

A note of introduction:

To those whom I have confused in the past, you might want to read the fall edition of *Pacific World 2003*, Journal of the institute of Buddhist studies: Kiyozawa Manshi and the Path to the Revitalization of Buddhism by Alfred Bloom. Personally, I can't stand footnotes and Dr, Reverend, Alfred Bloom tends to intellectualize a bit, still if you stick with it he has some good insights into the most thought provoking Buddhist thinker since Shinran, Kiyozawa Manshi. It was this Kiyozawa school of thought that is responsible for my becoming Jodo Shinshu, or Pure Lander. Culturally, I am an American, though lately I lie and say I am from Canada and will continue to do so while "That Man" is in office. Yes, I don't care for President Bush and his policies. As a Buddhist, I believe in Peace and don't feel that another person's sexual nature degrades my marriage. While I feel that all life should be protected, the right of a woman to choose when she is ready to be a mother comes first. I think ex-Catholics suffer terribly when they become Buddhist, but really, they have to let this stuff go. The idea of sin is such a handy crutch that the concept should be avoided at all costs. The concept of sin is something imposed from outside. Think for yourself, layout your own moral roadmap, and then question it. Just imagine how much safer the world would be if George W. had learned to question. Dharma in the White House. What a concept?

A practical approach to disappearing into the Pure Land, by Ed Parker

Remember, my words are like the moldering leaves pressed together by the snow lingering beneath the stark bare limbs of winter's maple.

I have known religious people and people concerned with the truth, even some who pursued it religiously, though these have been rare. I think most people are drawn to the truth, at least in the beginning. Most, stop when they think they have found the answer, become mired in dogma and go no further. And why should they, they have found the truth, the ultimate answer? These people have no where to go, they are stopped. Further thought would only take them away from whatever it is they've found. And having found the truth, they feel obliged to share it. How could they not share it? What else is left to them? Should one of these true believers come across someone else with a different final answer, the two invariably fight. There can only be one ultimate and final answer, and each feels they have it. Unless of course, one feels their truth is so obvious it doesn't need defending. Sadly, there are not many of these, though their arrogance must be a terrible burden. Most answer people feel that their ultimate answer requires their support. Why, I don't know. As I see it, when it comes to seeking truth, all answers are inappropriate (it stops you) and often dangerous for those who disagree. I say, why go there. Or, if you must, stop with a strongly held opinion and duck all absolute and final answers about truth.

Well, needless to say, this disturbs people who place great store by answers. Answer people get upset when the utility of their answers are questioned. They say: "What is the purpose of truth if it's not an answer?"

Being something of a coward let me hasten to clarify. As I see it, there are at least two types of answers. Many of which, well some of which, perform useful functions. There are those answers that pertain to questions in the objective world: How big is a bread box? What is a bread box? What time is it? Do you know the way to San Jose? How much is that doggy in the window? These are material questions that require material answers. This and that kind of answers. We can weigh and measure, compare and contrast this with that and find an answer. Most of us spend our day asking, answering, and looking for facts in the material world. We eat, sleep, work, and wash dishes in the material world and the material world is important, it keeps us warm and fed, it's just, well, a bit limited. We limit the objective world by how we define it. This, of course, is the problem, the Objective world is not Reality, not big R reality, because we have in effect, created it. I mean, what is a bread box anyway?

Then there is the Subjective world, the world of values. I love this and hate that, kind of reality. This is the second type of answer. The created world of, this is good, this is evil, want this, don't want that, ideas like right and wrong: good people do this, bad people do that, give me liberty, justice, motherhood, security, so on and so forth. These people feel that carrying the flag of freedom means that they are free, that truth and its symbols are one and the same. We rely on such flags and banners to give our lives meaning and measure our concept of self accordingly. To the best of my knowledge, freedom, liberty, even motherhood are processes that are dependent upon how we conduct ourselves toward them. We live in the Objective world, yet we give it subjective meaning based upon causes and conditions we have created, ones we can neither understand nor control. Hold on, this doesn't mean there is nothing to be done. It just means over coming our delusions is tough, we can't do it by ourselves. Ah yes, this Subjective reality is fanciful stuff, full of emotion. Consider all those concepts, ideas and beliefs that cause us to love, hate, fear and remain eternally distracted from anything meaningful, they're not all on TV. Still, it's entertaining. What would we do without drama? This is the world of delusion. This is the created world of self, of who I think I am. A self image negotiated without conscious thought or intent and then imposed upon the material world as a reference point. How does this benefit me, make me look good, smarter, thinner, younger? In the Subjective world, each of us is our own yardstick, which makes comparisons difficult, or would be if we were not deluded. Try comparing yourself to Amida. After experiencing the infinite, the finite becomes suddenly liberating.

