

*Hoonko Seminar (L. A. Hompa Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, January 11, 2020)*

**(Theme) “Buddha’s Wish: Vow of All the Buddhas Saying the Name”  
(17th Vow, “Chapter on Practice”)**

## **Tradition and the True Self**

**—Shinran’s Awakening of *Shinjin* (i.e., the True Self) through His  
Meeting with His Teacher (i.e., Tradition)—**

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### **PART ONE: INTRODUCTION**

#### **I. Shinran’s Teaching: the Teaching about “Tradition” and “the True Self”**

- A. “Tradition”: “the Name (or *Nembutsu* or *Gyo* [Practice])” means the tradition of historical teachers, such as Shakyamuni and the seven patriarchs. “Tradition” is the content of the 17th vow, “the vow of all the Buddhas’ saying the Name.”
- B. “The true self”: “*Shin* [or *Shinjin*]” means hearing teachers’ words and awakening the true self. This is the content of the 18th vow, “the vow of *shinjin*.”

#### **II. Shinran’s Meeting with Honen: “A Small Fish’s Meeting with a Big Fish”**

#### **III. What We Meet in Life Is the Most Important Issue in Our Lives**

- A. “Meet a teacher who has a teacher!”
- B. “If you do not have a true teacher, you had better not study Buddhism.”  
(Zen master Dogen)
- C. A passage in the *Nirvana-sutra* that Shinran quotes in his *Kyogyoshinsho*

As stated in this sutra, the cause of all pure practices is the true teacher. Although the causes of all pure practices are innumerable, if the true teacher is mentioned, they are all already exhaustively included.

*(Collected Works of Shinran [henceforth abbreviated as CWS], p. 234)*

- D. T’an-luan’s (Jpn. Donran’s) “The story about the insect named kalakula”

#### **IV. Tradition as the Basis of the Awakening of the True Self (or *Shinjin*)**

## PART TWO

### Outline of Shinran's Teaching: the Three Stage Transition

#### Preface: About Shinran's "Three Stage Transition"

#### I. The First (19<sup>th</sup> Vow) Stage: Shinran's Buddhism on Mt. Hiei (at Age 9-29). This Is "Provisional Buddhism within the Eggshell [of Human Wisdom]."

##### (19<sup>th</sup> Vow, "Vow of Performing Meritorious Acts")

"If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters—awakening the mind of enlightenment and performing meritorious acts—should aspire with sincere mind and desire to be born in my land, and yet I should not appear before them at the moment of death surrounded by a host of sages, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment."

*(Collected Works of Shinran [henceforth abbreviated as CWS], p. 208)*

- A. **Textual basis: the *Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* (Abb. the *Contemplation Sutra*), a sutra that talks about various practices that are designed for various types of practitioners**
- B. **Type of practitioners: "the falsely settled" (i.e., "ethics-oriented Buddhists")**
- C. **Wisdom basis: dualistic human wisdom (that Shinran calls "self-power [*ji-riki*]" or "calculating mind")**
  - 1. Being unhappy with one's present condition: Practitioners think that so long as they have blind passions (that are negative) they cannot be happy.
  - 2. Pursuing an ideal future goal: Practitioners envision in the future an ideal goal of Buddhahood that does not have any blind passions.
  - 3. Practices are necessary as a means to bridge the gap between an unsatisfactory present condition and a wonderful future goal of Buddhahood
- D. **Practices: "sundry practices" that include the practice of the *nembutsu*, or saying the Name—the practices that the *Contemplation Sutra* teaches**
- E. **Attainment: attainment of Buddhahood in this life or "birth attained beneath the twin *sala* trees" (i.e., attaining the peaceful physical death that Shakyamuni Buddha attained)—which Shinran calls "provisional birth."**

## II. The Second (20<sup>th</sup> Vow) Stage: Shinran's Buddhism When He Became a Follower of the Jodoshu (at Age 29-31?)—the Buddhism Which Shinran Initially Thought That Honen Was Teaching. This is “Provisional Buddhism within the Eggshell of [Human Wisdom].”

### (20<sup>th</sup> Vow, “Vow of Cultivating the Root of Virtue”)

“If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, on hearing my Name, should place their thoughts on my land, cultivate the root of all virtues [i.e., say the Name], and direct their merits with sincere mind desiring to be born in my land, and yet not ultimately attain it, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment.” (CWS, p. 229)

**A. Textual basis: the *Amida Sutra*, a sutra that emphasizes the importance of performing one practice of saying the Name (or the nembutsu)**

**B. Type of practitioners: “the unsettled” (i.e., “Buddhists of dualistic faith”)**

**C. Wisdom basis: “dualistic human wisdom” (that Shinran calls “self-power [*ji-riki*]” or “calculating mind”)**

1. Being unhappy with one's present condition: Practitioners think that so long as they have blind passions (that are negative) they cannot be happy. This is because of the fact that their spiritual basis is dualistic human wisdom.
2. Pursuing an ideal future goal: Practitioners desire to be born in the Pure Land after death where they will be liberated from blind passions.
3. A practice is necessary as a means to bridge the gap between an unsatisfactory present condition and a wonderful birth in the Pure Land after death.

