

*(The Ohigan Seminar, Orange County Buddhist Church, March 12, 2016)*

*Outline and Materials*

## Hearing

### —The Core of Shin Buddhism—

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“Religion means meeting a phrase to which we can  
devote our entire lives without any regret.”

—Daiei Kaneko

## I. Introduction: “Hearing” in Mahayana Buddhism (Yogacara): The Basis of Shinran’s View of “Hearing”

### A. Shakyamuni’s Awakening and Teaching

#### 1. Two Worlds:

- (a) The world of samsara (i.e., ignorance, attachment, and suffering): The world with words
- (b) The world of the ultimate truth (or reality): The world beyond words

#### 2. Shakyamuni’s Awakening: Two types of Buddha—the dynamic Buddha and the static Buddha

#### 3. Shakyamuni’s teaching: Return to the world of samsara

### B. Unbridgeable Gap between Shakyamuni’s Words and Human Understanding of His Words

#### 1. What Shakyamuni teaches with his words

- (a) Shakyamuni’s words: “The flow from the pure Dharma [Truth] realm (*Dharma-dhatu-nisyanda*)”
- (b) The Dharma (Ultimate Truth/Reality) and dharmas (teachings)

#### 2. Problems in human understanding of Shakyamuni’s words

- (a) Attachment to dualistic thinking (human wisdom, or self power)
- (b) Misunderstanding of Shakyamuni’s words in the initial stage of studying Buddhism

### C. How Can Humans Truly Understand Shakyamuni’s Words?

#### 1. Continuous hearing

#### 2. Hearing-perfuming (*Sruti-vasana*): Gradual permeation of Shakyamuni’s words

- (a) Smoking a salmon
- (b) Skin-pore Buddhism

#### 3. Double structure in the human mind—Two types of consciousness (or desire)

- (a) Outer consciousness (or ego-consciousness): Human desires
- (b) Inner (latent) consciousness: Innermost Desire (*Hongan*)

#### 4. Conversion of the basis (*Asraya-paravrtti*)

## II. “Hearing” in the Three-Stage (or Three-Vow) Transition: Three Stages in Shinran’s Life

### A. The First Stage (Stage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Vow): The Stage of “[Dualistic] Thinking”

#### (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*, p. 208)

1. “Provisional Buddhism”: Shinran’s Buddhism on Mt. Hiei
2. The stage of the “falsely settled” (i.e., “ethics-oriented Buddhists”)
3. The stage of “sundry practices that include the nembutsu chanting practice” based on the *Contemplation Sutra*
4. “Birth attained beneath the twin *sala* trees”—Attaining nirvana at the end of one’s life just like Shakyamuni
5. Basis of this stage: “[Dualistic] thinking,” “human wisdom,” or “self-power”

### B. The Second Stage (Stage of the 20<sup>th</sup> Vow): The Stage of “Hearing” and “[Dualistic] Thinking”

#### (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.”

(*Collected Works of Shinran*, p. 229)

1. “Provisional Buddhism”: Shinran’s Buddhism as a follower of the Jodo-shu School
2. The stage of the “unsettled” (i.e., “faith-oriented Buddhists”)
3. The stage of “exclusive practice of the nembutsu (or saying the Name)” based on the *Amida Sutra*
4. “Birth that is noncomprehensible (or difficult-to-conceive)—attaining birth in the Pure Land after death
5. Basis of this stage: “Hearing” and “[dualistic] thinking”

### C. The Third Stage (Stage of the 18<sup>th</sup> Vow): The Stage of “Hearing Alone”

#### (18<sup>th</sup> Vow, “Vow of Sincere Mind and Entrusting,” in the Third Translation during the Wei Dynastic Period)

“If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting, aspiring to be born in my land, and thinking of me [“saying the Name” according to Zendo and Honen] 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.”  
(*Collected Works of Shinran*, p. 80)

#### (18<sup>th</sup> Vow in the Fourth Translation during the Tang Dynastic Period)

“If, when I have realized the supreme enlightenment, living beings in other Buddha-lands should hear my Name, I will with sincere mind direct all my roots of good to them. Aspiring to be born in my land, they shall say my Name perhaps even ten times. If they should not be born there, may I not attain enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit evil acts that condemn them to Avici hell and those who slander the right dharma or the sages. (*Collected Works of Shinran*, p. 80)