Ok, so each of us experiences the Objective world, subjectively. We give meaning to the Objective world, subjectively. Everything is seen in relation to our needs; our wants, our desires. So how do we know what is truth? How can we know the truth? It all begins with the question: What am I? Wait, wait, there's

another question, the BIG ONE: could I accept the truth about myself if it was pointed out to me? This is where Amida's compassion lives.

Actually, Amida lives in the intuitive world. This is the world we visit in those moments when our Subjective mind is desperately pouring over Objective facts and finding nothing that answers; nothing of importance. The intuitive arises when answers fail. When answers fill the world, intuitive awareness must tiptoe around these jack booted, goose stepping certainties, constantly looking over its shoulder, trying to avoid all confrontation with these ruffians. If you want answers, buy a dictionary. If you want truth, Spiritual Truth, you must first get over your answers. The intuitive world of Amida has nothing to do with answers other than to point them out as delusions. If we ignore the intuitive light Amida shines onto our delusions, or deny that our delusions exist, our delusions grow stronger, the light more difficult to see. On the other hand, if we see what is within us, accept our foolishness and in accepting it, let it go, the light grows stronger. All we have to do is ask, "Why?"

It is all in the questions we ask. You got to careful what you ask for. If you ask a material question, you will get a material answer. This and that questions have this and that answers. This, compared to that, is what? Spiritual questions are different, for the variable in every equation is you. Instead of looking outside, you must look within, into the person you have become, the person you have created. The subjective world is subjective because we have created our sense of self from delusion; delusion is our filter, our mask. It is this deluded sense of self that translates the limited Objective world into Subjective meaning, meaning designed by I, the me in ego, amigo. You know, stuff in, garbage out. And we are stuck there, each in our own way. One day each of us will discover that we have no answer for the really important things in life: Why did that child have to die so young? Why do people die all around me, yet I live? Why is there war? Why are some countries so fat, others, so thin? We ask, but don't expect an answer, there is no answer, or there are too many answers. If we ask: why did I become angry just then, or why am I so selfish, this is different, the question evokes the power of Amida. So just throw that why, high in to the sky, saying, Namo Amida Buddha with humility and gratitude and see what Amida has to show you. Each of us has experienced disillusionment; each of us has expected one thing only to discover that it was another. How much of our pain comes from promises we made to ourselves that reality could not keep. This is what is revealed in Amida's light, accept it and let it go. Take refuge in the Buddha.

The Light of Amida disrupts objective/Subjective dichotomy by allowing us to see that we have bent reality around who we think we are. This light points out that we are what we do, what we think, what we say. It shows us that when we act from delusion, we set that act in motion with no real idea where it is going. It is like bowling blind folded; hoping for the sound of falling pins, hoping no one will suddenly start screaming. Amida's light makes us ask, what am I? It suggests that if you don't know what is making you act, who you really are, all other

knowledge is pointless. How can you say what your intentions are? It asks, how can you judge others when you don't know for sure why you do what you do? How can we not be tolerant of others?

The light of Amida reveals that we are all limited, foolish people working with what we have. How can we not be tolerant? It is all about the question. When the question calls, Amida allows us to see, to hear, and to accept what is there, and in accepting our foolishness, our delusions become less, until one day our foolish sense of self is gone. On the day our delusions disappear, the self disappears, on that day we will find the Pure Land.

What does this all mean, likely nothing. For me it means that Amida is not out there, but inside me, inside each of us, trying to get our attention. Our lives are filled with distractions, those we create ourselves; those others create for us. Few of us would know reality if it bit us. We are all ordinary, foolish people, limited by our blind passions. There are no exceptions. I take a few minutes when I can, to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha and look at myself and question why. One day I will do this and find that I have disappeared. Maybe, I will laugh and say, "So this then, is nirvana." Maybe not.