

Bukkyo, Bachi, and otherwise

On the traditional temple altar, there is a small table called the Uajoku placed immediately before the Buddha statue. On it are placed an incense burner called a Kasha, two offerings of cooked rice on either side called Buppan, and two vases of water on either side of the Buppan called Kebyo. Greenery is placed in the Kebyo to indicate fresh water. They represent offerings of food and water, the final offering before one encounters the Buddha. What does this mean?

One view might be that one does not approach the Buddha or the Truth with ulterior motives. In other words, we do not look to the Buddha for cancer cures, passing exams, predicting the future, curing aches and pains, or even acquiring a strong moral sense. The basic necessities of life represented by the offering of food and water must be satisfied first. In other words, Buddhist awakening requires a basically healthy person. A starving person must first be fed, a sick person must first be cured, and an emotionally upset person must first be calmed. Then the very difficult business of seeing oneself begins, and with it the beginning of awakening to the Buddha as Truth. Jodoshinshu Buddhism is about 90% truth value and 10% utility value. That is to say, Jodoshinshu is valuable primarily for what it offers as a means of seeing the truth about me myself alone, in the awakening experience called Shinjin (real and true mind). The remaining 10% of utility value is in the social, cultural, and community closeness of the Sangha of fellow traveler.

Knowing this, we still opt for the utility value of religion. Is meditative breathing good for your health? Can you live longer by chanting every morning? Can you succeed in business, or get what you want by chanting morning and night? Why would I pay more attention to someone who can levitate while talking than to someone who cannot? Does the ability to levitate mean that that person is more egoless and less attached to the idea of self than most people? Is a psychic more likely a kinder and gentler and more understanding person than one who is not? Having a talent that few others have does not automatically make you kinder, or more gentle, or more understanding

For Nembutsu followers, awakening means becoming gentler and more understanding with oneself and with others. It is not about controlling one's life, but of letting go of the obsessive need to be in control. In this regard, Jodoshinshu talks continually of death, the ultimate loss of

control. The encounter with absolute loss of control awakens true and real life in us and takes us beyond just existing. It takes us from the artificially self-created world we call "real" to a world or moment free or pure of that delusion. If the Buddha is Bodhi itself, then awakening to the Truth is its own reward and punishment. A Buddha separate from you is beside the point. Buddhism is not about rewards and punishments from an exterior force or being, it is not about cures, miracles, protective amulets and incantations, blessings, curses, or exorcisms. It is about waking up to true and real life, enjoying, and dying. The encounter with our ego-self is an ever-deepening, ever-darkening experience, which at the same time, is an ever broadening, ever-enlightening, experience. The stronger the shadow, the brighter the Light.

Namoamidabutsu,
Namoatnidabutsu,
Namoamidabutsu.

Gassho,
Rev Mas