**D. Practice: “the one practice of the *nembutsu*, or saying the Name**

**E. Attainment: “birth that is noncomprehensible (or difficult-to-think)”—birth in the Pure Land after death that Shinran calls “provisional birth.”**

**F. Shinran's doubts about the teaching of the second stage that is based on the *Contemplation Sutra***

1. Shinran's doubts about Jodoshu concepts such as Amida Buddha, the Pure Land, the *nembutsu*, and birth in the Pure Land after death, that are based on the *Contemplation Sutra*
2. His discovery of the importance of the *Larger Sutra*: his doctrinal basis changed from the *Contemplation Sutra* to the *Larger Sutra*.
3. His view of two Honens: (a) Honen as understood by other disciples of Honen; (b) Honen as understood by Shinran

**III. The Third (18<sup>th</sup> Vow) Stage: Shinran's Buddhism after His Textual Basis Changed from the *Contemplation Sutra* to the *Larger Sutra* (at Age 31?-90). He Thought That Honen Taught the Buddhism That Was Based on the *Larger Sutra*. This is "True Buddhism (Shinshu) in Which Shinran Came out of the Eggshell [of Human Wisdom]."**

**(18<sup>th</sup> Vow, "Vow of Sincere Mind and Entrusting")**

"If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma." (CWS, p. 80)

- A. Textual basis: the *Larger Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* (Abb. the *Larger Sutra*), the sutra that talks about the importance of awakening *shinjin* by hearing the Name (i.e., the teachings of historical teachers)**
- B. Type of practitioners: "the truly settled" (i.e., "ordinary [i.e., neither ethics-oriented nor religious] persons")**
- C. Wisdom basis: the Buddha's [nondualistic] wisdom**
1. Being happy with the present: Having received the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom that transforms the negative into the positive, a person experiences his blind passions being transformed into virtues. He finds meaning in all things in his life.
  2. No need to pursue an ideal goal: For the person, his dynamic seeking process itself becomes the goal. He has no need to seek a goal in the future like ideal Buddhahood or birth in the Pure Land after death—things that are imagined on the basis of dualistic human wisdom. He is fully content with his present reality.
  3. No practice (or means of bridging a gap between the unsatisfactory present and the wonderful future goal) is necessary.
- D. No practice but hearing alone: By meeting with a teacher who embodies Amida's Innermost Aspiration (Hongan) and hearing his words (i.e., the Name), a person awakens the true self (i.e., *shinjin*) that keeps on seeking the Buddha's wisdom.**
- E. Attainment: "birth that is inconceivable"—which Shinran calls "true birth." He says that awakening *shinjin* (that is synonymous with the Buddha's Innermost Aspiration) means immediate birth in the Pure Land, the sphere of the Buddha's Innermost Aspiration.**

#### IV. The Textual Basis of the Third Stage: “The Passage Describing the Fulfillment of the Three (i.e., 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup>) Vows”

The most important textual basis of Shinran’s teaching is “the passage describing the fulfillment of the three (i.e., 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup>) Vows” that is found at the beginning of the second volume of the *Larger Sutra*.

When Shinran met Honen, he experienced the *fulfillment* of the three vows in his life. Having experienced the fulfillment of the three vows, he lived the powerful life of a constant seeker and fulfilled his life.

Although both Jodoshu teachers (such as Shan-*tao* and Honen) and Shinran honored the 18<sup>th</sup> Vow, there was a considerable difference between their understandings of the Vow. The Jodoshu teachers based their doctrine on the 18<sup>th</sup> Vow itself in which Bodhisattva Dharmakara expressed his desire or promise. But Shinran’s teaching is based on the *fulfillment* (or *actualization*) of the 18<sup>th</sup> Vow. When the Jodoshu teachers based their teaching on the 18<sup>th</sup> Vow (which was a desire or promise), their teaching meant, “all sentient beings *will* attain birth in the Pure Land after death.” Then it was a teaching that talked about salvation that was to be realized in the future, after death. There was an element of uncertainty about Jodoshu salvation. Jodoshu followers had to have faith in a future salvation. For Shinran, there was no element of uncertainty about liberation because he was already experiencing it.

Shinran reads “the passage describing the fulfillment of the three vows” in a unique way, as follows, ignoring its traditional reading:

All Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters, countless as the sands of the Ganges, are praising the inconceivable and majestic virtues of the Buddha of immeasurable life. [Fulfillment of the 17<sup>th</sup> Vow]

*When all sentient beings hear the Name [that is being said by all Buddhas in the ten quarters], they experience even one-thought moment of shinjin and joy. Amida directs his virtues to all sentient beings with his sincere mind. Aspiring to be born in the Pure Land, they then (i.e., immediately) attain birth there. They dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.*” [Fulfillment of the 18<sup>th</sup> Vow]

(Trans. and emphasis by N. Haneda. Cf. *CWS*, pp. 154, 474-476.)

