

Shinjin – Experience of True Entrusting

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Introduction

In our daily conversations in Japan, we sometimes hear them say, for instance, that he or she has deep Shinjin and never fails to pay homage to his or her family altar every morning or that young people nowadays have no Shinjin and it is a deplorable situation, etc. This makes me wonder if the meaning of Shinjin is correctly understood or not since these remarks sound to me as if Shinjin were a self-generating mind.

Shinjin means the true, real, and sincere heart and mind ('makoto no kokoro' in Japanese) that is given by Amida Buddha or Tathagata, according to the Glossary of Shin Buddhist terms. This clearly means that Shinjin is not the heart and mind as developed or cultivated by ordinary beings like us through our own efforts. Shin, as an adjective, has the meaning of 'true, real, and sincere.' As a verb, it means 'to entrust oneself to the Buddha,' which is an act made possible by the working of the true, real, and sincere heart and mind of Amida Buddha.

Thus, Shinjin is translated as 'True Entrusting' in English. Needless to say, Shinjin is one of the most crucial terms for us to understand the teaching of Jodo Shinshu (the True Teaching of Pure Land way). Now, let me further elaborate on what Shinjin is all about as the structure of Shinjin is somewhat complex.

What is Shinjin?

If Shinjin is the heart and mind of Amida Buddha, then who is Amida? Amida is the transliteration of a Sanskrit word Amita into Chinese characters. The term 'mida' means 'to measure.' With the negating prefix of 'a' being added to create amida, it means 'immeasurable.' Amita refers to two Sanskrit words, i.e., *Amitahba* and *Amitayus*, which mean immeasurable (or infinite) light and immeasurable (or eternal) life, respectively. The light that cannot be measured symbolizes the wisdom (*prajna*) of Amida, while the life that cannot be measured symbolizes the compassion (*karuna*) of Amida. These two qualities of Amida, i.e., wisdom and compassion, are inseparable from each other.

The wisdom of Amida sees things as they really are. It is constantly working to awaken us to the true reality of life and the universe. It never ceases to work until we become fully enlightened to the ultimate reality of the world in which we live. Nothing is permanent in this world as everything is constantly changing under the law of causes and effects. This is the reality of impermanence which is always before us. Also, nothing can exist just by itself without depending upon others as everything in this world is interrelated to each other. This is the principle of interdependence or interconnectedness. Our life is sustained, guided, and protected by the lives of all others called Other Power or Tariki. We simply can not live without Other Power. In other words, Other Power is the essence of life.

The wisdom of Amida sheds light on the darkness of human condition which is deep-rooted in egoistic bondage and self-centeredness. Even if we think we have ever done good deeds out of our pure and sincere mind, there still remains an element of the pursuit of our own interests, i.e., profit and fame, or self-righteousness, superiority, and pride in our mind. The

issue here is our mental attitude toward carrying out good deeds, not good deeds themselves.

Shinran, the founder of Jodo Shinshu, deeply reflected on such human condition, and fully recognized his limitations and imperfections based on his 20-year-long monastic life in Mount Hiei. The following are the confessions that Shinran left in the Hymns of the Dharma-Ages (more specifically, Gutoku's Hymns of Lament and Reflection #94 & #95, respectively), exposing his inmost spiritual condition honestly from his many years of religious experiences:

Although I take refuge in the true Pure Land way
It is hard to have a true and sincere mind
The self is false and insincere
I completely lack a pure mind
Each of us, in outward bearing
Makes a show of being wise, good, and dedicated
But so great are our greed, anger, perversity, and deceit
That we are filled with all forms of malice and cunning.

Those actions tainted with impure and empty mind are what Shinran calls 'poisoned good acts and false practices.' They cannot be called 'true and real actions.' Shinran further states that to seek to be born in the land of immeasurable light through such false and poisoned good acts is completely wrong.

Our mind is defiled, tainted, and filled with blind passions, i.e., the very opposite to the mind of Amida which is true, real, and sincere. We can hardly purify our minds by using our impure minds to achieve it. The true wisdom of Amida clearly sees through such passion-ridden beings and knows them thoroughly. Out of pity and concern, Amida Buddha has made and fulfilled his primal vows to save all sentient beings unconditionally. This is the true compassion of Amida. The pure heart and mind of Amida is thus given to us as a gift in the form of Namu Amida Butsu which means 'taking refuge in Amida Buddha.' When Namu Amida Butsu is accepted and received, it is called Shinjin. The contents of Shinjin are wisdom and compassion.

Thus, Shinjin is the characteristic of the heart and mind of a person who entrusts himself or herself to the primal vows of Amida. As Shinjin is the heart and mind of Amida, it can not be defeated nor broken and, therefore, is likened to a diamond. When the diamond-like Shinjin is received by us from Amida without any single thought of doubt, we are grasped to be never abandoned (*sesshu fusha*) by the embrace of the compassionate power of Amida's vows, and enter into the company of truly assured, with no retrogressions, in the present life.

