

Shinran's Religious Experience of Shinjin :

Salvation in Self-negation

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According to Shinran (1173-1262), one's awareness or realization of the working of Amida Buddha and the working of Amida Buddha comprise *shinjin* ("entrusting mind or faith"). Salvation takes place when one sees one's limitation and helpless mode of being : it is a realization that occurs at the very moment when the self is negated. Shinran's religious experience can be characterized by the fact that he rejoiced in Amida's compassion at the very moment of his self-negation. He can be categorized, according to an analysis of William James, as a person of "the twiceborn" or "the sick soul" type, but certainly not of "the once-born" or "the healthy-mindedness" type. In this article, Shinran's religious experience of *shinjin*—an individual, personal experience of Amida's working here and now—will be discussed.

Shinran was fully aware that he was living in the *mappō* era. In his *Shōzōmatsu-wasan* (*Hymns on the Ages of the True Dharma, the Semblance Dharma, and the Last Dharma*), and in his major work, the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, he stressed the appropriateness of the Pure Land path. As Shinran was one who reflected deeply upon himself and was a self-negating individual, his reaction to *mappō* was extremely subjective and existential. He understood *mappō* to mean the degeneration of people themselves because of their self-centered mode of being. Sensing the depth of his own degeneration and seeing the innate contaminated nature of the ordinary people through his own experience, in the third chapter of his *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran stated:

Since the beginningless past, all sentient beings have been wandering in the ocean of ignorance, being submerged in the wheel of existence and being bound

by the wheel of various forms of suffering. They do not have the joy of faith, clean and pure. They do not naturally have the joy of faith, true and real. Because of this, it is difficult to encounter the unexcelled merit and to attain the pure faith of the supreme quality. The mind of greed and attachment, of all ordinary beings at all times, always contaminates their good mind. And the mind of anger and hate always burns the Dharma-treasure.

Shinran seeing his own feelings and emotions of anger and hate, which were beyond his control, read and understood the message of *mappō* with extremely personal subjectivity. He was driven to despair when, after discovering his own nature, he became fully convinced of human decadence and hopelessness. Shinran felt that one could not attain enlightenment through one's own endeavor. Again, in the third chapter of his work, he states :

I have truly come to realize, how shameful I am, this stupid bald headed one. Being submerged in the wide ocean of attachment and desires and being deluded and lost in the huge mountain of worldly fame and profits, I do not rejoice at being counted among the surely assured ones. Nor do I take any pleasure in getting close to the authentication of true authentication. How disgraceful ! How grieving !

Although the path of the Nembutsu could lead him to the Pure Land, Shinran could not rejoice in it all the time. He sensed that his innate nature was so profoundly degenerated and deluded that he could not really, in an absolute sense, even appreciate Amida's compassion. The above passage, however, does not mean literally that Shinran did not appreciate Amida Buddha. The realization of his own nature and Amida's compassion made Shinran realize the fullness of Amida's vows. The above passage is therefore a true expression of Shinran's gratitude to Amida Buddha.

At the age of 82, Shinran stated in the verses of his *Shōzōmatsu-wasan* :

Although taking refuge in the Pure Land teaching—

It is hard to have a true mind ;

Being full of foolishness and falsehood—

It is hard to have a pure mind, too...

Difficult is it to be free of blind foolishness—

The heart is like a snake or a scorpion ;

Good acts also are mixed with poison—

They are but deeds vain and false.

These verses show Shinran's feelings of introspection and also the way he saw his degeneration within himself. He was firmly convinced that, as discussed before, a person was inherently bound by one's self-centered mode of existence, which caused all kinds of sufferings in *samsāra*.

Thus, Shinran was constantly living in two contradictory realms of mind. On the one hand, he rejoiced in Amida's compassion when he was admiring the glory of the Pure Land. On the other hand, when he reflected upon his own mode of being, he sensed that he was not worthy of Amida's compassion and was still bound by the karmic world. For Shinran, self-negation and the realization of Amida's embrace always existed simultaneously—this is the way Shinran underwent his religious experience. The more he realized Amida's compassion, the more deeply he came to see his innate self-attached mode of being and the ugliness of human nature. This realization of one's self-centeredness and limitation is what is required in order to understand and appreciate Amida's vows.

On having reached the limitation of his self-negation, Shinran found himself regenerated by the "inconceivable" power of Amida Buddha, the Other-power. Shinran discovered himself within Amida and Amida within himself. Thus, paradoxically it was when he totally let go of his attachment to self and, even to the recitation of the Nembutsu for the sake of enlightenment that he realized his true self. At the moment Shinran let go of his clinging to himself, Amida's compassion spontaneously filled Shinran's empty mind. This "awareness" of the working of Amida, called *shinjin*, is the ultimate religious experience. In *shinjin*, that is when *ōjō* ("birth in the Pure Land") is assured. This awareness is more important and essential than the act of the Nembutsu i.e. the recitation of Amida's name. So long as one is reciting the Nembutsu for the sake of enlightenment, one is not fully enlightened yet. True Nembutsu should come together with realization.

