

## **Shakyamuni and Shinran** —Buddhism as a Teaching of Self-Examination—

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### **I. Introduction—Shakyamuni and Shinran Taught the Same Teaching**

### **II. The Basic Similarity between Shakyamuni and Shinran: Buddhism as a Teaching of Self-Examination**

### **III. Shakyamuni Buddha**

#### **A. An Outline of Shakyamuni's Life (ca. B.C. 460-380)**

##### (Age 1-29: His Life as a Prince)

In 460, born as a prince in a small kingdom in North India. His mother dies seven days after his birth. Witnesses the reality of human sufferings such as aging, sickness, and death. Meets a traveling monk by whom he is deeply moved. At age 29, renounces his secular life and becomes a seeker of the path.

##### (Age 29 -35: His Life of Learning and Ascetic Practice)

Visits teachers and studies under them. Engages in ascetic practices. Although he masters all forms of practices, he has deep doubt about traditional doctrines and practices. Having recognized the futility of ascetic practices, he stops them.

##### (Age 35: Awakening)

Sits under a tree and meditates: he seriously examines himself--if he has the *atman*, the permanent self or soul. When he understands the absoluteness of the Dharma (Truth) of impermanence, he recognizes the mistake in believing in the existence of the self. At age 35, he attains Awakening (*bodhi*) and becomes a Buddha (an Awakened One). He describes the content of his Awakening, saying, "My life is already spent. The Universal Working is already established."

##### (Age 35-80: Teaching Activities and Death)

Travels many places in India and shares his teachings. At Kushinagara, he enters *pari-nirvana* at the age of 80.

#### **B. The Three Dharma Marks**

1. *Duhkha* (Difficulty or Suffering)
2. *Anitya* (Impermanence)
3. *Anatman* (Selflessness)

### C. Four Important Points in Shakyamuni's Teaching

1. Renunciation of the Traditional Religion
2. Two Aspects of Awakening (*Bodhi*) Experience
  - i. Negative aspect (Endarkenment): "My life is spent" or "I (i.e., my body and mind) am impermanent."  
Seeing the Dharma of impermanence in the self, Shakyamuni recognized the emptiness of the self. The Dharma totally humbled him.
  - ii. Positive aspect (Enlightenment or Enlivenment): "The Universal Working is established."  
Shakyamuni now saw the Dharma, the dynamic flow of life, to be the only true reality in him. He became a dynamic seeker who was liberated from all values to which he was attached.
3. Dynamic Life after Awakening Experience
  - i. "Rely on the Dharma, not on human beings."
  - ii. Continuous learning (*virya*)
  - iii. Negation of being a teacher
  - iv. Formation of the Sangha, a community of Dharma seekers
4. Fulfillment of the Human Life (*Parinirvana*) at the End of This Life

## IV. Shinran

### A. Shinran's Life (1173-1262)

#### (Age 1-19: Background)

In 1173, born as a son of Hino Arinori, a low-ranking aristocrat. While Shinran is quite young, his parents die. At 8, becomes a novice at Mt. Hiei.

#### (Age 8-28: Life on Mt. Hiei)

On Mt. Hiei, studies and practices Buddhism. Becomes a monk in charge of a hall designed for intensive practices such as meditation, circumambulation, and chanting. Starts to have deep doubt about traditional teachings and practices.

#### (Age 28-34: Meeting Honen and Discipleship under Him)

In 1201 (28), visits Honen (who is sixty-nine) at his dwelling in Yoshimizu. Shinran says that this meeting is the most important event in his life. In this meeting, Shinran experiences *shin* (deep awakening). He describes it, saying, "I have abandoned the miscellaneous practices [based on *jiriki* (the calculating mind, or human wisdom)] and taken refuge in the Innermost Aspiration (*Hongan*)."  
(*Kyogyoshinsho*, Epilogue).

