

SHIN BUDDHIST

14

March 2024

I ABC

Magazine of Shin Buddhists

SHIN BUDDHIST:

Magazine of Shin Buddhists

No. 14

March 2024

Editor: Esho Sasaki

Co-editors:

K. Asuka, A. Honda, Y. Inoue, H. Ishida, J. Kamuro,
N. Kashiwahara, M. Kikuchi, H. Kiyomoto, T. Kobata,
M. Moriwaki, E. Nasu, B. Langner-Teramoto,
T. Teramoto

Published by

International Association of Buddhist Culture and
Nagata Bunshodo, Kyoto

Printed by

Dohosha Printing, Kyoto

Poems, articles, translations and news should be sent to

I A B C

302 Namba Royal Heights, 112 Nakaicho,
Shimogyo-ku, KYOTO 600-8219 JAPAN

Tel & Fax: +81 75 352 1839

e-mail to: iabc@office.email.ne.jp

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BUDDHIST CULTURE

<https://www.ne.jp/asahi/iabc/homepage/index.html>

EDITORIAL

There is a Japanese proverb that says, *kouin ya no gotoshi*, which means “Time flies like an arrow” or “Time and tide wait for no man.” I find this to be true as I look back on the many memorable moments and much thought that I have had through taking part in the biennial European Shin Buddhist Conferences (ESC).

The 19th ESC was held in September 2018 in Southampton, UK and the 20th ESC was conducted at the Eko-Haus in Dusseldorf, Germany in 2023. The 20th Conference was initially planned to be held two years following the conference in Southampton. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however, the 20th Conference was postponed to 2023.

With the conference being held every two years, the global pandemic impacted us greatly in that the conference had to be postponed. The 20th ESC was thus conducted in 2023, through the devotion of many fellow Dharma friends.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all for your endeavor and contributions you have made in making the ESC possible.

In this edition of *Shin Buddhist* 14, papers presented during the 19th ESC in Southampton as well as article contributions are included. I would like to thank those who have submitted articles.

Papers from the 20th ESC will be introduced in the next issue of *Shin Buddhist* 15.

SHIN BUDDHIST 14

As always, it is in the hope of establishing a place for discussion and exchange, a place for “turning the wheel” of the Buddha-Dharma of Mahayana Buddhism that *Shin Buddhist* has come into being. We welcome articles, translations, essays and poems on subjects or topics relating to spirituality and inner life of Mahayana Buddhism. The pages of this magazine are open to exchanges of opinion and information, and to any suggestions that you, our readers, may have to help *Shin Buddhist* serve your spiritual needs.

Namo Amida Butsu

E. SASAKI

Editor in Chief

无^ム慚^{サン}无^ム愧^{カイ}ノコノ身^ミニテ
 マコトノコ、ロハナケレドモ
 弥^ミ陀^タノ廻^エ向^{カウ}ノ御^ミ名^ナナニ
 功^ク徳^{トク}ハ十^{ジュ}方^{ハウ}ガニミチタマフ

Shōzōmatsu Wasan (Hymns of the Dharma-Ages) 97

Gutoku's Hymns of Lament and Reflection

Calligraphical print: from *Shōzōmatsu Wasan, The Japanese Sacred Scripture*, published by the Hongwanji, p.111

Muzan mugi no kono mi nite

Makoto no kokoro wa nakaredomo

Mida no ekō no mina nareba

Kudoku wa jippō ni michitamō.

(Shōzōmatsu Wasan, 97)

無慚無愧のこの身にて
まことのこゝろはなけれども
弥陀の廻向の御名なれば
功德は十方にみちたまふ

Although I am without shame and self-reproach
And lack a mind of truth and sincerity,
Because the Name is directed by Amida,
Its virtues fill the ten quarters.

Hymns of the Dharma-Ages (Shōzōmatsu Wasan) 97

The Collected Works of Shinran vol. I, p. 421

Shin Buddhism Translation Series

Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, Kyoto, 1997

A Reflection on the Wasan

Nobuyuki KASHIWAHARA

Although I am without shame and self-reproach
And lack a mind of truth and sincerity,
Because the Name is directed by Amida,
Its virtues fill the ten quarters. (CWS I, p. 421)

Animals' Parental Love

One day early in the summer, I heard my wife shouting "Oh, My!" I rushed to see what had happened. There was a little baby kitten in the irrigation canal with running water. Although it was about to be swept away, it managed to cling to the side wall of the concrete irrigation canal with its little claws. The mother cat was trying desperately to stretch its front leg to help it, but she couldn't reach it. The mother cat meowed sadly in a panicked manner. She must be wondering, "What should I do?" The soaking wet kitten asked for help with a pitiful face and a thin voice.

I fetched a wire cage and saved it successfully. The kitten scared very much and stuck to the bottom of the cage. It was not going to come out of the cage. The mother cat kept a distance and did not approach the cage but was calling out to her baby from a distance. She probably knew very well that she should not be caught together leaving her other babies. The baby kitten in the cage continued calling out to and crying for its mother. I left it as it is, and left the site. After a while I could not hear the kitten meowing. I was worried about what was going on. When

I went to see it, the mother cat came up to the kitten's side and was licking the kitten through the wires of the cage. The kitten seemed completely relieved. It reminded me of the scene in Disney's first color animated film, *Dumbo*, where Dumbo clings to the trunk of Jumbo, his mother elephant, in the prison.

The mother cat never entered the cage. She called and encouraged the kitten in the cage to come out. The kitten at last came out. The kitten followed the mother cat as it was leaving. The mother cat stopped many times and looked back with concern for her baby. The kitten could not climb the stone wall of only thirty to forty centimeters. The mother cat encouraged it, but it was impossible for the kitten to climb the wall. The mother cat bit the kitten's neck and pulled it up. Eventually, they disappeared under the floor of the temple.

The heart of parent who cares about their children and the heart of children who adore their parent are the same for both animals and humans.

Humans are Not Superior to Animals

We human beings have been developing technologies without developing our mind. And we have had many wars. There are no borders for swans which come from the north lands to my countryside. Konrad Zacharias Lorenz wrote about "the fighting instinct in beast and man which is directed against members of the same species" in *On Aggression*. Male deer fight only to compare their powers, and they never kill each other. Massacre and genocide have occurred among human beings. We human beings have fought against nature and have destroyed the environment. Now, we are being defeated by nature.

We are All to Be Saved

We often hear the words: 'humanity,' 'human dignity,' 'Homo sapiens,' 'primate,' 'as human beings,' etc. Shinran Shōnin does not say that human beings are superior to other beings. He never discriminates against others with intelligence.

He says,

For all sentient beings, without exception, have been our parents and brothers and sisters in the course of countless lives in the many states of existence.

A Record in Lament of Divergences (Tannishō 5)

(CWS I, p. 664)

The multitudes of beings all receive the radiance.

Hymn of True Shinjin and the Nembutsu (Shōshinge)

(CWS I, p. 69)

The mother cat and her kittens sleep together peacefully in front of the temple every day. When I see them, I think this is indeed peace. I feel very happy as I am the same kind of sentient beings, and I utter "Namu Amida Butsu."

Because the Name is directed by Amida,

Its virtues fill the ten quarters.

SHIN BUDDHIST

—Magazine of Shin Buddhists—

No. 14

March 2024

CONTENTS

i Editorial

iii Frontispiece

v A Reflection on the Wasan:

Nobuyuki KASHIWAHARA, Japan

I. 19th ESC Southampton 2018:

3 Report of the Conference
Enrique GALVÁN-ÁLVAREZ, UK

8 The Dimension of Wisdom in Shinran's Shinjin:
An Experiential Perspective
within the Context of Shinshu Theology
Kenneth K. TANAKA, Japan

40 A Small Rural Shin Buddhist Temple in the 21st Century
Diane Jishin PETERSON, USA

50 Jodo Shinshu in the 21st Century
Ilona EVERS, Germany

59 Being a Bomby, but not apart from Amida's Light
—The Relationship to the Spiritual Friend (Zenchishiki) —
Jan Marc NOTTELMANN-FEIL, Germany

- 78 The Twenty-Second Vow, Ignorant Bodhisattvas & Millennials
in the 21st Century
Iulia DINCA, Romania
- 94 Entering the World, —Jodo Shinshu and Mindfulness—
Günter PETERS, Germany
- 101 Amida's Space-time and Man's Space-time
Toshikazu ARAI, Japan
- 117 A Philosophical Approach to the Meaning of Shinjin Worldwide
Thais CAMPOS, Brazil

II. Articles:

- 141 Namanda, the Pathless Path
Shogyo Gustavo PINTO, Brazil
- 145 Live in the Nembutsu
Kakusho IZUMI, USA
- 152 The Greatness of the Nembutsu
Joanne M. YUASA, Canada
- 155 Responsibility in the Shin Buddhist Sangha
Markus RÜSCH, Germany
- 165 May There Be Peace in the World!
—Shinran's Letter to Shōshin—
Hoyu ISHIDA, Japan
- 177 Going Home
The Story of a Wandering Priest and Her Temple
Diane Jishin PETERSON, USA
- 181 Heart of Buddha
Kodo UMEZU, USA
- 185 Limits of Language in Shin Buddhism
M. Angela ANDRADE, Brazil

Drawings: *Hisao Zuio INAGAKI*, Japan



Section I

19th ESC Southampton 2018

**August 20th-24th 2018
Southampton, United Kingdom**





The 19th European Shin Buddhist Conference

Enrique GALVÁN-ÁLVAREZ

The 19th European Shin Buddhist Conference took place in the British city of Southampton and it brought together many Dharma friends from Europe, the Americas and Japan. The event was held at the new and comfortable Solent Conference Centre 'The Spark', a facility connected to Southampton Solent University. The event was held together with the 16th European Branch Conference of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies and it was organized by a committed group of British Shin followers led by Rev. Gary Robinson. The conference was graced with the attendance of the Zenmon-sama, or Monshu Emeritus, of Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, Rev. Koshin Ohtani.

The first day, August 20th, featured opening remarks by Rev. Eshō Sasaki, president of the International Association of Buddhist Culture, and Rev. Gary Robinson, lead organizer of the event. Following these, Rev. Diane Peterson offered a presentation on her Dharma activities in rural Oregon (U.S.). Shortly after Rev. Ilona Evers spoke about the relevance of the Jōdo Shinshū teaching in a contemporary context, by drawing on various sources from the tradition and her own experience. Just before breaking for lunch, Markus Rüschi gave his presentation about contemporary *myōkōnin* which elicited much interest from the public, including a question from the Zenmon-sama. After lunch, Matthew Backhouse shared his personal experience of walking the Shin Buddhist path in the U.K., shortly followed by Rev. Prof. Kenneth

SHIN BUDDHIST 14

Tanaka's keynote address, which provided a thorough and lucid explorations of the various meanings of shinjin. After a full day of stimulating conversations and talks, the program was formally closed with a service held at the Jury's Inn hotel near the conference centre, and where most participants were hosted. At the same venue, the participants gathered later for a formal dinner generously sponsored by the International Association of Buddhist Culture.

The following day, August 21st, began with another service at Jury's Inn, after which all participants walked to The Spark to listen to David Quirke Thornton's presentation on the future of European Shin Buddhism, followed by Rev. Kiyonobu Kuwahara's discussion of the use of the term 'oneness' in English language Jōdo Shinshū materials and Rev. Marc Nottelman's talk on interpreting the meaning of maras and demons in Buddhist texts. They were all very thoughtful and well received presentations that generated much conversation and reflection. In the afternoon, there were two more presentations, by Rev. Iulia Dinca from Romania and Günter Peters from Germany, who spoke about their experience of the Shin Buddhist path and its significance in their lives. After participants walked back to Jury's Inn, Dr. Enrique Galvan-Alvarez, from the U.K., and Akiko Rogers, from the U.S., led a chanting workshop where the participants were invited to recite the Shōshinge together. The second day finished with another event at the hotel: the screening of recordings from the 750th memorial for Shinran Shōnin, which had taken place in Kyōto, Japan in 2011.

Unlike the other conference days, August 22nd did not involve any talks or presentations. The focus moved away from Jury's Inn and The

Spark to Chōmon House, the private residence of Rev. Gary Robinson, which also functioned as a Dharma centre at the time of the conference. Enjoying the warm and dry weather, participants visited Chōmon House throughout the day, dropping in and out in a more relaxed manner. Food was generously provided by the lay members of the Southampton Sangha which ensured, through their hard work, that the day run smoothly. Most significantly, the Zenmon-sama and his party also visited Chōmon House and mingled with the participants in a warm and friendly manner while enjoying refreshments in the sunny garden. This was a day of many meaningful encounters and connections, conversations flowed freely and spontaneously; this occasion would be remembered by all those who were part of it. The day finished with another screening at Jury's Inn, this time featuring manga movies with a Buddhist theme.

The following day, August 23rd, the conference returned to its usual format, by starting with a service at Jury's Inn, followed by an address by Rev. Prof. Mitsuya Dake, president of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies, which fulfilled the purpose of introducing and framing the more academic side of the European Shin Buddhist Conference. Subsequently, the Zenmon-sama, Rev. Koshin Ohtani, formally addressed the conference, commending the efforts of the organizers, reminding the participants of the essence of the teachings and offering his insightful remarks on the event's theme: 'Jōdo Shinshū in the 21st Century'. Shortly after, Dr. Enrique Gálvan-Álvarez presented on his anthropological work on Shin ritual in the Americas, and Thais Campos also offered a detailed and thoughtful account of

different interpretations of shinjin she had encountered in her Buddhist journey. After breaking for lunch, another significant guest speaker, Rick Stambul, then president of BCA, took the floor and shared his experiences of activism in the light of his involvement in the Dharma. Shortly after, Iona Marinescu, from Romania, share her intriguing research on Buddhist art and the Rev. Prof. Toshikazu Arai gave the last lecture of the day, with an insightful reflection on the nature of time in Buddhism. The day, however, continued with a deeply meaningful and awaited event: the Kikyōshiki Ceremony. In preparation, Rev. Dr. Jérôme Ducor acted as chanting leader for the recitation of Shōshinge. Then the Zenmon-sama officiated the Kikyōshiki Ceremony, granting Dharma name to a few Jōdo Shinshū followers from the U.K. and the rest of Europe.

The final day of the conference, August 24th started with a morning service, followed by presentations by Rev. Frank Kobbs, who spoke about his Dharma activities in Germany and Ken Mullen, from the U.K., who spoke about his academic research on Buddhism and psychology. Following their talks, Ryukoku graduate Yoshinari Hemmi discussed the interfaith implications of Shinran Shōnin's work and Rev. Nobuyuki Kashiwahara, from the IABC, also offered his thoughts on Jōdo Shinshū outside Japan. All presentations elicited much interest and lively discussion. In the afternoon, the honor of offering the last lecture of the conference fell upon Rev. Prof Hōyū Ishida, who presented a Buddhist reading of some key texts of English literature. Following his speech, closing remarks were offered by Rev. Prof. Mitsuya Dake, Rev. Eshō Sasaki and Rev. Gary Robinson, formally concluding the conferences and thanking the participants for their attendance and important

contributions. The last day of the conference convivially ended with a Gala Dinner, which took place at the Spark Atrium and was kindly hosted by the Zenmon-sama of Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha.

The Dimension of Wisdom in Shinran's Shinjin:

An Experiential Perspective

within the Context of Shinshu Theology

Kenneth K. TANAKA

1. Misconception

Shinjin (信心), normally translated “faith,” “entrusting,” or “faith-mind,” constitutes a central role in Shinran's (1173-1263) doctrinal framework. Despite its importance, the nature of *shinjin* remains unclear and misunderstood especially in the West.

For example, *shinjin* is often perceived as being ‘merely’ *devotional* in nature, rooted in a dualistic and polarized relationship involving, on the one hand, Amida Buddha, a buddha of infinite capacity and, on the other hand, a seeker or practitioner who has no capacity whatsoever to perform any effective practice. While I hold no prejudice toward ‘devotion’ as a religious act per se, it is inaccurate to categorically regard *shinjin* as being devoid of any element of wisdom (*prajñā*). Consequently, *shinjin* is not seen to be in the same league as wisdom promoted and realized by practitioners of other traditions in Mahayana Buddhism.

This misconception has led some to regard the Shin (Shinshū or Jōdo Shinshū) tradition as not being authentic Buddhism and, at its extreme, gone so far as to regard its teachings as an aberration. For example, Albert Schweitzer as far back as 1936 commented, “Of course

the doctrine of Shinran is an outrage on Buddhism.”¹ More recently, a scholar of Buddhism, Heinz Bechert, remarked, “It takes the ideas of the Buddha and, in a way, twists them into their opposite. The most radical spokesman for this approach is Shinran Shonin”²

Further, that many regard Shin to be merely a devotional form of Buddhism (and by extension, shinjin) cannot be divorced from the popular perception of Shin Buddhism being comprised of illiterate, uneducated people who first became the disciples of Shinran in the hinterlands of Kanto. However, a scholarship addressing this topic has shown that of the 56 of Shinran's direct disciples in the Kanto region, 36 were of the samurai class, 3 were of the nobility, 13 were priests, and only 2 were commoners. This paints a very different picture from the image of Shinran's teaching being for the illiterate peasants.³

2. Methodology

There have, of course, been numerous studies of *shinjin* within the traditional Shin sectarian studies (*shūgaku*, 宗学). However, given their restricted approach and limited reach beyond Shin studies, they have had little impact in refuting the criticism shown above. In contrast, the works of Takamaro Shigaraki, Kōtatsu Fujita, and Yoshifumi Ueda and Dennis Hirota have overcome many of the shortcomings of sectarian studies and have introduced a deeper and more accurate

¹ Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*. Translated by Mrs. Charles E. B. Buswell (1936. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1957), p. 154.

² Küng, Hans, et. Al. *Christianity and the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 373.

³ Uchiyama Junko, “togoku ni okeru jodo-shinshu no tenkai, Tokyo University Shuppan, 1997.

understanding of *shinjin* to a wider readership.⁴ Building on their valuable findings, I seek in this presentation to focus on one of the vital topics not fully addressed in their studies.⁵

This presentation is being carried out within the context of what I am calling ‘Shinshu Theology,’ a term which may strike some readers as being anomalous. While ‘Shinshu’ would not be problematic for it refers to the Buddhist school founded by Shinran, it would not be the case so for ‘theology,’ which normally refers to ‘the study of God’ associated with Christianity. However, *Buddhist Theology*, an anthology published in 2000 by a group of North American Buddhist scholars, has already addressed the questions raised by the use of this term in a Buddhist context. The editors of this volume have argued that “theology” does not refer exclusively to the study of the monotheistic God but also carries a broader meaning of, “an intellectual reflection within a religious tradition,” a definition attributed to a noted American theologian David Tracy.⁶

As “an intellectual reflection,” I seek to pursue the topic at hand - Shinjin in Shinran’s thought -- not within the framework of traditional sectarian studies. In taking this approach, my concern does not lie in

⁴ Shigaraki Takamaro. *Jōdokyō ni okeru shin no kenkyū*. Nagata bunshodo, 1975. Fujita Kōtatsu, *Genshi jōdo shisō kenkyū*. Iwanami shoten: 1970. Yoshifumi Ueda and Dennis Hirota, *Shinran* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989), 150–57.

⁵ I have found one article by one of the leading scholars of traditional Shinshu studies written in his younger years that specifically acknowledges the experience of wisdom on the part of the seeker. Washibara (Naito) Tomoyasu, “Shinran kyōgaku ni okeru shinjin no chie (2),” *Nihon Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* vol. 29-1 (1980): 162-163.

⁶ Roger Jackson and John Makransky. *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (Curzon Press, 2000). The definition is found on p. 2.

stressing or promoting the uniqueness of Shinshū teachings over against the other teachings. Moreover, in line with the definition of “theology” as “an intellectual reflection,” I seek to remain true to my personal experience as a product not only of Japanese but also of American culture. As a result, “Shinshū Theology” provides greater license to engage in “intellectual reflection” unshackled by the frameworks of traditional sectarian studies as well as Japanese cultural values and sentiments that have nurtured our understanding of *shinjin*.

One example of this Shinshū theological approach is the greater allowance for reflection from an *experiential* perspective. In Shin sectarian studies the majority of discussions on *shinjin* are carried out from a “normative” perspective in which the concern is with the truth claims about *shinjin* as being “true and real as the mind of Amida.” While this normative perspective is obviously important, I believe that an “experiential” perspective of the practitioner is equally important. The difference in these two perspectives on *shinjin* can be encapsulated in the phrases, “wisdom as endowed by Amida” (normative) and “wisdom as *experienced* by practitioners” (experiential). It is this latter perspective that is of concern in this presentation.

Now, as in the case with the dominance of the normative perspective, I believe that the overreliance in the West on the comparative perspective of identifying *shinjin* with Christian “faith” has also restricted our full understanding of *shinjin*. Many past writings have referenced the teachings of prominent Western theologians and philosophers. For example, *shinjin* has been compared to the doctrines of “faith only” (*sola fide*) of Martin Luther and the “leap of faith” of Søren Kierkegaard among others. While there are legitimate reasons for “faith” being the

lens for Western understanding of *shinjin*, it fails to fully reveal the distinct qualities of *shinjin* and has perpetuated its misconception.

3. Multi-dimensional nature of *Shinjin*

According to traditional explanation particularly within the Hongwanji Branch of Shin Buddhism, a seeker entrusts whole-heartedly in Amida's Vow and passively receives *shinjin* as an endowed gift of Amida. This image continues to serve as the basis for the most common English translation of *shinjin* as “true entrusting.”⁷

While “entrusting” does express one vital dimension of *shinjin*, it fails to capture the *full* picture of this multivalent term. The fact that “entrusting” does not adequately reflect the full picture becomes readily apparent when we see Shinran's following description of *shingyō* (信樂), a term synonymous with *shinjin*:

Entrusting⁸ (*shingyō*) is the mind full of truth, reality, and sincerity; the mind of ultimacy, accomplishment, reliance, and reverence; the mind of discernment, distinctness, clarity, and faithfulness; the mind of aspiration, wish, desire, and exultation; the mind of delight, joy, gladness, and happiness.

(*The Collected Works of Shinran*. Hereafter, CWS.)⁹

In this Hongwanji translation, we find on this list of definitions the term

⁷ “True entrusting” is used by some of the most influential books in English on Shin Buddhism. Ueda and Hirota, *Shinran*, 150–57. Taitetsu Unno, *River of Fire River of Water* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 58–62; Alfred Bloom, *The Promise of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Buddhist Study Center Press, 2002), 129.

⁸ I question the choice of “entrusting” as translation for (*shingyō*) in keeping with the thrust of the argument in this presentation.

⁹ *Kyōgyōshinshō* in *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 2 vols., trans. Dennis Hirota, et. al. Hisao Inagaki, Michio Tokunaga, and Ryushin Uryuzu (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), 94. Hereafter, CWS.

“reliance” (*yū* 用), which is synonymous with “entrusting.”¹⁰ We can also include other terms on this list such as “reverence” (*jū* 重) and “faithfulness” (*chū* 忠) that are approximate in meaning to “entrusting” or “reliance.” However, this passage includes many other terms not synonymous with “entrusting.”

In my view, entrusting or reliance is but one of the four primary dimensions of *shinjin* experience, which are 1) entrusting (委託), 2) joy (歡喜), 3) overcoming of doubt (無疑) and 4) wisdom (智慧). Since entrusting, joy and overcoming of doubt are well-known dimensions, I have chosen to focus on the least discussed dimension, that of wisdom.

What I am calling “wisdom” in this presentation is not limited to the kind of profound wisdom realized by buddhas and bodhisattvas but also encompass a broad range of practitioners’ experience that are far more modest in nature but, at the same time, clearly not merely “devotional.” These qualities of experience are represented by such terms in the English translations of Shinran’s writings as “reflection,” “knowing,” “awareness,” “insight” and “wisdom.” In other words, the “wisdom” dimension of *shinjin* points to the tangible experiences of the practitioners wherein they gain a greater degree of understanding, awareness, or realization about the teachings and of themselves in the process of aspiring for Buddhahood.

This wisdom dimension as *experience* of the practitioner has received little attention in discussions surrounding the nature of *shinjin*.¹¹

¹⁰ I am, however, perplexed as to why the character (*yū* 用) was translated as “reliance” for it normally does not warrant such a meaning. Even if we assumed that there is justification for this translation, “reliance” is merely one of seventeen terms that define *shinjin*.

¹¹ Shigaraki Takamaro is one of the main proponents among contemporary

Justification for paying greater attention to the wisdom dimension can be seen, for example, in Shinran's above passage defining *shinjin*. It includes terms such as "discernment" (*shin* 審) and "clarity" (*sen* 宣), which approximate the meaning of "wisdom" as defined above.

We are now ready to examine some of the passages from Shinran's writings that describe the qualities of reflection, knowing, awareness, insight and wisdom.

3.1 Reflection

Shinran quotes from the *Nirvana Sutra* a passage that values the role of reflection.

Again, there are two kinds of *shinjin*: one arises from hearing [*mon* 聞] and the other from *reflection* [*shi* 思]. These people's *shinjin* has arisen from hearing but *not from reflection*. Therefore it is called "imperfect realization of *shinjin*" (*shin fu gusoku* 信不具足). (CWS I, p. 235) (Italic for "reflection" added. The term *shinjin* is not italicized in quotes from the Hongwanji translation in keeping with their practice.)

Here, despite the enormous value traditionally placed on hearing in Shin Buddhist teachings, this passage cautions us against *shinjin* based on hearing without reflection. After hearing the teachings, a seeker must *reflect* on them if one is to come to realize true *shinjin*, for, otherwise, it would constitute "imperfect realization of *shinjin*."

writers who have pointed out the non-dual, wisdom-based nature of *shinjin*. See for example, his discussion, *Shinshūgaku gairon* 真宗学概論, Shinshūgaku Shirizu 真宗学シリーズ (Kyoto: Hozokan, 2010). In this presentation, I have sought to examine passages that point to what I am referring to as qualities of reflection, knowing, awareness, and insight, which Prof. Shigaraki appears not to have fully addressed.

Reflection also plays a vital role in overcoming doubt, which as alluded to above is one of the four dimensions of *shinjin*. This is evident in the following statement by Shinran:

Truly we know, then, that this is called shinjin because it is untainted by the *hindrance of doubt*. Shinjin is the mind that is single. The mind that is single is shinjin that is true and real.

(CWS I, p. 194) (Italics added)

Despite such a statement, there is no detailed explanation as to how that elimination of doubt is achieved. It is, of course, presumed to be eliminated in the process of “receiving” *shinjin*, but it is not clear how that is done. There is, however, one reference among the numerous passages on doubt that throw some light on this issue. Here in Shinran’s own words, we see an exhortation to “reflect” on the truth that one is assured of not being abandoned.

If you should come to realize shinjin, rejoice at the conditions from the distant past that have brought it about. But if in this lifetime still you are entangled in a net of doubt, then unavoidably you must pass once more in the stream of birth-and-death through myriads of kalpas and countless lives. Hear and reflect on the truth that one is grasped, never to be abandoned—the teaching of attaining birth in the Pure Land with transcendent quickness and ease; and let there be no wavering or apprehension. (*Passages on the Pure Land Way*, CWS I, p. 303) (Italic and underlined added)

In my view, “to reflect” requires the seeker to not only hear the teachings but to think upon and digest its meaning. Without going through such a mental process, the hindrances to doubt would not

simply disappear; reflection contributes to casting away the veil that clouded his understanding of the teachings.

3.2 Knowing and Understanding

Next, the process of “knowing” is expressed in the well-known passage that Shinran cites from Shandao’s statement about the “deep mind.”

Deep mind is true and real shinjin. One truly knows (*shinchi* 信知) oneself to be a foolish being full of blind passions, with scant roots of good, transmigrating in the three realms and unable to emerge from this burning house. And further, one truly knows (*shinchi*) now, without so much as a single thought of doubt, that Amida’s universal Primal Vow decisively enables all to attain birth.

(CWS I, p. 55) (Italics and underlined added)

Here, the seeker is shown to have come to “know” (*shinchi* 信知), but the character for “knowing” (*chi* 知) forms a compound with the character denoting “faith” or “conviction” (*shin* 信). I take this to mean that the “knowing” here is extremely firm or with conviction. I would even consider this firm knowing as “insight,” for this is not just about knowledge but a deeper understanding about the nature of oneself and one’s relation to Amida. Hence, the deep mind or *shinjin* entails firm knowing or having insight into the truth of, 1) the seeker’s passion-filled, foolish nature as well as 2) the Vow that assures the seeker’s birth in the Pure Land.

Besides the above passage, there are other passages that point to a degree of knowing and understanding:

But though the light of the sun is veiled by clouds and mists,
Beneath the clouds and mists there is brightness, not dark.
When one realizes shinjin, seeing [ken 見] and revering and
attaining great joy,
One immediately leaps crosswise, closing off the five evil
courses. (Shōshinge CWS I, p. 70; underlined added)

The character for “seeing” (*ken*) suggests that despite the clouds of desire, anger and hatred, the practitioner comes to know or understand that it is bright beneath the clouds on account of the working of Amida’s compassionate light. This, in my view, shows that the seeker has gained insight into a newly-found reality on account of the transformative experience of *shinjin*.

3.3 Awareness

The sense of coming to a deeper understanding of one’s karmic evil is clearly expressed in Shinran’s own words in one of his letters to his disciples. He specifically uses a term, *omoishirite* おもひしりて, which the Hongwanji translators rendered, “having become thoroughly aware.”

When people first begin to hear the Buddha’s Vow, they wonder, having become thoroughly aware of the karmic evil in their hearts and mind, how they will ever attain birth as they are. (Lamp for the Latter Ages #20, CWS I, p. 553)
(Italics and underlined added)

I believe that further evidence of awareness can be found in the following passage in the Preface of *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization*:

Reverently *entrusting* [*kyōshin* 敬信] myself to the teaching,

practice and realization, . . . I am especially *aware* [*shirinu* 知りぬ] of the profundity of the Tathagata's benevolence.

(CWS I, p. 4)

While these two passage are not direct reference to *shinjin* – though ultimately so – it expresses Shinran's fundamental attitude in which he acknowledges the experience of being “aware” of the depth of one's karmic evil and Amida's benevolence.

3.4 Insight

The following passages reveal a mental working that I categorize as “insight,” which are realized as a result of the seeker being ‘associated’ or ‘identified’ with the teachings or practitioners at higher levels of the Buddhist path.

When a foolish being of delusion and defilement awakens *shinjin*, he *realizes* [*shōchi* 証知] that birth-and-death is itself nirvana. (Shōshinge, CWS I, p. 72)

In this passage Shinran uses the Chinese character (*shō* 証) which means “proof” or “confirmation” of what one comes to know or understand (*chi* 知), which the Hongwanji translators rendered as “realizes.” And what the seeker comes to realize here is that “Birth-and-death is none other than nirvana,” which, by any standard of Mahayana Buddhist doctrine, constitutes a high level of insight or teaching.

Next is the well-known passage that Shinran cites in “Chapter on Shinjin” from the *Nirvana Sutra*, in which he equates *shinjin* with Buddha-nature.

Buddha-nature is great *shinjin*. Why? Because through *shinjin* the bodhisattva-mahāsattva has acquired all the *pāramitās*

from charity to wisdom. All sentient beings will without fail ultimately realize great *shinjin*. Therefore it is taught, "All sentient beings are possessed of Buddha-nature." Great *shinjin* is none other than Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is Tathāgata.

(*The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization*, CWS I, p. 99)

One of the important points that this passage conveys is that a person of *shinjin* is identified with the categories that are intimately associated with some higher levels of awakening, that is to say, Buddha-nature and the *pāramitās* from charity to wisdom. Given Shinran's understanding of human nature, it would be difficult to interpret this passage to mean that foolish ordinary beings (*bombu* 凡夫) have *fully* attained these higher levels of enlightenment. Nevertheless, it would be reasonable to interpret, based on the above discussion, that persons of *shinjin* have experienced some levels of these elements of awakening.

