

INTRODUCTION

If one truly studies, he will come to see even more clearly the true intention of the Buddha, realizing the limitlessness of the compassionate Vow; and he will teach those who are unsure of being born in the Buddha Land because of their lowly station that the Primal Vow does not discriminate between the good and bad, the pure and impure. Only then does he deserve to be called a scholar.-----

Tannisho, Chapter XII

I

At the heart of all religion is the "religious experience", that experience in which the Absolute becomes a realized presence or force in the life of the individual. This meeting, as it were, of the Absolute and a finite being, causes the individual to see his self, in a different light, that is, in light of or in relation to the Absolute; this changes the individual's perception of his world and the role he and the Absolute play in it. The religious experience, then, is an existential experience, rooted and confirmed in the very life of the individual. Also, the religious experience is a transforming experience, and this and its existential, self-confirming nature are what !!! distinguish it from philosophy, metaphysics and psychology. !!!

It is this transforming experience, of course, that the religious seeker, regardless of tradition, is after. !!! The religious quest is undeniably the attempt to get the Absolute into our lives !!! and, hopefully, to put to rest those human questions of pain, suffering, and mortality. The ways in which we attempt to do this are as numerous as there are seekers, but for most of us this means to include turning to the words of teachers. Other traditions notwithstanding, transmittal of the teaching in Buddhism, either spoken or written, holds the inherent and inevitable dangers of misunderstanding and confusion; !!! for the Truth of the Dharma is not intellectual, not the result of logic, but is rather outside of the mental process altogether. !!! In other words, the Dharma cannot be reduced to words; !!! nevertheless, language and logic, being the major tools of man, seem to be the most reasonable, if not the only, mutual medium of exchange. !!! So, even at best, transmittal, in the sense of transferring the Truth of the teaching from one person to another is simply not possible; the only tool of transfer available, as it turns out, is the weakest link in any such attempt.

[I usually say that we as human beings cannot speak Truth, but only words ABOUT Truth-the capital "T" Absolute kind of Truth. ed]

One approach to this dilemma has been, therefore, to turn the power of the intellect upon itself in hopes of revealing to it that it, itself, is the cause of its own suffering. In this regard, we are taught that the mind views the universe from a dualistic point of view. First and foremost, it posits a self, a separate, unchanging entity, which is, for all intents and purposes, the center of the universe. It separates, classifies and isolates what it experiences into good and bad, right and wrong and all the variations in between and attempts to impose these distinctions on the world around it, in order to support and sustain its image of the self. !!! This dualistic point of view, self over here and all else over there, distorts the true nature of existence, which is not static, but fluid and inter-related in nature, !!! constantly changing from good to bad, right to wrong, to good and bad, right and wrong, separately and all at one and the same time. And the attempt to hold this flow still, the attempt to posit permanence where ALL is impermanent, is an attempt to distort what actually is. !!! It is this very activity of

trying to resist the natural flow of life that causes the existential friction we recognize as suffering, pain, and sorrow. !!!

But as clear as that message may be understood, it is, nonetheless, a product of the intellect. And in the everyday living of our lives, the confusion and suffering remain, just as it did in the Buddha's time, just as it did in Shinran's, as it does today and as it will in the future, is an inherent part of the human condition, a peculiarly human dilemma. !!! Whether we are still struggling for our own salvation or have received the gift of SHINJIN, our efforts to clarify our understanding of the Dharma and transmit it to others is, at best, only a finger pointing at the moon; ultimately, each individual must personally know the Truth in his own heart, and until that occurs the confusion and suffering will remain for that person. !!! Nevertheless, the effort to clear the confusion for one's self and to assist others in doing so is a worthwhile and significant undertaking, not only because this effort seems inherently connected with one's own salvation, but because this kind of effort is undeniably aligned with the ultimate goal of Buddhism, that is, salvation of all beings. It is in this spirit that this volume is given.

