

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

This issue is dedicated to Rev. Russell Hamada and will feature an article written by him in April of 1990. He is and will always be a mentor and friend.

What did Rev. Russell bekieve about Todo Shinshu Buddhism?

<u>A Window to Jodoshinshu</u>, by Rev. Russell Hamada, Los Angeles Hompa Hongwanji Betusin.

The "compassionate appearance of the Tathagata in this world" is evidence that the teachings of Jodoshinshu are meant as a living experience. Through our own unique experience, the truth of Namoamidabutsu shall arise in each individual with its own flavor. It is my intention to avoid a lengthy presentation and to offer a "taste" of my understanding with the hope that it shall serve as a window for you to approach further studies. The ideas presented are not intended to be conclusive. They shall have meaning and application only if they are expanded through your own doubts and experiences. (Shinran wrote:)

When I carefully consider the Vow which Amida brought forth after five kalpas contemplation, I find that it was solely for me Shinran alone! So how gracious is the original Vow of Amida who resolved to save me, possessed of many karmic sins.

We have been left adrift by a well-know adage, "Jodoshinshu is a religion of inward reflections." Although this expression best describes the beginning of the Jodoshinshu experience, it does not identify our true "inward" existence, and fails to point the way to greater untainted truth.

Unlike traditional Mahayana Buddhist masters, Shinran did not emphasize the existence of an innate Buddha-nature (potential for enlightenment). Although he did not deny its existence, he emphatically pointed out the differences between the

potential to attain enlightenment and our true "inward" existence.

Without a doubt, we are beings of limited abilities, wrong views and ego-centered passions. All of which are motivated by greed, anger, and ignorance. We lament over birth, growing old, declining health and death. And, as beings who suffer great anxieties over the effects of our thoughts, words and actions, it is only natural that we desire a world of comfort and peace of mind. For this reason, it is said, "If you listen to the Dharma just to understand yourself, you shall never see beyond your own self-centering." In other words, if you only see yourself, you shall never see all that exists around you.

Upon reflecting "inward," the hopelessness and despair of the human condition is realized. Notwithstanding, "if you only see yourself, you shall never see all that exists around you." This is where the nature of Shakyamuni's enlightenment is known and experienced. Despite our "inward" existence, our life is sustained, embraced and a world of comfort and peace of mind is revealed.

In order to experience this world of comfort and peace of mind, we must reverse the way we perceive ourselves and all that exists around us. We must abandon all self-centered schemes (self-power). To illustrate this, an example is given by the great religious scholar Kaneko Daiei.

Suppose I am looking at the moon. Because I am on this earth looking upwards at the moon in the sky above, my field of vision is very narrow. But, if we reverse the direction of sight, and imagine that the moon sees me, then I, the so-called seer of the moon, am now illumined by the moon's light, and correspondingly, everything around me also bathers in the light of the moon. I can even sense the reflect-

ing light of a single drop of dew hanging on the edge of a small leaf.

When I reverse my normal method of perception, my field of vision broadens and deepens. As in the example of the shining moonlight, it would be to see myself totally embraced by the nature of Shakyamuni's enlightenment (*Truth*). The world is no longer seen from a self-centered point of view, rather, I become the object or purpose of a flow of Truth.

My heart and mind, is your heart and mind.

Your heart and mind, is my heart and mind.

It is not I that become you,
But it is you that become me. (Saichi)

The nature of Shakyamuni's enlightenment is the dynamic activity of life that he had awakened to. If we were to understand and give a name to this Truth, it refers to Amida Buddha. The flow of this Truth that embraces us and reveals a world of comfort and peace of mind is the power of Amida Buddha (*Tariki*). It is everything that draws us closer to broadening and deepening our perception of Truth and realizing a world of comfort and peace of mind; which is none other than the Pure land, where all of our uncertainties and anxieties are reconciled.

If there were not any uncertainties and anxieties in this life, there would not be a need for a Pure Land. But because in fact we lament over the uncertainty of life and suffer great anxieties, the power of Amida Buddha flows towards my life, embraces me, and works to alleviate my uncertainties and reconcile my anxieties. As this power of Amida Buddha reveals the Pure Land, the effort to alleviate my uncertainties and reconcile my anxieties is called the true wish or Vow of Amida Buddha.

Through the power of Amida Buddha, the Vow causes our aspiration for the realization of the Pure Land. When we take refuge in the intent of the Vow and our thoughts turn towards the Pure Land, we naturally become more aware of our lives in this world. This realization is expressed as the name of Amida Buddha, Namoamidabutsu.

Thus, when those afflicted by wrong views and ego-centered passions respond to the Vow of Amida Buddha, their uncertainties and anxieties are "settled" with peace of mind, and the Name, Namoamidabutsu flow through their lips in joyful acknowledgement and gratitude. Our potential for enlightenment (Buddha-Nature) is not self-centered, but through the power of Amida Buddha, it is given to us through the Great Compassion of the Vow.

Rev. Russell Hamada's explanation of Shinshu.

What are the essentials of Jodo Shinshu?

