

Hoonko Seminar
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Outline & Materials

Life of Awakening: The Fulfillment of Human Life **(*Parinirvana*)**

—Shinran’s View of the Four Types of Buddhism—

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(Outline)

I. Introduction: The Fulfillment of Human Life

- A. “Spending one’s life in vain (*kuka*)”—the only “sin” in Buddhism**
- B. Shin Buddhism, the teaching of Shinran—a teaching that can give us the fulfillment of human life**
- C. The traditional way of explaining Shinran’s view of the four types of Buddhism: “Four insects in a bamboo tree”**
- D. Shinran’s view of the four types of Buddhism: Shinran’s criticism of both the self and others**

II. Shinran’s View of the Four Types of Buddhism (Cf. The Diagram, “Shinran’s View of the Four Types of Buddhism”)

- A. Lengthwise departure: Path of sages (or self-power), Gradual. Schools such as Hinayana and Hosso**
 - 1. Passions can be eliminated in this life: “By severing passions, one attains nirvana.”
 - 2. Attaining Buddhahood (or arhathood) after many lives through various (self-power) practices
- B. Lengthwise transcendence: Path of sages (or self-power), Immediate. Schools such as Zen, Shingon, Tendai, and Kegon**
 - 1. Passions can be eliminated in this life: “By severing passions, one attains nirvana.”
 - 2. Attaining Buddhahood in this life through various (self-power) practices

C. Crosswise departure: Pure Land (or Other Power), Gradual. The Jodo-shu School, a teaching that is based on the *Contemplation Sutra*

1. Having become failures in the first two (A and B) types of Buddhism, practitioners here cannot eliminate blind passions in this life.
2. Amida is a personal savior. The Pure Land is a place where people go after death.
3. Amida, out of compassion, gave the nembutsu practice (i.e., saying the Name or Namu Amida Butsu) to practitioners as a last resort for their liberation. Through the practice of repeatedly saying the nembutsu, they attain birth in the Pure Land after death.
4. When Amida comes to welcome nembutsu practitioners at their deathbeds, they are supposed to have right-mindedness.
5. It is in the next life that nembutsu practitioners perform the bodhisattva practices and attain Buddhahood. They cannot live a powerful and meaningful life in this life because of their blind passions. For them, this life is a preparation period for a wonderful life after death.

D. Crosswise transcendence: Pure Land (Other Power), Immediate. Shinshu (True Buddhism), a teaching that is based on the *Larger Sutra*

Having gone through the first three types of Buddhism, Shinran realized that the doctrinal basis of his teacher Honen's teaching was the *larger Sutra*, not the *Contemplation Sutra*. Shinran said that the fourth Buddhism that was based on the *Larger Sutra* was the shinshu (True Buddhism).

The Most Important Textual Basis of Shinran; “The Fulfillment of the Three (i.e. 17th, 18th, and 11th) Vows” in the *Larger Sutra*

(Fulfillment of the 17th Vow) “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 18th and 11th Vows) “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. [The Name] is directed to them by Amida's sincere mind. Aspiring to be born in the Pure Land, they then immediately attain birth there and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.”

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

1. The Terms referring to the Dharma that liberates people

- a. “Amida (Skrt. Amita-abha [Limitless Light]): It is a symbol of the Buddha's wisdom.

The Buddha's wisdom means the wisdom of oneness (or nondualistic wisdom) that transforms the negative into the positive—that finds meaning not only in the positive but also in the negative. It is diametrically opposed to human wisdom (dualistic wisdom) that finds meaning only in the positive.

The Pure Land is a symbol of the sphere of the Buddha's wisdom.

- b. **“The Name (or *Namu Amida Butsu*)”:** It is an imperative sentence, saying, **“Come to Limitless Light (i.e., the Buddha’s Wisdom)!”**

Shinran says that the Name is verbalization of the voiceless voice of the ultimate truth. It is a command or calling voice, or an expression of the Innermost Aspiration that all Buddhas had.

- c. **“The existences of historical teachers and their words”:** These are the concrete form that the Dharma takes in historical contexts. They are the concrete manifestation of Amida Buddhahood (i.e., the Buddha’s wisdom) and the Name, **“Come to Limitless Wisdom!”**

Shinran believes that all the words of the historical teachers (such as Shakyamuni and seven patriarchs) are saying the same thing, “Come to the Buddha’s Limitless Light (i.e., the Buddha’s Wisdom)!”

The actualization of the existence and historical teachers and their words (i.e., the Name) is called the fulfillment of the 17th Vow, the fulfillment of *Gyo* (Practice or the Name).

2. **People’s encounter with the Dharma: Shinjin experience—The fulfillment of the 18th Vow, the fulfillment of *Shin***

- a. **When a person meets a teacher and hears the Name said by the teacher and understands its meaning, he experiences deep awakening experience called *shinjin*.**

Shinran says that hearing and understanding the Name alone is good enough. Saying the Name is a condition, not the cause, of liberation.

