in death, and promises eternal life. While the latter may be meaningful aspects of religion, Buddhism's true significance is lost when it is regarded exclusively from this aspect of utility value.

The truth value of religion is not concerned with giving mundane benefits to people. Rather it is concerned with providing answers to the ultimate questions of human existence. It becomes significant when those things considered necessary for life, such as the arts, literature, and learning, lose all their value for a person. In such a critical time, the meaningfulness of life itself comes to be doubted, and our

hearts are restless and agitated. While the benefits derived from the utility value of religion are at best temporary and passing, awakening to the truth value of religion allows us to discover the fundamental ground and source of our existence which give true fulfillment, resulting in gratitude.

I shall use the terms truth value and utility value in the way just defined, and first consider the implications of utility value of religion. When we look at religion from a utilitarian viewpoint, there is no qualitative difference between superstitious beliefs and the faiths of higher religions such as Buddhism and Christianity. The reason for this is that both meet some real need in people, wherever that may be. That is why, even in our modern enlightened age, superstitious beliefs are rampant.

An important point to note about utility value is that the practical value of anything is determined by need. The existence of various religions and sects results from the fact that people have different views concerning the utility value of religion. If a given religion attracts a large following because of its practical appeal, that does not mean that it is more true than another religion, but that it is simply of greater immediate, practical value.

The definitions of True & Utility Value is all that I will write about Ueda Sensei's book at this time. I have received comments on a passage that Ueda Sensei wrote and I would like to explore that further. If you would like to learn more on this subject, please read the book referenced at the beginning of the question.

What does becoming a Buddha mean?

From the last issue, Ueda Sensei states the following, "Man and Buddha, thus, are not two separate beings but the selfsame being at two extremes of spirituality: unenlightened and enlightened, or non-awakened and awakened. The crucial factor between man and Buddha, then, is not dependence, but the process of becoming. A Buddha is called Tathagata because he or she has arrived at suchness, the true state of being, that is, has awakened to what it means to be truly human. This is true even in the case of Pure Land Buddhism which begins with the relationship between a foolish being and Amida Buddha, but ends with the foolish being becoming an awakened one, the Buddha." He also states this, "In the case of Pure Land Buddhism, 'faith' begins with truly hearing the Name of Amida Buddha, 'Namu-amida-butsu,' in which is embodied the Primal Vow, and culminates in the attainment of supreme enlightenment. This process of becoming occurs when the heart of man and the heart of Amida unite in a 'single taste.' 'Single taste' implies that this unity is not a mere oneness, but oneness that does not eliminate the opposition between man's heart and Amida's heart."

A commentary I received from a regular contributor asks the following, "The passage suggests that we are in a constant state of 'becoming.' This process of becoming is framed in the context of Shinjin or faith. Because of this, although he (Ueda) mentions that in early Buddhism faith was just the beginning, he is implying that fully realized faith is the equivalent of Buddhahood. This isn't the problem because Shinran Shonin says something similar, but the process of becoming is stated as a continuum we

traverse until (one assumes) we realize the Buddha in us (it is a unity he states). Shinjin, then, is also in a constant state of becoming until it reaches fruition or what we could call Enlightenment. The difficulty is in the definition of what Shin No Ichinen (the one-thought moment of Shinjin) becomes. If Shinjin is in a constant state of becoming, then in what sense was Shinran Shonin able to say that his Shinjin is equal to that of Honen? If it is the same because it is the same essence that is becoming (albeit in different stages), then why do we even bother with Shinjin? What would it matter if I'm at the extreme lower end of the unity that is being discussed? It's all the same, isn't it? If there is a qualitative difference in Shinjin depending on where on the becoming spectrum you are, then unless Shinran and Honen were at identical places in becoming then it would make no sense for Shinran to have argued his Shinjin was equal to Honen's. There is also the issue of what it means to be 'independent' of the Buddha because of the 'we are a Buddha argument.' But I was focusing on Shinjin because I remember you (Ray Fukumoto) saying that you're understanding of Shinjin is that it is the same Shinjin because it is the same heart of Amida Buddha. Ueda sensei does, however, challenge people to clarify what that means."

The commentary I received made me think and I clearly see the point made. Although it would have been great to ask Ueda Sensei for a clarification, I would like to respond to the comments received here. I never thought about the Shin No Ichinen, the one thought moment in that context until receiving this comment. I guess this is just my inexperience. From Rev. Russell Hamada I first heard of "becoming" or as he said "the action of the search" (or something like that) and also having heard that from Rev. Mas Kodani years later in the context of a "verb" or action versus noun (Shinjin). But, you are right in that I also believe that all it takes is to entrust once with a single mind and in that moment you are embraced by the Amida never to be let go. Because of this, there is no need for another instance. However, having written that, I can understand the issue of "Becoming" in the context of the search and the futility of the search. The search would, in my mind, be the contextual equivalent to "Jiriki" (self-power) which I believe most of us try at one time or

another, until we finally realize the futility of the search (the becoming part). As we open our eyes to the reality and futility of the "becoming" we let go of that search, only to be Graced by the Amida. As you said, the Power of the Amida does not lie in "Namo Amida Butsu" itself, it lies in the Amida Buddha and not us just saying the words. Quality and single minded entrustment of the Nembutsu, not constant and repetitious reciting of the words leads us to Settlement (Anjin). The action of that One Thought Moment (Shinjin), is to BE, and not to become.

There are many proponents of Ueda Sensei's thoughts and they should all be taken seriously. But I believe for each of us who takes the Nembutsu Path, there is a unique path based on who we are, and though our understanding maybe different, it is always directed towards the Enlightenment assured by the Amida Buddha.

How was the "Hongan" or Original Vow Made?

This is an excerpt from "Anjin Ketsujo Sho" or "The Attainment of True Faith," translation by Eizo Tanaka from THE PURE LAND - Journal of European Shin Buddhism, Series 1, 1982-1983.

Shin Buddhists should first of all understand how the Original Vow was made. Amida's Great Vow is made up of forty-eight 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 Raikan 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.

Ryogemon by Rennyō Shonin:

Moro moro no, zoo gyo zasshu jiriki no
kokoro wo furi sutete,
isshin ni Amida Nyorai warera ga kondo
no ichidaiji no go shoo, ontasuke soorae
to tanomi mooshite sooro.

Tanomu ichinen no toki oojo ichi jo, ontasuke
jijoo to zonji,
kono ue no shoo-myo wa, go-on hoosha
to zonji yorokobi mooshi sooroo.

Kono onkotowari chomon mooshiwake
sooro koto, gokaisan shonin goshusse no
go-on,
shidai soojo no zenjishiki no asakarazaru
gokanke no go-on to, arigataku zonji
sooroo.

Kono ue wa, sadame okaseraruru on-
nokite, ichi go wo kagiri mamori moosu
beku sooroo.

A final Thought:

I am very busy at the LA Betsuin with this year's Obon, and as a consequence I was barely able to get this issue out in June. In Vol. 1 Issue 4, I provided a translation of the Ryogemon, this time here is a Romanized version of the same in Japanese. I am also attaching an audio of the reading, please read along and remember, this is the Jodo Shinshu Creed. I hope all is well and the Summer joyful, as for me I have been enjoying the Obon's to date, Sun Valley & Senshin Buddhist Temples. Take good care & please send questions. NAMO AMIDA BUTSU