

A Surprise Encounter

Part Six of a Nine Part Series by Reverend Shindo Nishiyama

Buddha and Shindo are walking together around Jikoen temple.

Shindo: Buddha, I want to ask a question about death. Do you know what happens when we die? I just want to know if there is a kind of life after death?

(The Buddha remains silent.)

Shindo: Buddha, did you hear my question? Can you help me find answers to my question?

(The Buddha remains silent.)

Shindo: Buddha, I know that you have an answer to my question! Please!

Buddha: Shindo, I have no answer for your question because I have not died yet.

Shindo: Yes, I understand, but because of you're the Awakened One, you are supposed to know, right?

(After a moment of silence, Buddha responds to Shindo.)

Buddha: Shindo, dying is as important as living. When we realize that our lives are impermanent, we can live more meaningfully each day. There is no distinction between living and dying because we are living but dying and we are dying but also living in this moment. This is my response to your question. Do you understand?

Shindo: Oh yes, I understand, but I am still wondering what will happen to me after my death.

Buddha: Shindo, the Dharma is for living your daily life. By awakening to the impermanence of all things, you will be able to see what life after death is.

Shindo: What do you mean?

Buddha: I mean that you don't need to worry about what happens to you after you die. What you need to do is think how you are living your unrepeatable life. You must see your true self. The most important thing is to enjoy the Dharma as your great partner in your spiritual life's journey. It doesn't matter when you die or how you die or how what happens after death because we don't know how it will be. So, the great questions are not: "How shall I die, or when shall I die or what is the life after death?" Your only questions should be: "How shall I live? How shall I share my unrepeatable life with others? "

Listening to the Dharma is important to our daily practice. It is the path to become an awakened one who truly understands the meaning of the Dharma. Shindo, living is suffering; aging is suffering; sickness is suffering; and dying is difficult to grasp. These are issues for everyone, but they are all very much a part of our lives. To be liberated from these issues; to be free from all delusions, doubts, anxiety, and sufferings, we need to become awakened and accept all things just as they are. If we do, our life will be free from doubts and anxiety in our limited lifetime.

I have no answer to your question, "What happens to us after death?" because it is an inconceivable and unknown issue. We can only listen to the Dharma and engage in our daily lives joyfully. Shindo, there is a beginning and ending for everything in the world. We are part of this Universal Truth and if we truly realize and accept it, we will have no anxiety and fears of dying and death. We were all born and die in Amida Buddha's Infinite Life and Light, the Universal Unconditional Love for all.

Your death is not the end of your presence here on this earth. Your memories, loving, caring, and dedicated life will continue to live within your surviving family members and the people in your community. Because of this truth, you will be able to lead people to the Dharma through your life of joy and gratitude in listening to the Dharma.

Shindo: Buddha, thank you so much for your guidance! I now understand that your teachings are about living and dying! I accept that living is okay and dying is also okay for me, because I am embraced by the light of Amida Buddha's unconditional love and wisdom! I am not alone!

(The Buddha is silent.)

Shindo: I am so grateful that you are here in Hawaii with me! Please stay a few more days and continue to teach me!

Buddha: I am sorry, but I do not have much time due to my many commitments. I have to leave to share the Dharma with future generations.

Shindo: Oh, no!

Buddha: There is a beginning and ending to all things, do you remember?

Shindo: Yes, but....

End of Part Six