At the center of Jodo Shinshu is the experience we call SHINJIN. SHINJIN is the meeting or the coming together of the individual and Amida (the Absolute); this coming together is the transforming, religious experience that defines Shin Buddhism. Most present day explanations of SHINJIN include the notion of self-reflection. An ordinary understanding would be that SHINJIN is that which we are aiming at as Shin Buddhists and self-reflection is the process that somehow leads us in the direction of SHINJIN. But although these notions are central to a clear understanding [intellectual understanding, ed.] and appreciation of Jodo Shinshu, they seem to remain significantly elusive and create considerable confusion. One reason for this seems to lie in the perennial problem of translation; but, more at the heart of the problem, in my mind, is our natural tendency to separate SHINJIN from self-reflection, when, in fact, they are one and the same.

With regards to translation, we are dependent upon the scholars. [I don't agree here, there are lay teachers available who can help one awaken to the core of the Jodo Shinshu religious experience (SHINJIN), yet are not scholars in the traditional sense of the word, ed.] The alternatives seem to include a translation of the term into the receiving language, in this case replacing SHINJIN with its English equivalent; [of which it is none, really. ed] or the introduction of the (foreign) term into the receiving language, that is making a new word that people come to understand, as it is. In the case of SHINJIN, I believe the latter alternative may be best. To date, the most common translation of SHINJIN contains or is limited to the word faith. In a Christian culture this translation tends to invite much misunderstanding. Rev Taitetsu Unno notes "In general Buddhism, faith is basically a trust in the Buddha's teachings as the first step on the path to enlightenment. In some other religions, faith is a belief in God, heaven or hell. In all such cases, faith is considered from the standpoint of men, self-enclosed and unconsciously affirming some kind of fixation."

First, in the broader view, Buddhism is ultimately self-confirming, a teaching verified by the individual, in the context of his own life. Therefore, faith or trust in the word of another can be seen only as preliminary or helpful, but in no way as the culmination of spiritual efforts. It must be remembered, too, that the Shin teaching is for those incapable of successfully performing any spiritual practices; that is central to the teaching and precludes the possibility of true faith on the part of the average man in any event. [I disagree again here, Amida is open to one who practices as well! ed] Furthermore, in the instances above, faith is man-centered. This kind of faith is clearly not SHINJIN, for the source of SHINJIN is Amida, not man. For the purpose of this presentation, then, I would prefer to avoid any "equivocal" English term for "SHINJIN" and instead direct our efforts at understanding what SHINJIN is and thereby allow it to come alive for us, as it is.

Like all other Buddhist notions, it is important to understand that SHINJIN is not static, not a fixed idea or concept. SHINJIN is a process, a

dynamic, never ending flow, participated in by and enfolding the person of SHINJIN. Thus, in the discussions below, any appearances or implication of fixed orders or relationships should be discounted as necessary for the structure of the explanation, but not taken as accurate as to the essence of the SHINJIN experience. Shinjin is a living process, unique to each individual, manifesting its overlapping, interrelated and simultaneously occurring aspects as each individual's life unfolds.

With this in mind, it can be said that the religious experience of SHINJIN has a dual nature. Or, put another way, SHINJIN manifests, or has two aspects, much the same as a coin has two sides; these aspects can be characterized loosely as the intellectual and the emotional. Generally speaking, these aspects can be explained as referring to insight into or understanding of the self (intellectual) [the True Self, ed] and trust or the entrusting of the self to the Dharma or Amida (emotional). SHINJIN is not one or the other of these, but necessarily and simultaneously both. Shinran clearly shows this in the KYOGYOSHINSHO, quoting Zendo's SANZEN GI:

The Deep Mind is the mind of Deep Faith. It has, again, two aspects
The first is that which believes deeply and determinedly that we are really sinful, ordinary, beings, fettered to Birth-and-Death, continuously drowning and transmigrating (insight into or understanding of the self) ...The second is that which believes deeply and determinedly that the Forty-Eight Vows of Amida Buddha embrace the sentient beings, enabling those who trust His Vow-Power... to attain Birth

(trust or entrusting of the self to Amida)

Rev Taitetsu Unno describes this dual nature with the term "true-entrusting".

