

prajna



# **Gohonzon** - Amida Nyorai

Our Gohonzon, or main object of veneration, is Amida Nyorai – either is the form of a statue, a picture scroll, or a scroll with the characters Namoamidabutsu written on it. While most of the BCA temples have a standing wooden statue of Amida Buddha in the main altar or shrine, a few have a picture scroll or a character scroll. Rennyō Shōnin's preference was of course a character scroll, a picture scroll, and a statue in that order. This preference de-emphasizes the anthropomorphic figure of Amida Buddha for the more abstract character scroll. Why is this?

Simply put, because Amida is not a god who created the universe, not a supreme being who rewards good deeds and punishes evil doers. It is not a personal deity who can be communicated with through prayer in the manner of western religions. Amida does not dictate a specific way of living or a list of value judgements. A classic definition of a “cosmic Buddha” is “shinjitsu no hataraki”, or “the workings of truth/reality. As Dharmakaya or “the Dharma-body” it has no shape, no form, no definition whatsoever. It is simply what it is, “thusness”. In describing this indescribable thing, it takes a form and name – one form and name being the form of a human statue named Amida. This name and form comes from “thusness”, but is not the thing itself. “Comes from thusness” is “Nyorai” in Japanese. And Amida Nyorai means the form and name that comes from the formless and nameless ultimate reality. It is the form and name that points to the ultimate.

If you were a frog or elephant, no doubt the form and name would be more conducive to a frog or elephant. But for human beings, it would naturally take human form. The name of Amida means “infinite life and light”, that which is beyond time and space - something to be experienced, not just believed in. “Faith in Amida Buddha” is at best misleading. Petitional prayer, by the way is labeled, along with fortune telling, astrology, and magic, as superstition in our Kyōshō – the Essentials of the Teaching. Ours is a teaching of what ultimate reality is and how it is experienced, not through our own efforts, but by seeing that our own efforts are precisely what block Amida out. And that in spite of our best deluded efforts, Amida breaks through this jiriki shell to reveal the obvious to us. And those moments are Namoamidabutsu.

Gasshō, Rev. Mas