Such being the case, we can regard those of *shinjin* to have gained some degree of understanding, awareness or insight into the teachings in their continuing effort to live up to the ideals of these teachings. That, after all, is the spirit of *bodhisattva-mahāsattva* which the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* identifies with the person of *shinjin*. Further, since Buddha-nature is none other than *shinjin*, the persons of *shinjin* can be regarded as being associated with some higher level of insight, since only the bodhisattvas of the tenth *bhūmi* can fully understand Buddha-nature.¹² It is, thus, safe to presume that some degree of insight can be experienced by them, and this is precisely the point that Shinran's following words

¹² See Jikidō Takasaki, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra) Being a Treatise on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, S.O.R. 33 (Roma: IsMEO, 1966).

appear to support.

In this passage Shinran explains the level attained by the persons of *shinjin* within the context of earlier Buddhist teachings.

Thus, when one attains the true and real practice and *shinjin*, one greatly rejoices in one's heart. This attainment is therefore called the *stage of joy* [*kangi ji* 歡喜地]. It is likened to the first fruit: *the sages of the first fruit* [*shoka shōja* 初果聖者]....

(*Kyōgyōshinshō*, CWS I, p. 54) (italics added)

Here, the person of *shinjin* is said to have attained the Stage of Joy, which is the first *bhūmi* stage within the Mahayana doctrine on the stages of enlightenment and constitutes an extremely high stage of attainment; those at this stage are often thought of as bodhisattvas. Furthermore, Shinran equates this Stage of Joy to the “first stage of the sages” (*shoka shōja*), which is expounded in pre-Mahayana works and is also actively taught by contemporary Theravādins. The “sages of the first fruit” are called the “stream-enterers” (*srotāpanna*), when one is said to overcome doubt and attachment to the notion of a substantial self (*satkāya-drṣṭi*). It is worth noting that a certain level of insight would be necessary to overcome especially the attachment to substantial self.

I realize that in this passage Shinran is stressing one of the vital doctrinal points, that is to say, that persons of *shinjin* attain the level of non-retrogression or the rightly-established state. He goes to cite Nāgārjuna and Tanluan, both of whom argue for the assurance of no longer back-sliding to the lower stages for they enter “the stage of the definitely settled” and “group of the truly settled,” respectively.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume, based on the above discussions, that persons of *shinjin* could very well have embodied these

qualities traditionally associated with the stream-enterers, that is to say, overcoming 1) doubt, 2) attachment to worldly conventions and 3) attachment to substantial self. After all, the overcoming of doubt similarly constitutes one of the dimensions of *shinjin* experience. Moreover, as we look at Shinran's life, we see a man who expressed views sharply criticizing even the emperor and lived a life relatively unshackled by worldly precepts and conventions. And finally, his overcoming of the attachment to the view of substantial self can be demonstrated in his exuberant utterance wherein his existential base has shifted from the conventional ego to that of the Buddha's Vow:

How joyous I am, my heart and mind being rooted in the Buddha-ground of the universal Vow, and my thoughts and feelings flowing within the dharma-ocean, which is beyond comprehension!
(*Kyōgyōshinshō*, CWS I, p. 291)

3.5 Wisdom

It is well known that Shinran identified *shinjin* in terms of wisdom as seen in the following passages from the *Hymns of the Dharma Ages*:

It is by entering the wisdom of shinjin (*shinjin no chie* 信心の智慧)

That we become persons who respond in gratitude to the Buddhas' benevolence.
(CWS I, p. 407)

Shinran then clarifies in his notes by what he means by "wisdom of shinjin" as follows:

Know that since Amida's Vow is wisdom, the emergence of the mind of entrusting oneself to it is the arising of wisdom.
(CWS I, p. 407)

There then follows another verse which uses a similar but varying phrase, “the nembutsu that is wisdom,” a term that Shinran also explains in his note.

It is by the power of Dharmākara’s Vow

That we realize the nembutsu that is wisdom (*chie no nembutsu* 智慧の念仏)

Were it not for the wisdom of shinjin,

How could we attain nirvana?

[Shinran’s note affixed next to the above main verse:] *the nembutsu that is wisdom*: this is said because one attains Buddhahood through Amida’s Vow. (CWS I, p. 407)

It is sufficiently clear that *shinjin* is not the product of the seeker’s practice or effort. The traditional doctrinal position is firm on this point, that is to say, the seeker is the recipient of endowed wisdom from Amida.

However, the question before us is to inquire into the nature of the seeker’s response. To adopt a well-known Indian Buddhist metaphor, is the seeker one hundred percent passive like a kitten carried by the neck by its mother in her mouth? Or is there more active participation on the seeker’s part, like a child monkey *grabbing onto* its mother?

Based on Shinran’s note above, “the emergence of the mind of entrusting oneself to it is the arising of wisdom,” the seeker comes to entrust in Amida’s vow on account of Amida’s wisdom. It is, again, not the case that “wisdom” is actually manifested *fully* in the seeker, but it does seem safe to assume that there awakens in the seeker some degree of understanding which then triggers the willingness and the decision to entrust in the Vow. And that act, in my view, requires some degree of understanding and wisdom about the teachings that enables

the seeker to contextualize its meaning within the framework of one's own religious search and eventually take the action to trust in the Vow.

4. Joy and Overcoming Doubt

I have now cited passages that reveal the wisdom dimension associated with *shinjin* as expressed in terms ranging from reflection to awareness to wisdom. In that process I referred to one reference in which the overcoming of doubt, one of the four dimensions of *shinjin* experience, also required some qualities of wisdom. Allow me now to briefly discuss how the same argument can be made with regard to joy, the third of the four dimensions of *shinjin*.

Shinran's writings abound with passages that identify *shinjin* with "joy" and its cognates such as "joyfulness" and "rejoicing." One such passage is the following that describes the one-thought moment of *shinjin*:

One thought-moment expresses the ultimate brevity of the instant of the *realization* of *shinjin* and manifests the vast, inconceivable mind of joyfulness [*kyōshin* 慶心].

(*Kyōgyōshinshō*, CWS I, p. 110-111) (*italic added*)

He then goes on to quote the famous passage from the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha Sutra*, in which "joy" appears in a compound phrase with *shinjin* itself.

All sentient beings, as they hear the Name, *realize* even one thought-moment of *shinjin* and *joy*, which is directed to them from Amida's sincere mind, and aspiring to be born in that land, they then attain birth and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.

(*Kyōgyōshinshō*, CWS I, p. 111)

In my view, joy points to an emotional quality of the practitioner's experience. However, here as in the case with overcoming of doubt, it is accompanied by some degree of wisdom. In the above passages, we see that the seeker's joy came as a result of having come to *realize* that Amida has not abandoned him and was guaranteed birth in the Pure Land. One would not be able to feel that level of joy without some level of realization.

5. *Shinjin* as “Realization”

I believe I have provided sufficient number of passages that revealed the strong wisdom dimension related to *shinjin*. As a result, even with the admission of “entrusting” as one of its four dimensions, *shinjin* deserves a different English rendering than “entrusting.” I, thus, propose “realization” that best articulates the wide range of terms that represent “wisdom.” I believe this position is supported by the Hongwanji translation where the verb for attaining *shinjin* is one of “to realize,” as witnessed even in three of the passages cited above, “All sentient beings will without fail ultimately *realize* great *shinjin*,” “the ultimate brevity of the instant of the *realization* of *shinjin*,” and “*realize* even one thought-moment of *shinjin*.”

As an English term, “realization” conveys a sense of fulfillment of a personal goal that transforms a seeker to experience higher or deeper levels of reality, as in the usage of “self-realization” in the field of psychology and in everyday parlance. Further, its verb form, “to realize,” conveys a greater sense of active and dynamic qualities than “to entrust,” but not taking on the qualities of ‘self power’ (*jiriki*) that Shinran vehemently opposed.

And I believe that “realization” also captures the sense of “spiritual empowerment,” which a growing number of contemporary seekers value to a much greater extent than in the past. This reflects the emergence of a new religious environment that has turned more individualized and internal in contrast to the more collectivized and external orientation of the past, particularly of the agrarian society of Japan. I believe “realization” is in concert with the former while “entrusting” belongs to the latter.

Regarding some of the other candidates for translation, “faith” is acceptable for it can encompass a broad range of meaning in the same manner as *shinjin* and provide a common framework for clarifying the areas of convergence as well as divergence with Christianity and other religions. However, for ordinary usage “faith” carries too strong an identification with Christianity, thus, increasing the chance of *shinjin* being dismissed before its uniqueness is explored and understood.

“Awakening,” on the other hand, is perhaps more acceptable for it is closer in meaning to “realization,” but it is too closely associated with the enlightenment experience of other Buddhist schools, particularly of Zen. Plus, in its English usage, “awakening” often denotes full enlightenment or Buddhahood, which can only be attained in the Pure Land according to Shinran.

In the end, no one translation would be completely satisfactory. However, “realization” is a better choice than “entrusting” for it dispels the misconceptions discussed at the outset and captures more dimensions of *shinjin* experience. This finding was made possible based on an analysis from the Shinshu theological perspective, which allowed the inquiry to emphasize the perspective of the practitioner’s experience –

not that of Amida – and to be freed from the constraints of the traditional sectarian paradigm.

(key words: *shinjin*, wisdom, Shinran, experience, theology, realization, faith)

Post script #1:

An Antecedent in Indian Mahayana Buddhism

(Postscript #1 is based on my article, “Assessing Shinran’s *Shinjin* from an Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist Perspective: With a Focus on Tathāgatagarbha Thought.” Edited by Richard K. Payne, *Scripture: Canon: Text: Context: Essays Honoring Lewis R. Lancaster*. Institute of Buddhist Studies and BDK America, Inc., 2014, pp. 237-255.)

A. In this article, I examined the nature of *adhimukti* (faith, confidence, resolution; 信、信解、勝解; *mos-pa*) in Indian Tathāgatagarbha thought as found in its major treatise, *Ratnagotravibhāga*. I found *adhimukti* to have qualities that are similar to those of *shinjin*, including 1) a degree of wisdom, 2) reaching the stage of non-retrogression, and 3) made possible by the workings of Dharmakāya. Hence, we have an antecedent in Indian Mahayana thought, which undercuts the criticism seen above that Shinran’s teachings are “an outrage on Buddhism.”

B. *Śraddhā* (信) is trust in the Buddha or a teacher. Thus, it represents an act that is more “devotional.” On the other hand, *adhimukti* is attended by other practices at a much higher rate than with *śraddhā*. The most frequently cited attendant practices are the cultivation of wisdom, samādhi and great compassion. In these examples, *adhimukti* is part of

a set of categories of practices that require more rigorous effort and realization.

C. The attainments connected to *adhimukti*, the seekers in most of the examples attain realms associated with enlightenment, expressed by such terms as *pāramitā*, *dharmakāya*, and *tathāgatagarbha*. In a couple of the cases *adhimukti* leads to attainment that includes the generating of Bodhicitta and the state of non-retrogression. Thus, the differences between the two kinds of faith are apparent. While *śraddhā* exhibits traits that are devotional in nature, *adhimukti* entails on the part of the seeker a higher level of insight or wisdom and an enhanced motivation to aspire to enlightenment.

D. With regard to the central doctrine of Tathāgatagarbha thought, it acknowledges what I am calling an “Other Power” element, which makes it possible for “all living beings to be possessed of the embryo of the Buddha” (= Buddha nature). In other words, without being included in the “Buddha’s wisdom,” there would be no embryo of the Buddha in sentient beings.

The multitudes of living [beings] are included

In the Buddha’s wisdom.

Their immaculateness is non-dual by nature,

Its result manifests itself on the Nature of the Buddha;

Therefore, it is said: all living beings

Are possessed of the embryo of the Buddha.

(Chap. 1, Verse 27, p. 197)

In regards to the first sentence of the above passage, “the multitudes of living [beings] are included in the Buddha’s wisdom,” the

commentary helps to clarify its meaning. It explains, “Its meaning is that the Dharmakāya of the Buddha penetrates everywhere” (*tathāga-tadharmakāya-parispharaṇārtha*). This idea, then, is said to be based on the well-known metaphor of “the one dust includes the entire Three Thousand Great Thousand Worlds” found in the Chapter on the “Arising of Tathāgata” in the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*.

Postscript #2:

A need for Shin re-evaluation of Soto Zen

(Postscript #2 is based on my article: “The Role and Implication of Meditation Practice in Shin Buddhism.” *Pure Land Journal* new series Vol. 22 (December 2006): 29 - 30, 51- 61)

A. In *Gutoku's Notes*, Shinran did regard the teachings of Busshin-shu (仏心, Buddha-mind) as belonging to the difficult practices of the Path of the Sages. (CWS I, p. 587) However, there existed during the time of Shinran (1173-1263) various streams of Zen, such as Daruma-shu, Rinzai and Soto. We should, therefore, not group them all as if they are all the same. When Shinran wrote, it is quite safe to presume that he was referring to these older streams of Zen, Daruma-shu and Rinzai, but not necessarily to Dōgen. Dōgen (1200-1253) was born 27 years after Shinran and died 9 years before him. Thus, Dōgen would not have figured prominently for Shinran. This, in my view, would make it quite unlikely that Shinran had Dōgen Zen in mind when he spoke of the “Buddha-mind school.”

B. Many Shin Buddhists understand meditation is a *means* (or cause) of realizing enlightenment. However, meditation for Dōgen is *not*

a means to enlightenment. Meditation is the *actualization* or the outcome of Buddha nature. The practice (= meditation) is free from any aim, including enlightenment, and thus, referred to as “practice-enlightenment as one” (shushō ittō 修証一等) And it is to be practiced throughout one’s life. Hence, we can see Dōgen’s meditation as “expression” of enlightenment. This is very close to the Shin understanding of *nembutsu* as expression of true reality or Amida’s Vow. And a Shin Buddhist is also expected to utter the *nembutsu* throughout one’s life.

C. Further, Shin Buddhists often say that Zen meditation attempts to *eliminate* blind passion or defilements and awaken to Buddha-nature. However, no Zen practitioner that I know sees that as one’s spiritual aim. While Dōgen speaks of having realized some level of spiritual breakthrough expressed, for example, *shin-shin datsuraku* (literary “body-mind sloughing off”), he does not claim to have *eliminated* blind passion.

D. We need to take note of the fact that Shinran equated Buddha-nature with shinjin as can be seen in his own statement in *Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone:’*

Since it is with this heart and mind of all sentient beings that they entrust themselves to the Vow of the dharma-body (Dharmakāya) as compassionate means, this *shinjin* is none other than Buddha-nature. This Buddha-nature is dharma-nature.

Dharma-nature is dharma-body.¹³ (the underlined added)

And as we saw earlier with regard to Tathāgatagarbha thought, shinjin

¹³ *Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone,’* CWS I, p. 461.

and Buddha embryo or Buddha nature share a common point in that they are made possible on account of the workings of Dharmakāya. With regard to shinjin, the source of shinjin is Amida, which is a manifestation of Dharmakāya. The same is true for Buddha-nature, since it, too, is made possible due to Dharmakāya.

E. This being the case, we can arrive at a more accurate perspective on Amida and Buddha-nature, which are often regarded as conflicting teachings that justify the differences between Shin and Zen Buddhism. Rather than being polar opposites, Amida and Buddha nature are two dimensions (“outer” and “inner,” respectively) of the liberating workings of ultimate reality, Dharmakāya. Having said that, it would be more appropriate to compare shinjin with Buddha-nature. They both represent the “inner” dimension of the workings of Dharmakāya. Finally, Buddha nature should not be mistaken, as is often done, for the concept of “the pure nature of the self” (自性清淨心), which is considered the intrinsic nature of the self by itself, without any involvement of Dharmakāya.

F. I believe that what is really at stake in our discussion of meditation is not so much a question as to whether Shin Buddhists can or should adopt meditation but whether or not to *shift the paradigm* of the way we discuss Shin teachings and “practice.” I believe that this call for a paradigm shift reflects the fundamental contemporary outlook and approach of most people in search of answers in Buddhism. And this outlook and approach are characterized by, 1) a focus on the seeker and 2) a clearer sense of “practice.”

G. However, Shin Buddhists of the Nishi-Hongwanji line have traditionally functioned within a paradigm that is centered on the Dharmic dimension (*hō*) of Amida's Vow at the expense of the dimension of the seeker (*ki*). The terms *hō* and *ki* derive from Rennyo's well-known teaching of *kihō-ittai* (the one-body of the seeker and Dharma), in which he stressed the oneness or unity of the relationship between the seeker and Amida. There is, of course, no problem with this teaching, but the problem lies, in my view, the inordinate degree of emphasis placed on the active workings of Amida's vow, while the seeker is portrayed as a "powerless receptacle" just passively waiting to receive it.

H. By shifting the emphasis onto the seeker and his/her recitation of *nembutsu*, it will be more in line with the "contemporary Buddhist paradigm." It will, then, be easier to present Shin, in the similar vein as Zen. Zen meditation is "bodily action." And Shin *nembutsu* is "verbal action." The bodily and the verbal constitute two of the Three Karmic Actions (*sangō*) (the other being "mental") that are commonly accepted by all Buddhist schools. This will facilitate the presentation of Shin position within a commonly-accepted Buddhist framework for practice.

Postscript #3

One's sincere seeking is itself a confirmation of one's shinjin

A. At a Soto Zen meditation session (接心) that I attended years ago in Fukushima, Japan, a participant sitting next to throughout the session was determined by the main teacher to have realized Kenshō (見性) on the last day of the session. The main teacher and supporting priest all came around to congratulate him on his attainment. I watched

with a sense of being amazed and confounded, for I have never come across such a scene in our Shin tradition.

B. In our Shin school, hardly anyone talks about “receiving Shinjin” or “realizing Shinjin,” even though it is the of ultimate soteriological importance. This reticence to talk about Shinjin is probably influenced by a sense of self-deprecation (or enryo) which is prominent in Japanese culture. This, in my view, is symbolized by Rennyo Shonin’s words to the effect that “Those who have Shinjin do not speak about it, while who don’t really have it do talk about it.”

C. One of the exceptions to this is the Myōkōnins, whose utterances and lifestyle are often held up as epitome of Shin spirituality. However, these Myōkōnins are often portrayed as other-worldly and quite eccentric, making it difficult for many contemporary Shin Buddhists to identify with them or to see them as exemplars to be followed.

D. In part to remedy this situation by allowing more contemporary people especially in the West to feel that Shinjin is more accessible and to have greater confidence in its spiritual and soteriological “reality,” I propose that we do the following:

E. Not to regard Shinjin as taking place only in a specific, one-time event or experience.

- 1) To regard one’s concerted and sincere seeking (求道) over an extended period of time as a confirmation that one is on the Shinjin “path.”
- 2) To see that this seeking is rooted in one of the three minds in the 18th Vow, that of “aspiration for birth (in the Pure Land)”

(yokushō 欲生). Because this mind along with “sincere mind” (shishin 至心) and “entrusting mind” (shingyō 信樂) are bestowed by Amida, a seeker who aspires to be born in the Pure Land or attain enlightenment is grasped by Amida or within the great compassionate workings which we call Amida.

Post Postscript #4

Summary of the Main Points of the Articles in an Anthology (in Japanese):

Kenneth Tanaka, ed. *Chie no Ushio (Tide of Wisdom) —Shinran no Chie, Shutaisê, Shakaisê (Shinran's Wisdom, Subjectivity and Social Engagement). Shinshu Theology kara mietekuru atarashî suihêsen (A New Horizon Seen from the Perspective of Shinshu Theology)*, Musashino Univ. Press, 2017.

This anthology is the result of a research projects sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Buddhist Culture at Musashino University. It was one of three research projects that were initiated in 2010, wherein close to 30 members of the Institute became affiliated with one of the three projects.¹⁴

As for the group that produced this anthology, our intent was quite clear from the start. We wanted to seek a greater balance in the heavy tilt in our contemporary understanding in both Japan and in the West of Shinran. And that imbalance refers to the minimization of the three qualities in characterizing Shinran's thought: wisdom, subjectivity, and

¹⁴ One of the other two groups focused on the life and thought of Dr. Junjiro Takakusu, the founder of Musashino University with special focus on his heretofore-unstudied diaries left in his archive. The other of the two groups focused on a wider set of topics dealing with Buddhism and contemporary society.

social engagement.

In our view, the paradigm prevalent in traditional Shinshu studies have made it difficult to bring out the dimensions of wisdom, subjectivity and social engagement in Shinran's thought. In their extreme view, these three dimensions were seen not to even exist. Even if they existed, they were not thought to belong on the side of the seekers (*gudōsha*). For example, "wisdom of shinjin" is acknowledged but only as a dimension of Amida's working; it is hardly regarded in terms of what a seeker would experience. In other words, the "objective" perspective has dominated the "subjective" perspective in our discussions about this vital subject. It is our contention that this kind of approach has contributed to Pure Land Buddhism, and Shin in particular, to fail to be seen as a "religion of awakening" as it rightly should as a Buddhist tradition.

Summary of the Main Points in the Articles:

I now wish to share the synoptic summary of the main points brought out by the thirteen authors of the articles found in this anthology. It needs to be qualified here that I chose these main points [without consulting with the authors in advance] as part of the self-imposed duties of the editor in order to enable the readers to better understand the findings of this volume.

1. Buddhism is a "religion of awakening" and not a "religion of belief." It is also a "religion in which one becomes an 'awakened person,' a Buddha." This awakening brings about wisdom. Shinran explained this wisdom as "realization" (証). (Ichijō Ogawa, Former President and Professor Emeritus, Otani University)
2. "Other Power" does not mean that seeker does nothing. The dominant understanding in traditional studies (行信論), that is, practice

is carried out by Amida and that Shinjin is endowed to us by Amida, implies that Amida accomplishes everything by himself. However, that cannot be how it actually is. (Fumihiko Sueki, Professor Emeritus, The Univ. of Tokyo and the International Research Center for Japanese Studies)

3. The Shinshu doctrinal position of “the affirmation of Other Power and the negation of Self Power” does not negate “subjectivity” and “social engagement” as understood in the general society. (Norio Watanabe, Lecturer, Ryūkoku Univ. and Researcher, Center for the Study of Buddhist Culture at Musashino Univ.)
4. We Shin Buddhists bear the responsibility for the misunderstanding among the general populous about “Other Power of the Primal Vow.” It is generally understood negatively as relying on others or on gods (transcendent beings) while shirking one’s responsibility. It’s not enough just to insist that the two (Other Power of the Primal Vow versus the power of others/gods) are different. We Shin Buddhists must do a much better and thorough job of clarifying those differences on doctrinal and ideological levels. (Norio Watanabe)
5. Shinran’s Pure Land teachings do include the doctrinal structure of “wisdom” in keeping with the Mahāyāna teachings of Vasubandhu and Tanluan. (Muryō Tanaka, Lecturer, Ryūkoku Univ. and Researcher, Center for the Study of Buddhist Culture at Musashino Univ.)
6. The “experiential perspective of the seeker” has been severely weakened in the traditional Shinshū doctrinal studies. Its reasons lie, in large measure, in the impact of the Sangō-wakuran Doctrinal Debates (1798-1806). It has strengthened the “salvational”

character of the Shinshū teaching, portraying it as a “religion of belief” rather than a “religion of awakening.” We need to clarify, for example, the meaning of the “wisdom of Shinjin” (*shinjin no chie*). (Yoshinari Fuji, Professor, Ryūkoku University)

7. The dimension of wisdom is clearly evident in Shinran’s understanding of Shinjin. The qualities of “awakening,” “realization” and “awareness” make up the Shinjin experience of the seekers to a much greater degree, thus, forcing us to question the use of its most dominant and prevalent English translation today: “true entrusting.” (Kenneth Tanaka, Professor, Musashino Univ. and Director, Center for the Study of Buddhist Culture at Musashino Univ.)
8. “Wisdom,” of course, emanates from Amida, but that wisdom also *manifests* in the person of Shinjin. And that wisdom begets the “mind of equality,” and that becomes possible precisely because wisdom arises in us. (Hisao Maeda, Lecturer, Musashino Univ. and Researcher, Center for the Study of Buddhist Culture at Musashino Univ.)
9. There manifest changes in a person of Shinjin, such as: 1) realizes that one is guaranteed Buddhahood even though one has not yet overcome blind passion; 2) one’s mind dwells in the Pure Land and experiences the “mind of equality”; 3) learns about wisdom in one-self and comes to have faith in the Nembutsu; 4) even though one cannot achieve them fully, one still aspires to put into practice the ideals of “having less desire and knowing sufficiency” and “having an amiable countenance and a speech of loving-kindness” as our ideals in life. (Hisao Maeda)

10. When one encounters the truth of interdependence and emptiness as taught by Shakyamuni, he/she realizes his/her own “foolishness” (a foolish being filled with blind passions and immersed in the cycle of births and deaths). This becomes fully possible only by encountering the truth as taught by Shakyamuni. (Ichijō Ogawa)
11. A person of Shinjin experiences “joy,” which is felt with one’s total being, physically and mentally. (Taishin Kawasoe, Professor, Ryūkoku Univ.)
12. A person of Shinjin experiences some levels of wisdom. That level is equivalent to the Stream-enterer or the Stage of Joy, both of which are the first stages of those in the ranks of the Awakened Ones according to the teachings of early Buddhism and general Mahāyāna Buddhism. (Kenneth Tanaka)
13. The absence of the social dimension in the Shinshū institutions has become clearly evident. It is due to the excessive emphasis on Shinjin of Other Power. It is inappropriate to discourage social volunteer activities by labeling them as “Self-Power.” (Fumihiko Sueki)
14. In Shin Buddhism, we are able to confirm that absolute subjectivity in the persons of Shinjin such as the “Myōkōnins” and the “True Disciples of the Buddha.” When one experiences absolute subjectivity, Amida Tathagata takes on a genuine reality and is regarded as being “equal to Tathāgata.” (Ryūsei Takeda, Professor Emeritus, Ryūkoku Univ.)
15. Traditional Shinshū teachings interpreted the [Transference of the] Phase of Returning to take place *after* Birth in the Pure Land. However, the [Transference of the] Phase of Returning should be

understood to be working in *this life* in *all* activities imbued by social engagement and subjectivity of the ordinary foolish seekers; it should not be limited just to Shinjin. (Fumihiko Sueki)

16. Subjectivity and social engagement take place in this life and in society, not in the life after death. Subjectivity is manifested when the seeker realizes the Buddha's wisdom in the [Transference of the] Phase of Going toward Birth [in the Pure Land], while one actualizes the Phase of Returning in living together with others in society. In living the Phase of Going toward Birth, one leads the life of benefitting others as the Phase of Returning, for the Phase of Returning is not limited to life after death. (Takeshi Kaku, Professor, Otani Univ.)
17. Subjectivity in Shinran's view can be seen in the "three exclamations" based on the: 1) insight into his limitations and imperfections, 2) experiencing of his immense joy, and 3) profound appreciation for the truth of the Pure Land teachings. (Taishin Kawasoe)
18. The Shinjin experience entails a radical self-realization. There emerges a new relationship of the self with the world and with the Buddha. That realization, however, is not merely a subjective decision or a mental function but a radical transformation. (Dennis Hirota, Professor Emeritus, Ryūkoku Univ.)
19. The correct understanding of subjectivity was changed and weakened in the ensuing centuries after Shinran's time. This is seen in the "loss" (de-emphasizing) of the original meaning in the teachings of "[persons of Shinjin] being equal to the Tathagata" (*nyorai-tōdō*) as well as "[persons of Shinjin] being members of the group of the assured in this life" (*genze shōjōju*). With regard to the former

teaching, Shinran had in mind “bodhisattvas of *bombus*” and not simply “ordinary *bombus*” as they came to be regarded subsequently after Shinran. With regard to the latter teaching, Kakunyo and others after Shinran interpreted it to mean “birth in the Pure Land is assured in this life” (*heizei-jōgō*), which merely emphasized that the assurance was attained when we realize Shinjin in the regular course of this life and not at their death bed. While this interpretation is not incorrect, the significance of this teaching focused unduly on being born in the Pure Land [and avoiding falling into hell] and, thereby, stripping this teaching of the dynamic Nembutsu way of life characterized by greater subjectivity of bodhisattvas. (Shingyō Saito, Lecturer, Ryūkoku Univ. and Researcher, Center for the Study of Buddhist Culture at Musashino Univ.)

20. Social engagement is found in Shinran's thought. Its tangible expressions are found in the teachings of “the stubble-headed ignorant one” (*gutoku*) and “neither monk nor lay” (*hisō-hizoku*) in referring to himself. This social engagement is rooted in the strong element of subjectivity that characterizes Shinran's thought and has points in common with Thich Nhat Hanh's social engagement. (Naoyuki Ogi, Researcher, Center for the Study of Buddhist Culture at Musashino Univ.)

A Small Rural Shin Buddhist Temple in the 21st Century

Diane Jishin PETERSON

Introduction

Operating a small rural Shin Buddhist Temple in the 21st century offers challenges as well as rewards. I will share my experience of running such a temple in the United States. The challenges as well as the lessons learned, I feel, are universal in their nature. Many small communities in the United States are still in the midst of a depressed economy. In 2017, one in six Americans live in a distressed community. Myokoin Temple is located in such a community. The town of Deer Island, Oregon and the county in which it is located lies just outside of the metropolis of Portland, Oregon. Though Portland currently finds itself in a period of growth and prosperity, Deer Island and the surrounding rural communities continue to struggle. The absence of jobs and social services result in residents relocating. Those that stay struggle to maintain the necessities; food and shelter. Substance abuse, suicide and homelessness are on the rise in my own community. Though my story and that of Myokoin may sound familiar, as I have shared with you in the past, the lessons learned through the struggles experienced may strike a deep chord with many of you now more than ever. Through my experience with operating an independent rural temple I will share some lessons learned, particularly the following:

- to cultivate a shared vision for the temple and sangha
- to learn that “less is more”, keep programs simple and to a minimum
- to take care of the financial necessities without which the temple would be impossible to maintain
- be cognisant of the minister's dual role as householder and priest

Who Am I?

My heritage is quite common among many Americans, a reflection of the early settlers/immigrants that found themselves on the shores of a new home. I am the great granddaughter of German immigrants (mother's side). My father's ancestors were Quakers that immigrated from England and were crucial in the forming of the State of New Jersey in 1702. I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and have lived throughout the United States over the last 55 years.

Many of you first came to know me when I lived in Anchorage, Alaska. It was from Alaska that I came to Dusseldorf, Germany 18 years ago to receive Kikyoshiki (receiving of Buddhist name). It was from Alaska that I flew to Kyoto, Japan 15 years ago to receive *Tokudo* (ordination). Upon returning from Japan, I found myself, at the age of 40 years old, a mother to three children, a grandmother of one and an ordained Jodo Shinshu Priest. It would be just four short years later that I would become the Resident Priest for Myokoin Temple.

The History of Myokoin Temple

In 1998, Rev. Bruno Van Parijs, a Jodo Shinshu Priest from Antwerp, Belgium moved to Anchorage, Alaska to join me and my family.

A Shin Sangha of two had been created and the White Lotus Center for Shin Buddhism was established. In 2004, Myokoin Temple (Temple of Wondrous Light) was designated with permission from the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha.

Rev. Bruno Van Parijs was a student and close friend to the late Rev. Shitoku Peele of Jikoji Temple in Antwerp, Belgium. I had the good fortune to meet Rev. Peele and felt that I had met a great teacher. I attended my first Shin Buddhist service at Jikoji Temple. The welcoming spirit of a small Shin temple 20 years ago in Antwerp, Belgium, was the pivotal influence of my spiritual life and that set me firmly on the Nembutsu path. It was along this Nembutsu path that Myokoin Temple was created in Alaska. A bit unorthodox, to say the least, yet, not unusual given the history of Jodo Shinshu. We have all read accounts where Shin Buddhists have gathered to create a community and from that sense of Sangha, a temple was built. Could a sangha of two do the same in Alaska?

The Alaskan Community

Though Anchorage, Alaska is a city of 250,000 people, I would still consider it rural given its remote location. The community in Anchorage was quite receptive to a new Buddhist group being formed. There were already several Buddhist communities that were well established. The Thai Buddhist Community created two temples by purchasing homes as temples and holding weekly services. A small sangha of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners had formed as well. The Anchorage Zen

Community met weekly in an office building to sit zazen together. The idea of another small group of Buddhists coming together was not foreign. Considering that Anchorage, Alaska is a relatively small city (250,000 pop.) with Christian, Greek Orthodox and Catholic churches being in the majority, it was wonderful to see that Buddhism had a place as well. We faced several challenges in the Alaskan community. We were not prepared for the fact that 1) the Anchorage Buddhist community had little to no knowledge of Jodo Shinshu, 2) there were no other Shin Buddhists (at least none that made themselves known) in the whole of Anchorage except for Bruno and myself and 3) the emotional and financial toll it took on us resulted in a broken relationship and financial hardships.

