

Living as a Shin Buddhist: Experiencing Two Types of Deeply Entrusting Mind

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Introduction

The title of my Dharma talk that I have chosen for the IBA sangha this evening is 'Living as a Shin Buddhist' with the subtitle being 'Experiencing Two Types of Deeply Entrusting Mind.' Briefly stated, living as a Shin Buddhist means to walk the unobstructed single path of nembutsu in shinjin toward Pure Land through everyday living. Now, let me elaborate on what this is all about.

Human Condition

From the eyes of Buddha, we are all seen as deluded beings with blind passions. Constantly agitated by deep-rooted self-centeredness, foolish beings like us cause mental, emotional, and physical afflictions one after another and fall into the samsaric world of births and deaths endlessly. Blind passions are represented by 'three poisons' of greed, anger (or hatred), and foolishness. They bring pains that torment the body, and also, afflictions that distress the heart and mind. Those who are bound by all sorts of blind passions are called 'shackled' foolish beings. The mental functions, arising from within ourselves, often cause pains and sufferings, not just in ourselves but all other beings, thus harming each other.

Shan-tao (613-681), a Chinese monk who is the fifth master in Shinran's spiritual lineage, describes the human condition as one of the two aspects of 'deep mind' (deeply entrusting mind) in his "Commentaries on the Contemplation Sutra" as follows:

"One aspect of deep mind is to believe 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."

In Buddha's teaching, the root cause for transmigration is our ignorance of the true reality of life and the universe. We assume what is impermanent to be everlasting. Also, we cling to what is egoless and non-substantial as possessing a permanent identity. In addition, we pursue what actually brings pain out of illusions of self-gratifications. Furthermore, we see what is defiled by egocentricity as pure.

Our views are false, inverted, and distorted as we are obsessed with our egoistic bondage. Based on wrong views, we take three modes of actions through body, speech, and mind from time to time to accumulate evil karma. Anyway, we continue to pursue our own interest in order to satisfy our egos, while neglecting all other beings that sustain, nurture, and protect our lives.

A problem is that we do not fully recognize such selfish nature of our human condition. This means that when things go well, we usually take it as the fruits of our own efforts. When things go wrong, however, we often blame others for the unfavorable results for us. We are good at making excuses to justify ourselves with self-righteousness and pride. Even if we

ever admit our own faults and think we are wrong, we have a tendency to consider others to be even more wrong.

Clearly, passion-ridden ordinary beings are totally incapable of purifying themselves from defilements by their own efforts to cut off the miseries of transmigrations through the six evil paths of the delusory world beginning with hells, hungry ghosts, ravening beasts, angry spirits, human beings and gods.

Amida's Vows

Out of pity and concern for those who can not perform any virtuous actions but constantly commit evil acts, Buddhas have appeared in this world to bring all beings into enlightenment with his boundless compassion and wisdom, despite their delusions and ignorance.

The "Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life" states that the reason why the Tathagatas have appeared in the world is because they desire to save multitudes of beings by blessing them with the benefit that is true and real. What is meant by 'true and real benefit' is Amida's Vow. Thus, the reason why all the Buddhas have come into the world age after age is because they desire to bless and save all sentient beings by teaching the power of Amida's Vow.

Another aspect of the deep mind as stated by Shan-tao in his "Commentaries on the Contemplation Sutra" is as follows:

"The second is to believe deeply and decidedly that Amida Buddha's Forty-eight Vows grasp sentient beings, and that allowing yourself to be carried by the power of the Vow without any doubt or apprehension, you will attain birth."

Amida refers to two terms in ancient Indian language Sanskrit, i.e., *Amitabha*, meaning the Infinite Light that symbolizes his infinite wisdom, and *Amitayus*, meaning the Eternal Life that symbolizes his infinite compassion, respectively. These two qualities of Amida are inseparable from each other.

The wisdom of Amida Buddha sees things as they really are. In Buddhist tradition, therefore, the wisdom of Buddha is frequently illustrated in many sutras as a stream of light that illuminates the true reality of life and the universe. Under the truth of the law of cause and effect as expounded by Sakyamuni Buddha, nothing remains unchanged at any single moment in the world of impermanence and yet, nothing can exist just by itself without depending upon others in the world of interdependence. There is nothing in the universe that has no relationship at all with our life.

According to Tan-luan (476-542), a Chinese monk who is the third master in Shinran's spiritual lineage, there are two kinds of dharma-body with regard to the Buddha. The first is called 'dharma-body as suchness' and the second, 'dharma-body as compassionate means.' The dharma-body as suchness is formless and colorless and thus, the mind can not grasp it nor words describe it. As the dharma-body as suchness goes beyond conceptual understanding, it emerges into human awareness as the dharma-body as compassionate means. Compassionate means refers to manifesting forms, revealing a name, and making itself known to sentient beings. It refers to Amida Buddha. The form it takes is the light, and the light is none other than wisdom.

As an illustration of the many forms that Amida can take or manifest in making his truth known, Shinran refers to the relationship between Amida and Sakyamuni in one of his Hymns of the Pure Land as follows:

"Amida, who attained Buddhahood in the infinite past
Full of compassion for foolish beings of the five defilements
Took the form of Sakyamuni Buddha
And appeared in Gaya."