It should be noted, however, that even when Shinjin is settled, the defiled and tainted mind of passion-ridden beings will not disappear, and our human condition as *bombu*, i.e., foolish ones with evil passions, remains unchanged. The nature of Amida itself is the mind which is absolutely true, sincere, and pure. It becomes Shinjin in our minds which are defiled and tainted. This means that the true mind of Amida mediates through our minds in Shinjin where we still remain as *bombu*. Thus, we can in no way claim to be superior in any way even when we receive Shinjin from Amida.

As Shinjin is awakened in us, our defiled and tainted mind receives the mind of Amida that is true, real, and sincere, whereby the mind of Amida and the mind of a foolish being become one. This means that the two completely opposite minds become one. It is like many different small rivers, even if they are polluted, once they enter into the great ocean of the primal vows of Amida, become one in the same salty taste with that of the great

ocean. The small polluted rivers, however, will remain just as they are. The following are the Hymns that Shinran wrote (more specifically, Hymns of the Pure Land Masters #42 and Hymns of the Dharma-Ages #40, respectively) to reveal the state of mind in Shinjin:

Rivers of blind passions, on entering the ocean –
The great, compassionate Vow
Of unhindered light filling the ten quarters –
Become one in taste with that sea of wisdom.

When the waters – the minds, good and evil,
of foolish beings –
Have entered the vast ocean
Of Amida's Vow of wisdom, they are immediately
Transformed into the mind of great compassion.

As Shinjin is aroused, the defiled mind of a foolish being is transformed by the compassionate power of Amida into the good mind of the Buddha whereby things can be seen as they really are by the true wisdom of Amida. With the true wisdom of Amida, even what we think is the highest good deed is still tainted with our egoism and self-centeredness. It is often said that the brighter the light, the sharper the shadow. This is the deep awareness as revealed in the teaching of Shinran that the true reality of our human condition is nothing but evil, but, at the same time, even such foolish beings are embraced by the great compassion of the vow power of Amida for unconditional salvation, just as they are, in spite of their evil passions. This can be called the promise of the boundless compassion of Amida Buddha or the cosmic will to save all sentient beings universally.

When such absolute compassion of Amida is made known to us, we become shameful, but, at the same time, grateful for the all-embracing compassion of Amida to bring even the most evil person into salvation without any particular conditions imposed. This is the core of Shinjin realization. Shinran was deeply moved by this realization as he firmly believed in that he was the most evil person based on his deep insight into the true nature of self and, therefore, hell was decidedly the only abode for him. The teaching of Shinran gives hope and joy for all ordinary beings like us who are incapable of removing our evil passions through our own efforts because salvation does not lie in ourselves but in the Other Power of Amida who embraces all. Out of joy, we are prompted to recite the Nembutsu as an expression of our gratitude for the salvation that has already taken place.

In *Shoshinge*, which is the Hymn of True Shinjin and the Nembutsu, Shinran clearly states the awareness of his Shinjin realization as follows:

When the one thought-moment of joy arises
Nirvana is attained without severing blind passions
When ignorant and wise, even grave offenders and slanders of the dharma,
all alike turn about and enter shinjin
They are like waters that, on entering the ocean, become one in taste with it.

It is a profound statement by Shinran that Nirvana is attained without severing blind passions. It goes against the traditional teaching of Buddhism that Nirvana can only be attained if and when blind passions are removed from making the strenuous self-power efforts in monastic life that ordinary people can hardly make.

Conclusion

In summary, Shinjin is the root cause for salvation for all. It is given by Amida as a gift, unilaterally, without expecting anything in return from those saved. There exists no trade-off in this relationship.

Although the all-embracing salvation by Amida has already taken place, it should be noted that Jodo Shinshu is certainly not a 'do-nothing' religion nor 'other-worldly.' We will need to clearly understand through our deep hearing of the Buddha Dharma why the primal vows of Amida have been made and fulfilled. This is because the true reality of human condition as nothing but evil and foolish is thoroughly seen by Amida Buddha with his true wisdom. Also, it is the true compassion of Amida that embraces us for unconditional salvation despite our delusions and ignorance.

Given the ultimate reality that we cannot live without such infinite light and eternal life from Other Power, all we have to do is to just receive the wisdom-compassionate power from Amida with gratitude, and work for others in the path of the Nembutsu. By so doing, can we realize the Bodhisattva ideal of Mahayana Buddhism and live positively in this world, thus not only benefiting ourselves but for benefiting others also (jiri rita). This is what the life of Shinjin is all about, and what the goal of Mahayana Buddhism really means to us.

Reference

"The Collected Works of Shinran" (Volumes I & II) by Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha.