

Published by the Buddhist Churches of America,
Southern District Ministers' Association with
funding from the Southern District Council.

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This World and the Other World



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I would like to introduce an old Japanese genre of literature called Shinju-mono that focuses on stories of young couples who fall in love but are not allowed to marry each other. Because they are not allowed to marry each other, the couple chooses to commit suicide. These stories, however, usually end with the couple expecting and promising to marry each other in the “other world”, before they take their life.

Many people believe in the world of ghosts. That world is described as a scary world. You might think that my essay is talking about this kind of scary world. But that is not the case. The other world that I am mentioning is completely different from this kind of scary “other world.” “Other world” simply means the world that is not “this world.” To use the expression, “other world” means that there is a world absolutely different from this world. However, there are no two worlds around us. There are no two different worlds like the world of hell and the world of heaven. There is only one world around us, but it looks like there are two worlds co-existing.

to use to wash your paint brush. Here, the same cup of water can be sweet, a home, a weapon, or a tool. Depending on the perspective, depending on who perceives the water, it can become at least four different things. It can play four different roles.

In the same manner, there is no difference between this world and the other world. It can be a hell for one person, or a Pure Land for another, depending on the person who is seeing it. However, regardless of who is doing the seeing, it is originally just one world. In Buddhism, we call this “Oneness.”

The following poem by the Shin Buddhist *Myōkonin* (deeply spiritual person of the Nembutsu), Saichi Asahara, clearly shows this kind of spirituality.

Where is Saichi's Pure Land?
Saichi's Pure Land is right here.
Where is the borderline of the Pure Land in this world?
The eyes are the borderline of the Pure Land in this world.

*This floating world is wretched,
But this floating world becomes the Pure Land.
I'm joyful
Namu Amida Butsu.*

The Buddhist Concept of Hell
Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga; p. 69-70