

JUNE 2003

The "Inexhaustible Namuamidabutsu"

This month I would like to share and reflect on a wonderful poem written by the famous Shin Buddhist Myokonin, Saichi. Myokonin are the most exemplary and faithful followers of the Nembutsu tradition. Shin Buddhism is rich in its history of ordinary lay people who came to have profound understanding of the Dharma and the Nembutsu. In many cases these lay people were uneducated, and even illiterate. Saichi was one of those Myokonin who had a limited education, but whose poems reflect the depth and understanding equal to a Zen Master's. It is no doubt that D.T. Suzuki was quite fond of the poetry of Saichi, and the following poem by Saichi was one of many translated by Suzuki in his book, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*.

Before I quote Saichi's poem, let me explain a few of the terms that Saichi uses. To refer to the Buddha, he often uses the term *Oya*, or *Oyasama*. In Japanese, *Oya* literally means one's parent. It can be either mother or father, or refer to both parents. Saichi uses the term *Oya* when referring to the Buddha. For Saichi, the Buddha is not something or someone far, far away. The Buddha is close to his heart, just like the heart of a mother or father.

Saichi also uses the terms *ki* and *ho*. *Ki* refers to sentient beings, or we unenlightened beings. *Ho* refers to truth, to the Dharma, to enlightenment. Saichi's religious insight is that he saw and realized the oneness of *ki* and *ho*, the oneness of man and Buddha, the oneness of samsara and nirvana.

Let us look at the following poem that reflects this insight.

*The "Namu-amida-butsu" is inexhaustible,
 However much one recites it, it is inexhaustible;
 Saichi's heart is inexhaustible;
 Oya's heart is inexhaustible.
 Oya's heart and Saichi's heart,
 Ki and Ho, are of one body which is the "Namu-amida-butsu."
 However much this is recited, it is inexhaustible.*

Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist, p. 183 – D.T. Suzuki

Think about this poem in terms of things in our ordinary life. Everything in our everyday life is "exhaustible", not "inexhaustible." The joy you feel when you buy a new car is great at first, but in time, it fades away as the car gets older. Your joy in your new car is exhaustible.

Money can give you joy sometimes. If you hit the lotto, I am sure you would be very joyous. But the joy of hitting the lotto would begin to fade in time. Even the joy that the money gives you can begin to fade with time, such that you have to find new and innovative ways to spend the money to give you that joy again.

A cruise or a trip abroad can give you joy, but eventually the joy of that trip fades away in your memory. Eventually you can't even remember what year you took that cruise. It is exhaustible.

Even love in one sense, is exhaustible. When you first fall in love you are in rapture. You give flowers, candy, and jewelry out of your romantic sense of love. But that kind of love is also exhaustible. One student in my class said, "When I first got married my husband used to buy me flowers. Then later he said, go buy them yourself!"

Which is why many marriages face difficulties when the romance fades away. There must be a source of inexhaustible love to sustain a marriage over a lifetime.

Saichi, on the other hand, finds something in the Nembutsu, Namuamidabutsu, that is inexhaustible. While other things fade away in time, the Nembutsu continues to give him an inexhaustible source of joy, of meaning, of gratitude, of insight.

When you think about it, that is really the only thing in life that is inexhaustible. Our health is not inexhaustible. Eventually it will fail us. Our life is not inexhaustible. Eventually it must come to an end. Our relationships are not inexhaustible. Eventually we must part from our loved ones. To receive something that is inexhaustible is to receive the ultimate gift in life.

Saichi's heart is inexhaustible and the Oya's heart is inexhaustible because they are not the limited hearts of our ego self. Our ego self has a small, limited heart that is concerned about its own welfare, its own gratification, its own happiness. Saichi, however, has

received a heart beyond the ego self. He has received the heart of his true self, the heart of the Buddha, the heart of enlightenment. That heart is not limited or bound by anything. It is inexhaustible, unlimited, and unbounded.

When you think about it, we are foolish for spending so much energy and time in our lives about things that are "exhaustible." It's nice to diet and exercise, but what's the use of dieting and exercising for the sake of the limited ego self that is "exhaustible?" Wouldn't it be better to spend time discovering our true self, discovering a truth that is "inexhaustible."

When Saichi says no matter how much one recites the Nembutsu, it is inexhaustible, he means that his life of listening to and saying the Nembutsu is a constant source of learning, of growing, of seeing not only himself, but the truth of the Dharma as well.

If I asked you to say over and over again, something like, "Chocolate cake, chocolate cake, chocolate cake", eventually you would get sick and tired of saying "Chocolate cake." However, for Saichi, he never gets tired of saying "Namuamidabutsu." He doesn't get tired of saying it because it is more than just something to say. It is not a secret Mantra. It is not a mystical formula. It is his life itself. To tire of the Nembutsu would be to say one is tired of life. The Nembutsu is the embodiment of wisdom and compassion in his life. It continuously brings light and warmth to him, just as the sun brings us warmth each and every day.

This one poem by Saichi, teaches me to discover something true, something inexhaustible in my life. The ultimate joy, the ultimate happiness in life cannot be found in things that are exhaustible. To place our reliance of happiness on things that are exhaustible is to ultimately be left empty when those things run dry. We must find for ourselves the inexhaustible depth of the ocean of the Dharma, the inexhaustible source of light that is wisdom, the inexhaustible source of warmth, that is compassion. To receive this one simple word, this one simple truth, into the bones and marrow of our being, is to receive the inexhaustible *Namuamidabutsu*.

Discovering Buddhism in Everyday Life

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BUDDHIST EDUCATION CENTER

Discovering Buddhism in Everyday Life

Copyright 2011, Marvin Harada

Corrected second printing, 2014

Published by Buddhist Education Center

Anaheim, California

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ISBN 978-0-9721395-4-0