##### A. The fulfillment of the 17<sup>th</sup> Vow

1. “The Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters”: Shinran interprets this as the realization of the tradition of historical teachers, such as Shakyamuni and seven patriarchs.
2. “... are praising the inconceivable and majestic virtues of the Buddha of immeasurable life”: Shinran interprets this as realization of the Name (or *Namu Amida Butsu*)—the calling voice of Amida Buddha, the Ultimate Truth. *Namu Amida Butsu* means “Take refuge in limitless light (or the Buddha’s wisdom)!”

## B. The Fulfillment of the 18<sup>th</sup> Vow

1. "...all sentient beings": those who are failures at traditional Buddhist practices. Shinran identifies himself with one of them.
2. "When all sentient beings hear the Name [that is being said by all Buddhas in the ten quarters]": Here Shinran emphasizes the importance of meeting with a historical teacher who embodies the Name. He also emphasizes the importance of hearing (and understanding) the meaning of the Name, the calling voice.
3. "...they experience even one-thought moment of *shinjin* and joy": awakening of *shinjin* in sentient beings' mind, which is accompanied by joy. Here Shinran says that sentient beings awaken the true self (*shinjin*) by hearing the Name alone.  
 Shinran believes that *shinjin* is Bodhisattva Dharmakara's spirit that limitlessly keeps on seeking the Buddha's wisdom and compassion. The awakening of *shinjin* in the human mind is the direct cause of the attainment of the highest Buddhahood (or Mahayana nirvana).
4. "Amida directs his virtues (*eko*) to all sentient beings with his sincere mind": Amida gives all kinds of virtues, or wonderful spiritual qualities, that the three components of the Pure Land—the land, Amida Buddha, and bodhisattvas—symbolize.

## C. The Fulfillment of the 11<sup>th</sup> Vow

1. "Aspiring to be born in the Pure Land": Shinran says that the power of the Name (i.e., teachers' words) makes sentient beings aspire to be born in the Pure Land. It is not so much his own aspiration as the Buddha's aspiration that is working here.
2. "They then (i.e., immediately) attain birth there": Shinran says that the moment sentient beings awaken *shinjin* (i.e., the Buddha's Innermost Aspiration), they are already being born in the Pure Land, the sphere of the Buddha's Innermost Aspiration. Shinran's awakening the Buddha's Innermost Aspiration within him means his attainment of birth in the Pure Land, i.e., the sphere of the Buddha's Innermost Aspiration.
3. "They dwell in the stage of nonretrogression": Shinran believes that attaining *shinjin*, attaining birth in the Pure Land, and attaining the stage of nonretrogression (or the truly settled) are all synonymous.

Attaining the stage of nonretrogression means that a *shinjin* person receives the Buddha's wisdom that transforms the negative into the positive. The Buddha's wisdom makes the *shinjin* person no longer regress in his path because the negative things, such as sickness and blind passions, which usually hinder people from advancing on the path, no longer hinder him; they all turn into positive conditions that help deepen his *shinjin*. He lives a powerful and creative life, being full of joy and gratitude.

Thus, he has the true beginning (i.e., the stage of nonretrogression) and the true ending of his life (i.e., attaining the highest Buddhahood or Mahayana nirvana) at the end of his life. (See *CWS*, pp. 123, 405, 476-7)

## PART THREE: CONCLUSION

### **Shinran's Teaching: Exclusive Emphasis on the Importance of the 17<sup>th</sup> Vow (as the Vow of "Pure Conditions") and the 18<sup>th</sup> Vow (as the Vow of "Pure Cause")**

#### **A. What is the "the cause [of liberation]" in the respective stages of the three stage transition?**

1. The first stage (i.e., Mt. Hiei Buddhism): Practitioners generate what they consider "the pure cause" (i.e., *bodhicitta*) by themselves. But Shinran came to the conclusion that "the pure cause" that he thought he could generate in himself on Mt. Hiei was not pure at all after years of practice. (*CWS*, p. 402)
2. The second stage (i.e., Jodoshu Buddhism): Practitioners can no longer find any "pure cause" within them. Having known themselves to be full of blind passions and lacking any pure cause, they rely on Amida, the external savior, as "the pure cause" of salvation.
3. The third stage (i.e., True Buddhism [Shinshu]): Persons awaken "the pure cause" (i.e., *shinjin* or *bodhicitta*) by hearing the words of historical teachers—by receiving the power of "pure conditions."

#### **B. Shinran's words concerning "the cause" (*shinjin* or *bodhicitta*) and "conditions"**

"Truly we know that ... if *shinjin*, karmic-consciousness, is lacking, one will not reach the land of light. The karmic-consciousness of true and real *shinjin* is the inner cause. The Name and light—our father and mother—are the outer conditions. When the inner cause and outer conditions merge, one realizes the true body in the fulfilled land [i.e., Buddhahood]."

(*CWS*, P. 54, with modification by N.H.)

1. Outer conditions: (a) the Name (or the compassionate father) refers to the teachings of historical teachers, such as Shakyamuni and the seven patriarchs; (b) light (or the compassionate mother) refers to the Buddha's wisdom (of which Amida is a symbol) that underlies the teachings of historical teachers.
2. The inner cause: "karmic-consciousness of true and real *shinjin*" that lies behind regular (ego) consciousness.