#### (Age 34-41: The *Nembutsu* Persecution and His Exile)

In 1207 (34), four of Honen's disciples are executed and eight individuals, including Honen and Shinran, are exiled. Shinran is exiled to Echigo; he is defrocked and given a lay name, Fujii Yoshizane. He and Honen are separated and never to meet again. In Echigo, marries Eshinni. Starts to call himself Gutoku Shinran ("Foolish Bald-headed Shinran") and identifies himself as "neither a monk nor a secular person." In 1211 (38), his exile is pardoned.

(Age 41-62: Life in the Kanto Area)

In 1214 (41), moves from Echigo to Kanto (present-day Tokyo) area. In 1224 (51), the first draft of the *Kyogyoshinsho* is completed. Actively shares his teachings with people. The number of his followers increases.

(Age 62-89: Life in Kyoto and His Death)

In 1235 (62), returns to Kyoto. In 1248 (76), writes many important shorter works such as the *Jodo-wasan* (Verses on the Pure Land) and the *Koso-wasan* (Verses on Great Monks).

In 1262 (89), dies at his brother's temple.

**B. Shinran's Four Similarities with Shakyamuni**

1. Shinran's Renunciation of the Traditional Buddhist Practices: "I have abandoned the miscellaneous practices and took refuge in the Innermost Aspiration (or Hongan)."
2. His Awakening (*Shinjin*) Experience: Two (i.e., Negative and Positive) Aspects of Awakening
  - i. Negative aspect (i.e., deep understanding of the self): "I am evil" or "I am ignorant." (See Lecture Materials below, p. 4)
  - ii. Positive aspect (i.e., deep understanding of the Dharma): "Amida embraces me."
3. His Dynamic Life after Awakening Experience (See Lecture Materials below, p. 5)
  - i. "Rely on the Dharma (Amida or Innermost Aspiration [Hongan]), not on human beings"
  - ii. Continuous learning (*virya*): "Birth in the Pure Land [i.e., the sphere of limitless light and life]," or "Attaining the stage of nonretrogression (or the truly settled)"
  - iii. Negation of being a teacher: "I, Shinran, do not have even one single disciple."
  - iv. Formation of the Sangha: "My fellow-learners and fellow-practitioners (*on-dobo on-dogyo*)"
4. Fulfillment of the Human Life (*Parinirvana*) at the End of This Life (See Lecture Materials below, p. 6)

**C. Shinran's Pure Land Concepts in Terms of the Three Dharma Marks**

1. Concepts that Are Related to the Dharma
  - i. Dharma (i.e., Ultimate Truth that is beyond words): Suchness, Naturalness, Oneness, Nirvana
  - ii. Symbolization or personification of the Dharma (i.e., Ultimate Truth that is beyond words): *Hongan* (Innermost Aspiration or Primal Vow), the Name (i.e., Amitabha [Limitless Light] or Amitayus [Limitless Life]), the *Nembutsu*, and the Pure Land

## 2. Concepts that Are Related to Human Awakening Experience

- i. The true beginning of the human life: *Shinjin*, birth in the Pure Land, attaining the stage of nonretrogression (or the truly settled), or attaining the stage equal to Bodhisattva Maitreya
- ii. The fulfillment of the human life: Attaining *parinirvana* (or supreme enlightenment), or becoming a [Amida] Buddha

## V. Conclusion

# Lecture Materials

## 1. Seeing the Dharma in the Self

### Shakyamuni:

Form [i.e., physical components of the self] is impermanent... Thus there is no self [i.e., permanent substance]. Likewise, sensation, conception, impulse, and consciousness [i.e., mental components of the self] are impermanent... Thus there is no self.

### Shan-tao (613-81), the fifth Shin patriarch:

*The second is deep mind. Deep mind* is the deeply entrusting mind. There are two aspects. One is to believed deeply and decidedly that you are a foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death, ever sinking and ever wandering in transmigration from innumerable *kalpas* in the past, with never a condition that would lead to emancipation. The second is...

(*Collected Works of Shinran*, p. 85)

### Genshin (942-1017), the sixth Shin patriarch:

Deluded ideas are the basic nature of a [foolish] ordinary person [like me]. Aside from deluded ideas, there is nothing that can be called the mind.