The Approach to Outreach in Alaska

In order to give the general public (and other Buddhists that were curious) a framework for understanding Jodo Shinshu, we had to start with the basics. Bruno offered a free, six-week course “An Introduction to Buddhism”. It was through this course that those in attendance became interested in knowing more about who we were and what our Buddhist “practice” looked like on a daily basis. It was difficult for many people to grasp the idea that Shin Buddhists did not sit and meditate. Many were disappointed that we didn't “do” something to gain enlightenment. When explaining the term *shinjin* (true entrusting) we would get the question, “Ok, but what do you do to get it?” *The important lesson we learned was this: People that **attended the lectures** were primarily*

*seeking **community** and fellowship, not **just** the “**mechanics**” of the tradition.*

We worked very hard to provide many opportunities for the community at large to experience Shin Buddhism at work. At one point we were hosting over ten different workshops. Bruno's dedication to manually type and upload the entire *Collected Works of Shinran* into the www.shinranworks.com website remains an incredible resource for many world-wide. I became the first Buddhist to be part of the Interfaith Council of Anchorage, gave talks to various groups, volunteered and worked for non-profits and trained as a Chaplain. Once the community associated us, just ordinary people, with Shin Buddhism, it was through living and sharing our experience of a life in the Nembutsu that resonated most with people. I think this may be one key point for small rural Shin temples to take note. *Not only must we talk about the Nembutsu, we must be the Nembutsu to the best of our ability in daily life.* It was through the slow, purposeful introduction of Shin Buddhism, that we began to see people identify as Shin Buddhists, participate in temple sponsored activities and build a sangha.

Financial Hardship Took its Toll

I would like to speak to the financial hardship I mentioned. We were not under the umbrella of an administrative organization that can provide a living wage salary to a minister. While in Alaska, in order for Myokoin Temple to maintain a physical space that would be welcoming it was necessary to rent a large home in which we could live as a family

as well as dedicate space just for Dharma activities. This was very costly at an average of \$2000(USD) a month.

The number of Dharma activities that we provided as well as participated in, taxed our energy and resources. Though we had an active, generous Sangha and received an annual grant for some of the Dharma activities, it was a constant monthly struggle to pay the bills. The emotional strain was too much to bear, and I became chronically depressed. A fact I choose to share because I wish to be honest and transparent of my experience.

Was it worth the risk, heartache and stress? Yes, it was. Why? It forged in me a deeper understanding of what it means to be “embraced and never abandoned”. The triumphs and failures experienced in Alaska were a result of a Sangha living an authentic life in the Nembutsu. A life filled with joy and suffering. Forging lifelong bonds with the Shin Buddhists in Alaska, providing a temple and opportunities for Buddhists to gather, maintaining a close relationship with the Hongwanji International Center and maintaining the online version of the *Collected Works of Shinran* are just some of the great memories that I carry forward with me.

Making A Move to Oregon - Myokoin 2.0

Because of many causes and conditions (too many to mention in this brief presentation), I returned to the one place that always felt like home, Oregon. Now living in the Pacific Northwest of the United States,

I have traded in large amounts of snow for rain! Not only did I pack up myself and my 11-year-old son, Arnesto, I packed up the altar, myogo and the little hand painted temple sign and set out to find a new home.

This story continues to be a personal one. I was fortunate enough to remarry. My husband, Jason, (for the record not a Buddhist) and I began the search for a new home. The search included my wish to find a home big enough to create a place for Myokoin Temple. In 2014, we found and purchased an old school house (built in 1908), in Deer Island, Oregon located just 35 miles from Portland, Oregon. Deer Island was visited by the explorers Lewis and Clark in 1805 and is part of the historic Lewis and Clark Trail.

Deer Island, Oregon is no longer considered a “town” and is just a shadow of its former self. It is home to approximately 300 residents. In 1887, the town of Deer Island was a vibrant logging community. Vibrant enough to have a grocery store, post office, motel, gas station and, last but not least, a school. The school became the focal point of the community once the logging camps ceased to exist. The current school (now our home), built in 1908, is the third oldest school in Oregon.

Fourteen months later we completed the renovation by converting the school into our home, a Bed and Breakfast and Shin Buddhist temple. The former gymnasium of the school is now the home of Myokoin Temple. I find it wonderful to think that children learned to read and write, played games, shared meals and made friends in the great hall where we now hold Temple services twice a month. The sharing,

learning and friend making continues within its walls.

On the completion of the altar in 2015, an invitation was sent to the Shin Buddhist Community in Portland, Oregon (BCA's Oregon Buddhist Temple) as well as the community at large to attend the dedication. An Oregon Buddhist Temple (Portland, Oregon) Assistant Minister, Teresa Soto, assisted me in conducting the dedication service.

A Sangha Member's Reflection

The Deer Island Temple provides us with a sanctuary for reflection, discovery and learning the ways of the Pure Land Path to enlightenment and it offers fellowship and support from like-minded friends. Many of us travel great distances to experience the uniqueness of a more intimate temple. In my own mind I imagine the Shin Buddhists of old would gather in small groups rather than large congregations, and the Deer Island Temple is mighty in the teachings of Shin Buddhism relative to its size.
Randy Cantonwine & Tamara Texley

A New Vision for Myokoin Temple in Oregon - Keep It Simple!

Do you know that saying "if you build it, they will come"? My thought on bringing Myokoin to a new, very small community was a simple one. If I build it, they MIGHT come and if no one does, I will continue to be grateful every morning to stand before the Myogo with Amida and Shinran by my side.

My vision for Myokoin Temple in Deer Island is four-fold 1) to provide a space for a sangha, 2) to share the Dharma in the community 3)

to create a temple that would offer a small retreat/BNB space for Shin Buddhists and/or guests that found themselves traveling in the Pacific Northwest and 4) to create Deer Island Press and publish, in small quantities, Shin Buddhist poetry from contributors world-wide.

A New Approach - Just Be!

What did we learn from the Alaskan model? Providing a multitude of programs that exhausts the time and resources of a small temple can be counterproductive.

Vigorously promoting temple activities to a community that is unfamiliar with Buddhism, predominantly Christian and is grappling to retain its identity as a rural Oregon community (vs. a “bedroom community of Portland”) would be met with suspicion and rejection. Temple activities now are focused on quality versus quantity. We no longer have to focus on the number of members needed to survive and can focus on the members that help the temple thrive! Each temple member carries the teaching of the Nembutsu within and shares their lives with family, friends and co-workers. This is the natural way of outreach - just live a life in the Nembutsu.

Social Media Trappings

We currently have a website, Facebook page and a local presence on Meetup, however I must admit that my views on web based sanghas and e-groups have slightly changed. People can become connected superficially and mistake it for being a holistic connection and rarely did

a member on our local social media site actually attend a service at the temple. I suppose the karmic conditions have not cleared the path for them to do so. The digital persona that many people become online does not transition - 49 - into the non- digital world and I therefore encourage those that can to connect “in person” and create community with others that are seeking the path of Compassion and Wisdom that Amida provides.

Final Thoughts

I am grateful for the experience of starting a temple “from scratch” and I have shared great joys and sorrows with sangha members. This, I am certain, reflects the life of any sangha regardless of size and location.

The echo of Shinran Shonin's words will be a guide and Amida's Compassion and Wisdom will be what embraces those that seek refuge on the doorstep of each and every Shin Buddhist temple.

Thank you. Namu Amida Butsu

Jodo Shinshu in the 21st Century

Ilona EVERS

The 21st century is a difficult time to live in. Conflicts discussed in the news are the buildup of political tension between the USA and North Korea, and between the USA/European Union and Russia. In Africa there are countless wars. Terrorist attacks threaten cities in the rich industrial countries. Wealth inequality is increasing, meaning the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

In modern agriculture, chemical warfare against weeds and pests threatens our drinking water and kills a lot of insects that birds need for survival. Honey-bees are in danger and so is our agriculture.

On a social level there is a lot of uncertainty and anxiety. Many people fear for their jobs, suffer from depression and burnout. Poor people struggle to make ends meet. Wealthy people are doing yoga, and are concerned about their proper diet. There seems to be a vague fear of the future, a vague uneasiness all around.

How do we as Jodo Shinshu followers live with all these problems? How shall we who teach the Jodo Shinshu dharma respond to the despair, uncertainty, and fear of the people who come to us?

Ecology and the probable future of our industrialized societies and of humankind in general has been one of my deep interests in the last years. I have been reading about and contemplating this issue quite intensively. In one of my searches for further information I was happy to find texts from Shin authors Mark Unno, Don Castro, and John Paraskevopoulos; their writings have been major inspirations for this talk.

Mark Unno tells us in his essay “The Great Hesitation and the Great Liberation: The Long and Short of Karmic R/Evolution:”

“...global society may be at a crossroads regarding some of the assumptions that have driven the development of human culture. It is not news to say we face many challenges, including climate change, peak oil, water shortages, nuclear radiation fallout, overcrowding, and the global financial crisis. Even compared with a few decades ago, many experts concur that the challenges we face today are formidable. Leading organizations, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), have delivered assessments that it is already too late to avoid impending drastic, negative consequences of our collective cultural actions. Even if we were able to implement the best available technology, it would not be enough. Add to this the cultural and political obstacles we face, and there remains limited hope of stemming the tide of destructive consequences that the human species has unleashed.”

I agree with Mark Unno’s assessment that we cannot avoid severe consequences; but much can still be done to mitigate the difficulties we face now and will face in the future. On a personal and community level there are things each of us can do. When many people do or don’t something it has an effect. For example, because many people buy vegetables products, you find more and more of them in supermarkets. Many customers in Germany refuse plastic bags. Grocery shops and supermarkets adapted to this and offer cloth or paper bags instead. One could join groups which manage community gardens, work against pollution, teach how to develop a personal lifestyle which does the least possible harm to the environment or engage in activities to improve working conditions in firms, etc.

So, do I propose Jodo Shinshu should join the engaged Buddhists? John Paraskevopoulos in his essay “Amida’s Dharma in the Modern World” advises against it. He begins his essay with a quote from Shinran:

“Because the power of the vow is without limits, even our evil karma, so deep and heavy is not burdensome, Because the Buddha’s wisdom is without bounds, Even the bewildered and wayward are not abandoned. (*Shozomatsu Wasan*, Verse 37)”

Because Jodo Shinshu is a path for “the bewildered and wayward,” he warns: “An ‘engaged’ form of Buddhism, while well-intentioned, harbors the very real possibility of causing a certain measure of spiritual harm to those who find themselves unable to conform to the ‘engaged’ agenda....”

“...One really has to ask whether Shinran had any sense of social engagement of the kind envisaged by its modern exponents. What Shinran *is* engaged with is Amida Buddha and his Dharma, not with transient values which have no bearing on his final goal of emancipation. To be sure, he was acutely aware of the many injustices of his time as well as the deep-seated moral and spiritual hypocrisy of his contemporaries but he never sought to have his faith act as a kind of catalyst for social transformation. Quite the contrary, he pointed to the many evils of his time in order to encourage people to turn their minds from worldly matters and focus on the nembutsu path.”

“To be perfectly blunt, the life of shinjin is, first and foremost, a spiritual path aimed at the attainment of enlightenment and the liberation from samsaric bondage. Its social application is really neither here nor there.”

“The other point that needs to be made is that people of shinjin are perfectly capable of having profoundly opposed positions in relation to moral, social, and political questions.”

Personally, I find that looking closely at the predicament of the industrial societies can be a challenge. It can leave people depressed and feeling hopeless and helpless. To be active in some way, to try to do something for the environment or avoid something harmful can help to overcome these feelings. I wouldn't want to discourage Shin followers who want to be active, who want to do something on the so to speak samsaric level. I also wouldn't want for Jodo Shinshu to become a member of the movement of socially engaged Buddhists. Because first and foremost the teaching of Shinran is a spiritual one, we don't just want samsara to be redecorated; we want to transcend it. I share John Paraskevopoulos' opinion that Jodo Shinshu is a path for the bewildered and wayward who might be overwhelmed by the socially engaged agenda.

Since humanity learned to use fossil fuels, a galaxy of possibilities opened up for the handful of nations which participated in it. For quite a long time it was true that life got better with each new generation and the future brought more and more technological wonders and vast new possibilities. Due to these experiences the story of everlasting progress, growth, and growing wealth for everybody developed.

There are severe downsides, though. In the name of profit, nature, plants, animals, and humans alike were treated like machines. A strange and dangerous phenomenon came into being; the mindset that humanity is somehow exempt from the laws of nature and can do with nature as it pleases without having to think of the consequences.

Western languages (for certain I know about English and German) mirror this attitude when speaking of the conquering of nature. The western industrial societies and maybe the eastern industrial societies too suffer from profound illusions, I think; the illusions that we as global societies are too big to fail, and that we are entitled to get from the earth what we want.

We as societies suffer from a profound lack of modesty and humility and have an excessive sense of entitlement. I say, we as society. I am criticizing these mindsets. To be honest, as a citizen of a rich industrialized country like Germany I am also pampered and used to all sorts of luxuries, like being able to buy exotic fruits for moderate prices and, of course, I partly suffer from these attitudes, too.

To help us to change mindsets that ultimately hurt the earth and therefore us too, and to be able to cope with difficulties the future might bring, the mindset Jodo Shinshu teaches can be very useful; and particularly for us westerners, certain attributes of the Japanese culture can be very helpful, too.

Don Castro in his essay “The Greening of Jodo Shinshu” has good advice.

He stresses the importance of attitudes like non-entitlement, humility, gratitude and the feeling of indebtedness; and explains terms like *mot-tai-nai* and *okagesama*. In his words:

“The Shin Buddhist attitude of non-entitlement cannot really be expressed by one word. But there are everyday expressions in Japanese that include feelings of unworthiness, self-effacing humility, considerateness, deference, personal responsibility, and gratitude. These characteristics of the Japanese personality are sometimes chuckled at by

foreigners (he who bows the lowest wins) and even scorned by many modern Japanese but, to the extent they persevere in Japanese society and language, they reflect the subtle and profound influence of Shin Buddhist attitudes. One such expression is “*mottai-nai*.”

In his excellent article “*Mottai-nai*,” the late Rev. Chijun Yakumo explains, “*Mottai-nai* is written with the characters for ‘thing’ and ‘essence’ and a negating suffix. The literal and original meaning of *mottai-nai* is therefore, ‘The essence or quality of the thing does not exist’.... If we ignore the characteristics of these individual things and use them merely for our advantage, it means that we are killing the ‘life’ in them. ...*mottai-nai* refers to the astonishment we feel when we become aware of ourselves who are killing the essential quality of things. That is what gives rise to the thought, ‘What an unworthy person I am!’”

Rev. Yakumo gives the following examples of *mottai-nai* behavior: “Trees are looked at only for the lumber they produce, grass only for how many heads of cattle it will support. Similarly, rather than considering a person as a person with his or her own characteristics, we evaluate him or her based on what kind and quantity of work he or she can do. This attitude of looking at something only in terms of its utility can be said to be true not only in the world of nature or things that have forms, but also the formless world of the mind and heart.”

“*Okagesama*.” This expression reminds me of one in English, “behind the scenes.” There are many out of view behind the scenes who enable the drama of my life to go on and *okagesama de* have led me to encounter the Buddha Dharma. As was stated in my ordination ceremony, “You have been brought here by profound causes and conditions.”

“I’ve noticed in almost all introductory books on Buddhism in

English, there is little or no reference to the easy Pure Realm Path, although Jodo Shinshu may be the largest Buddhist sect in Japan. Introductory books almost exclusively present the Path of the Sages and the cultivation of pure wisdom and boundless compassion but rarely discuss humility, gratitude, and indebtedness.”

Referring to the Bodhisattva vows other Buddhist denominations take: “In Jodo Shinshu, rather than identifying as a Bodhisattva, we identify as the ones the Bodhisattvas are trying to save. When asked, “Saved from what?” The answer is, “Saved from our deluded, attached self.” Actually, rather than “are trying to save,” from a Shinshu perspective I should say, “Have saved.””

“In his book *Ethics for the New Millennium*, the Dalai Lama emphasizes universal responsibility. “I am convinced that it is essential that we cultivate a sense of what I call universal responsibility.... It is true that in Buddhist practice we constantly remind ourselves of our duty to serve all sentient beings in every universe.” A Shinshu Pure Realm approach to universal responsibility does not deny the Dalai Lama’s injunction. Rather, a Shin Buddhist looks at universal responsibility from a different perspective. **Yes, we are responsible for the universe but the universe is also responsible for us.** The implications of this shift in perspective are clearly presented by my close teacher, the late Rev. Philipp K. Eidmann:

“When we really understand our relation to the whole universe, it makes us very humble. We realize that all our good fortune is due to the efforts of countless others. When we realize this, our gratitude extends to everything in the universe. It is only with their help that we have ever been able to hear and realize the truth of Buddha’s teachings....

Faith, then, according to the Hongwanji doctrine of Buddhism is an attitude of unselfishness. It causes us to realize our interdependence on everything in the universe. Through the awakening of such faith, gratitude becomes the motivation of our life.... We are grateful to the Buddha for showing us the path to end suffering. We are grateful to the whole universe, and this gratitude is part of our great happiness.”

Conclusion

Jodo Shinshu has something very important to give to the world and to other Buddhist denominations; namely, modesty, humility, gratitude, and a feeling of indebtedness. Japanese culture has concepts like *mottai-nai* and *okagesama* to offer.

Our global industrialized societies suffer from a profound lack of modesty, humility, and caution. Regrettably, there seems to be little interest in these qualities at the moment. Western Buddhists know about interdependence, and should also know about modesty, gratitude, and indebtedness. There are Buddhist scriptures which stress these qualities; but western Buddhist teachers focus more on mindfulness, the development of wisdom and compassion through meditation, and the improvement of daily life. The comment of the Dalai Lama about our universal responsibility is an example of this tendency. Jodo Shinshu can but provide information about our teaching. Hopefully the qualities we have to offer will be more appreciated in the future.

For us Jodo Shinshu followers our teaching provides good advice for difficult times. The *myokonin* could be our role models. In stories of *myokonin* you can read about the all-embracing humility, gratitude, and sense of non-entitlement of these amazing Shin followers. For the

myokonin everything they experienced seemed to be a reason to be grateful. When you think about and feel the all-pervasive quality of the Nembutsu, the liberating activity of Amida Buddha, you can find Amida Buddha in everything you experience, so that everything is a reason to say the Nembutsu, as Shigaraki-sensei put it.

I would like to finish my talk with a statement by Mark Unno: *“Each of us individually and all of us collectively are responsible for the difficulties our species faces. That we are in this together, that we vow to take this journey together, not blaming one another but, rather, embracing our collective karmic responsibility, with a long view to its positive outcome, may be one way to approach the path to our liberation.”*

List of sources:

John Paraskevopoulos, “Amida’s Dharma in the Modern World,” *Muryoko, Journal of Shin Buddhism*

Don Castro, “The Greening of Jodo Shinshu”

Mark Unno, “The Great Hesitation and the Great Liberation: The Long and Short of Karmic R/Evolution,” Dharma World

Being a Bompu, but not apart from Amida's Light –The Relationship to the Spiritual Friend (*Zenchishiki*) –

Jan Marc Nottelmann-Feil

Preliminary Thoughts

on the spiritual friend and religious experience

Why do we need spiritual friends?¹ Being asked, many of us would answer: because spiritual friends (i.e., spiritual teachers) help us to gain a religious (spiritual) experience. In other words, the spiritual teacher has an experience which he wants to convey to the student, and the student, longing for a spiritual experience, must entrust the teacher.

The idea that “religion” or “spirituality” is connected to “experience” is not so old. The use of the expression “religious experience” starts in America in the middle of the 18th century with the First Great Awakening. On the verge of the 20th century, William James introduced the term “religious experience” into the academic language, and authors like Suzuki Daisetz were very quick in applying it within the Buddhist context (“enlightenment-experience”). Certainly, the people in the medieval era and earlier had something, what we would call “religious experience” nowadays, but it is our interpretation, for they did not use the term “experience” by themselves, and neither did the people in the West or East.

¹ The term 善知識 *zenchishiki* is commonly known as translation for the Sanskrit word *kalyāṇa-mitra*, which means “a friend of virtue” or “good friend”. It usually refers to the spiritual teacher and is rendered in the Collected Works of Shinran by “good teacher.”

In his monography on Meister Eckhart, “Esse est Deus”, Reiner Manstetten criticized Suzuki’s Meister Eckhart interpretation in a way, which is interesting in our context. Suzuki was convinced that the Christian philosophical “experience” of Meister Eckhart is ultimately identical to the Buddhist one. Suzuki fathomed the intention of Meister Eckhart in terms of his own Zen experience. Being convinced that there is one *philosophia perennis*, one “religious experience,”² he often mentions Eckhart in his Buddhist essay writing. But Manstetten asks, how can we verify Suzuki’s assertion?

*Can the interpreter of a mystic’s scripture [in Suzuki’s sense, MNF], since he is allegedly aware of its essential meaning (Gehalt), not conveniently skip the effort of its careful reading? Is he not withdrawing his interpretation from the reexamination of the philologist by insisting on his own intuition, on his own inner experience? ... Is someone who has not the intuitus not consequently excluded from the access to the truth of the mystic?*³

Reiner Manstetten is not an outspoken opponent of Suzuki, he does not deny the worth of intuition as necessary supplement to philology, and therefore writes: “It is an essential goal of Eckhart’s teaching to initiate this internal realization in his readers and listeners.”⁴ But

² Suzuki, Daisetz: *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist* (“The basis of Buddhist Philosophy”): “Eckart expresses the same experience [i.e. prajñā intuition, MNF] in terms of Christian theology.”

³ Manstetten, Reiner: *Esse est Deus. Meister Eckharts christologische Versöhnung von Philosophie und Religion und ihre Ursprünge in der Tradition des Abendlandes* (München: Alber, 1993) p. 39.

⁴ Manstetten, p. 43.

despite the possibility that Suzuki understood something important – this “internal realization,” his insights remain somehow a mere subjective conviction, because he does not give stronger notion to Eckhart’s subtle theological argumentation, especially in his Latin works. For Suzuki (and kindred thinkers like Rudolf Otto) Eckhart’s theology is just the “outer shell”. As we know, Suzuki repeatedly points out in his Zen Buddhist writings how little scriptures can contribute to the “inner experience.” In this sense, Suzuki is a devoted non-philologist, and he is so-to-say the opposite extreme to the mere philologist or structuralist, who fastidiously analyses the wording and levels of meaning of Eckhart’s writings without being interested in any “internal realization.”

Manstetten’s approach is the middle way between these two extremes:

*We must, indeed, be aware, that an insightful enactment (Vollziehen) of what is taught by the scriptures (...) is an essential, or even the essential concern of all of Eckhart’s talking and writing, but that such an enactment presupposes the truth of the scripture and must not substitute it.*⁵

What Suzuki would call Eckhart’s “religious experience”, is for Manstetten his “insightful enactment of what is taught by the scriptures.” The scriptures and the theological language are in Manstetten’s view not an arbitrary “outer shell,” which Eckhart, as a child of his time, was unable to overcome. They are in fact the *origin*, and their truth is the *inner essence of Eckhart’s “religious experience.”*

As long as we follow Suzuki (or other successors of William James’

⁵ Manstetten, p. 42.

psychology,) we are fixed to see only two players in the game: the teacher, who has an inner experience, and the student, who is still looking for it. From Manstetten, however, we conceive the idea that beyond this mere teacher-student-relationship there might be something else, a third component which sets down the yardstick: and this third component has something to do with scriptures and the religious tradition in general. In the case of Eckhart, it is the Holy Scripture which is unlocked by the words of the Church doctors and in the light of heathen philosophers.

Shinran's understanding of the "true teacher"

Eckhart's contemporary Shinran has a quite similar relationship to the scriptures. In his principal work *Kyōgyōshō monrui*, direct hints to matters we could understand as his "personal experience" are comparatively rare. The starting point of his teaching is always the scriptures, or better said, the Primal Vow of Buddha Amida. From the Primal Vow he develops lines of arguments, which lead via the most important Buddhist masters (the seven patriarchs including Hōnen, and others) to his "personal experience." However, his "personal experience" marks always the end of such a line, and it is never its basis. He does not appeal e.g., to his (Gutoku's) vision in the Rokkakudō temple to prove the truth of the Primal Vow. His reasoning always follows the opposite direction: because it is written in the scriptures, "I, Gutoku Shinran, can understand, why I am now experiencing this." Shinran does not interpret the scriptures by the means of his personal experience, but rather he interprets his personal experience by the means of the scriptures.⁶

⁶ Compared to Martin Luther, the German Reformer, who talked more about

“Spiritual friend,” the word I was dealing with in the preliminary thoughts, has only one possible equivalent in the scriptures: 善知識 *zenchishiki* (or *zenjishiki* as it is read in most publications of the Hongwanji tradition). *Zenchishiki* is a compound of *zen* “good” and *chishiki* “knowledge.” It was the common Chinese translation for the Sanskrit term *kalyāṇa-mitra* (or the Pāli term *kalyāṇa-mitta*) which means “good friend” or “friend of virtue.” Usually, it refers to a Buddhist teacher, who in many cases, but not necessarily is a monk or nun. Every Buddhist denomination, dependent on its respective teaching focus, has its own specific view on what *zenchishiki* or *kalyāṇa-mitra* means in concrete terms.

The yardstick for the Pure Land interpretation of the word is certainly the passage of the Contemplation Sutra, which describes the birth of the spiritually lowest people (“those who attain birth in the lowest grade of the lowest rank”).⁷ We read, that someone of the lowest spiritual level at the end of his life meets a *zenchishiki* or “good friend”⁸ who explains to him the nembutsu. By calling “Namo Amida Butsu” the dying person attains birth in the Pure Land. – *Zenchishiki* in this context refers to the person by which the practitioner hears the “Name that embodies

himself than we want to know, Shinran was almost silent about his private life. This is why we are forced to speculations concerning many hard facts of his biography, even about his marriage partners. Nevertheless, most of the argumentation in the *Kyōgyōshō Monrui* end in Shinran’s personal contemplations or even his “personal experience.” Even if Shinran quotes the words of the sutras and patriarchs, at the end all these teachings must be relevant for him, otherwise they would be mere theory. In this way, personal experience is the selection criterion of Shinran’s anthologies (*monrui*).

⁷ Nagao, Gadjin M. (Gen. Ed.): *The Three Pure Land Sutras*. Volume I (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 2003) p. 59.

⁸ We read here explicitly the synonym of *zenchishiki*: 善友 *zennu*, the literal translation for “good friend.”

Amida's Primal Vow.”⁹ In this meaning *zenchishiki* appears in many passages of other authors that Shinran quotes in the *Kyōgyōshō Monrui*. In all these passages the *Collected Works of Shinran* translates the term *zenchishiki* as “true teacher.”

If we want to know more about *zenchishiki* than it is contained in this merely formal definition, we find that Shinran is reluctant to go into deeper discussion of what the features of a “true teacher” are. In the *Kyōgyōshō monrui* we find a passage which is captioned in the *Jōdo Shinshū seiten (chūshakuhon)* with “True Disciple of Buddha (真仏弟子釈, KGSM III, 84ff),” but there is no comparably explicit passage on the “true teacher.” I see here a connection to the sixth chapter of the *Tannishō* where Shinran refuses the idea of having personal disciples: “For myself, I do not have even a single disciple.”¹⁰ In a certain sense he denies here to be a “true teacher.” How should he, Gutoku Shinran, meet the conditions for being a “true teacher,” if he admits at the end of his lifework: “I lack even small love and small compassion, and yet, for fame and profit, enjoy teaching others?”¹¹

Here is not the time to read the passage from the *Kyōgyōshō monrui* in detail. Essentially, Shinran interprets the true discipleship as fulfillment of the Primal Vow. The diamond like heart, which is the essence of the true disciple (and the true teacher as well) is given by the Buddha and has positive results which are described broadly. Shinran quotes e.g. the 33rd vow: “people having received the light (...) will become gentle in body and mind, surpassing devas and humans in those

⁹ *Kyōgyōshō Monrui* II, § 27. CWS I, p. 34.

¹⁰ CWS I, p. 664.

¹¹ CWS I, p. 429 (Concluding Hymns of Shōzōmatsu Wasan).

qualities (...).” But finally, Shinran interrupts his train of thought in a disturbing way. It is one of the five “I, Gutoku Shinran” self-references in the *Kyōgyōshō monrui*:

I know truly how grievous it is that I, Gutoku Shinran, am sinking in an immense ocean of desires and attachments and am lost in vast mountains of fame and advantage, so that I rejoice not at all at entering the stage of the truly settled, and feel no happiness at coming nearer the realization of true enlightenment. How ugly it is! How wretched!

The following passage on the “person difficult to save” is certainly to be read in the light of this blunt self-reflection: it is Shinran’s fight with the idea that he could be a person like prince Ajātaśatru, who had killed his father and is therefore – in the literal interpretation of the 18th Vow – excluded from birth. The salvation of Ajātaśatru by the samādhi of the Buddha at the end of the long passage quoted from the Nirvana Sūtra is in a certain sense the salvation of Shinran. But *nota bene*: the “person difficult to save” cannot even be saved by “bodhisattvas, whether they preach the dharma or not” (*KGSM* III, 114), i.e. only a Buddha can save them! In other words, there is no other true teacher-student-relationship than Amida-Shinran!

Shinran’s understanding of the masters (honshi 本師)

Here, we must not transfer uncritically some concepts into the Shin Buddhist context which originally stem from Zen Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. It is not my concern (and ability) to explain what these concepts mean correctly in these two traditions. I simply want to point out here that the “seven patriarchs” cannot be simply regarded as a

“bloodline” (血脉相承 *kechimyaku sōshō*) in the sense Westerners often understand it, i.e. as a kind of master genealogy, a line of direct or face-to-face transmission (of what Suzuki called the “enlightenment-experience”) from teacher to student, which originates from the Buddha. It is quite unlikely if not impossible that the seven patriarchs should really belong to one and the same transmission line. Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu were representatives of rivalling schools, and Shandao was not a Tendai monk like Genshin or Hōnen. Certainly, there was no transmission from mind to mind between them, and it was just Hōnen’s extraordinary mind who recognized the inner connection between these outstanding proponents of Pure Land Buddhism.

In the Shōshinge, in the first stanza on the first patriarch, Nāgārjuna, Shinran refers to a passage in the Laṅkāvatāra sūtra. In terms of its philosophical content the passage is quite peripheral, without deeper meaning. Śākyamuni prophesizes here that the Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna will “appear in this world” (SHUT TO SE). Nāgārjuna’s appearance was therefore not accidental, it was in line with Śākyamuni’s masterplan, with his intention “to teach the oceanlike Primal Vow of Amida” (YUI SETSU MIDA HON GAN KAI). But even Buddha Śākyamuni’s appearance in this world had already been motivated by Amida’s vow that his name will be heard throughout the ten quarters (JU SEI MYŌ SHŌ MON JIP PŌ). From this viewpoint, we can interpret Nāgārjuna even as a transformation or manifestation of the Buddha. In the Koso Wasan (高僧和讃 Hymns of the Pure Land Masters 106), Shinran writes of his master, Honen like so:

Genkū appeared as Mahāsthāmaprāpta,
and also as Amida.

Emperors and ministers venerated him,
And the ordinary people in the capital and the countryside
revered him. (*Kōsō Wasan* 106)
Amida Tathāgata, manifesting form in this world,
Appeared as our teacher Genkū; (*Kōsō Wasan* 114)

The following verse of the *Kōsō Wasan* can hardly be interpreted as metaphoric speech:¹²

When Genkū was alive
He emanated a golden light,
Which the Chancellor, an ordained layman,
Saw before him.¹³ (*Kōsō Wasan* 104)

Shinran applies the so-called *honji-suijaku* idea (本地垂迹)¹⁴ to all of the seven patriarchs, and he goes so far that he attributes supernatural powers (*jinzū* 神通) even to his own teacher Hōnen. This is an extremely strong interpretation of the term “good teacher,” but we can discover this comprehension on the earliest Shin Buddhist altarpieces, the *kōmyō myōgō* (光明名号): they show the written name of the Buddha (*myōgō*) emitting beams of light (*kōmyō*). At the end of the beams (but never connected by one beam like in “bloodline!”) appear “manifestations” of the great teachers like the patriarchs Shōtoku Taishi and others.