The essentials of Jodoshinshu (kyosho) and Ryogemon (Creed) have traditionally expressed the doctrinal basis for Jodoshinshu Hongwanji-ha. Their importance cannot be underestimated, and it is our responsibility to graciously acknowledge their meaning and significance. Russell Hamada.

## ESSENTIALS OF JODOSHINSHU (KYOSHO)

I Name of Denomination: Jodoshinshu Hongwanji-ha (Nishi Hongwanji)

II Founder: Kenshin Daishi Shinran Shonin (1173-1263)

III Central Image of Reverence: Amida Tathagata (Namoamidabutsu)

IV Sutras: Triple Pure Land Sutras Bussetsu Daimuryojukyo (Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life)

Bussetsu Kammuryojukyo (Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable life) Bussetsu Amidakyo (Smaller Sutra of Immeasurable life)

V Teaching: Entrusting oneself in the teaching of Namoamidabutsu; Rejoice that one shall attain Buddhahood, and with the heart of gratitude, live for the welfare of the people of the world.

VI Discipline of the Denomination: This denomination is a brotherhood joined together in the joy of entrustment in Amida Buddha. The followers shall always be discreet in words and conduct; maintain the path of humanity, obey laws, and shall

together spread the teaching of truth to the world. Also, through deep understanding of the law of causation, they shall not be misled by superstition, indulge in fortune telling, nor use of any charms or exorcism.

## **EXPLANATION**

I Jodoshinshu (True Pure Land School), refers to the name and teaching of our school of Buddhadharma, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni is believed to have taught over 84,000 paths to true awakening and peace of mind. Each path is uniquely distinct and exemplifies the different capabilities and qualities inherent in all human beings. Hongwanji (Temple of the Primal Vow); our school was named by the grandson of Shinran Shonin, Kakunyo Shonin. Until then, Hongwanji was referred to as Ohtani Byodo, the site of Shinran's mausoleum. Through the writings and activities of Kakunyo Shonin, various groups of Shinran's followers had been organized into the formal institution known as Hongwanji.

Primal Vow refers to the 18th Vow of Amida Buddha, which contains the essential teachings of Jodoshinshu... Namoamidabutsu.

"In the Jodo teaching there are the true and the provisional. The true is the selected Primal Vow (18th Vow). The provisional teaches the good of meditative and non-meditative practices. The selected Primal Vow is Shin Buddhism-the true Dodo Teaching (Jodoshinshu); good practices, whether meditative or non-meditative, are provisional ways. Shin Buddhism is the consummation of Mahayana Buddhism. (Mattosho, Letters of Shinran)

II The founder of Jodoshinshu is Shinran Shonin (1173-1263). Emperor Meiji later bestowed the title Kenshin Daishi (Seer of Truth, Great Master) posthumously upon Shinran. Although Shinran himself adamantly denied having any disciples or teachings of his own, following his death it became necessary to organize the teachings that he had conveyed to avoid confusion and deviation. Such an effort is remarkable considering that the great organization we know as Hongwanji had its beginnings as a gathering for Shinran Shonin's annual memorial service.

"The founder of our teaching, Shinran Shonin, based his teachings on Teaching, Practice, Realization and Attainment. Thus, his work in six parts entitled <u>A Collection of Passages Revealing the True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure land</u>
Way explains the doctrines of true teaching

in great detail." (Kyogyoshinsho Dai-i, Kakunyo Shonin)

III The Central Image of Reverence for all Jodoshinshu followers is Amida Tathagata. It must be understood that the statue itself is not regarded to be an "idol" possessing supernatural powers of abilities. In most temples, statues of Amida Buddha are enshrined, however the statues themselves are only an expedient means to express the natural flow of reality... Namoamidabutsu. That is why, the 8th Abbot of Hongwanji, Rennyo Shonin, advised; "...in our tradition, preference is given to the painted image over wooden images, and the Name (Namoamidabutsu) over painted images." The Name refers to the written six characters of Namoamidabutsu.

IV Each school of Buddhism bases its particular method of practice upon specific sutras. The sutras are the sermons of discourses given verbally by the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. As mentioned previously, each sutra is different and is explicitly directed towards the varying capabilities of each individual; much the same way that a physician prescribes medicine depending upon symptoms of illness and the condition of the patient. The three sutras the Jodoshinshu is founded upon are;

Bussetsu Daimuryojukyo: Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life

Bussetsu Kammuryojukyo: Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable life Bussetsu Amidakyo: Smaller Sutra of Immeasurable life

The Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life, sometimes referred to as the "Larger Sutra" was regarded by Shinran as containing the essential teachings of Nembutsu (Namoamidabutsu), and referred to it as the "True Teaching." Many of the gathas that we chant during everyday services such as Juseige and Sambutsuge are sections of the Larger Sutra.

In this sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha explains why those who exist in a world of uncertainty and anxiety are unable to attain true awakening. And, it is for that reason he appeared in this world.

"The reason why he (I) manifested himself in this world is to teach the Dharma and to illuminate the Paths, and then to save the swarming sentient beings and to give the True and Real Benefit to them."