(Cf. *Heard By Me*, p. 164)

### Honen (1133-1212), the seventh Shin patriarch:

I have 84,000 deluded ideas in one day.

### Shinran (1173-1262):

He [i.e., Shinran] continued, “There is an important lesson here. If we could always act as we wished, then when I told you to kill a thousand people in order to attain birth, you should have immediately gone out to do so. *But since you lack the karmic cause enabling you to do this, you do not kill even a single person. It is not that you keep from killing because your heart is good. In the same way, a person may wish not to harm anyone and yet end up killing a hundred or a thousand people.*” Thus he spoke, referring to our belief that the good of our hearts and minds is truly good and the evil truly evil, not realizing that Amida saves us through the inconceivable working of the Vow... The master further stated, “...*When the karmic cause within so moves us, we will do anything.*”

(*Tannisho: A Primer*, pp. 33-34)

### Manshi Kiyozawa (1863-1903), a Japanese Shin thinker:

Perception of color or recognition of fragrance is not initiated by the power of the color or the fragrance itself. These events would not occur were it not for the initiative of the one great, inconceivable power. In addition to colors and fragrances, can't we say the same thing about the self? It is not for us to determine where the self came from and where it is going. *We are powerless not only with regard to things before our birth and after our birth, but also with regard to the arising and vanishing of our thoughts in this very moment. We are absolutely within the hands of Power beyond Self.*"

(Cf. *December Fan*, p.26)

## 2. Shinran's View of Attaining Birth in the Pure Land in This Life

When Honen Shonin was alive, there was an argument concerning Buddhist scriptures. *I, Shinran, said that those who attain birth in the Pure Land through the nembutsu attain birth in the Pure Land before they die; while Zen'e-bo Shoku of Kosaka (the founder of the Seizan branch of the Jodo School) said that they attain birth only after they die. That was the content of the argument. Then, some of my fellow-learners, desiring to know which one of us was right, went to Honen. They told him that there had been an argument between Zen'e-bo and me concerning Buddhist scriptures, and explained the contents of our argument...*

(*Kudensho*, No. 14, trans. N. Haneda)

The practitioner of true shinjin, however, abides in the stage of the truly settled, for he or she has already been grasped, never to be abandoned. There is no need to wait in anticipation for the moment of death, no need to rely on Amida's coming. *At the time shinjin becomes settled, birth too becomes settled; there is no need for the deathbed rites that prepare one for Amida's coming.*

(*Collected Works of Shinran*, p. 523)

*Immediately (soku) means at once. Immediately [attain] birth is to become settled in the stage of the truly settled without any time elapsing, without a day passing. This is expressed, when they become mindful of the vow they are immediately brought to the attainment of birth.*

(*Collected Works of Shinran*, pp. 487-8)

See also *Collected Works of Shinran*, p. 455; p. 475; pp. 494-5.

## 3. Shinran's View of the Wonderful Life of a Shinjin Person

When sentient beings of this evil world of the five defilements  
Entrusting themselves to the selected Primal Vow,  
Virtues indescribable, inexplicable, and inconceivable  
Fill those practitioners. (Collected Work of Shinran, p. 406)

By these words we know that these virtues quickly and rapidly become perfectly full in the hearts of persons who entrust themselves to them. Thus, *though persons of the diamondlike mind neither know nor seek it, the vast treasure of virtues completely fills them; hence it is likened to an ocean of great treasure.* (*Ichinen-tanen-mon'i, Collected Work of Shinran*, p. 487)

#### 4. Shinran's View of Attaining Parinirvana at the End of This Life

Because sentient beings of the nembutsu have perfectly realized the diamondlike mind of crosswise transcendence, they transcend and *realize great, complete nirvana on the eve of the moment of death.*

*(Collected Works of Shinran, p. 123)*

Bodhisattva Maitreya must pass 5,670,000,000 years  
Before attaining Buddhahood,  
But the person who realizes true shinjin  
*Will attain enlightenment with (or at) the end of this life.*

*(Collected Works of Shinran, p. 405; See also p.488)*