¹² Shinran had a very strong faith into visions, dreams, and supernatural phenomena. In this aspect, frankly speaking, he was a lot like the Western Buddhists in the tradition of Henry Olcott (1832-1907), who regarded occult phenomena as possible and even natural, then to Buddhists of the enlightened-secular tradition, which can be traced back to Paul Carus or Paul Dahlke.

¹³ Interestingly Shinran is not talking about his own experience; he is just quoting a generally accepted witness, the Chancellor Kanezane. This reserve can be observed everywhere and can be interpreted as Shinran's mistrustfulness into his own experiences. See above!

¹⁴ 川添泰信『親鸞浄土教と師弟像』Kawasoe, Taishin: *Shinran Jōdokyō to Shiteizō* (Kyōto: Jishōsha Shuppan) p. 110ff.

However, this is only half the truth: Is the heart of the teacher-student-relationship for Shinran really complete entrusting, following the paradigm of Amida-bombu-relationship? Is on the one side the perfect teacher, the “manifestation of Amida”, a luminous being, a “good man” (よきひと *yoki hito*, compare Tannishō): Hōnen, and on the other side: Shinran -the “bad person” (悪人 *akunin*), who has reviled the true dharma, and whose eyes are obstructed by passions?

The situation is palpably more complex, because Shinran in his later years acted as teacher and applied for the younger generation the same rule Hōnen had implemented for him. Even if Shinran denied having personal disciples, he was aware of being a teacher – not less than Hōnen was – and behaved like him.¹⁵ Shinran’s *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls* (尊号真像銘文 *Songō shinzō meimon*) are a collection of texts which Shinran regarded as suitable as caption for altar-pieces, i.e. sacred scrolls depicting patriarchs etc. This collection includes even a text of Shinran himself and there is little doubt that Shinran, in fact, meant it as a kind of testimony, which should appear on the sacred scrolls depicting him, Shinran. Consequently, we find the text on the 安城御影 *Anjō no goei*, one of the earliest portraits of Shinran.¹⁶

However, most of these portrayals stem from the time after his death, when the foolish being Gutoku had become completely to ashes. A piece of evidence that in the early Jōdo Shinshū it was uncommon to

¹⁵ For example, by passing his writing the *Kyōgyōshō Monrui* to his close disciples in the same way as Hōnen had given him his opus magnum. In our days, this symbolic act is re-enacted after the tokudo ceremony, when the new priests receive a copy of the *Kyōgyōshō Monrui* with the seal of the Hongwanji.

¹⁶ Illustration in CWS I, p. xi.

set the portrayal of a living person on an altar piece is a *Kōmyō Honzon* (光明本尊) in the possession of Myōgenji temple in Okazaki. A *Kōmyō Honzon* is a *Kōmyō Myōgō* scroll, which is used as the central object of reverence on the altar, the *go-honzon* (ご本尊). The *Kōmyō Honzon* of the Myōgenji temple is the only *Kōmyō Honzon* proven to be from Shinran's lifetime.¹⁷ It shows many Buddhist masters, including Hōnen and Shinran, emanating from the light rays that stream from the central *Myōgō*. But Shinran's portrayal is smaller and looks a little displaced. It was obviously added afterwards.¹⁸

In short, seen from Shinran's own perspective he was an ordinary foolish being, there was never a moment of big mutation, when Shinran switched sides and became a "true teacher" – not even when Shinran was allowed to copy Hōnen's major work and to paint his portrayal, an act he interpreted later as "manifestation of the decisive settlement of birth" (*ketsujō ōjō no shirushi* 決定往生の徴).¹⁹ However, seen from his students, after his passing away, he was the transmitter of light, a "true teacher," and even a manifestation of the Buddha. This perspective, which is absent in Shinran's own writings, was taken by all hagiographic accounts of Shinran's life, starting with Kakunyo's *Godenshō*. Kakunyo reports in the *Godenshō* the dream of a devoted follower Ren'i, in which he saw the Crown Prince Shōtoku bowing in worship to Shinran Shōnin. Kakunyo interpreted the dream, saying: "Hence, it is clear that Shōnin,

¹⁷ The *Kōmyō Honzon* of the Myōgenji temple cast light on the earliest Shin Buddhist liturgy when the classical setting of a Shin Buddhist altar with the go-honzon in the middle and two scrolls at the side altars not had developed.

¹⁸ Hiramatsu, Reizō: *Die Shin-buddhistischen Kulturschätze in der japanischen Kunstgeschichte* in: Ekō-Blätter Nr. 20 (Düsseldorf: Ekō-Haus, 2005).

¹⁹ *Kyōgyōshō monrui* VI, 118.

the Patriarchal Master, was an incarnation of Amida Tathāgata” (*Mida nyorai no keshin* 弥陀如来の化身).²⁰ In other words, Shinran as a holy being (*Shōnin* 聖人), and a transformed Buddha (*keshin*), being worth to be added in the aureole of the *Myōgō* in a *Kōmyō Honzon* picture! This is the after-death perspective of the devotees.

Shinran’s comprehension of the teacher-student relationship

Shinran’s fervent eulogies on his own teacher Hōnen can be easily mistaken as a paradigm for teacher-student-relationship in general. We should never forget that the relationship between Hōnen and Shinran is the foundation of Jōdo Shinshū itself. Especially Hōnen’s part is very special and cannot be compared to teachers in our time. Not even Ren-nyo Shōnin, who emphatically recommended the gratefulness to the “good teachers” in his *Ryōgemon*, had such a close relationship to one certain personal teacher: he never called one of his personal teachers e.g. an “incarnation of Shandao” (善導之再誕 *Zendō shi saitan*) as Shinran did in concerning Hōnen.²¹ Hōnen fused Shandao’s ideas with that of Genshin and others, creating a completely new perspective on the “intention why the Buddha appeared in the world.” This was his extraordinary achievement, only a Bodhisattva could have done. Therefore, Hōnen was a honshi 本師, a “Master” who is essential for the Shin Buddhist tradition.²²

²⁰ *Jōdo Shinshū Seiten (Chūshakuhon)*, p. 1046. Translation by Zuio H. Inagaki: <http://web.mit.edu/stclair/www/horai/a.htm> (access 2024, June 27).

²¹ *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*. CWS I, p. 514. *Jōdo Shinshū Seiten (Chūshakuhon)* p. 667.

²² For example, in the *Shōshinge*, CWS I, p. 73. The term *honshi* in Jōdo Shinshū is used almost exclusively for the seven patriarchs. - See *Jōdo Shinshū yōgo daijiten. Chū* (Kyōiku shinchōsha) p. 538ff.

The following points of the general theoretic framework of Jōdo Shinshū I regard as essential to avoid misunderstandings about the teacher-student-relationship:

1. Jōdo Shinshū followers are ordinary beings (*bombu* 凡夫) until the last moment of their life.
2. Jōdo Shinshū is a non-gradual teaching (compare the term *ōchō* 横超, which is usually rendered as “transcending cross-wise”).
3. Not extraordinary experiences make a “true teacher” in Jōdo Shinshū, but his clear understanding of the teaching which has condensed in his heart to true *shinjin*.
4. There is no true understanding of the teaching without the clear and heart-felt conviction: I am a *bombu*.
5. In one sentence: In Jōdo Shinshū *bombu*-teachers teach *bombu*-students.

As for 1, Shinran in his self-reflection and personal experience, found himself to be an ordinary person, and emphasized it strongly in all his written texts.

There is a big difference between people who are alive - and full of our human mental affliction (*bonnō*) – and those who are reborn in the Pure Land. Shinran mentioned in the *Kōsō Wasan* the exact time of Hōnen’s death, and I guess, he did it not only, because he wanted to promote memorial services for Hōnen. It is difficult to imagine that a text like the “*Hymns on Genkū*” could be written during Hōnen’s lifetime. However Hōnen is for Shinran special even in his death as we understand if we look at his wording: “He returned to the Pure Land” (浄土に

還歸せしめけり *jōdo ni genki seshimekeri*).²³ Hōnen was a Bodhisattva coming from the Pure Land, and now he had returned! When an ordinary being died, Shinran used of course, the simple word “birth” (往生 *ōjō*).²⁴

Should our teachers after they have died also be regarded as manifestations of the buddhas or bodhisattvas, should we revere them on our *butsudan* (Buddha altar)? This is extremely problematic. Do we know (as ordinary beings!), who of our dharma friends was our most important teacher, and how exactly the Buddha saves us? This is calculation from our side. In our time, many Jōdo Shinshū followers put images of deceased people on their Buddha altar. This is insofar correct as the deceased who died with *shinjin* are now bodhisattvas in the Pure Land. But it is also wrong, because we remember the deceased in a form as we knew them in their former life, i.e. as ordinary beings and we cannot remember them differently (with the 32 physical characteristics of buddha etc., compare 22nd Vow). This also applies to our *onshi* 恩師, our benevolent teachers after their death. We should remember them thankfully, we can even feel that they came closest to our notion of a Bodhisattva, but we should not put their picture on our altar.

As for 2, the teaching of Jōdo Shinshū is not gradual, not meaning “vertical,” and it relies completely on “other power” and not “self-power.” In other Buddhist schools, e.g. the Hossō school many bodhisattva stages are explained. Metaphorically speaking, the Buddhist way is then like a stair, and the student follows the teacher, who is at least one

²³ CWS I, p. 391 *Jōdo Shinshū Seiten (chūshakuhan)* p. 599.

²⁴ For example, in the letter, in which he mourned for Myōhō-bō. CWS I, p. 550. *Jōdo Shinshū seiten (chūshakuhan)* p. 743.

step above him. But in Jōdo Shinshū, *shinjin* is the whole matter. At the moment a person receives *shinjin* he or she is without delay on the top of the stairway, this is the stage of the Bodhisattva Maitreya. Therefore, it cannot be said that the teacher has a deeper fulfillment or realization than the student. In the well-known anecdote from the *Godenshō* Shinran states that his *shinjin* and his master's *shinjin* are one and the same (ただひとつなり *tada hitotsu nari*),²⁵ because both are given by the Buddha. Nevertheless, we should not oversee that Shinran remained as Hōnen's disciple even after this event. Shinran took profit from the enormous treasure of Hōnen's knowledge.

For 3, as we have seen above, Shinran never mentioned personal samādhi experiences in his writings. Generally speaking, it is a misunderstanding to relate the competence of a Shin Buddhist teacher to his or her special samādhi experiences. In the *Saihōshinanshō*²⁶ we read an anecdote about Daochuo and Shandao, the only two patriarchs from which we know that they stood in a direct teacher-student relationship.²⁷ Despite the fact that Daochuo was Shandao's teacher, Shandao had deeper realizations than Daochuo, because he could enter a samādhi which allowed him to see the Buddha Amida and the Pure Land directly. Daochuo did not have this ability. Therefore, he tested Shandao's

²⁵ *Jōdo Shinshū Seiten (Chūshakuhan)*, p. 1050.

²⁶ The *Saihōshinanshō* is a collection of anecdotes, teachings and Hōnen's dharma talks compiled by students of Hōnen. Shinran was perhaps one of the co-writers, and there is no doubt that he wanted to propagate the ideas of this book because there exist some copies written by his own hand.

²⁷ T. 2674, 681a6-b9, 新井俊一 Arai Toshikazu: 親鸞『西方指南抄』現代語訳 Shinran "Saihōshinanshō" <Translation into Contemporary Japanese> 春秋社 Shunjūsha 2016, p. 115ff. This book is now available in English: Arai, Toshikazu: *The Path to the Pure Land. A Translation of and Commentary on Shinran's Saihōshinanshō* (New York: American Buddhist Study Center, 2021) p. 60 ff.

“samādhi experience” and found that Shandao did not lie. The passage closes with the words “In this way [Shandao] was superior to his teacher.” (シカレハ師ニ勝タル也) Daochuo was not Shandao’s teacher because he had inspired Shandao’s “samādhi experience,” but because he had a clear understanding of the teaching.

For 4, a “true teacher” in Jōdo Shinshū must always be aware of being a *bombu* by himself. This is a consequence of Shinran’s *mappō* thought. The “latter days of the dharma” started due to Shinran’s calculations in 551 A.D.²⁸ For this era Shinran explains:

Now, amid the five defilements in the last dharma-age,
Sentient beings are incapable of practice and realization;
Hence the teachings that Śākyamuni left behind
Have all passed into the naga’s palace.”

(Shōzōmatsu Wasan, Verse 3)

This means that – even though sutras like the *Pratyutpanna-Samādhi-Sutra*, which teaches a practice on how to gain a direct vision of the Buddha Amida and so on still exist in Buddhist libraries – ordinary beings cannot take advantage of them. Ordinary beings can learn the how-to-do of such a practice, but they are unable to implement it. Their situation is comparable to that of a high-tech-company which must stop production in a global economic crisis because no components of the necessary quality are available at the world-market. That Shandao had the ability to see the Buddha Amida directly, although he was born in the *mappō* era, i.e. after 551 A.D., is only possible because he was already a Bodhisattva in former ages, and Shinran made it very clear

²⁸ This follows from *Kyōgyōshō Monrui* VI, § 79 and 80, i.e. CWS I, p. 244, and p. 245 (middle).

that he regarded Shandao as such a bodhisattva.²⁹ If a Shin Buddhist teacher in our days makes his students believe that he has many “extraordinary experiences” then he is, from the viewpoint of Shinran Shōnin, implicitly claiming: “I am a Bodhisattva,” and this contradicts the Shin Buddhist self-reflection: “I am a *bombu*.” This is inappropriate for the teacher himself, and poison for his students, who will look for their own “extraordinary experiences” and forget their self-reflection.

And 5: Despite the fact that Hōnen in Shinran’s view was not a bombu, he was the founder of a bombu-tradition in the “latter days of the dharma.”³⁰ Shinran portrays himself so-to-say as the first bombu-teacher. For this reason, he does not mention his own attainments – his visions, dreams, or whatsoever. A bombu can never know whether his visions come from Amida or from his wanton imagination,³¹ why should he look for them? Jōdo Shinshū is not a tradition of “seeing,” but of “listening.”

Conclusion

In the last years, many cases of mistreatment, especially sexual

²⁹ Shinran always claimed and was looking for evidence that the *mappō* patriarchs had realizations and were practitioners in former lifetimes. For Shandao: *Kōsō Wasan* Verse 62 and 63. CWS I, p. 377. For Genshin: *Kōsō Wasan*, Verses 88-90, CWS I, p. 384. For Hōnen: *Kōsō Wasan*, Verses 112-114, CWS I, p. 390. Only Daochuo (562-645) is problematic. Shinran called him in *Kōsō Wasan*, Verse 55 (CWS I, p. 375) 禪師 zenji, literally “Zen Master” or “dhyāna master,” which seems to suggest a familiarity with Samādhi experiences. In the *Saihōshinanshō* we read about his visions and the miracles that happened at the time of his death. Arai, Toshikazu: p. 61.

³⁰ Compare *Shōshinge*: HONSHI GENKŪ ... “Master Genkū, well-versed in the Buddha’s teaching, turned compassionately to foolish people, both good and evil,”

³¹ In the *Kyōgyōshō Monrui*, he quotes a passage warning that the experiences in samādhi might also be illusions, produced by Mara. See: *Kyōgyōshō monrui* VI, § 104. CWS I, p. 275).

abuse by Buddhist teachers in the West became public. The case of Sogyal Rinpoche, so far, a deeply respected Tibetan teacher, attracted much attention in the worldwide media. As commentators stated time and time again, such teachers used their authority to manipulate and exploit their disciples. The manipulation worked because their victims had a completely overloaded idea of what a Buddhist teacher is. They had such an ardent faith into the “spiritual accomplishments” of their respective teacher, that they became blind for the terrible matters going on. Some victims speak today of an “entrusting trauma.”³²

In this presentation, I tried to show that it is very dangerous to regard the relationship between Hōnen and Shinran as paradigm for the teacher-student relation in general. It is actually the origin of a problem Jōdo Shinshū had from its very beginnings: the so-called *zenjishiki ian-jin* (善知識異安心 “heresy of entrusting into the teacher”). Throughout Shin Buddhist history, starting with Shinran’s son Zenran, there have appeared charismatic figures which founded exclusive circles claiming they had a very special knowledge about the Shin Buddhist teaching. Such charismatic leaders demanded a very strong faith into their doctrinal authority, that sometimes they gave initiations in which they transmitted their personal experience etc.

Returning to the starting point, we understand that the charismatic approach, in which the teacher with empty hands transmits “his personal experience” to the student, is certainly not the formative idea of Jōdo Shinshū. I concede, there were many deeply devoted followers, who expressed their “religious experience” in different ways like poems

³² Bergauf, Eva-Maria (Pseudonym): „Das Licht der Hoffnung und die Möglichkeit der Heilung“, in *Buddhismus aktuell* 2018-II, S. 62ff.

or remarks on daily life. However, it is a weak position to claim that in Jōdo Shinshū, reading sutras or scriptures could be ignored, or that just an inspiration taken from some of Saichi's poems could substitute systematic Shin Buddhist studies. Saichi himself would never have claimed it.

Listening always starts with the scriptures, not with the teacher. Shinran himself gives us an example. At the beginning of the *Kyōgyōshō Monrui* he writes:

How joyous I am, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Śākyamuni!
Rare is it to come upon the sacred scriptures from the west-
ward land of India and the commentaries of the masters of
China and Japan, but now I have been able to encounter them.
Rare is it to hear them, but already I have been able to hear.³³

Listen and reflect! By the way, here lies the origin of rationality in religion. Careful reading in the light of self-reflection opens the gate to a contemporary understanding of Shin Buddhism, which does not overlook the historical distance to Shinran. A mysticism which is only fixed on "personal spiritual experience" is hardly suitable to carry a religious tradition over the centuries and entails in the long run the risk of decline and abuse. The crisis of Western Buddhism in these days is just a reminder of this fact.

³³ A famous sentence from the preface of the *Kyōgyōshō Monrui*, which is often quoted at the beginning of ceremonies (so-called 頌讚 *Jusan*). CWS I, p. 4.

The Twenty-Second Vow

Ignorant Bodhisattvas & Millennials in the 21st Century

– My Journey –

Iulia DINCA

The Twenty-Second Vow

Buddhism, based on the teachings of Sakyamuni the Buddha, teaches the path(s) or discipline(s) by which one becomes a Buddha or an “enlightened one.”¹ The final goal of Buddhist aspiration and endeavor is Nirvana, where evil passions are extinguished, the highest wisdom attained.² The state of Nirvana has no *duhkha*, nor karmic retribution--there is no birth-and-death, nor rebirth.

In Buddhism, for example, those who choose self-benefiting salvation are termed *sravaka* and *pratyeka*. *Sravaka* are ones who become awakened by listening to the teachings of the Buddha,³ following Early Buddhist teachings to seek Nirvana and become an arhat.⁴ *Pratyeka* are ones who become awakened by themselves or by realizing the principle of *pratitya-samutpada* (interdependent co-arising).⁵ They are one of the two kinds of early Buddhism sages, a type of mendicant who attains emancipation by observing the principle of twelve causations without a teacher’s guidance.⁶

¹ Hoyu Ishida in “The Encounter between ‘That Which Is Unsurpassed’ and ‘That Which is Empty and False’ — ‘The Nembutsu Alone Is True and Real’” at EKO Haus in 2013

² Hisao Inagaki, *The Way of Nembutsu-Faith; A Commentary on Shinran’s Shoshinge*, p. 223

³ Hoyu Ishida, *Op. cit.*

⁴ Hisao Inagaki, *Op. cit.*, p. 235

⁵ Hoyu Ishida, *Op. cit.*

⁶ Hisao Inagaki, *Op. cit.*, p. 226

When one is liberated from karmic fetters, one attains spiritual freedom – Nirvana – and becomes an *arhat*. This is the objective of the path, by realizing Nirvana, one leaves Samsara forever.⁷ Early Buddhism claims that Nirvana is out there and can be obtained only by negating this mundane or secular world.⁸ *Sravaka* and *pratyeka*, are self-benefiting from the perspective of Mahayana Buddhism, because they attain enlightenment for their own sake.⁹

The central teaching of Mahayana Buddhism rests on the *bodhisattva* ideal. A *bodhisattva* is one stage before becoming a Buddha. The aim of a *bodhisattva* is to seek the path in order to attain one's own enlightenment (benefiting-oneself, *jiri* in Japanese), and to share that attainment of enlightenment with others (benefiting-others, *rita* in Japanese). The *bodhisattva* sets out on the course of practice that requires a long period of time. These two qualities of self-benefiting and benefiting-others emerge together spontaneously and simultaneously, coinciding with each other.¹⁰

Under normal circumstances, a *bodhisattva* must perform various practices for a long time, over many lives, to reach the Stage of Joy. Nagarjuna, however, cautions us against the danger of self-benefitting nihilism saying "If one falls into the state of *sravaka* and *pratyekabuddha*, this is called the death of the *bodhisattva*, for he or she loses all merits...Even if one has fallen into hell, one will eventually be able to reach Buddhahood...yet if one falls into the stage of the Two Vehicles

⁷ Hisao Inagaki, *Reflections on the Kyo Gyo Shin Sho: A Guide; chap. The True Buddha and Land*

⁸ Hoyu Ishida, *Op. cit.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

(*sravaka* and *pratyeka*), the path to Buddhahood will be blocked forever.” In his *Commentary on the Prajnaparamita Sutra*, Nagarjuna notes that many *bodhisattvas* were unable to reach emancipation by various self-power practices but finally attained it by the Nembutsu Samadhi.¹¹

The Pure Land branch of Buddhism is one of the main currents of the Mahayana (Great Vehicle) which emphasizes the possibility for all beings to become themselves buddhas. According to the Great Vehicle, the progression of a *bodhisattva* on the path of awakening is a conquest of himself, assimilated to the work of a heroic knight, a brave prince who conquers a territory to build his kingdom where he or she will become the sovereign. The field of buddha is thus presented as his kingdom, or as his land of Buddha, which the *bodhisattva* has progressively built and decorated with his merits. After having realized the perfect awakening, the former *bodhisattva* reigns as buddha in his pure land, where he spread his teaching.¹² All buddhas have their own pure land, which they built as they progress on the path of awakening (*bodhisattva*). But in East Asia, the expression ended to be applied for the Pure Land by excellence, the realm of ultimate bliss, peaceful bliss, expressed in Sanskrit as *Sukhavati*. This is the domain where Buddha Amida preaches now.¹³

The Buddhist method of deliverance consists of eliminating two groups of obstacles: obstacles resulting from passion and apparent obstacles. The first is eliminated by the acquisition of merits and the

¹¹ Hisao Inagaki, *The Way of Nembutsu-Faith; A Commentary on Shinran's Shoshinge*, *Op. cit.*, p. 76

¹² Jérôme Ducor, *Shinran - Un réformateur bouddhiste dans le Japon médiéval*, my English translation from French, p. 18

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 15

erasing of faults. The second is eliminated by the obtaining of wisdom. The teaching of Shandao is no exception.¹⁴

Of all the Buddhist teachings, traditionally enumerated to be eighty-four thousand, which is the true teaching? Every Buddhist master in all ages has struggled to find the true teaching. Shinran found the true teaching in the *Larger Sutra*. It was the very sutra for which Shakyamuni is believed to have appeared in the world. We must remember that the verities of the *Larger Sutra* and of Jodo Shinshu cannot be logically proven. They are to be accepted as facts that are revealed to us from the realm of the Buddha, just as Amida's saving power is to be accepted as a fact that can be experienced through the endowment of his Name and Faith.¹⁵

The entirety of the merits of Amida is transferred to ordinary beings through its Name, to erase their faults by the recitation of Nembutsu. For Shinran, however, he wanted to be born in the Pure Land by erasing the faults through personal power constituting nothing but a secondary and provisional path. Such a practice is founded on a discrimination between good and evil established through the calculation of ordinary beings. This discrimination is merely a belief in faults and merits (*shin-zaifuku*). For him, this belief is equivalent to doubting the Buddha's inconceivable wisdom or makes one to be born in the borders of the Pure Land, where one cannot yet hear Amida's sermons.

According to Shinran, the true doctrine of the Pure Land consists of the transformation of the evil in the good (*temmaku jozen*), which

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124

¹⁵ Hisao Inagaki, *Reflections on the Kyo Gyo Shin Sho: A Guide / chap. The True Teaching*

constitutes the third of the ten benefits in the present life.¹⁶

In Koso-wasan 40:

Obstructions of karmic evil turn into virtues;
It is like the relation of ice and water:
The more the ice, the more the water;
The more the obstructions, the more the virtues.¹⁷

In short, the obstacles of the passions and of the cognoscible are eliminated respectively by the merits of Buddha Amida's Name and by the wisdom of faith - transferred by its Primal Vow.¹⁸

In Shozomatsu-wasan 35:

It is by the power of Dharmakara's Vow
That we realize the nembutsu that is wisdom;
Were it not for the wisdom of shinjin,
How could we attain nirvana?¹⁹

Amida's infinite light is nothing but the perfection of wisdom which knows no limitations between rebirths and nirvana, nor, a fortiori, between the good and the evil produced in the cycle of birth and deaths.²⁰ This is religious experience in life. Religious experience does not last for a long time, but it succors us in our despair and brings us out from its agony and misery. Shinjin sustains our life, though we always live in Samsara, the repeating six realms of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, fighting spirits, human beings and heavenly beings. Attachment and ignorance are the cause of *duhkha* and we suffer from it. Our being

¹⁶ Jérôme Ducor, *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁷ CWS I, p. 371.

¹⁸ Jérôme Ducor, *Op. cit.*, p. 126.

¹⁹ CWS I, p. 407.

²⁰ Jérôme Ducor, *Op. cit.*, p. 125.

attached and ignorant is the very proof or reality that we are living. We will not get out from the six realms, but we live with and in them. Through realization of Amida's Primal Vow, we come to lead a life of gratitude. The Nembutsu serves as an expression of gratitude.²¹

Mahayana Nirvana is different from Early Buddhism Nirvana, because it is not merely a state of extinction; it is a state of dynamic activity. *Bodhisattvas* are engaged in endless altruistic activities in accordance with the *Twenty-Second Vow*. In connection with this, we must note that they act in compliance with Amida's '*Endowment in the aspect of Returning*.'²²

After one's birth in the Pure Land is enabled through Amida's Other Power, one returns to this world as the highest type of *bodhisattva* to work for the liberation of other beings. Shinran entitles the twenty-second Vow as "the Vow of directing virtue for our return to this world" (*genso eko no gan*). The Vow states:

When I attain Buddhahood, the bodhisattvas of other Buddha-lands who come and are born in my land will ultimately and unfailingly attain (the rank of) "succession to Buddhahood after one lifetime" – except for those who, in accordance with their own original vows freely to guide others to enlightenment, don the armor of universal vows for the sake of sentient beings, accumulate roots of virtue, emancipate all beings, travel to Buddha-lands to perform bodhisattva practices, make offerings to all the Buddhas and Tathagatas throughout the ten

²¹ Hoyu Ishida, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

²² Hisao Inagaki – *Reflections on the Kyo Gyo Shin Sho: A Guide; chap. The True Enlightenment. Op. cit.*

quarters, awaken sentient beings countless as the sands of the Ganges, and bring them to abide firmly in the unexcelled, right, true way. Such bodhisattvas surpass ordinary ones, manifest the practices of all the bodhisattva stages, and discipline themselves in the virtue of *Samantabhadra*.²³ Should it not be so, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment.²⁴

Taken literally, this Vow promises attainment of Buddhahood for those born in the Pure Land after a lifetime. Those who are not willing to undertake the compassionate work of saving sentient beings and deny themselves the bliss and repose of perfect enlightenment in the Pure Land may not be included. For Shinran, however, the person born in the Pure Land immediately realizes the supreme enlightenment and attains the “body of naturalness or of nonexistence,” the same Buddha-body as Amida.

Moreover, “when persons attain this enlightenment, with great love and great compassion immediately reaching their fullness in them, they return to the ocean of birth-and-death to save all sentient beings.”²⁵ Thus for Shinran, the state of “unfailing attainment of the rank next to

²³ *Samantabhadra* is the bodhisattva of enlightening activity in the world, his name means “universal virtue.” *Samantabhadra* and *Manjushri* are often paired as attendants on either side of Shakyamuni Buddha, with *Manjushri*, on his lion, representing the essence of wisdom, and *Samantabhadra*, on an elephant, representing the application of wisdom to actively benefit the world. He is particularly known for his ten vows: 1-Venerate Buddha; 2-Praise buddhas; 3-Make offerings to buddhas; 4-Confess one's own past misdeeds; 5-Rejoice in the happiness of others; 6-Request buddhas to teach; 7-Request buddhas not to enter nirvana; 8-Study the Dharma in order to teach it; 9-Benefit all beings; 10-Transfer one's merit to others

²⁴ CWS II, p. 215.

²⁵ *Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone,’* CWS I, p. 454.

²⁶ CWS II, p. 215.

Buddhahood” (or “succession to the position” of Buddhahood are), also called attainment of “buddhahood after one’s lifetime.” It is oriented not toward Buddhahood but back toward this world²⁶.

Ignorant Bodhisattvas & Millennials in the 21st Century

— My Journey

A generation is made up of people born and living at about the same time. Regarded collectively, every generation stamps its distinct signature on the world. Each cultural group reflects its own ideas, behaviors, expectations, work, ethics, and values. The psychological and sociological dimensions in the sense of belonging and identity which may define every generation are different for Japan, Asia and portions of Europe. They are grounded on the major cultural, political, and economic influences.

Considering a ‘generation’ simply only as the cohort of people within a delineated population who experience the same significant events within a given period of time, the Western culture contoured the following Cultural Generations (dates are approximate and there is some overlap because there are no standard definitions for when a generation begins and ends):

The Lost Generation (or the Generation of 1914) – born between 1890-1915

The Interbellum Generation - born between 1901-1913

The Greatest Generation - born between 1910-1924

SHIN BUDDHIST 14

The Silent Generation - born between 1925-1945

Baby Boomer Generation - born between 1946-1964

Generation X (Baby Bust) or MTV Generation- born between 1965- 1979

Xennials - born between 1975–1985

The Millennials (or generation Y, Next generation or Digital Natives) - born between 1980–2000

Generation Z - people born after the Millennials.

Taking into account that most of the Lost, Interbellum and Greatest Generations are hardly alive, on the Earth, today, there are still six unique generations of human beings who live and work together. The Millennials (or generation Y or Digital Natives) is usually considered to apply to individuals who reached adulthood around the turn of the 21st century, thus they are born between the years 1980-2000, they are the largest (approximately 70 million people) and the most educated generation in the western history, the first generation in history that has grown up totally immersed in a world of digital technology and integrated in the world of economic, cultural and political globalization which has shaped their identities and created interdependent attitudes.

I picked up some of the general features of their psyche. Millennials possess an intuitive sense in understanding technology due to the environment in which they've grown up in and they bring a much more creative and innovative approach to solving problems than any previous generation before them. Technology has always been a part of their lives and they can't even imagine a world without the internet or cell phones. Their primary source of communication is through email and text messaging and they find direct communication less necessary than

their immediate predecessors. They are very open-minded about diversity and equal rights of women with men, they are more accepting of all kinds of people, regardless of color, dress, religion, or sexual orientation. They are the first generation to grow up constantly connected to the world. The majority of Millennials see themselves as global citizens, having a responsibility to make the world better. They are less patriotic and more globally minded, which enables them to contribute to the general welfare of society. They feel urged to make the world a better place and they believe that they can. They are compassionate, and they volunteer mainly because they want to help people.

Millennials work well in a team environment and also strive to maintain balance between their work and personal lives. At the same time, they want to be real; staying true to who they are, to their values, and individuality. Millennials seem to be the most studied and talked about generation to date. I must confess that I have a special interest and experience with these young people - not only because my daughter born in 1984 is a Millennial, but also because my jobs have always involved working with Millennials, engineers, technicians and travel agents.