He further continues to point out the errors of those who are controlled by dependence upon self-centered schemes and calculation, for they shall not realize the state of Pure Land despite an encounter with the Buddhist teachings.

In Shakyamuni Buddha further describes, through cause and effect, the emergence of Amida Buddha and the 48 Vows. The virtues of the 48 Vows are embodied in the Name of Amida Buddha (Namoamidabutsu), and through true entrustment, those who "hear" this name shall realize the state of Pure Land and attain a status equal to Amida Buddha.

The Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, contains the method essential for awakening, stability and peace of mind for those beings unable to perform "good" actions and deeds (common human beings) This Sutra is based upon a historical tragedy that took place at the castle of Rajagriha. In an attempt to relieve the uncertainties and anxieties of all beings, Shakyamuni Buddha reveals the teachings of Amida Buddha to Queen Valdehi. At the end of this sutra, Shakyamuni states;

"Those who perform this samadhi will be able, in this present life, to see the Buddha of Immeasurable Life (Amida) and the two great bodhisattvas. If a good man or woman but hears the name of the Buddha and the names of the two bodhisattvas, the evil karma binding that person to birth-and-death for immeasurable kalpas is eliminated. How much more so if that person is mindful of the Buddha. Know that whoever is mindful of the Buddha is a pundrika (white lotus) among men. Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta will be his excellent friends, and sitting in the place of enlightenment, he will be born into the family of Buddhas."

The Buddha said to Ananda: "You should carefully hold these words in mind. To hold these words in mind is to hold in mind the name of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life."

The Smaller Sutra of Immeasurable Life, or more commonly referred to as Amidakyo is a short sutra that praises the virtues and adornments of the Pure Land of Amida Buddha. In this sutra, Shakyamuni describes the realm of Pure Land and explains the name of Amida Buddha as the "boundless, unhindered light" that illuminates all the worlds of the ten directions, thus reaching out towards the multitudes of beings "lost in the vast sea of birth and death."

Shakyamuni Buddha offers personal testimony to the power of the Dharma of Nembutsu and further declares that the countless Buddhas of the ten directions

also praise the virtues of and say the name of Amida Buddha.

V The first Nobel Truth explained by the historical Buddha Shakyamuni is that life is filled with Dukha, or disease. Matters in our life are off-centered or out of balance. This is because our thoughts, words and actions are motivated by self-centered desires, needs and expectations. When our desires, needs, and expectations are not satisfied our lives are filled with regrets, disappointments and disease. This is caused by our failure to awaken to the compassionate flow of the Truth that works to embrace and sustain our lives. Therefore, to totally entrust oneself to the Vow of Amida (Namoamidabutsu) is to live a life of stability and peace of mind. It is the joy of gratitude that acknowledges those causes and conditions that sustain this life.

"A man worries over the field when he has it; he worries about his house when he owns it. So with cows, domestic animals, servants, money, food clothing, and over everything thought of as 'mine.' These worries yield to imaginations, sighs, anxieties, fears and sorrow..." (Daimuryojukyo)

VI The Discipline of the Denomination is often times taken for granted or ignored. The temple membership is one that is united, both in spirit and function in the teaching of Namoamidabutsu. That is the sole purpose of the temple. It is not because we are of Japanese Ancestry, or come from the same prefecture in Japan. The temple is not a community center. All social activities are meant to enhance the mutual gathering of fellow practicers.

Jodoshinshu adamantly denies any superstitious beliefs or practices. The Law of Cause and Effect (Karma) is a truth effected thorough our daily thoughts, words and actions. And, this truth cannot be manipulated through mystical means or utilized for our own convenience. We alone are responsible for our thoughts, words and actions, and must correspondingly accept the resultant effects. Superstitious beliefs such as fortune telling, exorcism, or lucky charms are only a primitive escape from the realities of life, and a childish excuse for not confronting our own individual karma.

As I stated at the beginning of this issue, Rev. Russell was a mentor and friend. Rev. Russell Hamada once said, "Jodoshinshu has no flash, no trash, and no cash." This is why this issue is dedicated to one who died too soon. It was Rev. Russell who encouraged me to go to Japan in 1998 and allowed me to grow in my

understanding of Shin Buddhism. It was his attitude of Joy when he spoke of the Nembutsu, the attitude of sharing the gift of Namo Amida Butsu with passion and commitment that has allowed me to hear so clearly today. The description of a Bodhisattva fits Rev. Russell to a "T." Thank you Rev. Russell and this issue is for you.

A Final Thought:

I am planning a trip to Japan, and may be gone for a while. The Answer will be going on an indefinite hiatus after the next issue. I wanted to put all of Rev. Russell's words down and so this is a three pager. If you have questions, this is your last chance to ask for a while.

I am also including a couple of pictures from that trip in 1998, a trip also commemorating the 500th Anniversary of Rennyo Shonin. Rev. Russell was to have led the trip, but died suddenly on his return trip from Japan earlier in the year.

Thank you for reading the Answer over these past 3 years and I hope to start it again when I return.

NAMO AMIDA BUTSU



