

HEAVEN OR HELL

Milton Moon

Choice is not whether you have one,
almost everyone is destined
to spend some time in
either Heaven or Hell.

This time you have already
made your choice; a part of history
irredeemable and irreconcilable,
part of the Karmic flow.

You are what you are - you may spend
a thousand lifetimes of barren living
before gaining entry to the Pure Land.

The Christian Bible tells the story
of Saul of Tarsus becoming the Apostle Paul.
Saul was highly educated in the Jewish tradition.
and early Christians were preaching
alternatives to the established authority and beliefs.
Saul had the authority of life and death and had a moment
of deep doubt when Stephen, a follower of Jesus,
who was being stoned to death. Stephen
was appealing to the crucified, but risen Jesus
not to blame but to forgive the throwers of the stone
whose death they were causing.

The story of the epiphany, the Road to Demascus
completed the crisis of mind that saw the
transformation of Saul of Tarsus
becoming Paul of follower of JesusChrist.

There have been many Buddha's and one
five hundred years earlier, Gautama Siddhartha
also had a transformation and became a Buddha.
He told the story of an earlier Buddha who as
a Bodhisattva named Dharmakara who spent
many lifetimes of unfulfilled living before
his vows bore fruit. The Western Paradise
was formed and He became the Buddha Amitabha.

Amida, as he is known in Japan. made many vows,
forty-eight in all, the eighteenth being the most direct
and the simplest of them all to fulfil yet
all of them contain subtle demands of consecrated effort.

The Eighteenth Vow is central to followers of Pure Land practice.

The vow is called the nembutsu which means, mindful (nen) of the Buddha (butsu). The suggestion is saying the 'nembutsu' up to ten times a day, but some say it once, but others a thousand even more.

The aim is the nembutsu said at the last moment of life, even an evil person can gain entry to the Western Paradise, to begin the journey, to a Buddha nature enlightenment.

Enlightenment is not an easy state either to gain or maintain. The main hurdle is fitting it in with ordinary everyday life - hard enough. If living in a temple - otherwise the tendency is to carelessness or sloppiness or worse and smugness. An exercise of personality is another hindrance; even as an exchange of a greeting.

Reliance on so-called 'niceness' will not guarantee a place in Heaven or the Pure Land. Every human foible is a hazard that can awaken a sexual image; enticing food or drink or so-called harmless drugs. Human spectacle like sporting events can be a hazard if overdone. Even art exhibitions or music concerts can be all-encompassing and out-of-all proportion becoming competitive and ugly in human terms where political skill is astutely played with the politically adept. Money and commerce can prevent a genuine wish for a place in Heaven or the Pure Land.

There are many paths you can choose from: there are paths covered by brambles tiring to traverse. There are open highways you can see ahead for miles; interesting country roads linking villages. You have choices the ways you travel to your destination. If you are a Christian, by birth or inclination you have many leaders to follow like Saul the crucifier who became Paul a Saint of the Christian faith. Or you can follow centuries who trusted the Pure Land and said the nembutsu Namu Amida Butsu with faith in the Buddha of the Western Paradise, the Buddha Amida.