SHINJIN refers, first of all, to the mind and heart of Amida Buddha. When this (mind and heart) enters our minds and hearts, it enables us to entrust ourselves to the Other Power freeing us from ourselves. It is the final goal on the path, an awakening of the nature of self and Buddha.

He further states that " `true' " denotes the mind and heart of the Buddha; and `entrusting' refers to the mind of the Buddha working in the mind of a foolish being."

The impression of both of these explanations give us is of a process of understanding or insight that gives way to or allows for trust. That is, it appears that the process of SHINJIN is one of understanding of the true nature of the self AND understanding of the true nature of Amida, which leads to the self entrusting itself, opening itself, to Amidas heart and mind, which then works within the self. This understanding is ultimately misleading, because it leaves the definite impression that there are two distinct aspects, one leading to the other, when in fact, they are one and the same: [duality again! ed] deep understanding IS entrusting and I believe this can be seen if we look closely at the notion of self-examination, which, as noted earlier, I believe to be, ultimately, one and the same.

In the quote above, Zendo mentions understanding of the self and understanding of Amida; these two represent the two aspects of SHINJIN. Professor Unno, too, while clarifying the entrusting aspect of SHINJIN, makes specific reference to an "awakening to" (the understanding of) self AND the Buddha. He clearly states that this "awakening to the nature of self and Buddha" is the "final goal", that is to say, is SHINJIN. What this means, of course, is that the process of understanding of the self and Buddha is the same as the process of SHINJIN, which manifests in our life experience both intellectually and emotionally as deep understanding and entrusting. The fact that the entrusting aspect is not mentioned is, I believe, because it is unquestioningly understood to be a part of this process of deep understanding of the self and Buddha. The point of connection I would like to clarify here

is that this process of understanding the self and Buddha, established above as the heart of SHINJIN, is also one and the same with what we commonly refer to as self-examination. [Heard with certain reservations--ed.] And furthermore, if we look closely at what is meant by self examination, it will become clear that deep understanding and entrusting are in fact one and the same.

Self examination is the process of coming to see th self as it really is, not as what we think it is, not as what we would like or want it to be. Seeing the self for what it really is, is to understand that iss essence is impermanence. As noted earlier, no Buddhist term or concept refers to or represents a fixed entity. The self, like all else, is impermanent, is in a constant state of flux and flow and not static, fixed or constant as we would like. The true nature of the Dharma, the true nature of Amida is also impermanence. So, to come to know the self as it really is, is to come to know the self as one and the same with Amida; this is what is meant by self-reflection (examination) in Amida's light, a process of examining the nature of the self in light of our understanding of the teaching.

As our understanding of the teaching deepens, our understanding fo the true nature of the self deepens, for the truth of the Dharma includes all existence. What occurs is a process of detachment from our deluded, self-centered view of the staff (as different from the rest of existence, as good opposed to bad, as permanent, unique, etc.), and a deepening understanding of the nature of the self as it truly is (neutral, changing, good and bad, and essentially impermanent). A clearing of the confusion caused by this deluded view occurs simultaneously with our deepening understanding of or insight into the Dharma. Our self, once seen from a deluded perspective, comes to be seen as being filled with the Dharma; that is to say that our self becoming emptied of deluded views, simultaneously opens to the real truth of its essence, hence entrusting itself to the "mind and heart of the Buddha:", which works "in the mind of a foolish being". This is SHINJIN, this is "complete entrusting to the Buddha as the ultimate liberation from attachment to a fixed self."

In summation, SHINJIN is not soemthing we do not have and then somehow get, but is an existing, on going process that we awaken to; SHINJIN is the process of awakening to what as already been the true nature of the self. The person of SHINJIN experiences a deep understanding of the true nature of the self and of all of existence simultaneously, as his life unfolds, and thereby entrustes his life to life itself. Even though this process of awakening is ultimately a gift to us from Amida, we ordinary beings think we must pursue it with our own efforts, and, in fact due to our deluded views, we cannot help ourselves in this regard; it is impossible for us not to pursue awakening.

Jerry Bolick

[Ed comments by Tom Manship]