- b. **Shinran says that a student must meet with a historical teacher to embodies the Name, or the Buddha’s wisdom.**

Shinran says that when a person meets the teacher, there is a spiritual communion or resonance between them. He says that the power of the teacher’s Aspiration (or wisdom) moves the student and awakens the same power within him. The power arising within the student is called *shinjin*, Aspiration, or wisdom. So Shinran says, “The arising of *shinjin* within us is the arising of the Buddha’s wisdom within us.”

- c. **For Shinran, experiencing *shinjin* through hearing the Name is synonymous with attaining birth in the Pure Land—the death of the old self and birth of the new self.**

3. **The Shinjin person embarks on a new life that is assured of attaining *parinirvana* (perfect nirvana, peace, or Buddhahood): The fulfillment of the 11th Vow, the fulfillment of *Sho* (Realization)**

- a. **For Shinran, experiencing *shinjin* through hearing the Name is synonymous with attaining birth in the Pure Land, severing *samsara*, attaining “the insight into nonorigination (i.e., non-dualistic wisdom),” and attaining the stage of the truly-settled or nonretrogression.**

- b. **The *shinjin* person lives a powerful and meaningful life in this life. The Buddha’s wisdom (that transforms the negative into the positive) that the *shinjin* person receives in hearing the Name transforms the negative into the positive, i.e., blind passions into virtues.**

- c. **The Shinjin person fulfills his life: he attains *parinirvana* (perfect nirvana, peace, or Buddhahood).**

III. The Differences between the First Three Types of Buddhism and Shin Buddhism

A. The first three types of Buddhism

1. Human-wisdom-based: The first three types of Buddhism are based on human wisdom (i.e., dualistic wisdom) that hates the negative and loves the positive.
2. Future-goal-centered: Practitioners of the first three types of Buddhism hate their blind passions and long for the wonderful future self (Buddhahood) that does not have blind passions or the wonderful future place (Pure Land) that does not have blind passions.
3. Practice-based: They are not happy with their present impure self and land. In order to realize the ideal self and place in the future, they must engage in practices.

B. Shin Buddhism

1. Buddha-wisdom-based: Shin Buddhism is based on the Buddha's wisdom, the wisdom that transforms the negative into the positive.
2. Present-life-centered: The shinjin person does not have to long for a better future self or place. Since he receives Buddha's wisdom that transforms blind passions (the negative) into virtues (the positive), he can settle in his present situation while fully possessing blind passions. The Buddha's wisdom transforms the negative (such as blind passions, sufferings, shortcomings, and mistakes) into the positive and makes them become indispensable conditions for the fulfillment of his life. He lives his powerful and meaning life every step of the way in the midst of his daily life.
3. Hearing-based: The only thing necessary for the person is to receive the Buddha's wisdom through hearing the Name ("Come to the Buddha's wisdom!). He does not have to perform any practice.

(Materials)

The Shinjin Person's Dynamic and Creative Life

I. The Contents of the Shinjin Experience—"Birth in the Pure Land"

A. "One attains birth in the Pure Land"

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 idea of Amida's coming at the moment of death is for those who seek to gain birth in the Pure Land by doing various practices, for they are practitioners of self-power. The moment of death is of central concern to such people, for they have not yet attained true shinjin. We may also speak of Amida's coming at the moment of death in the case of those who, though they have committed the ten transgressions and the five grave offenses throughout their lives, encounter a teacher in the hour of death and are led at the very end to utter the nembutsu.

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, p. 523)

See also *Collected Works*, pp. 455, 475, 487-8, 494-5, 594.

B. "One completely abandons samsara (or birth-and-death)"

Only with the diamondlike shinjin
Can we, living in the evil world of the five defilements,
Completely abandon birth-and-death forever
And reach the Pure Land of naturalness.

When the time comes
For shinjin, indestructible as a diamond, to become settled,
Amida grasps and protects us with compassionate light,
So that we part forever from birth-and-death.

(Collected Works, p. 381)

Concerning the term *cut off*; because we have awakened the mind that is single, which is directed to us for our going forth, there is no further state of existence into which we must be born, no further realm into which we must

pass. Already the causes leading to the six courses and the four modes of birth have died away and their results became null. Therefore we immediately and swiftly cut off birth-and-death in the three realms of existence. Hence, *cut off*. The *four currents* are the four turbulent currents. They also refer to birth, aging, sickness, and death.

(*Collected Works*, p. 115)

C. “One attains ‘insight into the nonorigination of all existence,’ [i.e., non-dualistic wisdom]”

When shinjin unfolds in foolish beings possessed of all blind passions,
They immediately attain insight into the nonorigination of all existence
And come to realize that birth and death is itself nirvana.
Without fail they reach the land of immeasurable light
And universally guide sentient beings to enlightenment.

(*Collected Works*, p. 308)

They receive the diamondlike mind
And accord [with the Vow] in one thought-moment of joy; whereupon,
Equally with Vaidehi, they acquire the threefold insight
And are immediately brought to attain the eternal bliss of dharma-nature.

(*Collected Works*, p. 73)

See also Shinran’s discussion on “The True Disciple of the Buddha” (*Collected Works*, p. 117). In discussing the shinjin person whom Shinran calls “the true disciple of the Buddha,” he says that in the shinjin person the two vows (the 33rd vow—the vow of having the soft and gentle body and mind through touching Amida’s light; and the 34th vow—the vow of receiving the insight into the nonorigination of all existence through hearing the Name) are being fulfilled.

D. “One attains the stage of nonretrogression (or the truly settled)”

When one realizes truth and real shinjin, one is immediately grasped and held within the heart of the Buddha of unhindered light, never to be abandoned.

“To grasp” (*sesshu*) means to take in (*setsu*) and to receive and hold (*shu*). When we are grasped by Amida, immediately—without a moment or a day elapsing—we ascend to and become established in the sage of the truly settled; this is the meaning of *attaining birth*.

(*Collected Works*, p. 475)

II. The Shinjin Person Attains Nirvana Without Severing Passions

A. “While burdened as they are with blind passions, they attain the supreme nirvana”

“To abandon the mind of self-power” admonishes the various and diverse kinds of people—masters of Hinayana or Mahayana, ignorant beings good or evil—to abandon the conviction that one is good, to cease relying on the self; to stop reflecting knowingly on one’s evil heart, and further to abandon the judging of people as good and bad. When such shackled foolish beings—the lowly who are hunters and peddlers—thus wholly entrust themselves to the Name embodying great wisdom, the

inconceivable Vow of the Buddha of unhindered light, then while burdened as they are with blind passions, they attain the supreme nirvana.

(*Collected Works*, p. 459)

B. Shinran's Verses on "the Buddha's wisdom that transforms blind passions into virtues"

(39)

Through the benefit of the unhindered light,
We realize shinjin of vast, majestic virtues,
And the ice of our blind passions necessarily melts,
Immediately becoming water of enlightenment.

(40)

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

(*Collected Works*, p. 371)

III. The Shinjin Person as a Bodhisattva or as a Person Being Equal to Maitreya or a Tathagata

Someone on the western bank calls to him, "O traveler, with mind that is single, with right-mindedness, come at once! I will protect you well."

The phrase, *Someone on the western bank calls*, refers to the Vow of Amida Tathagata.

O traveler refers to the practitioner.

This is the definitely settled bodhisattva. Master Nagarjuna states of such practitioners in *Commentary on the Ten Bodhisattva Stages* that they "immediately enter the stage of the definitely settled." Bodhisattva T'an-luan states in his *Commentary* regarding them that they "enter the group of the truly settled." Master Shan-tao states that such a practitioner is "the rare person, the very finest person, the wondrous person, the excellent person, the best among the best" and "the true disciple of Buddha."

(*Gutokusho*, *Collected Works*, pp. 616-7. See also *Collected Works*, pp. 405, 476-77, 488, 528)

Since those counted among the truly settled are of the same stage as Maitreya, they are also said to be equal to the Tathagatas. Know that persons of true shinjin can be called equal of Tathagatas because, even though they themselves are always impure and creating karmic evil in their bodies, their minds are always equal to Tathagata. In the *Hymns [on the Samadhi] of All Buddhas' Presence* Shan-tao, the Master of Kuang-ming temple, explains that the mind of the person of shinjin already and always resides in the Pure Land. "Resides" means that the mind of the person of shinjin constantly dwells there. This is to say that such a person is the same as Maitreya. Since being of the stage equal to enlightenment is being the same as Maitreya, the person of shinjin is equal to the Tathagatas.

(*Collected Works*, p. 528 with modification by N.H.)

IV. The Shinjin Person Is Full of Virtues

A. The shinjin person is filled with virtues

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 practicers." (Shozomatsu-wasan, No. 31, *Collected Works*, p. 406)

Having met with the power of the Hongan,
 None of us passes his life in vain.
Our life becomes the treasure ocean that is filled with wonderful virtues.
 The defiled waters, our evil passions, are now an inseparable part of the
 treasure ocean. (Trans. by N. Haneda. Cf. *Collected Works*,
 p. 364 [13])

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 Works*, p. 487)

B. The ten benefits that the shinjin person receives in this life

- (1) The benefit of being protected and sustained by unseen powers.
- (2) The benefit of being possessed of supreme virtues.
- (3) The benefit of our karmic evil being transformed into good.
- (4) The benefit of being protected and cared for by all the Buddhas.
- (5) The benefit of being praised by all the Buddhas.
- (6) The benefit of being constantly protected by the light of the Buddha's heart.
- (7) The benefit of having great joy in our minds.
- (8) The benefit of being aware of Amida's benevolence and of responding
 in gratitude to his virtue.
- (9) The benefit of constantly practicing the great compassion.
- (10) The benefit of entering the stage of the truly settled.

(*Collected Works*, p. 112)

V. The Shinjin Person Attains Parinirvana (Complete Nirvana) 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*, 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*, p. 405. See also pp. 476-77)