Psyche and culture are mutually constructed and inseparable. I can only show you the case I know through my experience. It is through the eyes of a Romanian from the Baby Boomer generation. Explaining my generation is a very difficult task. In order to make it simple I will use a quote of the Romanian philosopher and essayist Emil Cioran.²⁷ He said, "One does not inhabit a country; one inhabits a language."

²⁷ Emil Cioran (1911-1995), Romanian philosopher and essayist. He has lived in Romania and France and published works in both Romanian and French.

The community I was born and grew up in was a completely closed communist system. Thus, the minds of my generation were formed in a system characterized by the words "the dictatorship of the proletariat" and "the dialectical materialist philosophy," without any relation to the traditions from my country or from all humankind. In Europe, Soviet Russia and all former communist countries were Slavic (Slavic ethnicities with Slavic languages). The communist system which transpired in twentieth-century Europe was built to fit the Slavic psyche which includes Romania. Furthermore, during this Slavic occupation, Romanians had to fight to keep the Latin origin of the Romanian language.

Here are a few words that did not exist before 1989 in my native language, Romanian. We did not have a correspondent in the three-dimensional space allowed by the communist dictatorship ideology. There was no science called psychology as it was forbidden. The word "thoughts" did not exist because "thinking" was banned. The absence of these two words continued even after 1989, to the occurrence of the assertion (with double sense: some considered it a joke, others took it seriously): "We don't think, we work." The word "entertainment" did not exist. It was because we did not have entertainment. The only Romanian television station broadcasted only 2 hours a day, during which only socialist ideology and politics were covered. Truth can be promoted through jokes, music, and movies. However, such things were not allowed during the dictatorial regime. Here are some words that have changed their original meaning. As any kind of religion was banned and everybody had to be atheistic, the meaning of the word "religion" became ideology. The word philosophy has been transformed into Marxism Leninism. Many words, such as mind, heart, compassion, love, and

feelings, have been given a pejorative sense.

In 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell, the Romanian communist sky also collapsed and the dictator of Romania was killed. We started a new life under a democratic sky; I can say that we were in a way born again and we had to rebuild ourselves under the new conditions. It was a tough and violent change of the political system. A dictatorship that enforced sameness, uniformity, and the demand to not diverge was replaced by a democratic way. Diversity became common law. A dictatorial society forges people with a dictatorial psyche, way of thinking, speaking and acting. Change in people's behavior takes time and effort and does not change suddenly. A complete understanding and awareness of oneself, and a lot of practice was needed to change, and above all, accurate books about the human mind written by qualified, true teachers – all these were necessary but didn't exist at that time in Romania.

Therefore, the gaps between my generation and previous generations of my parents and grandparents' and as well as younger generations including Generations X and Xennials widened at all levels. Struggles included differences from the way of thinking, speaking, living, beliefs, traditions, to the level of physical and cyberbullying. Therefore, I had to quit looking back on the past and leave my past behind as in the lyrics below:

I've left my yesterdays behind...

I've lived and died and come to life again...

And now I stand alone at the crossroads of my mind...

I've turned my back on yesterday...

I've been halfway to hell and back again...

I'll have to fight to become free...

But which road leads me to tomorrow?²⁸

I didn't know what I had to do, and I did not cry for help – who could help me? But in the blink of an eye, because I was a young mother at the time, because my daughter was only 5 years old and had not yet gone to school, I decided to follow my motherly instincts. Although I will now not talk about my motherhood, I will say that I love my daughter.

This feeling guided me to a very special situation. My daughter and I were in the same situation at the same time. She was on the journey through childhood and adolescence to becoming an adult, whereas my life was restarting on a new social system. My journey through motherhood brought me to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and to become a Shin Buddhist. Together with my Millennial daughter we watched the same movies, listened to the same music, we lived in the same conditions, we suffered together when her father passed away, and my psyche was rebuilt the second time similar to her Millennial psyche.

The advantage is that between the Millennial generation and I, there is no real gap. More than that, I can say that I have noticed, whenever I worked with Millennials, we understood each other very well. I respected them and they respected me. They learned from me and I learned from them. I can say that there has always been a good, harmonious relationship between us.

The concept of *upaya* is prominent in Mahayana Buddhism. A

²⁸ The song was written by Billy Strange and Mac Davis specially for the movie *Charro!* Elvis Presley was an actor in 1969.

bodhisattva or practitioner may have the ability to adapt their message to the audience in order to help ease the suffering of people. They introduce them to Dharma, or help them on road to Nirvana. In Shin Buddhism, we are guided to do so, by the wisdom and compassion of Buddha Amida. It means we are ignorant²⁹ *bodhisattvas*. The psychic configuration of the Millennials is very important for us because we need to connect to this generation in a meaningful way.

We are in the 21st century - a time of great scientific and technological progress. Buddha Dharma appears as an old or ancient teaching, as Shakyamuni the Buddha was born about 2,600 years ago. For this reason, we must not divide and label knowledge as 'science and religion.' We must know about science and how Buddhism can be linked with science. To become a Shin Buddhist of the 21st century means to integrate the teaching of Shinran in the modern, advanced, globalized world.

Buddhism has a logical investigative approach to the world. To live in this modern world as a Buddhist means not to be a blind believer. We must use reasoning when learning the teachings. The internet connection is decisive for the 21st century. In taking a look at the Millennials and younger generations, it is clear that their educational level is superior to that of previous generations. We must assess the need to elevate the level of our Buddhist discourse.

²⁹ Shinran says in *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, "Foolish beings: as expressed in the parable of the two rivers of water and fire, we are full of ignorance and blind passion. Our desires are countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves." CWS I. p. 488.

Living in the 21st century, one still witnesses many conflicts among nations or races due to religious exclusiveness or intolerance. It is therefore important to keep in mind that we need to avoid becoming a dictatorial, sectarian or bully. Prince Shotoku, in the tenth article of the Seventeen-article constitution (604), teaches us:

Let us cease from wrath, and refrain from angry looks. Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all men have hearts, and each heart has its own leanings. Their right is our wrong, and our right is their wrong. We are not unquestionably sages, nor are they unquestionably fools. Both of us are simply ordinary men. How can anyone lay down a rule by which to distinguish right from wrong? For we are all, one with another, wise and foolish, like a ring which has no end. Therefore, although others give way to anger, let us on the contrary dread our own faults, and though we alone may be in the right, let us follow the multitude and act like them.

I have exposed here a real-life situation in my journey as an ignorant *bodhisattva* linked to the Millennial Generation about whom everyone seems to be talking about today. I will try to say what I've learned from my experience. If we don't have a dictatorial behavior, if we are not shallowly sectarian or intolerant, if we feel equal and not superior to them, if we remain humble, and if we love and respect these young people, they will find us and come to us, because they are looking for harmony and mutual respect within society in life.

After all, humanity has not changed much for 2500 years! The first article of the 17 Articles of the Constitution of Prince Shotoku (604) is

“Harmony is to be valued, and an avoidance of wanton opposition to be honored.” This is still valid today.

Shinran in his letter to Shoshin says:

Those who feel uncertain of birth should say the nembutsu aspiring first for their own birth. Those who feel that their own birth is completely settled should, mindful of the Buddha’s benevolence, hold the nembutsu in their hearts and say it to respond in gratitude to that benevolence, with the wish, “May there be peace in this world, and may the Buddha’s teaching spread!”

In gassho, Namo Amida Butsu.

Entering the World

— Jodo Shinshu and Mindfulness —

Günter PETERS

Thinking of Buddhism in the 21st century, westerners with only little knowledge could associate Buddhism perhaps with Tibet, Zen and relaxed, smiling Buddha statues in Asian restaurants. Nevertheless, a typical Buddhist phrase has become popular and conquered almost the entire world: mindfulness. We can observe that mindfulness is really a global movement nowadays. But why? Taught in various, mainly secular programs, mindfulness — and with it all sorts of meditations — became one of the most popular responses to stress in today's life. Yet mindfulness, as we all know, is a part of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path and belongs to the core of general Buddhism.

While being a truly convinced Shin Buddhist, with all my heart or better, being on the joyful path of Shin Buddhism, I have also been for many years a teacher for MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction), a secular training and part of modern medicine. And here I am today standing in front of you: on one side a spiritual being and devoted pupil, and on the other a very hands-on coach. The more I live as both a Shin Buddhist and a mindfulness coach, the more I have the impression that both paths have really something in common. Let's see ...

Shinran Shonin's biography is unique and, in many ways very up to date. And so is the biography of Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of MBSR. At first glance the differences between these two lives are obvious. Shinran lived in Japan, Asia, Kabat-Zinn grew up in Northern-

America about 700 years apart from each other. But both did something revolutionary and changed the world significantly. In their time these two men have been, or still are, teachers in very important and meaningful ways. Kabat-Zinn had a strong influence upon me for many, many years. Especially through the curriculum of the MBSR training. I highly recommend his most popular book “Full Catastrophe Living” first published in 1990.

Shinran’s influence on me is upon my heart and thinking, rather than on my daily practice of course. As we all know, in Jodo Shinshu we can hardly do a thing from our side. I only mention jiriki and tariki — self-help and other-help, as I once called it in another article. Pure Land Buddhism, as taught by Shinran, cannot be practiced. We say “Namo Amida Butsu” but it is not a practice. Practice is according to him a manifestation of self-power, which is the product of the calculating mind and also a manifestation of doubt. Shinran’s teachings are absolutely fascinating for me as far as I heard and understood them. If we look at him superficially, he a sort of turned Buddhism upside down.

Of course we can’t mention Shinran without Honen, his teacher. Shinran never considered himself being a teacher, he always considered himself being a disciple, first of Amida and then of Honen. Honen lived and studied in the Tendai-monastery on Mount Hiei and after years he felt great despair, because he searched a way of salvation for all beings. He came across a quote about nembutsu recitation by reading Shandao and that was the end of his quest in the Tendai sect. He shifted from various practices to the nembutsu as the only practice, self-power to other-power. His move down from Hiei mountain to Yoshimizu later resulted in the start of the first Japanese Pure Land school, Jodo

Shu. Until then the teaching about Amida Buddha and the nembutsu had been practiced in China and Japan for a long time, but it was never a separate school.

Shinran, being 50 years younger, underwent similar experiences, lived like him on Hiei mountain in the Tendai monastery and also gave up in despair. He heard of Honen, converted and became his disciple. Later, Honen was banished by the emperor and so were most of his followers, some of them even sentenced to death. Shinran was banished to a remote part on the north coast, lost his monk status and lived with fishermen. There he got married, had children, and later became quite well known as a teacher in his time, although he always claimed he was not a teacher. However, he actually developed Honen's teachings and became an original thinker.

But going back to his crisis, I would say, that he experienced failure, which shaped his whole attitude towards the dharma-practice and teaching. To experience failure is rather human. I am sure, every one of us has experienced failure! Imagine experiencing failure after 20 years because of being absolutely devoted to an endeavor... it really demands radical humility to acknowledge this fact.

Shinran called himself a Bombu, a foolish person ... his so-called failure was partly circumstantial because of the time-period he was living in. He believed he lived in the third age of the Dharma where it is no longer possible to practice and to reach enlightenment. Japanese call this age "Mappo". Yes, he was like all the others a foolish person, absolutely incapable to practice the Dharma. It was the failure of the system. The time of self-power was over, and the only thing left was to give

oneself up to Amida and the Primal Vow leading us to the Pure Land. Shinran made failure into a trademark.

The most important word of our tradition shin-jin is often translated as faith. But it is much more – it is total entrusting, total knowledge. If we think of the 18th Vow, which says roughly: if we think of Amida in gratitude and single-mindedly, with an aspiration to be reborn in his Pure-Land, we will be reborn there.... The 18th Vow expresses a most important truth: it is telling us, although bad things do happen all the time to us, in a spiritual sense we are going to be okay. All is as it is and all is well. We can trust and relax.

This brings me to another term used by Shinran: hakarai, which means calculation. It also means to arrange or manage things, work out a problem, to bring a plan to conclusion and so on. It is the calculating mind, the mind of the ego, which is manipulating the world and other people. It is truly and utterly self-power. And hakarai is the opposite of entrusting. If shin-jin means entrusting to Amida with the mind of other-power, hakarai stands for doubt and the mind of self-power.

Someday I read the slogan at the wall of Higashi Honganji “Life is living you.” It means, that life cannot belong to us, but we belong to life. When we actually realize that life does not belong to us, and actually nothing belongs to us, life is not ours to manipulate ... at that point the self is giving up and is allowing to be lived by life. There is no more calculating, hakarai.

We could therefore say that real shin-jin is also a point of no return, because it is irreversible. And moreover, that it is an equivalent to seeing things as they really are. Shin-jin really is a fantastic change of heart. It is a shift of attitude. It arises in one moment of time, in the shortest of

all possible moments of time. It is a moment beyond time, even beyond timelessness, to which there is no end, no beginning ... it is the real NOW. So, if we follow the path of the Pure Land, it is absolutely for sure. We don't have to care about the past or the future, nor to worry or make any efforts. We just say Namo Amida Butsu.

Time to move on to Jon Kabat-Zinn, a professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts (Ph.D. in molecular biology). When he was young, Kabat-Zinn was a student of Buddhist teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh and Zen Master Seung Sahn and a founding member of Cambridge Zen Center. Unlike Shinran, Kabat-Zinn lives in our days, he mainly teaches in a medical, secular context in countries where Buddhism is not the most popular religion. In my opinion and according to others he is a Buddhist, but not committed to labels or schools.

His practice and studies with Buddhist teachers led him to integrate their teachings and in 1979 he developed MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) at the medical faculty in a stress reduction clinic. To explain it a bit more in detail: MBSR is an eight-week course or training for people mainly suffering from long term health conditions, including chronic pain, burn-out and stress. The main component of MBSR is mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as paying attention in a particular way: purposefully, at the present moment and non-judgmentally.

Let us talk first about the last term: non-judgmental. It means whatever you notice in your practice of mindfulness, you don't judge it to be either good or bad. It just is...! The practice is simply being aware of everything, including all mental states. Kabat-Zinn is not so concerned with ethics; he is concerned with people suffering from pain and wants

to help them to cope with it and accept it. It is obvious that judging one's condition is not helpful at all. Pain is pain. So, what is the point of judging it? We all experience pleasant events and unpleasant events. Physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually. Mindfulness teaches us to notice these events without judging them. In the present moment.

Pain and suffering only occur in the present moment where we can experience them. Learning to cope with pain in the present moment usually brings a real shift in attitude and great relief. It is not about past or future pain.... When we are in pain we concentrate on our pain and identify with it. But we are more than our pain. The pain is not us. It's just a part of us. There are, or remain, also pleasure, meaning, love, purpose, etc.

In his book "Full Catastrophe living" Kabat-Zinn also writes about healing and curing; through mindfulness we get a glimpse of our wholeness. Mindfulness helps us not to change things or the causes of pain, it changes our relationship towards it.

Shinran is also using the word mindfulness, but in a slightly different way. In Japanese it is called *shōnen* 正念 and it is translated as right mindfulness. It appears in Shinran's main work the *Kyō-Gyō-Shin-Shō* and also in the glossary of *Collected Works of Shinran*, volume two.

The present moment, the now, and the Jodo Shin term *jinen* which means naturalness are connected for me. This present moment is a gateway to the eternal moment. Kabat-Zinn mentions that meditation happens outside of time. According to Shinran, *shinjin* arises in one moment, and this moment is at the limit of time. Both, Shinran and

Kabat-Zinn, emphasize a kind of — I may say — “radical” or total acceptance.

Isn't it wonderful? Amida takes us into his Pure Land just as we are! We are accepted as we are. I like the expression, that “acceptance is the closest we can get to grace”. Mindfulness is entrusting oneself. Entrusting to life, to the natural process of transformation, to the shift ... we can watch things without interfering. It is a shift from our calculating mind towards a natural mind.

Shinran's problem was, that he could not get liberated from his evil passions after 20 years of studies and practicing. He could not make any more progress. He was unable to solve his problem using the traditional approach. Finally, he did something very different. He focused on the gift of Amida. And this gift is totally free for everyone, no conditions at all. There is nothing we could do to earn it.

Kabat-Zinn's problem was the stress and chronic pain of other people. Medical experts and their knowledge could not make a difference. So, what can people do? They can also do something different. They can change their relationship to the problem. The problem has not changed, though. All they changed is their mind.

For both, Shinran and Kabat-Zinn, the problem is the way, the path. What if we welcome our problems in the now, the present moment, and hug them? What if we change our relationship to them? Towards radical acceptance... a very modern approach in 21st century ... don't you think?

Namo Amida Butsu

Amida's Space-time and Man's Space-time

Toshikazu ARAI

Introduction

This paper attempts to discuss the relationship between nembutsu, shinjin and birth in the Pure Land focusing on the interaction between man's space-time and Amida's space-time. We will first examine the characteristics of the two kinds of space-time and then discuss that through nembutsu, the encounter of man's space-time with Amida's space-time decisively takes place. That is the moment of the attainment of shinjin and the stage of non-retrogression leading to birth in the Pure Land. We will mainly discuss "time" in this paper, but we should keep in mind that space and time are inseparable: space provides the foundation of existence and time that of change.

1. Diachronic Time and Synchronic Time

First, let us think about what time is. It has no form, no color, no weight, no substance, but has a significant role in our life. All human activities and events are placed in the time frame and are given their positions in the network of mutual relations. Time is the basis of order in all aspects of life. Chaos would reign, if it were not for the concept of time.

There are two types of time: diachronic and synchronic. The time we usually talk about is that which is linear, irreversible, mechanically constant, and neutral to human existence. It is linear because it is considered to progress from the past to the present, and to the future. It is irreversible; we are living in the world of "Once done is never undone."

It is mechanically constant because it is considered to progress at a rigidly fixed pace. It is neutral to human existence because it is unaffected by any human emotions and conditions. We name this type of time “diachronic time.”

On the other hand, there is a totally different kind of time called “synchronic time.” It is experiential, existential, subjective, and dynamically peaceful. For example, we sometimes forget the passing of time when we are immersed in the music we like. Music is produced with sounds that appear diachronically, but instead of listening to each sound, we enjoy the world that is created by that music as a whole. In that situation, time has dynamically stopped proceeding. It is not a dead, static time, but a very lively, energetic, and yet still time, as mentioned by T. S. Eliot:

..... music is heard so deeply

That it is not heard at all, but you are the music

While the music lasts. (T. S. Eliot, “Dry Salvages 5”)

This verse vividly expresses how it is to dwell in the world of synchronic time.

We also experience the same kind of exhilaration when we are attracted to works of plastic arts such as paintings, sculptures, and buildings. When facing a portrait such as “Mona Lisa,” we face the lady “here and now” in the broad span of the time encompassing the past, present, and future in the world presented in the painting. The lady in the painting is not just lines and colors, but very much “alive” with depth of space and time. She is communicating emotionally and aesthetically not only with its viewers now, but has communicated with the viewers in the past, and will communicate with those in the future. That means

that we are participating in the community of its admirers in the past, present, and future through the painting.

Other examples of synchronic time are found in the expressions such as “the world of the *Tale of Genji*,” “the world of *Nibelungenlied*,” and “the world of Shakespearean plays.” When a reader is involved in a literary work such as the *Tale of Genji*, every part of it, from the first sentence to the last are organically connected and the reader “lives” in that world until he/she decides to return to his/her diachronic world. Those tales, epics, and plays progress chronologically (or diachronically), but they also present their worlds in the ever-lasting present. Thus, synchronic time has strong relations with our artistic, literary, musical, and spiritual worlds.

Having confirmed the meanings of diachronic time and synchronic time, we will proceed to examine how this knowledge of the two types of time helps us understand the interaction between man's space-time and Amida's space-time. First, we will examine in what kind of space-time ordinary, unenlightened persons live.

2. Man's time – diachronic time

Time is deeply connected with the changes that occur in the world surrounding us. “Everything is in the process of change” is the mainstay of the Buddhist doctrine, and “change” comes from diachronic time. However, we must not forget the presence of a subject that recognizes those changes. That subject is each one of us. Because we recognize changes, we recognize the passing of time, which typically manifests as birth, old age, sickness, and death. Buddhists have ever been aware of such diachronic time and have called it “impermanence.”

Now in the light of Buddhist texts, we shall examine what kind of life we humans live. According to the *Larger Sutra*, our “defiled land” is removed from Amida’s Pure Land by Buddhalands numbering “one hundred thousand multiplied by one hundred million,” that is, ten trillion. That means it has taken an equivalently long time (ten kalpas) for the true teaching of Amida’s Primal Vow to reach us. In my understanding, this distance in space and time represents the spiritual distance between ordinary, foolish persons and enlightened ones.

There are various Buddhist paths guiding us sentient beings to cross this great chasm, but it takes an unimaginably long time to traverse it by self-power efforts.

In the *Larger Sutra*, there is a passage:

Even if they are wealthy, they are stingy and not willing to give anything to others.... Living in this way, when their lives come to an end, they find that they have nothing on which to rely. Each comes alone and goes alone, and there is nothing they can take with them. Good or evil, fortune or misfortune, follows them wherever they may go. Some abide in delightful realms while others enter those of suffering and torment. Later, even if they feel regret there is nothing they can do.

(*The Three Pure Land Sutras*, Vol. II, pp. 81, 82, abridged by Arai)

This passage describes the reality of the unguided persons living in diachronic time. Not knowing where they are going, they fritter time away, and even if they regret this waste, the lost time never returns. What rules this kind of space-time is karma—the powerful energy which is created by one’s actions and which continues to dominate one’s future

forms of existence.

In another part of the *Larger Sutra*, the situation of a person who must live in the space-time created by his own karma is compared to that of a prince who has committed an offense to the king and is confined within the palace, fettered with gold chains. The prince seems to live in great luxury, but being chained in the golden prison, he must live within a very limited space-time in total agony (*ibid.* p. 98). This symbolizes the condition of a *bombu*, or “an ordinary, foolish being” living in diachronic time.

To summarize the above discussion, we live in a world ruled by the working of karma, where time merely passes while we are driven to reap the results of what we have sowed.

3. Amida's time – synchronic time

In the following discussion, we will see that Amida and other Buddhas live in a grand-scale synchronic space-time. Concerning the time Buddhas live in, the *Larger Sutra* says:

The Buddhas of the past, future, and present all think on one another. Is it not also the case that [you], the present Buddha thinks on all the other Buddhas now?” (*The Three Pure Land Sutras*, Vol. II, p. 11)

This means that the Buddha's enlightenment transcends regular time, encompassing the past, the future and the present. We can also say that the present time contains the past and the future. We can find the same sentiment in Shinran's statement quoted in the *Tannishō*:

If Amida's Primal Vow is true, Śākyamuni Buddha's teaching cannot be false; if the Buddha's teaching is true, Shan-tao's

commentary cannot be false; if Shan-tao's commentary is true, how can Hōnen's words be vain? If Hōnen's words are true, what Shinran says cannot be empty!" (*Tannishō*, Chapter 2).

What Shinran means in this statement is that anyone who has awakened to the Primal Vow shares the same realization as the Buddha, Shan-tao, Hōnen and Shinran wherever and whenever he/she may be. Hōnen also said:

Amida Buddha and all other Buddhas share in common the compassion for sentient beings in the ten quarters who are always sunk in birth-and-death"

(*Saihō-Shinan-shō*, or *The Path to the Pure Land* (tr. by Arai), p. 138)

All these words point to the fact that those who awaken to Amida's Primal Vow live in the boundless Dharma-realm where there are no barriers between the past, future and present.

Amida Buddha's two major attributes, "immeasurable light" and "immeasurable life," suggest that the Buddha operates in an infinite space and time called the Pure Land of Peace and Joy for an infinite length of time, and that the Buddha's infinite space and time is condensed in "here and now." Thus, the Buddha's time is fundamentally synchronic.

Incidentally, the term "immeasurable," which is an English translation of the Sanskrit word "*amita*," does not mean that it is objectively endless, but it refers to the exquisite and limitless virtue of the Buddha engaged in the task of saving all suffering beings. Whether or not Amida Buddha enjoys an endlessly "eternal" life, or whether or not the Buddha's power reaches the edge of the presently known universe is not at

issue. The term “immeasurable” or “infinite” is used from the standpoint of the sentient beings who are the targets of Amida's salvific work, and who have become aware of it. In other words, the immeasurable nature of Amida's space and time is only felt by those who have awakened to the Buddha's working, as expressed by Shinran, “As I deeply consider the Vow which Amida established after a five-kalpa-long contemplation, it was for myself Shinran alone. Therefore, I am deeply grateful to the Primal Vow for resolving to save such a heavily karma-bound person as I am” (*Tannishō*, Epilogue). In this statement, Shinran is describing his encounter with the enormously long time “five kalpas” at the instant he is saying it. We can draw a conclusion from this discussion that the word *amita* covers both the infinite and the infinitesimal, ranging from innumerable kalpas in the past and future as well as “now.”

The infiniteness of Amida's space-time is also revealed in the fifth to ninth vows of Dharmākara Bodhisattva. They declare that when the Bodhisattva has attained Buddhahood, all the humans and devas in his land will be able to:

Know everything of their past lives. (the fifth vow)

See everything and every event in the world. (the sixth vow)

Hear all the teachings expounded in the world.
(the seventh vow)

Possess the wisdom to see into the minds of others.
(the eighth vow)

Travel any distance at will in a single thought-moment.
(the ninth vow)

All these vows indicate that the wisdom and compassion of Amida Buddha and those who have attained birth in the Pure Land transcend the

diachronic space-time and abide in the synchronic time.

4. From Diachronic Time to Synchronic Time

Concerning man's time, Shinran is quoted as saying, "We should know that we really are ordinary foolish beings burdened with karmic evil and repeating births and deaths, and that ever since unaccountable kalpas ago, we have been ceaselessly sunk and ceaselessly transmigrating, bereft of any karmic condition for emancipation." (*Tannishō*, Epilogue). This shows that we are struggling against the progression of time without knowing where we are going. This is the reality of the life in diachronic time.

Synchronic time is rooted in our emotional and spiritual elation. When we reminisce about our past experiences, we are reliving those events as if we were dwelling then and there. During those times, the past, present and future coexist and we can go back and forth in that space-time. In fact, when Shinran lamented his own "foolishness" and his own past lives that were sunk in ceaseless transmigration, he was already freed from the life of birth-and-death and dwelling in Amida's space-time. In this way, diachronic time can be transformed or transcended into synchronic time right at the moment we awaken to the Primal Vow.

In order to facilitate this transformation, Amida employs different means. One way is to manifest "transformed bodies," or "incarnations," who are specifically geared to guide sentient beings to the Buddha world. Since these figures appear in diachronic time, they also go through the suffering of life, consisting of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

There are many references to Pure Land teachers as incarnations of Amida Buddha. For example, Shinran extols Shan-tao as follows:

Manifested from the ocean-like great mind
Was Master Shan-tao;
For the sake of beings of this defiled world in the latter age,
He called on the Buddhas of the ten quarters to bear witness
to his teaching.

(Hymns of the Pure Land Masters, 62)

Shan-tao appeared in the world in succeeding ages,
Manifesting himself as Fa-chao and Shao-k'ang,
And by revealing the treasury of virtues,
He fulfilled the Buddhas fundamental intent.

(ibid. 63)

Hōnen also praises Shan-tao, saying:

Master Shan-tao is the incarnation of Amida Buddha and propagated the exclusive practice of the nembutsu for the benefit of all sentient beings.”

(Shinran: Saihō-Shinanshō, or The Path to the Pure Land, “Hōnen's Reply to the Nun Shōnyobō,” p.166).

Shinran adores Hōnen as the incarnation of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhi-sattva and says in one of his *wasan* poems:

When the moment death of approached,
Our teacher Genkū said,
“This is my third time to be born in the Pure Land;
It is especially easy to accomplish.”

(Hymns of the Pure Land Masters 111; CWS I, p. 389)

This means that both Hōnen and Shinran believed that Amida Buddha

appears in different forms in different times to accomplish his never-ending task of guiding sentient beings into the Pure Land.

5. Attainment of Shinjin and Birth in the Pure Land

As discussed above, Amida's time is synchronic, encompassing the past, present, and future. His space is boundless and open to all sentient beings. On the other hand, sentient beings dwell in diachronic time dominated by the power of karma. To create common grounds with the sentient beings, Amida tirelessly and repeatedly reveals his compassionate working by manifesting himself as transformed bodies. When we truly encounter one of those transformed Buddhas, the truth of the teaching is revealed to us. That is the time when shinjin is attained. The nembutsu we say marks the decisive moment of the encounter between man's space-time and Amida's space-time.

In connection with the encounter between Amida's time and man's time, we should note Shinran's citation of the following statement by Shan-tao in the *Volume on True Practice* in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*:

Namo means (1) "to take refuge" (*ki-myō*). It further signifies (2) "aspiring for birth and directing virtue." *Amida-butsu* is (3) "the practice." Because of this import, (4) one necessarily attains birth.

(cf. CWS I, p. 37; the numbers are mine.)

Shan-tao made this statement in the *Volume on the Non-meditative Good* in the *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* to show that the nembutsu is provided with both the aspiration and the practice for the attainment of birth in the Pure Land. However, on the level of its literal expression, the statement sounds as if saying the Name were the action

on the part of the practitioner in compliance with the Primal Vow.

Thereupon Shinran presented a more detailed argument about the meaning of the nembutsu, emphasizing its *tariki* element. He said (abridged and numbered by Arai):

- (1) According to Shan-tao, *Namo* means "to take refuge." "To take refuge" is the command of the Primal Vow calling to and summoning us.
- (2) "Aspiring for birth and directing virtue" indicates the mind of the Tathāgata who gives sentient beings the practice necessary for their birth.
- (3) "The practice" is the selected Primal Vow.
- (4) "One necessarily attains birth" means the attainment of the stage of non-retrogression.
- (5) Concerning this, the [*Larger*] *Sutra* states, "immediately attains." "Immediately" (*soku*) reveals the ultimate brevity of the instant in which the true cause of one's birth in the fulfilled land becomes definitely settled through one's hearing the power of the Vow.

(cf. CWS I, p. 38)

The above discussion indicates that "Namo" expresses the practitioner's readiness to take refuge in Amida's Primal Vow, and "Amida-butsu" the practitioner's actual action of taking refuge. It takes place due to the working of the Primal Vow, which is *tariki*, and the practitioner receives the benefit of attaining birth and the stage of non-retrogression "immediately" when one recites the Name. Attaining birth here is understood as attainment of shinjin. What is important is that all these transformations take place due to the power of the Primal Vow, that is, the meeting of the synchronic space-time with the diachronic space-time.

In this connection, when Shinran writes, "I, Gutoku Shinran,

disciple of Śākyamuni, discarded sundry practices and took refuge in the Primal Vow in the first year of Ken'nin (1201)" (*Kyōgyōshinshō*, Postscript; CWS I, p. 290), he was reminiscing about the decisive moment in which he definitely and decisively took refuge in Hōnen's teaching of the exclusive practice of the nembutsu; that was the moment when Shinran experienced the leap from an ordinary man's diachronic time to Amida's synchronic time.

This sense of excitement arising from the transfer from man's diachronic time to Amida's synchronic time is expressed by a number of Jōdo Shinshū followers. The following is a poem made by a coffee farmer in Kona, Hawaii named Iwaichi Nakamura (1889-late 1970's):

"Journey of My Eighty Years" by Iwaichi Nakamura

Looking back on the journey of my eighty years,

I am ashamed for turning my back on *Oya-sama*.

(Parent=Amida Buddha).

Now, being completely embraced by true compassion,

I work together with *Oya-sama*.

Captured by *Oya-sama* while I was running away,

I live happily together with *Oya-sama* every day.

The door of the dungeon of my dark mind

From beginningless beginning was opened with Amida's
spare key.

What joy when light entered into my heart!

Namu-amida-butsu.

(Tatsuo Muneto, ed. & tr., *Dharma Treasures*, pp. 17, 18)

In this poem, Nakamura is expressing his gratitude for his leap from the regular diachronic time ("the journey of my eighty years") to synchronic

time ("Captured..., I live happily together with *Oyasama* every day").

The famous Myōkōnin Genza (1842-1930) has left the following statement concerning the moment of his encounter with Amida's working:

My father died when I was eighteen years old. Although many times he had told me about Amida Buddha, I had never taken it seriously. But when he died after telling me to listen to the teaching well, for the first time, I got serious and began to listen to the teaching at Ganshōji Temple and other places....