Shinran taught further that this very awakening of *shinjin* is in essence the working of the Other-power of Amida. *Shinjin* is not a person's act of belief based on one's own fickle nature; *shinjin* is the true (*shin*) and real (*jitsu*) mind (*shin*) of Amida which penetrates and transforms one's inconstant mind into one that is true and real. Amida imparted this true and real mind in the Eighteenth Vow, since Amida saw that an ordinary person was not able to possess a true mind. Here, although enlightenment is made possible through the working of Amida, yet on the person's side, there is a quality of "knowing" or "realizing." A *shinjin* experience therefore has two phases: on the one hand there is the working of Amida, true and real, and on the other there is one's realizing it, which is an extraordinary experience. Takamaro Shigaraki in *The Buddhist World of Awakening* says that the meaning of *shinjin* has two aspects:

that of "realizing" or "knowing" as well as the implicit aspect of truth of reality. It is "to know the heart and mind" as well as "the heart and mind that is true and real." This "knowing" is a special implication, the "knowing" that in Sanskrit is expressed by the word *prajñā*, the Buddhist wisdom that is the dynamic of *shinjin*. To know one's heart and mind refers to the working of *prajñā*, the wisdom that brings about "the true mind and heart." This is not a dualism but a whole in which *prajñā* and "true mind and heart" (*cittaprasāda*) are descriptions, one of the function and the other of the essence of *shinjin*.

He then continues to discuss that this "realizing" or "knowing" as part of a person's experience is attained when one comes to know one's limitation in an ultimate sense and when self-negation is accomplished.

According to Shinran, the Eighteenth Vow among the Forty Eight Vows that Dharmākara established was the most essential Vow. This Vow reads as follows:

Upon my attainment of Buddhahood, if all sentient beings in the ten quarters, who with sincere mind and joy of faith wish to be born in my land, calling upon my name perhaps up to ten times, are not so born, may I not obtain the Highest Enlightenment. Excluded are those who have committed the five grave offenses and slandered the right Dharma.

Sincere mind (*shishin*), joy of faith (*shingyō*) and wishing to be born in Amida's Pure Land (*yokushō*) in the first half of this Vow are called the Three Minds (*sanshin*), which are needed for one to attain the enlightenment of the Pure Land. Among those minds, the most important one is *shingyō* or joy of faith. Joy of faith is attained on the basis of sincere mind (*shishin*), which is the true and real mind of Amida (*shinjitsushin*) discussed above. *Yokushō* or truly wishing to be born in the Pure Land is also required to attain joy of faith, but according to Shinran's understanding, this requirement for enlightenment is also imparted into a person by Amida because although one may hear about the glory of the Pure Land, one is unable to uphold a true sense of a wishing mind. When the working of Amida is realized, *shingyō* (*shinjin* can be replaced for *shingyō* in Shinran's other general usage) is attained. Furthermore in the final analysis, Shinran says that this joy of faith, *shingyō*, arises from the working of Amida.

Shinran interpreted the second half of this Eighteenth Vow, called *oku-shimon*, as being Amida's way of deterring a person's evil tendencies. He understood this vow to say that those who had already committed these grave offenses and slandered the right Dharma were the very ones who were to be saved by Amida first. Shinran stressed that this saving of the wicked ones (*akuninshōki*) was the intention of Dharmākara's vows. According to Shinran's understanding, whenever the necessary conditions arise, a person becomes capable of any offense or felony. Furthermore, a person was committing them in different degrees, and thus, it was hopeless or impossible for a person to obtain birth in the Pure Land through one's own power. Shinran was convinced that because of the hopeless nature of human-beings, Amida had established his vows.

Hōnen said that "Even a wicked person is born in the Pure Land, how much more so is a good person." Shinran turned the saying around: "Even a good person is born in the Pure Land, how much more so is a wicked person (*zennin naomote ōjō o togu, iwan'ya akunin oya*)." Here, Shinran did not mean to oppose Hōnen's saying but rather he tried to expound the compassion of Amida paradoxically. The *Tannishō* (*Notes Lamenting Devia-*

tions), expresses the reason why a wicked person has a real opportunity to be born in the Pure Land :

A person who intends to conduct good deeds by one's selfpower lacks the mind which relies wholly on the Other-power ; one is not the object for which Amida established the Original Vow. If one changes one's mind of self-power and relies on the Other-power, however, one will be born in the true and real Pure Land. Since Amida felt deep sorrow for us, who are full of evil passions and cannot leave the realm of birth-and-death no matter what kind of practice we perform, the Vow was established. And its original motive was for the sake of a wicked person's attainment of enlightenment. This wicked one who relies on the Other-power is the right cause for birth in the Pure Land. Hence, (Shinran) said even a good person is born in the Pure Land, how much more so a wicked one.

The true realization of one's self-centered mode of being leads a person to the awareness of one's limitation, and such a one is much closer to the religious awareness of the Other-power than a good person who still clings to one's own deeds. Shinran did not believe that there could be a "good person" in an absolute sense. The greater the awareness a person had of one's hopeless nature, the greater one's letting go of self-attachment and one's reliance on Amida Buddha were until the moment when *shinjin* was experienced. Then, one finally came to realize that both self-awareness and total reliance (which in effect frees one from bondage) also came about by the working of the Other-power of Amida, which was to be experienced here and now.

〈Key Words〉 *shinjin*, Other-power, self-negation, awakening

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