

# *The Life of Endowed Trust*

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For the few moments we have together in this time of meditation, I want us to reflect on Shinran's words and witness, which are key to the vitality and growth of Shin Buddhism.

As Shinran looked back over his relationship to his teacher Honen, he indicated the importance of this event in a terse statement, noting that in 1201: "I, Gutoku Shaku Shinran, abandoned the sundry acts and took refuge in the Original Vow." Decades after their meeting, Shinran clearly remembered the decisive impact Honen had on his life. The reverberations of this momentous turning point reach us today, so that we are gathered together today to share in that great event. We are still moved by the ripples that move out from that initial point of Shinran's transformation. It is a wondrous mystery how spiritual influence moves down the centuries to give new and fresh meaning to distant peoples and times.

As a memento of the relationship between the teacher and the disciple, Honen permitted Shinran to copy his book, the "Treatise on the Nembutsu of the Select Original Vow." We call it for short "Senjakushu." Shinran also made a portrait of his teacher. Today, we would take a photograph, as a reminder of the significant events. Like a kinen shashin.

In that ancient time, people thought very concretely and specifically. Buddha's compassion and wisdom were not simply abstract terms. Rather, these qualities were embodied, or expressed in real people. The reality of the value was seen in the reality of the person. Honen, for Shinran, was the embodiment of Seishi Bosatsu, as the expression of the Wisdom of Amida. Prince Shotoku was the embodiment of Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Shinran also saw his wife Eshin-ni as Kannon, and Eshin-ni, in turn, regarded Shinran also as the embodiment of Kannon.

We learn from these examples that truth, and spiritual values, however much we affirm and support them, have little power unless they are embodied, given flesh and blood expression, in our human relationships and actions. Shin Buddhism will have little meaning in our modern world unless we express its truth through our lives wherever we find ourselves.

When Shinran thought about the great privilege Honen gave him, he exclaimed:

"What a joy it is, that I place my mind in the soil of the Buddha's Universal Vow and I let my thoughts flow into the Sea of Inconceivable Dharma. I deeply acknowledge the Tathagata's Compassion and sincerely appreciate the Master's benevolence in instructing me. As my joy increases, my feeling of indebtedness grows deeper."

In these succinct, brief statements Shinran indicates the characteristics of Shin spiritual life.

1. "I place my mind in the soil of the Buddha's Universal Vow." Here we have the footing or **basis** of shinjin/Endowed Trust.
2. "I let my thought flow into the sea of the Inconceivable Dharma." In this affirmation we have the **focus** of shinjin/Endowed Trust.
3. "As my joy increases, my feeling of indebtedness grows deeper." This statement suggests the **fruit** of shinjin/Endowed Trust.

**1. I place my mind in the soil of the Buddha's Universal Vow.** The term "soil" can mean ground. It can mean footing, a place to stand, a foundation. Soil is a condition for the growth of the seed. It has nutrients. It is a basis for creativity. When we place our mind in the soil of the Buddha's vow, it suggests we have a basis for our conviction, a foundation for our religious reflection. We know where we are at -- in contemporary speech, "we have it together." Perhaps you have been to a large shopping center. Directories usually mark "You are here." You must know where you are before you can locate the way to your destination. It is true on any map. A map only becomes meaningful from the point where you are.

When our footing and standpoint is the Buddha's Universal Vow, we can better chart our path through life. The Vow clearly points the direction toward the future for ourselves and the Sangha as a whole.

**2. I let my thought flow into the sea of the Inconceivable Dharma.** Shifting the image from the soil to sea Shinran suggests that our thought is absorbed into, merges with, the sea of Dharma. The image of the sea implies breadth, depth. In other passages, Shinran tells that the rivers of our passions become of one taste with sea of the Dharma. The sea absorbs everything ("Kosowasan," Donran, 41, 42) It suggests the unconditional embrace of Amida which never abandons.

As our spirits flow into the sea of Dharma, our thoughts are permeated by the wisdom and compassion of the Vow. When our thought shares the one taste of the Dharma, we have a focus for our lives. There is much talk today about being centered. Some make wealth, success, etc. their center. We are whatever we make the center of our lives. We must each, as Shin Buddhists, ask ourselves: Is the One Taste of the Dharma the flavor of *my* life? Is *my* life centered in the Dharma?

As a practical matter, do we spend much time reading, studying, thinking, discussing the meaning of the Dharma?

**3. Through his experience and self-reflection, Shinran became deeply aware of the Tathagata's compassion which was mirrored in his teacher's great kindness to him.** He declared: "my joy increases, my feeling of indebtedness grows deeper."

The fruition of Shinran's shinjin/Endowed Trust was, on the one hand, a profound joy and, on the other, a deep sense of responsibility, commitment. The fruit of being rooted in the soil of the Vow and of one taste with the sea of the Dharma, was a confidence, a sense of liberation.

The joy is something beyond mere happiness which is based on external conditions. The people who have realized the diamond-like mind of shinjin are the equals of Queen Vaidehi and have been able to realize the insights of joy, awakening, and confidence (quoted in "KGSS," Shin, p. 276, comment on Yung.). It involves the whole person for "joy expresses gladness in body and mind" ("KGSS," Shin, p. 257). It is benefit number seven among the ten spiritual benefits of shinjin, the benefit of having great joy in our hearts. Joy and shinjin/Endowed Trust are inseparable, for "the mind of great joy is true and real shinjin" ("KGSS," Shin, p. 258). We have used the term "Anjin" more than shinjin in our tradition from the time of Rennyo. Anjin is the tranquil mind, the tranquility that derives from our confidence in the truth and embrace of the Vow. It is the certitude that arises in the moment when our trust becomes real. It is a moment of religious awareness that illumines ourselves and our world. In everyday terms, it is the moment we come to know who we really are, when our identity becomes secure; when we stand on a rock foundation-footing and focus in the midst of the shifting, turbulent sands of change and difficulty that engulf us.

From that joy-confidence arises a commitment, a sense of responsibility for what has been given to us by all those who have enabled the teaching to reach us. Shinran expressed gratitude not only to Honen, as central as he was, but to all the preceding teachers who gave direction and meaning to the teaching from earliest times. We also are debtors to the ages for the opportunities we have to bear the teaching and share it. Shinran made Zendo's statement "Jishinkyoninshin" the motto of his life -- it means to share the faith which one has received with others. This is the true way to express gratitude to the Buddha ("KGSS," Shin, 271):

*To realize Shinjin and to guide others to shinjin  
Is among difficult things yet even more difficult.  
To awaken beings everywhere to great  
Compassion  
Is truly to respond in gratitude to the Buddha's benevolence.*

The welfare and future of Shin Buddhism in Japan and the West depend greatly on our footing in the soil of the Vow and our focus on the sea of the Dharma and the fruition, the joy that inspires our gratitude and responsibility to share the Dharma with others.