But one morning, as usual, I went to the mountains to cut grass. When I began to throw bundles of grass onto the back of my cow, how delighted I was! I suddenly (*hyoito*) realized that Amida would take on any worries I had and save me from that burden. I was made to know this. That is why I am free of any worries now. Nammandabu. How wonderful this is!

(*Genza Dōgyō Genkō-roku*, p. 192; tr. Arai)

This onomatopoeic word, *hyoito*, points to the "ultimate brevity of the instant in which the true cause of one's birth in the fulfilled," in which the transcendence into Amida's time took place.

Here, some caution should be made concerning the meaning of "immediately" (*soku*). It does not necessarily refer to a quick, conscious realization of Amida's working on the part of the practitioner, but to the extremely quick working of Amida's salvific work to grasp nembutsu practitioners, never to abandon them. Oftentimes, due to the karma-bound nature of us ordinary persons, it takes time to realize the Primal Vow that is at work over us.

Conclusion

We have examined the meaning of the nembutsu, shinjin and birth in the Pure Land with attention mainly to the factor of “time” and found out that through the nembutsu takes place a drastic transition from the diachronic time of ordinary, unenlightened persons to the synchronic time of Amida Buddha. This transition is also vividly narrated in the story in the *Larger Sutra* of Dharmākara transforming from a king to a bhikṣu, to a bodhisattva, and to a Buddha.

When Bhikṣu Dharmākara first asked Lokeśvararāja Buddha to show him the way to establish the world-surpassing Buddhaland, the Buddha told him to know it for himself what needed to be done to adorn his Buddhaland. Then the bhikṣu said, “This task is too vast and profound for me to comprehend,” and further requested the Buddha to show him such a way. Thereupon, the Buddha explained the good and bad qualities of the heavenly and human beings in two hundred and ten *koṭis* of Buddhalands, as well as the coarse and exquisite aspects of those lands, and reveals them all for him.

Dharmākara, having selected all the good aspects of those lands, established the supreme and incomparable vows. After five kalpas of contemplation, he expounded his forty-eight vows in front of the Buddha and all bodhisattvas and received their approval. Then, after “inconceivable and uncountable kalpas,” he cultivated countless meritorious acts of a bodhisattva. After that, he attained Buddhahood. The sutra says that this took place ten kalpas ago.

If my proposition that Amida’s time is a grand-scale synchronic time is accepted, the corollary is that what is supposed to have happened ten kalpas ago is happening now and continues to happen in the

future also. The distance between the king and the Buddha is expressed by the phrase “vast and profound,” which means the distance between this “defiled land” and the Buddha’s Pure Land and which indicates the time it takes to traverse with the self-power efforts of even sages. However, the distance “vast and profound” can be crossed immediately when we entrust ourselves to the Buddha’s wisdom and compassion, just as Bhikṣu Dharmākara did to the guidance of Lokeśvararāja Buddha. In fact, the story of Dharmākara reveals the ever-ongoing process of ordinary, unenlightened persons attaining shinjin through reciting the Name of the Buddha and attaining birth in the Pure Land at this very moment.

References

[English Sources]

Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, *The Collected Works of Shinran*, Vol. 1, Kyoto, 1997.

Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, Vol. 1, Kyoto, 2003.

Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, Vol. 2, Kyoto, 2009.

Muneto, Tatsuo, tr. & ed., *Dharma Treasures, Spiritual Insights from Hawaii's Shin Buddhist Pioneers*, Honolulu: Buddhist Study Center Press, 1997.

Arai, Toshikazu, tr. & com. *Grasped by the Buddha's Vow (a translation of and commentary on Tannishō)*, Berkeley: Buddhist Churches of America, 2007.

Arai, Toshikazu, tr. & com. *The Path to the Pure Land (a translation of*

and commentary on Shinran's Saihō-Shinan-shō). American Buddhist Study Center, 2021.

.

A Philosophical Approach to the Meaning of *Shinjin* Worldwide

Thais Campos

Abstract

For many centuries, Jodo Shinshu tradition remained confined in Japan where it bloomed and developed. However, as Shinran Shonin's teachings crossed the seas, the need to adapt the doctrine to an audience that speaks a different language and comes from different social, political and ethnic backgrounds has become imperative in the dissemination of the Jodo Shinshu faith given the premise of universality of Pure Land schools. In this project I analyzed how different non-Japanese sanghas in different countries understand, explain, teach and experience key concepts of the Jodo Shinshu philosophy (such as the concept of *shinjin*) and how such ideas were adapted to the reality of different cultural contexts. In the course of three years, I travelled around the world interviewing ministers and lay followers from Nishi and Higashi traditions from different countries in order to explore the various forms in which Jodo Shinshu faith manifests in certain parts of the globe. The goal of this project is to reveal the different forms behind the essence of Shinran Shonin's philosophy from an intercultural point of view, providing insights to the future of Jodo Shinshu in non-Japanese communities worldwide.

1. Introduction

One of the basic premises of Buddhism is that the teachings left

by Shakyamuni Buddha are universal and do not apply only to a certain group of people – every human being suffers, independently of nationality, political affiliation or language spoken. Every human being can confirm impermanence as everything that is born will inevitably die and every moment of joy and sorrow will eventually come to an end. Also, each one of us has, at some point in life, come to the conclusion that we are not capable of ending our own suffering despite genuine attempts to live a happy fulfilled life. Some of us have painfully confirmed that no matter how much we read and practice – whether we practice meditation, visualizations, mantra accumulation, etc. – at the end of the day, we are still our unenlightened selves with all mundane little pains that torment us from time to time. This is pertinent no matter if we are in India, Japan, Brazil, Europe or anywhere in the world and this is precisely why the Jodo Shinshu teachings continue to be relevant to every person everywhere. However, it is also true that cultural differences and diverse social contexts play an important role in the way such concepts are experienced and transmitted.

As Shin Buddhism spread in the West, the Jodo Shinshu teachings went through adaptations, curves, obstacles and reevaluations exactly because the teachings are alive and moving. The question is: if the teachings of Jodo Shinshu are universal, how do key concepts of our school such as *shinjin* are experienced in the daily lives of followers around the world who come from completely different social, political and ethnical backgrounds? In other words: how does the experience of those living in feudal Japan at the early Kamakura period relate to the experiences of the contemporary followers around the world who are living different kinds of problems? Is it possible to find a common

ground?

This essay is part of an ongoing project in which I travel around the world talking to Jodo Shinshu followers, both lay and ordained, in order to understand the philosophical development of the Jodo Shinshu thinking – not only how it developed in the distant past, but how it continues to evolve and take different shapes. Having gathered hours and hours of interviews and having exchanged hundreds of e-mails and WhatsApp messages with the most fascinating people in the Jodo Shinshu community worldwide, I was inspired to write a little about such experiences.

2. The Burning Question

It was Saturday morning and I had just arrived at the temple after a 20-hour bus ride to another city. I was going to have my first recitation class after being formally accepted as a student of Jodo Shinshu at the main temple in São Paulo, Brazil. I had spent my time in the bus listening to *Shoshinge* and *Wassan* with my headphones, trying to associate hiragana to the sound as one of the conditions imposed on me as a student was that I should be able to read from the recitation book in *hiragana* since translations were not available. “Don’t worry, I have it under control!” I had said in that occasion, a couple of months before. And then the next two months I obsessed over it trying to figure out how that system worked. Against all odds, however, I was confident by the time I arrived at the temple that Saturday morning. The secretary complained that I looked like a zombie or something like that and showed me my room.

“Sensei will be in the classroom upstairs at 10:45, please don’t be

late”, she said as she shut the door behind her. Less than 15 minutes later, I was at the classroom, ready to go.

Sensei arrived. He didn't speak my language and I didn't speak Japanese, so we bowed to each other, he signaled that I should open the recitation book and we started chanting as I had been practicing. At some point he stopped and stared at the ceiling in silence. I realized something was wrong. Seriously wrong. Sensei started crying and sobbing, he said something like “sorry” in my language. My first thought was that I might be reciting completely wrong and that it was so painful to hear. He tried to say something which I didn't understand. I tried to ask him what was the matter but he also didn't understand me. As more tears rolled down his cheeks, I rushed down the stairs to search for somebody who would translate and tell me what was going on. Then... truth hit me like a truck. “Sensei apologizes but he cannot continue the recitation”, the translator said after sensei said something to her in Japanese. “His wife called from Japan this morning with some very bad news.” I froze. “His cat died last night”. Silence. “Excuse me....?” I said, “Well, you know, it has been four years since sensei was in Japan so he never got to say goodbye...”, said the translator, almost as sad as sensei. “So, he hasn't seen the deceased cat in four years?” I asked. The translator shook her head affirmatively. “Sensei's wife said the cat meowed all night before it finally passed away. It seems the poor little thing was in pain”. “Well, I'm sorry for your loss,” I said. But truth is, I couldn't care less and of course the cat meowed, one doesn't just die without complaining – and being a cat, one thing is certain: it will meow! And then I left because class was cancelled for the day. I was enraged. ENRAGED!

One might think that I was upset because I had spent hours and hours on a bus so that I could be there on time or because I had spent the past months obsessing over associating hiragana with sound in order to chant correctly and not disappoint my teacher, or maybe all the time, energy and effort put into learning something totally outside of my realm only to have the class cancelled because of a dead cat in the other side of the world. But that was not the problem. The whole cat situation touched in a much, much deeper wound.

How dare sensei be so attached to a cat? Hadn't he learned anything about detachment in all these years living inside a Buddhist temple? Isn't *shinjin* supposed to give you a serene joy because once you know you are saved, all problems become little and meaningless? How come he has read all scriptures and doesn't know that himself, the cat, the suffering over the cat and the cat's pain, are all illusions of the *sam-saric* realms?

Sensei, who was born and raised in a Buddhist temple, who came from a long lineage of Buddhist priests, with all scriptures at his disposal, who could read all of the Jodo Shinshu texts in its original language with no intermediaries, who was an authority in my country, who was the teacher of the teachers, even a person like him was still crying over mundane trivia after all the knowledge he had gathered over the years! So, what would become of me, who had never even heard about the *Dharma* a few years ago! I felt so betrayed. I needed the illusion that his teachings would lead me to some sort of inner bliss and I expected him to be cool and collected as a result of having attained imperishable faith in Amida.

Enraged, my third world self sent a message to a Dharma friend

across the globe on WhatsApp that night: “Sensei doesn’t know a thing about what it feels like to have a *real problem*! If I were to sit and cry over all my problems, I would spend the next 25 *kalpas* crying nonstop!” I said, “As a Buddhist teacher who teaches everyone about *shinjin*, he has the obligation of being unaffected by such mundane little sufferings!”

My friend replied to my message saying that I didn’t understand at all what *shinjin* was all about. The root of the problem is that I was still expecting something to happen after receiving *shinjin* or that I was associating having *shinjin* with achieving a certain peace of mind that would grant the cessation of suffering, and, Shinran himself had never said anything about achieving such a state – quite the contrary. My friend then sent me a picture of a page in the Tannisho:

If our hearts were filled with joyful happiness and we desired to go swiftly to the Pure Land, we might be misled to think that perhaps we are free of blind passion. [1]

I confronted my friend with another picture from *The Larger Sutra*:

If, sentient beings encounter this light, their three defilements are removed; they feel tenderness, joy and pleasure; and good thoughts arise in them. If sentient beings in the three realms of suffering see this light, they will all be relieved and freed from affliction. At the end of their lives, they all reach emancipation. [2]

“Did you see this? *JOY* and *PLEASURE* and *FREED FROM AFFLICTION*”, I said.

The exchange of quotes through WhatsApp lasted all night without conclusion.

So, in the process of feeling betrayed by my teacher and

questioning my own understanding of the Amida Dharma, the burning questions arose: what happens after receiving *shinjin*? If suffering does not disappear and it is fairly acceptable to have attachments – even small ones such as, well, cats, then what exactly changes? How concrete (or how subtle) is the serene kind of joy that follows *shinjin* if it is useless to help us deal with small little pains in our daily lives?

In my trips around the world, I have talked to many Dharma friends, teachers, lay followers and *tokudo* candidates about such matters – mostly non-Japanese and people who, like me, had come from a non-Buddhist background mainly because my questions were a non-issue for the Japanese around me at the temple. I interviewed well over 100 people in different countries in the course of 3 years and I got different answers from different people, but I can safely divide the answers in two categories (with a few variations in between):

Question: what happens after receiving *shinjin*? What exactly changes?

First group: Everything.

Second group: Nothing.

3. Everything versus Nothing or Here and Now versus The Afterlife or Internal versus External Truths

Before I go on examining what kind of different answers I received from people when I asked the burning question, it's important to point out that there seems to be a correlation between the symbolic approach to the teachings and the idea that *shinjin* refers to a certain state of mind which causes transformations here and now as a result of *Nembutsu*. According to professor Shigaraki:

Shinjin is equivalent to Shin (entrust) and *kangi* is the same as *gyō* (joy). Hence, both are Chinese translations of the original term *prasāda*. We can see that entrusting in Amida Buddha refers to a **state of mind, *prasāda-citta***, in which one's heart and mind become pure and serene, giving rise to a serene joy. [3]

And also:

I will first consider the question of whether Amida exists as a substantial entity, or a symbol. The conclusion that I will draw is that Amida Buddha exists as a symbol and that, as long as it is taken to be a substantial entity, there could be no “true Shin Buddhism. [4]

At some point, it became clear to me that those who see the Pure Land as a state of mind and *shinjin* as the point in which one finally attains it, is a more recent approach that accommodates the experiences of a modern society. This concept – Pure Land as a state of mind and *shinjin* as the moment when this state of mind is fully embraced – seems to be more prevalent among people who approached Jodo Shinshu from an academic background and who were not born in the tradition. There is a group of people that appreciate Jodo Shinshu for intellectual purposes and compare it to a kind of eastern existential philosophy. These people are more likely to reject religion and they want a practice that is free from supernatural thinking. It seems that the *sanghas* in which the majority of followers are non-descendants and have come to Jodo Shinshu after being in other Buddhist schools can find a certain level of familiarity in this explanation.

In this particular point of view, Pure Land is considered a state of

mind, *Nembutsu* is seen as a way of achieving *shinjin*, and therefore, being born in the Pure Land means nothing but being able to sustain, through *Nembutsu* practice, the state of mind that otherwise would not be available to us. Amida is not an external, existing entity, but rather a part of ourselves which seeks liberation from suffering. The afterlife doesn't matter. Self-power and other-power become imbricated in each other (other power could be better translated as unconscious power in opposition to conscious, deliberate power, in this case). When I asked those people what happened after receiving *shinjin*, they said: "everything" or in other words, if you cannot see the Pure Land here and now, then when? Salvation means being saved from oneself, from spiritual difficulties that arise from attempting various paths to achieve something unobtainable in the here and now of our existence but both the cause and the effect of salvation can be experienced in this world. Such understanding is the result of the attempt to bring all the *samsaric* realms such as heavens and hells to the worldly experience.

I remember I wrote to a friend in an e-mail:

"In the here and now of our existence, we really experience all realms, don't we? Whenever I am walking in a very crowded place, I like to observe those around me. We share the same physical space but some people are in the hellish realms, others in the heavenly realms and others are just there in the concreteness of their nothingness. In the way I see it, our state of mind becomes our concrete reality. The realms, including this one, are concrete representations of such states of mind. If you've had the opportunity of spending some time with extremely anxious or clinically depressed people, you know that their inner lives correspond exactly to Genshin's descriptions of hell with the hell

dweller fighting nonstop with each other, tearing their flesh apart, being boiled alive only to faint and hear a voice from above saying "revive". Such is the anxious mind, reviving the struggles in infinite loop without relief"

Shin thinkers such as Manshi Kiyozawa, Haya Akegarasu, Rijin Yasuda and Nobuo Haneda had already broadly developed this understanding.

According to Rev. Nobuo Haneda (when talking about Haya Akegarasu's awakening to the symbolic aspect of the Larger Sutra):

The essential message of the text [The Larger Sutra] is that "Dharmakara" symbolizes the "Basic Desire" or "Innermost Aspiration." Rev. Ryōjin Soga identifies "Dharmakara" with "latent consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna)" that is deeply hidden in all human hearts. When we meet a person who embodies "Dharmakara" (or "Basic Desire"), we are deeply moved by him and experience liberation. "Amida" (or "Dharmakara") is not a god or divine savior. He is a symbol for the "Basic Desire" in the human heart. Although the meaning of Amida is such, Amida has often been mistaken for a divine savior like the Christian God. Although Buddhism does not talk about anything divine, mysterious, or superhuman, Amida has often been mistaken for a divine savior [5]

And also:

[...] The first (external) voice is absolutely necessary for the second (internal) voice - the "Basic Desire" - to arise. Because our "Basic Desire" is so deeply hidden within ourselves and we are not even aware of possessing it, we cannot awaken it by

ourselves. We must have it awakened by the first voice, by our teachers. Although the first voice is absolutely indispensable for our birth or liberation, we must know that it cannot be our ultimate refuge. The first voice is like a midwife who assists at our birth. Its role is to guide us to the second voice. The most important thing, the thing that eventually realizes our liberation, is the second voice - our own “Basic Desire” that is awakened within ourselves. [6]

When I asked the burning question to members in different *sanghas* around Brazil who are non-descendants and who were not born in the tradition, they were almost unanimous in saying that they perceive the symbolic/internal approach to the main teachings of Pure Land Buddhism as the “true” aspect and the literal/external approach to be “provisional” and only meaningful in the context of feudal Japan. However, it is important to point out that in Brazil, Buddhist practices among non-Japanese spread mainly in the upper classes through academia and it seems that this is the case also in some non-Asian countries. This data, however, excludes the descendants who were born in a Jodo Shinshu family and never had to experience a sort of deliberate decision to join a Jodo Shinshu temple.

According to a member from the Buddhist Temple of Brasília:

You see, the problem is that in the context in which Jodo Shinshu arose in Japan, Shinran's audience was illiterate and had no access to any other form of Buddhism. This historical context does not apply anymore. Thanks to Google and social media, we have access to all information we might need in any language – if you happen to have a problem finding a

specific Buddhist teaching in your language, Google will gladly translate it for you in one click. Shinran could not envision that, hundreds of years after him, it would be that easy! So, I find it problematic to teach Jodo Shinshu as if we were in feudal Japan with no access to Buddhist teachings. So, to answer your question, of course shinjin is a state of mind and Amida Buddha does not exist outside of ourselves, the literal interpretation of the Sutras is out of context for us.

Also, a friend from the USA, David Belcheff:

There is something here that's much better than cold, calculating, critical thought. But Hongan won't let us give that up, either, we'll simply be guided by the liberating experience of shinjin to put our rational minds to better and better uses – transforming “bits of rubble into gold”. Amida is not a god, he is something like a yidam deity, a character provided to guide our nembutsu practice and eventually “he” (in you) becomes the awakening experience. Namo Fukashigiko Nyorai. Kimyo Jinjippo Mugeko Nyorai. Namandabu. All virtues are contained in the Name; this is no idle chatter!!! This is not the plaything of children or buffoons. Nembutsu is a real, powerful, and transformative practice, and the equal to enlightenment is its result. Genuine enlightenment pours into or spills itself over into the prediction for our enlightenment – our firmly settled state. But don't take my word for it, just chant the Name and find out for yourself!

And Rev. Hernan Vilar, recently ordained through Otani-ha:

shinjin is like the pollination of a plant. One day this plant will

become a tree and bear some fruits. The relation between the pollination and the fruit is the same as the relation between *shinjin* and enlightenment. Once you were pollinated through *shinjin*, enlightenment will eventually happen, but don't ask me when. It could be now.

The doctrinal implications of understanding Jodo Shinshu teachings in strictly symbolic terms that refer to this very existence only is that one might expect the effect of attaining *shinjin* to be similar to a form of *satori* and therefore, it becomes hard to address the problem of “when” enlightenment happens since Pure Land in the afterlife is not exactly an option in this kind of understanding. At the same time, being free from suffering or from samsaric pains here and now is not “a thing” either as most people who were interviewed could generally agree that having *shinjin* does not necessarily mean cessation of suffering (cats will die and owners will suffer, period), although they were certain Pure Land happens only here and now and some of them even equaled having *shinjin* to being enlightened, which produces a slight contradiction. In the process of investigating this paradox, I searched for other opinions on that matter.

According to Rev. John Paraskevopoulos, in his book *The Unhindered Path*:

Many people today struggle to accept the description they encounter in these texts as literally true – something not altogether surprising given the modernist mindset. Nevertheless, we must remain open to the profound truths to which such languages points so that they may start working on us. Imposing manufactured or confected interpretations, based on our

flawed calculations, will render the teachings meaningless. [7]

And also:

It is true that there are some Buddhist schools that advocate various practices (for example mindfulness meditation, tantric rituals and chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra) which aim to harness spiritual energies in order to help improve our human lot. However, there does not appear to be much evidence to support the efficacy of such practices in addressing the unsatisfactory nature of human existence. We will always have sickness, ageing and death to contend with – this is what this *Saha* world of endurance is and has always been. Therefore, attempts to promulgate a view of the Dharma that is entirely this-worldly are bound to fail. We must not be deceived by empty promises and false hopes. Our assessment of the world and human nature should be unflinching. This is more than just being honest – it also implies looking at things with the eyes of wisdom, which are given to us when we awaken to Amida's Light. If we are not interested in the truth, we can choose to ignore it and just busy ourselves with the creation of futile utopias or be distracted by superficial remedies to the real problems we face. [8]

I have always thought that the proof that I am in the right path in my Buddhist practice comes with feeling unbothered by worldly matters. Feeling happy despite the annoyances of life, despite death, ageing, sickness, separation, unrequited love, loss of pets. Hell breaks loose and I sit there, still like a mountain, with a half-smile thinking to myself “what a joke!” But, while corresponding with Rev. Paraskevopoulos, he

was very serious in saying that my expectations were impossible to achieve and there might be more wisdom in recognizing the reality of *samsara* as it is, rather than pretending that I can fight against it and therefore become extremely frustrated as a result of not achieving anything. Accepting sadness is not an easy thing to come to terms with but it can be extremely liberating. So, I decided to investigate the other side of the coin.

4. The Other Side of the Coin

Every movement has its counterpart. As a reaction to the modernist approach to the Jodo Shinshu teachings in the western world, there are groups of people that despite being part of those who are non-descendants and who were not born in a Buddhist environment, demand a more literal understanding of the Jodo Shinshu teachings.

In this point of view, Amida is a real, living, external entity. Pure Land is an existing and external place in the afterlife. Birth in Pure Land means being born, after physical death, in the realm of Amida Buddha. Salvation means having this otherworldly birth assured. True happiness and joy cannot be achieved here and now, only in another realm where defilements are forever removed, unable to bear new fruits. When I asked those people what happens after receiving *shinjin*, they answered: “nothing”, in case I was expecting some kind of thrill that would free me from worldly sufferings. All *shinjin* does is to provide the seeds to birth in the Pure Land in the afterlife, when one's true nature beyond the aggregate merges with Amida, like drops of water coming back to the ocean. Meanwhile, in this little *samsaric* world, one goes on with the same old sufferings, one cries over dead cats, except for a little bit of

gentle-heartedness that naturally arises from knowing birth is assured.

Even when we are evil, if we revere the power of the Vow all the more deeply, gentle-heartedness and forbearance will surely arise in us through its spontaneous working. [9]

In order to understand this side of the coin, I spent some time re-treating with followers who claim to be an Orthodox Jodo Shinshu sangha, they are fundamentalists in the sense of accepting the sutras as they are, literally. The term “fundamentalism” here is not necessarily taken as a pejorative term in the sense that it only means going back to what is fundamental without further influence from modern commentators.

According to the leader,

One of the most widely distributed is the theory that Amida is a symbol, a metaphor or a fictional character. Such interpretations prove the absence of the genuine shinjin from the hearts of those who support them. It is simply impossible to have the experience of faith in Amida and at the same time consider him a fictional character or a metaphor. On the contrary, such a shinjin is false or fictional like how fictional the object of faith is [...] Birth, life and death are not fictional symbolic or metaphorical. Also, our freedom from birth and death can't be fictional, symbolic or metaphorical. A Buddha who is not alive and active in the world of suffering, cannot help and guide us to the supreme, unsurpassed Enlightenment. Faith in a fictional character, in a symbol or metaphor does not keep warm and cannot free anybody. The true Jodo Shinshu Buddhism is not a rambling metaphysical system, filled with

symbols, metaphors and hidden meanings, but a set of clear and precise teachings intended to free all beings from birth and death through a simple faith in a living and active Buddha called Amida. Those who don't like or cannot accept this path are free to leave it or forget it, but they should never try to change it in order to accommodate it with their personal ideas and lack of faith.

The rules of their group were fairly simple: "you don't use the word symbolic here, you talk about Amida as a real existing being, you talk about Pure Land as a place you go when you die, you don't pretend you are enlightened 'here and now' and you don't bring books from modernist authors. Period."

After hours and hours of *Amidakyo* chanting by the altar, looking at the Amida scroll and thinking that there might be a Buddha like that living joyfully in the Pure Land, a place at many kotis of distance from Planet Earth, I asked them:

"So, if Pure Land is an existing place in the afterlife, are the hells as described by Genshin also like... literally there?"

"Of course!" they said, as if it was more than obvious.

And I went to sleep thinking that as I laid in bed there could be millions of beings being burned, boiled, frozen, impaled and cannibalized without the possibility of fainting or losing the senses. And all that for 2, 3 or 8 thousand years straight without relief.

So, again I had a philosophical decision to make: I could either think of Amida as an external being and Pure Land as an actual place. In this case the *samsaric* realms and the hells as described by Genshin would be real and tangible possibilities for the afterlife and therefore

shinjin would be like a pass given by external entity to escape the hells OR I could think of Amida as a symbol for an internal force within our psyche and Pure Land as a state of mind like all other samsaric realms. In this case the hells are the dark aspects of our personalities and *shinjin* is what happens when we surrender to the hidden part of ourselves that wants liberation so badly and that knows better than the many layers of fear and anxiety that comes with being a human.

5.The Non-Problems and the Non-Answers

There I was in the temple in Brazil again, drinking tea with one of the resident priests, one of the few Japanese descendants who could actually speak my language and therefore understand my struggles. I was telling him about my adventures here and there talking to all sorts of Jodo Shinshu followers, not knowing whether I had the right to expect some sort of ataraxia as a result of my *shinjin* – or if I even had *shinjin* – or if I should be content with being miserable in the here and now of my anxieties, or if I should be miserable thinking that I shouldn't be miserable since supposedly *shinjin* should give me a serene joy and a warm heart (and I wasn't feeling any of those).

“So, sensei... what do you think? Are Amida and the Pure Land internal or external realities?” I asked.

“Is the air that we are now breathing, inside or outside of us?” He asked.

Later, as everybody gathered at the *hondo* for the afternoon service, we all chanted and made our incense offerings by the altar. As I looked around I realized how the underlying reasons why each one of us was there at that room didn't matter at all. Causes and conditions

had brought us together and we were there calling the Name. Some of us might be there in an attempt to calm down the inner demons and catch a glimpse of the Pure Land through a symbolically open window inside, others might be there having a moment of relief knowing that once this life is over, there will be no more pain. Some will expect Amida and the *Bodhisattvas* to receive them in the afterlife with open arms, others will expect absolutely nothing beyond the physical world. Yet, we were all there chanting and being embraced by Amida for sure – symbolically or literally.

I then thought that whatever side one takes, it is still not the whole story, which is so not what Jodo Shinshu is all about. The internal/symbolic approach does not have to exclude the external / literal representations of the inner realms and the literal / external approach does not have to exclude the internal/symbolic aspects of Amida Dharma. Amida is like the air we all breath, it's both inside and outside (how could not be that?) If we only inhale, we choke. If we only exhale, we choke too. I call the Name and the Name comes to me in the form of *shinjin*, like breathing in and out, it's at the same time going from me to Amida (calling the Name) and coming from Amida (wherever Amida is) to me. My state of mind becomes my concrete, existing reality in the afterlife. I find Pure Land in my mind and it takes shape outside, I aspire for the Pure Land outside, and it comes to existence in my mind. Now and later. What came first – internal or external – doesn't matter at all. *Shinjin* is entrusting to this dynamic. So, what happens after *shinjin*?

Everything: I know that whatever comes after *shinjin* is and has to be the Pure Land, both here and there, in any shape or form.

Nothing: I do not become something different than what I am right

now. I continue being human, only human.

Did I have the right to be mad at sensei because he wasn't super enlightened as a result of his *shinjin*? No, I didn't. If I accept the internal/external problem as a “non-problem”, it means that I also accept the here-and-now/later problem as another “non-problem” and being happy or unhappy or worried or sad or in love or angry or fearful or joyful can be contained in the experience of *shinjin*. *Samsaric* accidents. I call this the radical non-dualism of the Vow.

The time came for me to have my next recitation class with sensei, almost 3 months after the first class. I was *slightly* more gentle than last time and I said in my newly learned robotic Japanese: “I am sorry about the cat”, but this time, I really meant it.

“What cat?” sensei asked, looking puzzled.

I had a moment of epiphany right there. Sensei had forgotten about the cat, but I obviously hadn't. So, who was attached? That night, I tweeted: “Amida took the shape of a dead cat to me”

Namu Amida Butsu.

6. References

[1] Unno, Taitezu (translator). *Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic*. Buddhist Study Center Press, 1996.

[2] Inagaki, Hisao. *The Three Pure Land Sutras: A Study and Translation from Chinese*. Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1994.

[3] Takamaro, Shigaraki. Translated by David Matsumoto. *Heart of the Shin Buddhist Path. A Life of Awakening*. Wisdom Publications, USA, 2013.

[4] Takamaro, Shigaraki. *The Problem of the True and the False in*

Contemporary Shin Buddhist Studies: This essay is based on a lecture presented by Dr. Takamaro Shigaraki to the Shinshu Rengo Gakkai in Kyoto, Japan, on June 8, 2001.

[5] Nobuo Haneda. *What is Hongan?* The Maida Center of Buddhism for the Study and Enhancement of Shin Buddhism in the U.S.A. Available at: <http://maida-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/3.-What-Is-Hongan.pdf>

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Paraskevopoulos, John. *The Unhindered Path: Ruminations on Shin Buddhism*. Sophia Perennis, August, 2016.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Unno, Taitezu (translator). *Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic*. Buddhist Study Center Press, 1996.

Section II

Articles



Namanda, the Pathless Path

Gustavo PINTO

Light-Life constitutes and moves all phenomena in the Cosmos and calls human beings to save them with the same three phonemes which prepare them to speak in childhood. Na, Man, and Da.

In all linguistic contexts children play with these three phonemes when they begin their sound adventures in search of communication. Other phonemes follow, the sound repertoire expands, and children learn their mother tongue.

The Buddha's Call (Niànfó, or Nembutsu), in six syllables (Namo Omitofô, or Namo Amida Butsu), nine syllables (Namo Bù Ké Si Yi Guang Rú Lái, or Na Mo Fu Ka Shi Gui Kou Nyo Rai), and ten syllables (Gui Ming Jin Shí Fang Wú Ài Guang Rú Lái, or Ki Myou Jin Ji Pou Mu Gue Kou Nyo Rai), are cultural constructions founded on a primordial, natural and universal expression, given by Light-Life to all human beings to enable them to speak. Na-man-da. Three syllables precede six syllables. Odds precede evens.

East or West, North or South, wherever children try their first sounds, all of them unknowingly repeat three sounds, Na, Man, and Da. When children vocalize these sounds, Light-Life is reciting the entrusting message in them and for them.

Later, when the Light-Life's Call is taught in Cultural versions, whoever learn the sequence of words is unaware of the connection between what is learned and the forgotten original sound experience. From 2011

on, a small sangha started reciting the Namanda in different countries due to “The Deaf and Dumb’s Nembutsu” paper presented at IASBS Conference in which this theme was first introduced.

Cultural worldview is a determinant factor on how one deals with Light-Life’s Call. After nearly four decades attending mostly Caucasian adepts, I noticed a kind of Upaya staircase imagined by those born and raised in a culture of prevailing individualism and anthropocentrism.