1. “True Buddhism (i.e., Shinshu)” based on the *Larger Sutra*
2. The stage of the “truly settled” (i.e., “ordinary [shinjin] persons”)
3. The stage of “no practice, but just hearing the Name. The Name means Namu Amida Butsu (a voice, saying, “Take refuge in limitless [Buddha’s] wisdom!”).
4. “Inconceivable birth”—attaining liberation here and now while having blind passions
5. Basis of this stage: “hearing alone”

#### (The Most Important Doctrinal Basis of Shinran: The Three-Vow Fulfillment Statement that Talks about the Fulfillment of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and the 11<sup>th</sup> Vows)

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 (*ichi-nen*) moment of shinjin and joy. Because Amida directs his virtues to them (*eko*) from his sincere mind, they aspire to be born in the Pure Land, and then immediately attain birth there. They dwell in the stage of nonretrogression. (Fulfillment of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Vows)

(Trans. by N. Haneda. Cf. *Collected Works of Shinran*, pp. 154, 474-6)

1. “The Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters”: The fulfillment of the 17<sup>th</sup> Vow—realization of the historical teachers such as Shakyamuni and seven patriarchs
2. “All sentient beings”—those who are failures in at traditional Buddhist practices
3. “Sentient beings’ hearing the Name [said by Buddhas in the ten quarters]”: Realization of the shinjin (awakening) of sentient beings (Read “Imperfect Realization of Shinjin” in the next section)
4. “Hearing the Name”: hearing and understanding the meaning of the Name, an expression of the Buddha’s wisdom—the wisdom of oneness (Read “Imperfect Realization of Shinjin” and “Imperfect Realization of Hearing” in the next section)
5. Meaning of the Name (or Namu Amida Butsu): a calling voice from ultimate truth, saying, “Take refuge in limitless light (or wisdom)!” and “Take refuge in limitless life (or compassion)!”

6. “Amida’s directing of virtues (*eko*)”
7. Birth here and now

### III. Shinran’s View on “Hearing” in His *Kyogyoshinsho*

All who seek the Pure Land, both monk and lay, must grasp the profound significance of the precious words concerning *imperfect realization of shinjin* and must become free of the wrong thinking of *imperfect realization of hearing*.  
(CWS, p. 108)

#### A. Two Types of “Imperfect Realization of Shinjin” As Described in the *Nirvana Sutra*

There are two kinds of shinjin: one arises from hearing and the other from thought [or thinking]. This person’s shinjin has arisen from hearing but not from thought [or thinking]. Therefore it is called “imperfect realization of shinjin.”

Again, there are two kinds of shinjin: one is to believe that there is enlightenment [or path], and the other, to believe that there are people who have attained it. This person’s shinjin is belief only that enlightenment [or path] exists and not that there are people who have attained it. Therefore it is called “imperfect realization of shinjin.”  
(CWS, pp. 99-100)

#### B. Four Types of “Imperfect Realization of Hearing” As Described in the *Nirvana Sutra*

What is the meaning of “imperfect realization of hearing”? What the Tathagata taught comprises twelve divisions of scripture. Such people believe in only six of the divisions, but do not yet believe in the other six. Hence this is termed, “imperfect realization of hearing.”

Again, although they accept and uphold these six divisions, they cannot recite them, so when they expound them for others, no benefit is gained. Hence this is termed, “imperfect realization of hearing.”

Further, having accepted these six divisions of scripture, they uphold, recite, and expound them solely for the sake of disputation, for the sake of defeating others, for the sake of gain and profit, or for some ulterior motive. Hence this is termed, “imperfect realization of hearing.”  
(CWS, p. 111)

#### C. Shinran’s Definition of “Hearing” in the “Three-Vow Fulfillment Statement”

The word *hear* in the Fulfillment Statement from the [*Larger*] *Sutra* means that sentient beings, having heard how the Buddha’s Vow arose—its origin and fulfillment—are altogether free of doubt. This is *to hear*.  
(CWS, p. 112)

*Shinjin* is shinjin that is directed to beings through the power of the Primal Vow. *Joy* expresses gladness in body and mind. *Even* includes both many and few. *One thought-moment*: because shinjin is free of double-mindedness, *one thought-moment* is used. It is the mind that is single. The mind that is single is the true cause of [birth in] the pure fulfilled land.

(CWS, p. 112)