Amida Buddha's compassion is expressed in the form of the vows established and fulfilled by the Bodhisattva Dharmakara which was the name of Amida in his disciplinary stage. Amida's vows are described by 48 aspirations in the "Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life," but they may all be summarized by one Primal Vow. The Primal Vow of Amida is to save all sentient beings -- unconditionally. It refers specifically to the 18th Vow to save even those with the inferior potential of becoming a Buddha. Thus, all sentient beings are grasped never to be abandoned by the power of Amida's Vow which is called 'Other Power' (or Tariki) . Shinran states, "Other Power is none other than the power of the Tathagata's Primal Vow" in the chapter on "Practice" of his major work "Kyogyoshinsho."

The Name That Calls

In addition to the qualities of infinite light and eternal life, Amida is characterized by his Name in its uniqueness as a means to make his compassionate activities known to beings. The Name of Amida is expressed as 'Namu-Amida-Butsu' in six Chinese characters.

The word 'namu' is a transliteration of the Sanskrit 'namas,' meaning 'to take refuge.' To take refuge is called 'kimyo.' In the term *kimyo*, 'ki' means 'to arrive at,' and 'myo' means 'to invite,' 'to command,' and 'to summon.' Shinran states that *kimyo* is the command of the Primal Vow calling to and summoning us. Thus, the utterance of the Name that embodies the Primal Vow is a calling voice of Amida that awakens us to the true nature of self and the all-embracing compassion that saves beings without exception.

While our life is sustained, guided, and protected by every existence in the cosmos, we are living in the darkness of ignorance with our ego-attachments. Through taking refuge in Amida as the infinite light (*Amitabha*), we are illumined by his wisdom, which, in effect, reveals our real nature in the light of truth. With the call of Amida, we are led to get out of the vicious circle of births and deaths with ego-attachments and enter the world of Oneness with no discriminations. When the darkness of ignorance is dispelled, we are emancipated from the bondage of karma and from spiritual darkness.

In Pure Land Buddhism from Shan-tao on, Nembutsu means the saying of the Name ('nen' has several meanings, such as, meditating, thinking, or pronouncing, and 'butsu' means Buddha). Nembutsu is not a means of gaining salvation but the Buddha's summons calling upon human beings in samsara. It is a calling on the part of Amida and, at the same time, the response from us who are thus called upon. The nembutsu itself brings together the two types of deeply entrusting mind as 'namu' represents our human condition which is linked in interdependence, and 'Amida Butsu' as the realization of true entrusting and universal embrace. The act of saying the nembutsu is itself the fulfillment of Amida's Vow in us and therefore, the reciting act itself is the proof (or acknowledgement) of our having been delivered.

Thus, an emphasis is placed upon hearing in the teaching of Shinran, who quotes a passage from the "Larger Sutra" in the chapter on "Shinjin" of his "Kyogyoshinsho" as follows:

"The word 'hear' 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'."

Hearing the call of Amida through nembutsu is a way for us to encounter the boundless compassion of Amida as the dharma-body as compassionate means. This leads us to entrust ourselves to the vow of Amida which is true and real, being free of doubt, with no calculation whatsoever on the part of nembutsu practitioners. This is called 'shinjin' – true entrusting.

Awakening of Shinjin

When shinjin is awakened, the mind of foolish beings is transformed into the good mind of Buddha. In "Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone," Shinran states: "To be transformed means that evil karma, without being nullified or eradicated, is made into the highest good, just as waters, upon entering the great ocean immediately become ocean water. By realizing Shinjin, our foolish mind and Buddha's mind become one, but, at the same time, foolish beings themselves remain just as they are as 'bambu'."

The following hymn is well known to illustrate the relationship between blind passions and Amida's mind on how foolish beings attain Buddhahood without severing their blind passions based on the principle of Mahayana Buddhism (which indicates essentially the non-duality of samsara and nirvana):

"Obstructions of karmic evil turns into virtues
It is like the relation of ice and water
The more the ice, the more the water
The more the obstructions, the more the virtues."

Our passions, while remaining just as they are, become one with great wisdom, so that they are gradually transformed like ice melting into water through the working of the wisdom. As they melt to become the same as the Buddha's wisdom, the evils, which had been hidden under the darkness of ignorance, are brought to light and hence, one's evils increase. Moreover, as we become aware of increased evils more broadly and deeply, we naturally repent, and at the same time, are filled with gratitude.

While we do not become Buddhas with the Buddha's mind, we experience more deeply our bambu-nature in such a way that our attitudes and relations with others are transformed and become more meaningful, reciprocal or sharing. In other words, there is a behavior outcome that can be traced in this transformation, though we still remain essentially our imperfect bambu selves. We do not become perfect, but we move to more positive actions in the course of our lives through this experience.

Conclusion

The teaching of Shinran gives hope to the hopeless as the infinite light of Amida is not hindered by evil passions of foolish beings. Given the awareness of the evil nature of our true self and the boundless compassion of Amida that embraces us all by saying the nembutsu, we are truly assured of birth in the Pure Land, here and now.

This is what the 'Living as a Shin Buddhist' in experiencing the two types of deeply entrusting mind is all about. Namu Amida Butsu