Religious or atheists, Westerners share a simple common creed: “Where there is a will, there is a way”, and consequently I must act and do what must be done for something to happen.

Five stages may help us to understand the winding road Westerners usually tread in search of hearing Light-Life’s Call. Westerners imagine that to hear the Light-Life’s Call one should search it. This assumption is both correct and wrong. Correct, because illusion is the condition for disillusion, imprisonment is the condition for deliverance. Wrong, because once you hear the Calling you realize it was given to you before you searched it.

Three phrases of the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* may help us to identify the meaning underlying the five stages.

From the unreal, lead me to the Real. From darkness, lead me to the Light. From death, lead me to Immortality.

Brhadaranyaka Upanishad 1.3.28.

In the first stage, beginners recite Namanda (or a cultural version of it) when faced with adversities they fear. They ignore that these conditions correspond to them in the unfailing chain of cause-conditions

and effects. They ignore that these conditions are part of learning and transformation for awakening. They recite Namanda asking Light-Life to help them to avoid or to overcome what they fear. The persisting sound of Namanda dries their tears, as children hearing the lullaby sung by their parents. Slowly, unexplainably, confidence dispels fears. Children fall asleep not by their own will and effort.

In the second stage, they recite Namanda when faced with misfortunes that afflict relatives or friends. They ask Light-Life to help their beloved ones to avoid or to overcome adversities. They still ignore that those conditions also correspond to their beloved ones as indirect ways (gyaku-en) to entrusting.

While they persist reciting Namanda, merits accumulated by Bodhisattva Dharmakara start blooming. Deep inside themselves resounds that Dharmakara's Vow saves even the most ignorant, and suffering is a temporary illusion.

External and internal transformations are triggered by Light-Life in those who recite and in those for whom they recite. Parents, with their imperfections and limitations heed the call of suffering children, much more does Light-Life for beings constituted by Light-Life.

In the third stage, they start reciting Namanda for all unknown beings, visible and invisible, in uncountable worlds. The Compassionate Light-Life energy, as always, responds and passes through those who recite to all suffering unknown beings, no matter where they are. Those who ask, do not know for whom they ask, and everyone is blessed.

In the fourth stage, they recite Namanda mentally, in silence or

aloud, no matter where or when, in response to whatever happens.

When a siren sounds, they recite for those who need the ambulance, the firefighters, the police car, and simultaneously in gratitude for those who attend.

They recite when passing by a hospital, cemetery, when seeing an accident, while reading the news of some tragedy, or when facing a sad face.

When they see happy people or hear a joyful laugh, they recite Namanda in gratitude to Light-Life for blessing those who live that moment in peace, and also for the joy of knowing that they are happy.

Reciting Namanda, they discover expanding gratitude, joy and trust in the Wisdom-Compassion of Light-Life that brought all beings to this world, cares for them here, and at the end leads them to be born in the Pure Land of Life-Light.

The more Namanda flows through them, the more they hear Namanda in singing birds, waves on the sea, wind that blows, breathing in and out, in all that happens, in all that does not happen.

In the fifth stage, they hear Namanda without an external trigger. Immersed in silence, the inner sound of life flowing through them is even more evident, audible. The internal hum of vital energy keeping them alive is Life-Light reciting Namanda to awaken the Confident Mind that dissipates illusions and attachments that generate suffering.

Amida's Call is Light-Life flowing and moving them here in this world. Wherever they go, Light-Life brings their smiling presence to spread the silent Namanda as flowers perfume everything around, without preference or exception.

Live in the Nembutsu

Kakusho IZUMI

Preface

Master Shan-tao, calling the Buddhas to bear witness,
Led us to overturn the two minds of meditative and non-meditative practices;
Presenting the parable of the two rivers of greed and anger,
He ensured the safeguarding of the shinjin of the universal Vow.

Hymns of the Pure Land Masters (Master Shan-tao), 69,
CWS I, p. 379

The Parable of the Two Rivers is a spiritual concession of Master Shan-tao and is an important guidebook of shinjin, which Shinran Shonin deeply appreciated and concentrated with sincere mind. It is obvious that Shinran Shonin was devoted to this parable as he quoted it in all of his works, including the *Gohonden/Kyo gyo shin sho*. I attempted to explain this parable in a modern way through the life of a person called Mr. K.

View of Impermanence

When Mr. K. was young, his parents passed away. His heart and life were always full of loneliness. He pretended to be fine in front of people so no one noticed. However, tears would flow down his cheeks when no one was around, as his loneliness steadily became overwhelming.

“Why did my mother pass away? My father died too. Nobody knows when we will take our last breath. What will happen to me when I die? Will I go to the Pure Land where my parents were probably born?” Those questions sometimes came to his mind.

Memorial services had been often held at Mr. K.’s home. He patiently sat when the minister was chanting, although he didn’t understand it. Also, it was a custom that Mr. K.’s family conduct a service at the Obutsudan every morning and evening. They couldn’t have a meal if Mr. K. or his brother didn’t read a *Gobunsho* – one of Rennyo Shonin’s letters. Mr. K. learned those Jodo Shinshu customs from his devoted grandmother and got used to venerating the Buddha.

View of Karmic Evil

Mr. K. left his hometown and began to live in the city. However, it was not easy to live like a human being among two million people in a drastically competitive big city. Driven by his weak mind, he justified himself and fell into the dark side of society. As a young person and without realizing it, he became attracted to alcohol and women, and his heart was deluded by evil. Mr. K. became severely exhausted by his life of making money and he ended up becoming really sick and bedridden. Thanks to modern medical science, his life was saved.

Conditions of Hearing the Dharma

After recovering from his illness, he visited a temple one day, without intending to. He didn’t have a clear aim to hear the Dharma. As he was lost in life, it seems his lonely, despairing mind was naturally drawn to the temple to find comfort. This led him to rediscover the spirit of reverence and the Nembutsu, which he had forgotten for years in the

midst of busy city life. Perhaps this occurred because of his past experiences with Buddhism before he had matured.

Seeing the Two Rivers of Water and Fire

The venerable minister lectured about the Parable of the Two Rivers written by Master Shan-tao. In our mind, there is an angry heart that is constantly upset (river of fire), and also a greedy heart of endless desire (river of water). Those seekers who acknowledged the two rivers in their minds, suffered from their own terrifying blind passions, and they trembled and feared their karmic evil.

However, the white path of Nembutsu is directed from the Pure Land to the seekers, and the evil person noticed it in their mind. But, when Mr. K. reflected on it, the heart of Nembutsu was working in his life only one or two times a day and didn't last even five minutes.

On the contrary, he spent much more time paying attention to making money, speaking ill of others, indulging in food, being attached to lust, and getting upset. While making mistakes, his heart was occupied with an angry and dark mind which overshadowed the heart of Nembutsu.

"It is impossible for me to be born in the Pure Land, as my heart is full of blind passions and shame." Mr. K. was so concerned and frustrated by these thoughts that he was lost on his spiritual journey. He could not move forward, nor return, as his heart was losing its power and direction. Although he tried to give up on his journey, he could not escape from the fact that he was facing the truth of impermanence. There was no choice but to attend the Dharma gathering and listen with a heavy heart.

The Heart of Shakyamuni and Amida

When he came to a deadlock in the way of faith for seeking spiritual truth, and knew his self that got into desperate situations, he was able to hear the voices of Shakyamuni and Amida, which didn't resonate in his heart before, powerfully reaching the very bottom of his heart.

Shakyamuni Buddha encouraged him, "Although you seem to be very troubled with many things, the white path of Nembutsu is directed to your heart of afflicting passions. Because this white path is the Nembutsu of Amida's Primal Vow, it is the true religion that brings you unfailingly across this painful ocean of birth-and-death. Entrust yourself to the Buddha decisively without turning your thoughts to other religions. Live and go straight on the path of the Nembutsu. That path is the straight path of sincerity, which leads you to the joy of living."

The seeker (Mr. K.) was also able to clearly hear the voices of Shakyamuni's exhortation and encouragement, and Amida's call to us with his compassionate heart. Amida's call is none other than Namo-amida-butsu, which is the Nembutsu, as well as the Name (*myōgō*) that he had heard and recited many times since he was small.

In particular, Amida Buddha said, "You are my only child. I am your parent who fulfilled the Nembutsu of the Primal Vow to liberate you from the suffering of karmic evil and recurring birth-and-death. Don't hold back from your parent. The ship of Amida's Vow and Namo-amida-butsu is unfailingly taking you across this painful ocean of birth-and-death, even though you are often tormented by your desires. You have an explosive temper and you get angry sometimes. Then your heart is filled with burning anger. Even at times when you are burning in your mind, I hold you tight and protect you with the light of compassion. Don't

be afraid of your greed and anger. Casting off the mind of self-power and doubt, entrust yourself to me and leave your difficulties to me. Buddha's heart of compassion pervades your heart and mind, day and night. I make you say Namo-amida-butsu with your mouth and bring you to be born in the Pure Land."

In this way, Mr. K.'s heart was able to be guided by this consoling parental affection.

Joy of Living

Mr. K.'s heart danced with joy because he could listen to the true Dharma after encountering a true teacher. He was able to leave his suffering behind, and the Nembutsu of gratitude arose in him endlessly. He experienced an amazing mental transformation. Mr. K. discovered that Namo-amida-butsu was his true parent. That discovery wiped away his feeling of many years of isolation. Whenever the Nembutsu arose in him, it gave him a real sense in his heart of meeting with his true parent without dying and being born in the Pure Land.

He was given awareness and hope to live properly, brightly, and strongly through the despair of his life.

Diamond-like Shinjin

Mr. K. entrusted himself to Jodo Shinshu and the teaching of Shinran Shonin and lived on the white path of Nembutsu. Scholars of the *Lotus Sutra* and high priests of other schools tried to persuade him and said, "The Nembutsu is worthless. Only our school is the sacred path, so throw away the Nembutsu and believe in our religion." A Christian priest and a member of *Seicho no ie* kindly invited him to their religious activities, but he never felt inclined to follow their persuasion

SHIN BUDDHIST 14

because he was satisfied with the single path of the Nembutsu and his whole body was filled with the joy of living. He had inherited diamond-like shinjin.

Shakyamuni and Amida are our father and our mother,
Full of love and compassion for us;
Guiding us through various skillful means,
They bring us to awaken to the supreme shinjin.

Hymns of the Pure Land Masters (Master Shan-tao), 74,
CWS I, p. 380

I. 1: Shakyamuni is likened to our father, Amida to our mother.

I. 4: awaken (*hotsu-ki*): *hotsu* means to awaken what has existed since the past; *ki* means to give rise to something new, for the first time.

(Resident Minister at Hawaii Hongwanji)

Note: There were five volumes of booklets called “Faith (Shinko) Booklet” that were published from 1957 to 1959 by some ministers from the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. They are very interesting booklets. We can learn a lot from them about the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii from 66 years ago. Therefore, the Hawaii District Ministers Association held an Online Buddhist Seminar on December 10, 2022, introducing two essays from the booklet written by Rev. Kakusho Izumi and Rev. Yoshio Hino. To prepare for the seminar, Rev. Joshin Kamuro of Honpa Hongwanji Hilo Betsuin and Rev. Ka'imipono Tomioka of Puna Hongwanji Mission translated Rev. Kakusho Izumi's essay “Nembutsu ni ikiru (念仏に生きる)” from “Faith (Shinko) Booklet” No. 1 in 1957. Rev. Kakusho Izumi served at the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii

(Puunene Hongwanji: 1931-1936, Kilauea Hongwanji: 1936-1941, Papaaloa and Honohina Hongwanji: 1946-1951, Hawaii Betsuin: 1951-1969) for 38 years. The Online Buddhist Seminar video is available on the Hawaii District Ministers Association YouTube channel as below.

from ***Faith (Shinko) Booklet*** No. 1, 1957, pp. 20-25

Translated by **Joshin KAMURO & Ka'imipono TOMIOKA**

The Greatness of the Nembutsu

Joanne M. YUASA

For all people - men and women, of high station and low-
Saying the Name of Amida is such
that whether one is walking, standing, sitting, or reclining is
of no concern
And time, place, and condition are not restricted.

Hymns of the Pure Land Master 94, (CWS I, p. 385)

This Passage is from Shinran Shonin's *Hymns of the Pure Land Masters*, the section on the teachings of Genshin Kasho, one of the Seven Masters of the Shin Buddhist teachings. This passage emphasizes the nembutsu as something that can be said or thought on by anyone at any time. That it is the practice that was created out of the great compassion of Amida Buddha, so that everyone can access the Buddha Dharma, no matter their life conditions

I am an immigrant/settler to Canada, having been born in Japan, and moving to Vancouver when I was 4 years old. I experienced a peaceful childhood in a suburb called North Vancouver. I had many friends who were also from immigrant families - from Ukraine, Iran, Denmark, and India among other places. In Canada, especially in the big cities, it is very common for families to have "birth-culture" traditions upheld in the home through food, language and religion, within the context of a larger, general Canadian culture. My home was a little Japanese bubble where we spoke Japanese and ate Japanese food. One

thing we did not observe was any religious tradition. Anything that could be thought of as religious, like Obon, was its connection to Japanese culture. I knew Buddhism was part of my heritage only because I saw evidence of it when I visited my extended family in Japan. I only truly and personally identified as a Buddhist as an adult in my 30s.

The very first time I went to Hongwanji was as a lay chaperone for a group of Canadian temple youth who were participating in the Young Buddhist International Cultural Exchange tour. During our visit to Nishi Hongwanji, a minister from the United States and I were talking to each other in a mix of English and Japanese, as we were leaving the morning service. Suddenly, the elderly woman who was walking out of the hall in front of us turned around quickly and asked in Japanese, "Why are you speaking English?" When I explained I was from Vancouver, she shared that she was born there but moved back to Japan before the war. She said she'd completely forgotten English but she had some very vivid memories - one was that one day she got to stand on the street to watch King George VI and Queen consort Elizabeth drive by on their royal tour. She remembered wearing a beautiful white dress and waving flags with her neighbors. That was 1939! The other thing she remembered was going to temple, climbing some stairs while holding her mother's hand. She expressed her pleasure that there were still young people in Vancouver who were going to temple and saying the nembutsu. She hoped we enjoyed our time at Hongwanji and she briskly turned around and went on her way.

I am still in awe of all the things that had to come together for me to have had this encounter. It was the first time the nembutsu felt really big to me. The greatness of it - that it went beyond the sangha that I

knew, and beyond the time that I knew it which at that time was only the Vancouver Buddhist Temple that I had been going to for only a few years. I was struck by the strange “mirroring” of our lives - she was born in Vancouver but wound up in Japan. I was born in Japan but wound up in Vancouver. We both encountered the nembutsu in Vancouver, she as a small child, and I, as a grown woman. This woman who at the time must have been about 80, had lived through so much and presumably, the nembutsu was with her in all stages of her life, even though war. My relationship with the nembutsu was just budding. I have no idea what it was in her life that made the nembutsu meaningful for her; I would not be surprised if it was totally different from how it is meaningful for me. But there we were, our paths crossing, and our voices mingling together, saying the nembutsu just moments ago at morning service.

This encounter helped me start to realize how greatness of the nembutsu means it can be encountered in and be meaningful in any part of the spectrum of human experiences. Feeling the bigness and greatness of the nembutsu made me feel kind of small. I didn't feel small in size or insignificance, but rather, humbled. It felt like the nembutsu was something that swept me up into it. I truly felt moved by the nembutsu.

The recitation of the nembutsu, Namo Amida Butsu, is the call to the immeasurable wisdom and compassion of Amida Buddha. Sometimes it can be notable and feel very special, like my encounter with the woman at Hongwanji. However, the compassionate simplicity of the nembutsu means being in the presence of the name of Amida Buddha can happen anywhere, to anyone.

Responsibility in the Shin Buddhist Sangha

Reflections on Evildoers and the Problem of Experience and Knowledge

Markus RÜSCH

1. Introduction

In addition to Buddha and dharma, the sangha is one of the three central elements (the so-called three treasures, *sanbō* 三宝) in which Buddhist disciples take refuge. Therefore, it is difficult to underestimate the importance of the sangha. Most followers agree with the claim that contact with other Nenbutsu followers significantly influences one's private encounters with Shin Buddhism. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, this also applies to online meetings, which, in my view, have changed the situation of especially smaller Shin Buddhist sanghas in a fruitful direction. For example, we established a German-speaking Sangha online meeting every two weeks, and it has been taking place since shortly after the pandemic outbreak. It brings together people from distant locations within Germany and Japan; everyone who speaks German is cordially invited to join these meetings.

Notably, online meetings cannot replace meetings in person. However, they are an invaluable tool for strengthening the sangha, particularly in Europe's Shin Buddhist diaspora. I believe that the online format should remain, regardless of the pandemic. I think prejudices against online meetings result from the misunderstanding that one must choose between meetings *either* in person *or* online. Moreover, online meetings should not be conceived simply as tools that people can use if they cannot meet in person. There is a value unique to online meetings. I

would even say that everyone is responsible for joining the in-person *and* online sessions within the range of possibilities.

However, this essay does not focus on responsibility in the post-COVID era. I aim to address a problem that lies in the basis of the sangha: the question of proper inter-being. It does not need to be mentioned that it is not easy to define a term such as responsibility in a Shin Buddhist context because it tends to touch the realm of self-power. However, there are good arguments to develop a distinct notion of responsibility in the Shin Buddhist sense. Readers should primarily keep in mind that the goal is not to maintain the need for responsibility to allow salvation by Amida. I want to discuss the necessity of responsibility in the worldly or secular meaning of the sangha. Thus, the two guiding questions are as follows: How should we understand our responsibility to accept or reject other interpretations of Shin Buddhism and what number of answers to this question are typical of Shin Buddhism? How do we deal with misdoings by other people? I think these questions are central to the continuation and expansion of the sangha because its habits can be the reason to join as well as leave Shin Buddhism, whether in an institutional or personal meaning.

2. What do Evildoers tell us about Responsibilities in a Sangha?

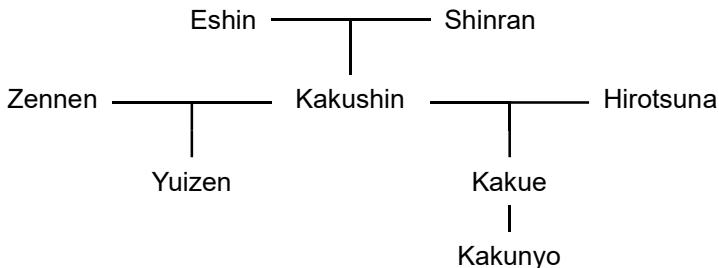
In this context, the idea of referring to evildoers was born from reading the book *Biographies of Shin Buddhist Evildoers* by Inoue Kenjun.¹ It is noteworthy that from the Shin Buddhist perspective, we are all evildoers and could be the protagonists of such biographies. Inoue

¹ Inoue, Kenjun 井上見淳. *Shinshū akuninden* 真宗悪人伝. Kyoto: Hōzōkan. 2021. The following paragraphs on Yuizen and Rensō follow the content of this book (excluding the remarks on responsibility).

refers to nine famous evildoers beginning with Zenshinbō Shinran 善信房親鸞 and ending with Kaneko Daiei 金子大榮, a Shin Buddhist scholar who lived from 1881 to 1976. Today, I want to point out some aspects of two people, namely Yuizen 唯善 and Rensō 蓮崇. However, I am not interested in these figures from a historical perspective. My question is, what do these two people tell us about our interbeing, regardless of the historical facts related to them?

2.1 Yuizen and Insistence

Yuizen was the son of Kakushin 覚信 and her second husband, Zennen 禅念, and was born four years after Shinran's death. His brother from another father, Hirotsuna 広綱, was Kakue 覚恵, and Kakunyo 覚如 (his nephew) was only four years younger than Yuizen. Yuizen's father owned land at the Higashiyama Ōtani, where he lived with his wife and son. At the end of his life, the father decided that his wife should use this place to erect a hall as a mausoleum for Shinran, which became the Ōtani Mausoleum. At that point, Kakushin decided to grant this land to Shinran's disciples in East Japan, while she and later her descendants functioned as caretakers (*rusushiki* 留守職). After Kakushin's death, Kakue followed her in taking care of the mausoleum.



It can easily be imagined that Yuizen must have felt discomfort because he was not in charge of managing his father's land. First, Yuizen left Ōtani and later even Kyoto. He travelled to East Japan and mixed with the Shinran community. However, during their trip to East Japan, Kakue and Kakunyo met Yuizen, who lived in poor circumstances. They asked him to return to Kyoto, and the conflict began to surface. Yuizen said that the house shared by the two families was too small and requested that Kakue buy additional land south of the house. They successfully purchased the land, but Yuizen claimed that he was its original owner. Consequently, the land was divided into north Ōtani—the home of Kakue and Kakunyo—and south Ōtani—the home of Yuizen. Further complicated developments are omitted here. They were intertwined even with Tennōs and the followers in East Japan. Finally, Yuizen was able to steal the key to the mausoleum and drive Kakue and Kakunyo away. Shortly after this incident, Kakue died. Following further hearings, it was finally determined that Yuizen was wrong. At that moment, Yuizen rushed back to Ōtani, destroyed the mausoleum, and fled to East Japan with Shinran's image and his bones in the luggage.

Kakunyo tried to restore the caretaker system and asked the disciples in East Japan to accept his request. They initially refused, but after several requests, Kakunyo was successful. However, the more time that passed since Shinran died, the more Kakunyo was confronted with what today we would call 'misunderstandings' of the teaching. Consequently, he began to explain Shinran's teachings using simple expressions such as 'faith is the true cause [resulting in birth]' (*shinjin shōin* 信心正因), 'saying the name is returning [in gratitude Buddha's] benevolence' (*shōmyō hōon* 称名報恩), or 'actual achievements during

this life' (*heizei gōjō* 平生業成). Through this effort, he converted the mausoleum from a place to *remember* Shinran into a temple where Shin Buddhist disciples could *gather*. Noteworthy this was the birth of Hongwanji, the establishment of Shinran as its founder, and the beginning of the Shin Buddhist sangha in the Hongwanji tradition.

One crucial aspect of this episode about the sangha is that the Shin Buddhist teachings of other power, self-criticism, and the awareness of being an evildoer do not imply that one has to accept any situation or interpretation of Shinran's teachings. In contrast, thanks to Kakue's and Kakunyo's continuous efforts against Yuizen, it was possible to establish Hongwanji and spread Shinran's teachings widely in this lineage. Therefore, I believe this scene reveals two types of responsibility. The first is the responsibility of opening the sangha to diverse members, whereas the second is to defend the standpoint and define the 'borders' of the Shin Buddhist 'field'.

2. 2 Rensō and Forgiveness

Rensō was a disciple of Rennyo and a key person who copied his *Letters*, in which he was even mentioned. His first contact with Shin Buddhism was in Kyoto, which he passed while travelling to Mount Kōya. He heard these teachings and was moved enough to cancel his original journey. Shortly after he arrived in Hongwanji, Rennyo and the Hongwanji group were forced by persecution to flee to Yoshizaki, which also was, accidentally, the birthplace of Rensō. He became familiar with Rennyo, encouraged him to write letters to spread the teachings, and finally, he even resided in the same building group as Rennyo. Further, he became a mediator between Hongwanji and the political powers.

Rensō's talent enabled him to gain an excellent reputation and wealth.

However, at the same time, he spread incorrect information about Rennyo's words and caused sincere trouble for Hongwanji at Yoshizaki. Consequently, Rennyo had to flee again, and it was only after 15 years that he could erect Hongwanji in Yamashina. Rensō was excommunicated at the moment his cheating became known. Upon receiving the news that Rennyo would die, Rensō came to Yamashina and tried to meet him. Rennyo's followers did not want to let Rensō see Rennyo, but Rennyo reacted as follows:

[Rennyo's] children and the other people living in the inner temple district said: 'How could we let him come in, who harmed the Buddhist teachings?' [Rennyo answered:] 'Exactly [that is the point]! What sad things do you say? When someone changes only in the heart, then—regardless of what person it may be—they will not be excluded [from the Primal Vow]'.

Rennyo shōnin goichidaiki kikigaki ²

'[A]mida's Primal Vow is the Original Vow with the purpose of saving evildoers primarily. It is the special characteristic of our school to tolerate such mischief-maker. You shall call him.' On the 20th day, he got invited and had a meeting [with Rennyo]. There, [...] he just shed tears and had no words. He threw his whole body to the ground and raised his voice: 'Thank you!'

Rennyo Shōnin genkōroku shūsei ³

As a result, Rensō got rehabilitated, and only two days after Rennyo's death, he also ended his life.

² *Jōdo Shinshū seiten zensho* 浄土真宗聖典全書, vol. 5, p. 596/7.

³ *Jōdo Shinshū seiten zensho* 浄土真宗聖典全書, vol. 5, p. 645.

This episode about Rennyo is remarkable because most people have difficulty forgiving someone who causes much trouble to themselves and the community. What this story reveals is a significant type of responsibility. What is most apparent is that regardless of a person's misconduct, one must forgive them in the case this person shows true repentance. This type of forgiveness is less a *compensation* for the former act but rather an expression of the *insight* that distinct conditions may force someone to do things they could not expect. Therefore, they remain responsible for their actions but not for the circumstances that were the basis for them. In my opinion, this problem is also addressed in the 13th section of *Tannishō*, where we read: 'Even if I—bearing a good mind—did not think of killing or harming someone, the day might come where I kill a hundred or thousand people'.⁴ As long as we admit individual responsibility for actions and a *worldly* type of repentance, responsibility for forgiving is a crucial value in Shin Buddhist ethics. This serves as a means not to forget or overcome evil acts, but to preserve memory and confirm their influence on us.

3. About the Role of Experience and Knowledge

The examples of Yuizen and Rensō showed us two types of dialectic responsibilities someone is obliged to in the Shin Buddhist sangha:

- (1) (a) Self-criticism (b) Insisting on the own standpoint
- (2) (a) Forgiving bad actions (b) Remembering bad actions

We can call the left aspect of each type the primary type of

⁴ Jōdo Shinshū seiten zensho 浄土真宗聖典全書, vol. 2, p. 1064.

responsibility, which someone can easily conceive from reading Shinran's writings. The key term in this context is our condition as 'a person heavily burdened with [karmic] evil' (*gokujū akunin* 極重悪人). This attribute disqualifies us from ultimately judging others and appreciating our good actions.

More worthy of discussion are the types of responsibilities on the right-hand side. To refer only briefly to the responsibility of remembering bad actions, it is crucial to emphasise that bad actions in the past remain a part of ourselves, even after a complete inner change. Therefore, there is, on the one hand, the possibility of receiving full forgiveness; however, on the other hand, even after this process, these bad elements last within and are integral parts of us. Therefore, there is a chance for full forgiveness, but its condition is the insight into its impossibility.

The 'insisting on the own standpoint' type is much more complex and connected to the role of knowledge in Shin Buddhism. In addressing this problem, I had the following questions in mind: How can the sangha guarantee the genuine plurality of its members? What is in the range and content of our responsibility to enable the sangha? How should we understand our obligation to accept or reject other interpretations of Shin Buddhism and what number of answers to this question are typical of Shin Buddhism?

I believe that there is a tendency (not only in Shin Buddhism, but also in other sects and religious traditions) to value experience more than knowledge. It hardly needs to be mentioned that, in particular, the Shin Buddhist standpoint of admitting foolishness also supports this tendency. However, in Shin Buddhism, we should also be aware of

scepticism about the experience because it can mislead us to the same extent as so-called knowledge. Therefore, I would stress that one must be mindful of what we call 'knowledge' as well as 'experience'. Both have the right to be maintained, and both *must* face criticism when in doubt. I think that this is the origin of equality in the Shin Buddhist sangha and is its unique characteristic. Each standpoint, either gained through study or experience, is potentially the object of debate; otherwise, a meeting of several people would end in a self-affirmation ceremony in which someone simply wants to hear their opinion out of the mouth of another person.

Therefore, the community is responsible for restricting specific interpretations of teachings to some extent. In my view, this is one significant value of the institution *kangakuryō* 勧学寮. More specifically, everyone can respond to a criticism that may arise from there, and everyone is obliged to receive and respond to it. There is no right to refer to an obscure experience as a reason in itself for being legitimate. Personal experiences should not be conceived as the ultimate means of justifying any interpretation and practice. The sangha must also be an institution that stands against misunderstandings because it is unnecessary to accept every interpretation as long as it is meant well. Notable grey zones are found in this process, and some idiosyncrasies may help their creators privately engage with Shin Buddhism, whereas other inventions directly lead to a misunderstanding that could even be dangerous for the stability of the sangha. Therefore, I believe that the erection of a small European *kangakuryō*-like institution—closely connected and somewhat 'observed' by the *kangakuryō* in Kyoto—would be in the interest of the European sangha.

Back to the question of responsibility, I argue that there are two main types of it: a primary and a secondary type, that is, rules that must be followed and regulations that should be followed. This applies not only to an abstract level concerning teachings but also to practical aspects, such as the places and ways of gathering. One central and precious ethical value of the first type of Shin Buddhism is the demand for endless self-criticism. In other words, awareness of the possibility of being wrong is essential. Therefore, people are obliged to expose themselves to others' comments and respond to them. Equally, any person has the right to criticise anyone they want; in some cases, there is even a responsibility to insist on primary rules. The basis for this system is to conduct a *true dialogue*—one example of the second type—based on the equality of all the dialogue partners. This applies to all conceivable directions, regardless of the specific type of knowledge or experience to which someone can refer.

This work was supported by a research grant from Kyoto Women's University.

May There Be Peace in the World! —Shinran's Letter to Shōshin—

Hoyu ISHIDA

Introduction

In the final analysis, it would be splendid if all people who say the nembutsu, not just yourself, do so not with thoughts of themselves, but for the sake of the imperial court and for the sake of the people of the country. Those who feel uncertain of birth should say the nembutsu aspiring first for their own birth. Those who feel that their own birth is completely settled should, mindful of the Buddha's benevolence, hold the nembutsu in their hearts and say it to respond in gratitude to that benevolence, with the wish, "May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha's teaching spread!"¹

With these words in a letter to Shōshin 性信 (1187-1275),²

¹ *The Collected Works of Shinran* (hereafter abbreviated CWS) 1, Shin Buddhism Translation series (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), p. 560.

² Shōshin is said to have become a disciple of Hōnen at the age of 18 and later have received guidance from Shinran. According to a record, he is listed as the first disciple in *nijūshihai* 二十四輩 or the top 24 disciples of Shinran. Shinran was in the Kanto region where he spent about 18 years after he had been pardoned from exile in 1211 at the age of 39. Yuien 唯円, author of *Tannishō* 歎異抄, is listed on the 24th.

Shinran 親鸞 (1173-1262) expounds on two kinds of nembutsu followers: those who are not sure about their own *ōjō* 往生 (birth into the Pure Land), and those who feel certain about their *ōjō*. He then says that the latter people, who are assured of their *ōjō*, holding nembutsu in their hearts, should wish the world to be peaceful and the Buddha's teaching to be spread.

This presentation starts with the issue that Shinran advises that those who say the nembutsu should recite it for the sake of the imperial court 朝家 and for the sake of the people of the country. Shinran was, despite this statement, critical about the political oppression of the government and/or the emperor over the nembutsu sangha community as related to the nembutsu suppression. This presentation then examines the criteria and the essence of Shinran's wish for peace in the world and the spread of Buddha-Dharma.

Nembutsu for the sake of the imperial court?

In the letter to Shōshin, Shinran says, "it would be splendid if all people who say the nembutsu...do so...for the sake of the imperial court and for the sake of the people of the country." This statement sounds controversial, and we need to verify the implication of this account—why does Shinran mention the imperial court to Shōshin. It is difficult to understand Shinran's real intent here. Reading Shinran's letter to Shōshin carefully, however, what Shinran wants to say is crystalized at the end of the head citation--"May there be peace in the world,

and may the Buddha's teaching spread!"

Regarding Shōshin and all people saying the nembutsu, Shinran is simply telling him that it would be splendid (*medetai*), if they do so for the imperial court and the people of the country. *Medetai* めでたい in Japanese means happy, joyous, auspicious, or congratulatory. Shinran realizes the situations or circumstances of the time and Shōshin. In other instances, Shinran expresses his bitterness toward the imperial court quite clearly. In the *Postscript* to his major work *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信証, Shinran refers to the nembutsu suppression. It was in 1205 that the Kōfukuji 興福寺 in Nara petitioned the retired emperor Gotoba 後鳥羽 (1180-1239) to take actions against Hōnen 法然 (1133-1212), and nine accusations were made against him.³ In

³ These accusations are given in James C. Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū: Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan* (Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 14-5.

- 1) Establishing a new school without imperial recognition and without proper lineage.
- 2) Devising a new graphic representation of Amida Buddha called the Sesshu Fusha Mandara ("Mandala of Those Embraced and Never Forsaken"), in which followers of the exclusive nembutsu are bathed in Amida's light but priests adhering to traditional practices are not.
- 3) Slighting the Buddha Śākyamuni by worshipping no Buddha other than Amida.
- 4) Precluding Buddhism's myriad ways of cultivating the good, outside of the nembutsu.
- 5) Refusing to revere the illustrious kami, the native deities of the Shinto tradition.
- 6) Misrepresenting Pure Land by denying that diverse religious practices lead to birth there.
- 7) Misunderstanding the nembutsu by claiming that uttering it is superior to using it in meditation.
- 8) Inflicting harm upon the Buddhist order by maintaining that violation of the clerical precepts is not an obstacle to birth in Pure Land.
- 9) Throwing the country into disorder by undermining the teachings of the eight schools which uphold it.

1207, Hōnen was exiled and a number of his followers were executed.

Shinran says in the *Postscript*:

The emperor and his ministers, acting against the dharma and violating human rectitude, became enraged and embittered. As a result, Master Genkū—the eminent founder who had enabled the true essence of the Pure Land way to spread vigorously [in Japan]—and a number of his followers, without receiving any deliberation of their [alleged] crimes, were summarily sentenced to death or were dispossessed of their monkhood, given [secular] names, and consigned to distant banishment. I was among the latter...⁴

Hōnen was exiled to Tosa 土佐, and Shinran to Echigo 越後. In 1211, Hōnen was pardoned during the reign of the emperor Juntoku 順徳 and was allowed to return to Kyoto. Shinran then writes the *Postscript*, “In 1212, during the midday hour of the twenty-fifth day of the first month, Hōnen passed away. The auspicious signs [that occurred then], too numerous to record here may be found in his biography.”⁵ Hōnen passed away soon after he was pardoned and returned to Kyoto, and Shinran never had a chance to meet Hōnen again after they were exiled. Shinran must have regretted that he was not able to meet his teacher

⁴ CWS I, p. 289.

⁵ CWS I, p. 290.

Hōnen in his later years due to the nembutsu suppression and exile.

In the *Postscript*, Shinran then explains how his work *Kyōgyōshinshō* came to be written down with sorrow and joy in relation to Hōnen. Shinran first talks about how he was joyful about his being recognized by his master Hōnen when they were together:

I, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Śākyamuni, discarded sundry practices and took refuge in the Primal Vow in 1201. In 1205 Master Genkū, out of his benevolence, granted me permission to copy his *Passages on the Nembutsu Selected in the Primal Vow*... my request to borrow his portrait was granted, and I made a copy.... Further, since my name “Shaku” had been changed in accord with a revelation in a dream, on the same day he wrote the characters of my new name [Zenshin] in his own hand. At that time, the master was seventy-three years of age.⁶

Regarding Hōnen’s work the *Passages on the Nembutsu Selected in the Primal Vow*, Shinran writes:

The crucial elements of the true essence of the Pure Land way and the inner significance of the nembutsu have been gathered into this work, which is easily understood by those who read it. It is a truly luminous writing, rare and excellent; a treasured scripture, supreme and profound. Over the days

⁶ CWS I, p. 290.

and years, myriads of people received the master's teaching, but whether they were closely associated with him or remained more distant, very few gained the opportunity to read and copy this book. Nevertheless, I was in fact able to copy it and to paint his portrait.... Thus suppressing tears of both sorrow and joy, I record the circumstances that have resulted [in my compilation of this work].⁷

It is thus very difficult to interpret that Shinran in his letter to Shōshin is saying the nembutsu should be for the sake of the imperial court. Rather, it seems that Shinran is saying this paradoxically. Or, understanding Shōshin's problems and/or political situations, as Shōshin himself was under harassment and litigation by the government,⁸ and knowing that Shōshin would understand Shinran's true intent, Shinran phrases it in such a cautious manner.

In the letter to Shōshin, Shinran, understanding Shōshin's circumstances, expresses his relief that Shōshin is safely back home. Shinran writes, "I had heard in general about the litigation involving you in Kamakura. Since I had not heard differently from what you write in your letter, I assumed that nothing beyond that had occurred; I am glad to hear of your return." Shinran continues:

⁷ CWS I, p. 291.

⁸ Shōshin, representing the nembutsu community in the Kanto area, undertook and managed the issue accused by the shogunate (government) regarding the nembutsu suppression.

Generally speaking, this litigation is not a problem involving yourself alone; it concerns all people of Pure Land nembutsu. Regarding this matter, when the late Master was alive, I was among those subjected to various accusations, so it is not a particularly new litigation. It is not something that you have to manage by yourself..., since, the prohibition of the nembutsu [in the past] led to the arising of disturbances in society, on this occasion I hope that everyone will, deeply entrusting themselves to the nembutsu and firmly embracing prayers [for peace in the world] in their hearts, together say the nembutsu.⁹

In the closing of the letter, Shinran says to Shōshin, “Again, I am very happy to hear of your speedy return home. If, holding [the nembutsu] well in your heart, you are certain that your birth is completely settled, then in expressing your appreciation of the Buddha’s benevolence, nothing else is necessary; you should say the nembutsu, being always mindful of it. You should say the nembutsu, being always mindful of it.”¹⁰

Here again Shinran does not say that the purpose of the nembutsu is for the benefit of the imperial court, but it is simply to express thanks for the benevolence of the Buddha. Interestingly, Shinran himself did

⁹ CWS I, p. 560.

¹⁰ CWS I, pp. 560-561.

not say the nembutsu for the sake of others. In Chapter IV of the *Tan-nishō* 歎異抄, he says,

As for me, Shinran, I have never said the nembutsu even once for the repose of my departed father and mother. For all sentient beings, without exception, have been our parents and brothers and sisters in the course of countless lives in many states of existence....”¹¹

May peace prevail on earth!

Shinran’s shinjin involves in essence one’s becoming awakened or enlightened and it includes two phases or qualities simultaneously—benefiting oneself (*jiri* 自利 in Japanese) and benefiting others (*rita* 利他), just as a bodhisattva establishes vows to attain enlightenment to save suffering beings, setting out on a course of practice. One cannot attain awakening or enlightenment all by oneself without the sharing of this *samsaric* realm—the world of sorrow and joy.

In the letter to Shōshin, regarding those who feel uncertain of their birth, Shinran writes that they “should say the nembutsu aspiring for their own birth.” For those who feel that their own birth is completely settled, he writes that they “should...hold the nembutsu in their hearts and say it to respond in gratitude to that benevolence, with the wish ‘May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha’s teaching spread!’” Shinran’s message broadens, having a wide social implication

¹¹ CWS I, p. 664.

such as peace in the world.

Let us look more closely at Shinran's stance when he appeals for peace in the world. He says that people who are not sure about their birth should say the nembutsu first. One has to first of all seek and aspire for one's own birth in the Pure Land, which is self-benefiting or *jiri*. One should become clear about one's own aspiration, attainment of one's wisdom. Then, when one becomes clear about one's own birth, one should "hold the nembutsu in one's heart" (*onenbutsu kokoroni iretemōshite*) and then say the nembutsu in gratitude with the wish "May there be peace in the world." The wish for peace comes with "holding the nembutsu in one's heart" as an expression of benefiting-others or *rita*. Shinran is saying that the nembutsu followers should realize the Buddha's benevolence for partaking the true and real heart/mind in the untrue and false heart/mind of ordinary beings, and with this realization should aspire for peace on earth and the spreading of the Buddha-Dharma.

Concluding Perspectives

Shinjin is a "particular" religious experience as the working of Amida's Vow in relation to the teaching of Shinran or Shin Buddhism. And through the very particular experience, "universal" values reveal themselves. Particularity of the nembutsu is an individual expression or experience while universality of the nembutsu manifests in the particular core of an individual. There is no universality outside of particularity.

The notions of particularity and universality in any given scheme have hinted at a quite important and significant impact on students of religious studies when a methodology is required as to how to study religion and its values. The terms particularity and universality are often used on a different scale and in a varied context. Generally, particularity is referred to as a certain, particular position of the teaching that a religion advocates, while universality is referred to as a common ground of certain values with which the religion can be shared and appreciated together in a globally communal sense. The end of universal values involves an ultimate goal of all humans, a goal like “peace,” “equality,” or “love,” which can be achieved when people seek it together, understanding what sorrow and joy in life is all about in its very fundamental import. Religions in many parts of the world may call their particular value variously as salvation, emancipation, liberation, deliverance, refuge, realization, awakening, enlightenment, freedom, etc.

Particularity is a subjective and clear norm of an individual position and experience--the core of an individual, while universality involves a common and mutual value system of particularity that can be shared by all humankind. And universality reveals only in particularity and particularity is its specific manifestation.¹²

The 21st century is facing so many problems in spite of the fact

¹² Hoyu Ishida, “Particular and Universal Norms of Religious Values in *Tan-nishô*” in *Academic Reports of the University Center for Intercultural Education, the University of Shiga Prefecture*, Hikone, December 2004, pp. 1-13.

that we are leading a comfortable and convenient life. For the convenience that we enjoy today thanks to the development of modern technology, we are sacrificing too many things—not only the destruction of the environment but also genocide. The COVID-19 pandemic also owns its consequences to humans. Our ego-centeredness of humans seems to have grown larger than ever, even though we say that this is intrinsic to us.

The problem seems to be that we are not able to become aware of our own self-centeredness or our ego-centricity. We know that we are all self-centered; yet, from time to time we cannot see this. And it is truly hard to break through our self-centeredness, which prevents us from freedom. Dukkha or suffering is inevitable.

Unless we encounter that which is unsurpassed, we are not able to deliver our ego into freedom—one cannot negate oneself, but when one realizes one's being encompassed/embraced by that which is unsurpassed, one is led to liberation. Disputes and wars are not the purpose of any religion when they talk about love for humankind. Religious values lie in the core of the person who seeks freedom and liberation from the *samsaric* bondage, and it is in the-here-and-now. Through a particular path, one comes to realize a universal norm of religion. Exclusiveness or exclusion of others is the issue that we have to conquer especially in this confused world of ours today.

Shinran's wish, "May there be peace in the world, and may the

Buddha's teaching spread!" is particular in terms of "holding the nembutsu in their hearts" and universal in terms of the wish for peace in the world. Shinran asserts that one should first of all seek and aspire for the path, and that once one is settled, one aspires for peace in the world, holding the nembutsu in one's heart, the core of an individual in Pure Land Buddhism.

Going Home

The Story of a Wandering Priest and Her Temple

Diane Jishin PETERSON

I have had an extraordinary life. I am deeply grateful for this life I have been given. It has been an adventure these last 20 years since becoming a Jodo Shinshu Priest (Tokudo). I was 40 years old when I received my Tokudo. I was living in Anchorage, Alaska at the time with my family. I found such a sense of purpose being a Priest. I vowed to share the Nembutsu teachings. Sharing the teachings of Shinran Shonin was not always easy because I wasn't the most knowledgeable teacher. I held temple services and Dharma talks, started a children's Dharma program and reached out to the community at large in Anchorage, Alaska. Myokoin's small Sangha was supportive and active. People came and went but a small core group of members remained. My life was very busy with a fulltime job away from the temple, raising a family and fulfilling temple duties. It was a life that took its toll on me physically, emotionally and financially. I felt like I was a failure. Yet, I never gave up hope and I always felt embraced by Amida's Compassion. Amida vowed to save all foolish beings such as myself. I felt and still feel a deep sense of gratitude when saying Namo Amida Butsu.

Causes and conditions led me to make a move to Deer Island, Oregon. Members of the Alaskan Sangha went their separate ways, yet remained committed to their new found life in the Nembutsu. In Deer Island my little temple, Myokoin, found its second home. This is an

unusual approach, a wandering Priest with her Temple, but it was the nature of my life circumstances. A small Sangha formed in Deer Island and temple services and Dharma talks resumed once again. It was a time where my faith in the power of the Vow grew deeper. My life was most joyous when immersed in sharing the Dharma. Great difficulties began to happen in my personal life. It was that difficult time I found myself saying the Nembutsu out of the deepest sense of gratitude. It eased my mental and emotional pain. I felt the embrace of Amida. I was once again faced with making a big decision. I either had to stay in Deer Island and struggle to live on my own with very little income or return home to Alaska where I would be close to loved ones. I made the natural choice to return home to be by my parents in a little rural town called Kenai, Alaska. I now live next to the beautiful Kenai River. Once again my little Myokoin Temple found a new home in the wilds of Alaska.

Living in Kenai, Alaska is a new experience for me. It is a very small town. There are no Buddhist groups here. The closest Buddhist temples are in Anchorage, Alaska 165 miles away. This has proven to be a challenge as I work towards forming a Sangha once again. It is a task that I welcome as I find that living a life in the Nembutsu creates a life of gratitude and commitment. Commitment to share the Dharma in my everyday life. I share this life I live in the Nembutsu as not a wise person, but as a foolish person living an ordinary life. A life that is filled with wonderful moments as well as not so wonderful moments. This is the only way I know how. This life of mine continues to stay firmly rooted in the Nembutsu. This wandering Priest has come home to Alaska. Surrounded by the beauty of the landscape as well as the moose and

caribou that visit my yard on a regular basis. Eagles and sandhill cranes roost nearby. The river is filled with fish to keep us fed. Life is good. I hear the Nembutsu in the call of the birds and the rustling of the leaves of the trees. Alaska called to me and my little temple and we are home. We are home to stay.

Namo Amida Butsu.

Elfjes Poems

–Reflections in Eleven Words

Searching.

I have
a sense of coming home
with every Nembutsu.

Home.

I hear the Nembutsu
in every call of the eagle.

Alaska.

Wild and full of natural beauty and wonder.

Namandabu
Namandabu!

Reflections.

I look inward
and see my foolishness.
Amida embraces me!

SHIN BUDDHIST 14

An ordinary person
can settle their heart
by saying the Name.

Namo Amida Butsu

Heart of Buddha

Kodo UMEZU

The Great Practice is to say the Name of the Tathagata of unhindered light. This Practice, embodying all good acts and possessing all roots of virtue, is perfect and most rapid in bringing them to fullness. It is the treasure ocean of virtues that is suchness or true reality. For this reason, it is called Great Practice.

“Chapter on Practice,” Kyōgyōshinshō

I have heard that first time visitors to Jodo Shinshu temples are often looking for meditation sessions. In the visitors' minds, Buddhism and the practice of meditation may be equivalent. Besides, what they are truly seeking is, probably, not a simple practice, but rather something that can help them spiritually. It is certain that all of us are seeking something that offers a sense of security, meaning and fulfillment in our lives, and that we look for it in all aspects of our lives, whether it is through material things or engaging in religious practice. However, it is impossible to find this security through any object or person in our human world because everything in this world is conditioned and impermanent.

Shinran Shonin profoundly understood that nothing in this world was guaranteed to give him lasting spiritual security, or true meaning and fulfillment in his life, but through Honen Shonin's teachings he was able to look towards something outside of this conditioned world, which was the Vow of Amida Tathagata. This Vow is the embodiment of

formless Wisdom-and-Compassion itself which reaches in the form of the Name, Namo Amida Butsu. Shinran Shonin clarified that the Vow does not just come out of the heart of Amida Tathagata, but *it is* the heart of Amida. Those of us who have been able to hear this teaching are extremely fortunate, for we can become aware of this heart that is being directed towards us, that deeply wishes for us to rely on it so that we may discover settlement in life now and assurance for the future.

Although we are continuously being given this heart, it is not always apparent to us that we are receiving this heart as Namo Amida Butsu. However, if we do not receive this heart, we are not wholly receiving the gift being given.

I would like to share an unforgettable experience that I had as an example of what I mean by this. One year for Christmas, our eldest daughter presented a gift box to my wife. She opened the box and inside was a red scarf. She stared at it and finally realized that the scarf was hand knit. It was obvious that it wasn't a store-bought scarf and even I was able to see that it wasn't knit consistently. My daughter had just graduated from college and had no income or savings, but she really wanted to give a gift to her mother, so she took the time to knit her a scarf. I saw tears in my wife's eyes and right away, I knew they were tears of happiness and joy. She knew that the scarf was a gift of love and appreciation from a daughter to her mother. Realizing all the hard work that went in to make the scarf, my wife was touched by her daughter's thoughtfulness. The knit scarf was no longer just a scarf; It was a manifestation of her daughter's love and was nothing but her daughter's love and appreciation.

We usually may not see people's kind thoughts behind the gifts we receive. When we receive gifts, however, it is because someone thought of us, took the time to go shopping and spent their hard-earned money in order to give us a present. If we don't see the giver's thoughtfulness behind the gift, we are not receiving the whole gift.

I suppose that it is the same with Namo Amida Butsu. Shinran Shonin urges us to say the Name as an expression of our deep appreciation and indebtedness to Buddha, understanding that we are not just saying a name, but we are acknowledging the heart behind the gift of Namo Amida Butsu.

Wisdom's nature is formless but also active and dynamic, trying to be recognized by others. However, in order for us to encounter it, it needs to express itself as something we can sense. This is the reason *The Larger Sutra expounded by Sakyamuni Buddha* described the heart and activity behind the establishment and fulfillment of the Vow that is embodied in the Name that calls out to us.

We, as sentient beings, have been transmigrating in the world of samsara since the beginning-less past without realizing we have been lost. Sadly, we have been trapped in our own dark karmic world not knowing our true conditions. Lost people who don't realize they are lost guide other lost people. Our living conditions worsen through continuously pushing our own thoughts and actions that are based on our three poisons. We have too much confidence in ourselves and our abilities. We impose our own 'good' over others only to cause others to have negative reactions. This is how we exist, from the perspective of the eyes of Wisdom. Thus, Wisdom knows that we do not have the karmic ability to remove ourselves from this cycle of suffering. This is why

Wisdom asks nothing of us except to sincerely hear the Name that comes from the True-and-Real Realm of Suchness.

To hear the Name means to come to realize that I am lost and suffering in this world due to having deeply rooted Three Poisons within me, and it means to realize that I am already within Buddha's Wisdom-and-Compassion because of my karmic condition.

In other words, when we hear the Name, we realize the Name is not just a name; It is a gift of Wisdom-and-Compassion that appears in this world out of deep sorrow and care for our karmic condition. We come to realize that Buddha has long been waiting for us to acknowledge its heart. Once we become aware that we are already within the grasp of the Name, our lives become a journey to the Buddha's Realm, settled on the Pure Land Path, with the assurance that no matter what unfolds in life, our lives will always have meanings and not be lived in vain. Wholly receiving this gift and acknowledging it by saying the Name with deep joy and gratitude is the Great Practice that Shinran Shonin urges us to all engage in.

Namo Amida Butsu

Limits of Language in Shin Buddhism

M. Angela ANDRADE

As the Buddha Dharma is introduced and welcomed in different cultures throughout the world it has been inevitably reinterpreted, it changed forms many times and offered a variety of written material, schools of thought and practices. Doctrinal debates focused on what can be considered “words of the Buddha” can be found among Western scholars such as Eugène Burnouf and Étienne Lamotte since the nineteenth century. While textual interpretation entails a commensurate approach to the quest for the ultimate truth, such as those concerning distinctions of precise and indeterminate meanings in sutras¹, it is nonetheless circumscribed by the limits of language. Despite what the rule of textual interpretation applied to the Buddha’s teachings found in the *Catuhpratisaraṇasūtra*, “the spirit is the refuge, not the letter”² suggests, to translate Buddhist works nonetheless implies being entangled in deadlocks and challenges.

As a follower of the Buddha’s teachings Shinran, inspired by his teacher Honen, found in the non-dual logic of Mahayana Buddhism the nembutsu path of the Other Power perspective. From this viewpoint he

¹ Étienne Lamotte, “The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism”, in Donald S. Lopez, Jr, ed. *Buddhist Hermeneutics*. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1988, p. 17.

² *Ibid*, p. 12

could perceive the reality of the Primal Vow in the Pure Land teaching. This perception allowed him to necessarily “turn around” some linguistic conventions through a method of reading the Chinese Texts of the Pure Land tradition.

As we translate Shin Buddhist’s works into Portuguese, we must look for linguistic expressions that may convey that Other Power standpoint or at least come closer to the perspective of the so-called “spirit” instead of the “letter”. In this process we come across the unavoidable problem of using terms tinted with self-power hues or intentions typical of our *bomby* nature. Therefore, as culture limits us, so does language. And as ignorant beings we can only rely on another dimension of language, such as the nembutsu. It seems then that it is in the Pure Land Buddhist teachings on the Name as Shinran understood it that we may find a particular dimension of language in its relation to the wisdom of *shinjin*. Shinran elucidates that “the sacred Name of Tathagata surpasses measure, description, and conceptual understanding”³. It is at the same time, “the source of creative life, the power reality-as-is.”⁴ Thus, despite being part of the realm of language, and also because it belongs to the realm of language “the nembutsu is a process that leads us along a path of realization of *shinjin* as the ultimate religious experience”⁵. The present study attempts to examine Shinran’s words

³ Shinran, *Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone’*, CWS I, p. 452.

⁴ Taitetsu Unno, *River of Fire, River of Water*. Doubleday, 1998. P. 28

⁵ Takamaro Shigaraki, *A Life of Awakening: The Heart of the Shin Buddhist*

understood as limits of language, how he dealt with them, and consider new suitable ways to translate his works.

Nāgārjuna, widely known as the proponent of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and one of the seven Pure Land masters according to Shinran, expressed words' illusory nature, and its transcendence. He stated that "The real nature of things cannot be explained without words, but words give rise to errors"⁶. The late scholar Gadjin Nagao examined Nāgārjuna's theories while he mentioned that "the word is, as it were, merely a finger pointing at the moon".⁷ Rev. Takamaro Shigaraki's refers to the metaphor of the finger and the moon quoted Nāgārjuna's work to indicate that: "The Buddha-body called 'Amida', that Buddha's Name, and all of the other words in the Sutra are all nothing more than 'fingers.'"⁸ Thus, the Name is Amida Buddha, and at the same time is a "finger". If words give rise to errors, however, the centrality of the Name (or the nembutsu recitation) to the Shin Buddhist path reveals a fundamental reality, also known as reality-as-is.

However, this realm of letters and culture in which words are *so-ragoto* as Shinran defines them is to be carefully considered. Dennis

Path. Hozokan Publications. Kyoto, 2005. pp.79-80

⁶ Inagaki, H, transl. *Nagarjuna's Discourse on The Ten Stages (Dasabhumika-vibhasa)*, Ryukoku Gakkai. Ryukoku Literature Series V, 1998. p. 32.

⁷ Gadjin M. Nagao. *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra: A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies*. State University of New York Press. N.Y. 1991, p. 40.

⁸ Takamaro Shigaraki, "The Problem of the True and the False in Contemporary Shin Buddhist Studies: True Shin Buddhism and False Shin Buddhism." *Pacific World*, Third Series no. 3, 2001, p. 32

Hirota pointed out that,

Shinran characterizes the self and the world as lies (or 'hollow words', soragoto) and gibberish or delusions (tawagoto), and states that the nembutsu alone is true and real (makoto).⁹

Hirota also indicated that the Pure Land way does not claim, like the Zen school, 'no dependence on words.' In fact, it actually recognizes its importance to convey the teaching. Further, he scrutinizes Shinran's writings while describing its main characteristics and concerns.

Probably the clearest mark of his education is the subtlety and precision of his use of language. (...). In a letter, he assures a disciple that scholarly learning and discourse are of no significance in themselves for religious attainment, which is expressed as birth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha.¹⁰

Shinran was notably extremely careful in choosing accurate words in his transmission of the teaching. He in fact went further to create a language that made it easy to grasp the essential meaning of the Shin Buddhist teaching. More important, he accomplished to reveal the fundamental purport of the Pure Land Way, with regards to the Primal Vow

⁹ Dennis Hirota, Shinran's View of Language: A Buddhist Hermeneutics of Faith. Part One. *The Eastern Buddhist. New Series*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring 1993), p. 15.

¹⁰ Yoshifumi Ueda & Dennis Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to his Thought*. Hongwanji International Center. Kyoto, 1989, pp. 21-22.

from his absolute Other Power perspective.

Alfred Bloom clarifies this point as he explains the way Shinran interpreted the *Muryojukyo* (Daikyo) in accordance with his standpoint of absolute Other Power.

By applying the Japanese grammar to the text, he [Shinran] implied that the faith and thought of the Buddha were given to beings by Buddha himself. With the addition of the honorific ending 'seshimetamaeri' Shinran converted what originally was an act of human beings into an act of the Buddha¹¹.

The late Rev. Hisao Inagaki, always keen on the Mahayana viewpoint, elucidates Shinran's reinterpretation of the Pure Land teaching.

Re-interpretation ..., is an indispensable element for any religious or philosophical advancement. In order for any religious theory and practice to keep its vitality, it needs to be interpreted and re-interpreted from new viewpoints based on deeper insights, personal experiences, and so forth.¹²

Different Buddhist schools introduced specific reinterpretations of the Buddhist Dharma, its Sutras, main commentaries and texts. David Kalupahana's work looks into the Buddha's philosophy and language, to explain that his philosophy of non-substantialism compelled the

¹¹ Alfred Bloom, "Shinran's Philosophy of Salvation by Absolute Other Power". *Contemporary Religions in Japan*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (June, 1964), p. 138

¹² Hisao Inagaki, *Essays on Shin Buddhism*, Printed in Singapore, 2007, p. 16

Buddha “to make minimal use of the active voices and that the passive forms, the aorist and past participles, as is evident in the discourses”¹³. The author argues that the Buddha needed a language that avoided substantialist and nihilistic implications. This quest points out some limits inherent in language.

Ms. Keiko Toro’s article on the *Kyogyoshinsho* is an inspiration and an experience on hearing. As she states that words can be a gateway to transformation, and that Dharma talks can be heard as if its words are spoken directly to ourselves, the depth of this Shinran’s major work appeared anew.

Finally, I found out that the *Kyogyoshinsho* is not just a book, but it is a living energy of Namu-amida-butsu. The important thing is “approaching” it.¹⁴

The fact that texts can propel us in a journey of self-reflection, true joy is magnificent. Our effort then, as seekers of the Dharma is to create a bridge through language to approach each other, people and nations. As a language that belongs to the Indo-European family, the Portuguese language reveals its influence from Christian religion, particularly in Brazil with its Catholic background. It is only natural to discover a lack of terms that would correspond to the Buddhist perspective of the world

¹³ David Kalupahana, *The Buddha’s Philosophy of Language*. A Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha Publication. 1999, p. i

¹⁴ Keiko Toro, “*Kyogyoshinsho* in Everyday Life -My experience with a *Myok-onin* Woman”. *Shin Buddhist*, No. 12 March 2020. IABC. Magazine of Shin Buddhists, p. 84.

and the self. For instance, no Portuguese word corresponds to the Japanese expression "*okagesama desu*," since this term comes from the dependent origination view of reality. This situation, however, represents an opportunity to explain the Buddhist worldview. Therefore, it requires delving into how Buddhism penetrated Japanese culture and to what extent is mixed with it. Likewise, we hear sometimes of discussions about the concept of faith, its meaning for the Christian tradition and the problems that may emerge once it is used to translate the Shin Buddhist term *shinjin*. An attempt to go across the limits of language entails creating words fitting to the context, towards a teaching that starts anew. For instance, person of nembutsu (*nembutsu sha*), could be translated as one who lives the nembutsu (in Portuguese, "aquele que vive o nembutsu").

We may perhaps affirm that a Shin Buddhist view of life is contained in the nembutsu. For Shin Buddhists as ourselves the nembutsu is ever present, it is broad and profound. Besides its comprehensiveness, it is a Name of a Buddha. At the same time, as language, it embodies wisdom.



The International Association of Buddhist Culture

The International Association of Buddhist Culture (IABC) was founded in Kyoto in 1980 to promote Buddhism throughout the world. The association has sponsored conferences, lecture meetings, seminars, publishing etc., and has offered subsidies to Buddhist groups and scholarships to well-motivated students of Buddhist culture and philosophy.

On April 1, 2013, IABC was authorized to operate as a Public Interest Incorporated Foundation by the Japanese government and is dedicated to achieving world peace through the spreading and propagation of “culture,” specifically the Buddha Dharma of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

President: Koshin OHTANI
Monshu Emeritus, Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha

Chairperson: Esho SASAKI

Directors: Nobuyuki KASHIWAHARA
Shinryo TAKADA
Naohachi USAMI

Councillors: Kokei ERI
Hidenori KIYOMOTO (from June 2025)
Robert RHODES

Auditor: Ryu ICHIDA

Office: I A B C
302 Namba Royal Heights
112 Nakaicho, Shimogyo-ku,
Kyoto 600-8219 JAPAN
Tel & Fax: +81-75-352-1839
E-mail: iabc@office.email.ne.jp

IABC PUBLICATIONS

IABC Magazine:

***SHIN BUDDHIST*, Magazine of Shin Buddhists**

- No. 1, March 1993
- No. 2, March 1994
- No. 3, December 1995
- No. 4, March 1999
- No. 5, March 2000
- No. 6, March 2003
- No. 7, March 2005
- No. 8, September 2008
- No. 9, March 2010
- No 10, March 2014
- No 11, September 2016
- No 12, March 2020
- No 13, March 2022

Translation Series:

(French Translation)

Tannishō: tr. by J. Ducor, 1983.

(Esperanto Translation)

Tannishō: tr. by K. Sasaki and revised by S. Asano, 1984.

(German Translation)

Shōshinge: tr. by G. Kell, 1984.

Jōdo Wasan: tr. by G. Kell, 1986.

Kōsō Wasan: tr. by G. Kell, 1986.

Tannishō: tr. by G. Kell, 1992.

Shōzōmatsu Wasan: tr. by G. Kell, 1995.

(Portuguese Translation)

Igyōbon: by Angela Andrade, 2019.

<http://www.ne.jp/asahi/iabc/homepage/Igyobon.pdf>

On Shin Buddhism:

Shinshu Service Book: ed. by J. Ducor and E. Sasaki, 1990.

Myokonin O-Karu and Her Poems of Shinjin:

Intro. and tr. by H. Ishida, 1990.

Revised Shinshu Service Book:

ed. by J. Ducor and E. Sasaki (IABC Study Group), 2004.

Ojoraisan: Liturgy for Birth compiled by Shan-tao

“*Hymns for the service at the first watch of the night*”

(Chinese and English with music for chanting), 2000; revised 2006.

Call of the Infinite: by J. Paraskevopoulos, 2009.

IABC Pamphlet Series:

1. *Bamboo Rain* [Contemporary English haiku]:
by L. Rosenthal, 1986.
2. *The Nembutsu Way*:
by Shoken Yamasaki, 1987 (Japanese & English); out of print
3. *Shinran and Jōdo Shinshū*: by H. Inagaki, 1992.
4. *Shinran et le Jōdo Shinshū*: trad. par J. Eracle, 1994.
5. *Shinran et il Jōdo Shinshū*: trad. di S. Marcoz, 1995.
6. *Shinran und Jōdo Shinshū*: tr. von D & G. Kell, 1999.

7. *Encounter with the Nembutsu Way*,
interviewed by T. Teramoto, 2001 (Japanese & English).
8. *Cristianismo e Jōdo Shinshū*,
Portuguese tr. of A. Peel's *Christianity and Jōdo Shinshū*
by A. Andrade, 2005.

Published under our support:

The Buddhist Wish for the World:

by Monshu Koshin Ohtani

New York, 2009

Call of the Infinite—The Way of Shin Buddhism—:

by John Paraskevopoulos

Sophia Perennis, 2009

The Fragrance of Light, A Journey into Buddhist Wisdom:

Compiled and edited by John Paraskevopoulos

Sophia Perennis, 2015

The Unhindered Path: Ruminations on Shin Buddhism:

by John Paraskevopoulos

Sophia Perennis, 2016