

Spring Ohigan Seminar (OCBC, March 16, 2024)

The Core Issue in Shinran's Teaching

—The Differences between the Two Types of Obstacles: “the Passions-Obstacles” and “the Dualistic-Thinking Obstacle”—

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PART ONE

The Two Types of Buddhism and the Two Types of Obstacles

I. The Two Cars and the Two Types of Problems

A. Two Cars: the Car A and the Car B

B. The Two Different Types of Problems Possessed by the Two Cars: the First Car Sees a Problem in the Trailer and the Second Car Sees a Problem in the Tractor.

- 1. The problems of the first car: “the problems in the trailer”**
- 2. The problem of the second car: “The problem in the tractor”**

II. The Two Types of Buddhism (or the Two Types of Cars) and The Two Types of Obstacles (or Problems)

A. The Two Types of Buddhism: “Dualistic Buddhism” and “Non-dualistic Buddhism”

- 1. “Dualistic Buddhism” that is based on dualistic thinking: Shinran followed this Buddhism from his age 9 to 31 (?). Generally speaking, the Hinayana Buddhism belongs to this Buddhism. Shinran called this Buddhism “Provisional Buddhism” or “Buddhism of self-power.” Zen masters call this Buddhism “Hinayana Zen.”**
- 2. “Non-dualistic Buddhism” that is based on the Buddha's non-dualistic wisdom: Shinran followed this Buddhism from his age 31 (?) to 90. Generally speaking, the Mahayana Buddhism belongs to this Buddhism. Shinran called this Buddhism “True Buddhism (Shinshu)” or “Buddhism of the Other Power.” Zen masters call this Buddhism “Mahayana Zen” or “Tathagata Zen.”**

B. The Two Types of Obstacles (or Problems)

1. **“The problem in the trailer (or in the body)”**: “The passions-obstacles (*klesa-avarana*)”—passions, such as greed, anger, ignorance, doubt, and conceit. These passions are connected with the body. These obstacles accompany our life; they are inherent. Although we can easily identify these obstacles as a problem, we cannot easily destroy them. They are like lotus roots that have many fine fibers, which are difficult to cut.
2. **“The problem in the tractor (or in the mind)”**: “The dualistic-thinking obstacle” or “to-be-known obstacle” (*jneya-avarana*)—views, such as a dualistic view, a prejudiced view, and a taboo-based view. This obstacle is connected with the mind. We acquire this obstacle after our births. Although we cannot easily identify this obstacle as a problem, we can cut it easily. It is like a roof tile that we can easily break.

C. The Two Types of Buddhism Deal with the Two Different Types of Obstacles.

1. **“Dualistic Buddhism” deals with “the passions-obstacles”—“the problem in the trailer (or in the body).”**
 - a. The follower of this Buddhism does not doubt his mind, the upward direction of the tractor (i.e., “dualistic thinking”); he believes that he is going the right direction.
 - b. He discovers a problem in the trailer, or in the body (i.e., “the passions-obstacles”). Since he believes that passions are the cause of suffering, he attempts to eliminate them and realize peace and happiness.
2. **“Non-dualistic Buddhism” deals with “the dualistic-thinking obstacle”—“the problem in the tractor.”**
 - a. The follower of this Buddhism doubts his mind, the upward direction of the tractor (i.e., “dualistic thinking”); he realizes that he is going the wrong way.
 - b. He sees a problem in the tractor (i.e., the dualistic-thinking obstacle, or the mind obstacle). He believes that his attachment to dualistic thinking is the cause of suffering. Thus, he deals with the mind obstacle. By hearing the words of his teacher, he makes a U-turn. When dualistic thinking is replaced with the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom, he returns to his original direction.

PART TWO

Shinran's View of Human Liberation

I. The Three-Vow Fulfillment Passage

The following eight-line passage is the most important doctrinal basis of Shinran. This passage is found at the beginning of the second volume of the *Larger Sutra*. It talks about the fulfillment of the Three (i.e., the 17th, 18th, and 11th) Vows. Shinran read this passage in a unique way ignoring its traditional reading. (For traditional reading of this passage, see *Collected Works of Shinran* [hereafter abbreviated as *CWS*], p. 474, footnote)

In this passage, Shakyamuni says that all historical teachers are now calling the Name (or praising the virtues) of Amida Buddha. Having heard the Name being praised by historical teachers, we, all sentient beings, can experience shinjin (deep spiritual awakening) and joy. All of this takes place because Amida Buddha (i.e., a symbol of the Ultimate Truth) has transferred his virtues (among which the Buddha's non-dualistic wisdom is the most important) to us in the historical context. When we aspire to be born in the Pure Land, we are immediately born there and attain the stage called "nonretrogression" (i.e., the stage that assures our eventual attainment of Buddhahood). The passage is as follows:

(Text)

[Fulfillment of the 17th Vow]

All Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters, countless as the sands of the Ganges, are praising the inconceivable and majestic virtues of the Buddha of immeasurable life.

[Fulfillment of the 18th and 11th Vows]

When all sentient beings hear the Name [that is being said by all Buddhas in the ten quarters], they experience even one moment of shinjin and joy. Amida directs his virtues to all sentient beings from his sincere mind. Being commanded to aspire to be born in the Pure Land, they immediately attain birth there. They dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.

(Tr. by N. Haneda. Cf. *CWS*, pp. 154, 474-6.)

A. The Fulfillment of the 17th Vow (i.e., Appearance of the Big Car and Its Driver's Calling Voice)

(Text)

All Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters, countless as the sands of the Ganges, are praising the inconceivable and majestic virtues of the Buddha of immeasurable life... Amida directs his virtues [or the Name] to all sentient beings from his sincere mind.

1. **“All Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters, countless as the sands of the Ganges”**: Shinran understands this as appearance of historical teachers, such as Shakyamuni and Honen.
2. **“... are praising the inconceivable and majestic virtues of the Buddha of immeasurable life”**: Shinran understands this as realization of the Name—a calling voice from Amida (i.e., historical teachers), saying, “Take refuge in limitless light (or the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom)!”
3. **“Amida directs his virtues [or the Name] to all sentient beings from his sincere mind”**: Shinran understands this as Amida’s giving the Name (i.e., the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom) to all of us for our liberation.

B. The Fulfillment of the 18th Vow (i.e., Meeting the Big Car, Hearing the Calling Voice, and Making a U-turn)

(Text)

When all sentient beings hear the Name [that is being said by all Buddhas in the ten quarters], they experience even one moment of shinjin and joy.

1. **“When all sentient beings hearing the Name [that is being said by all Buddhas in the ten quarters”**: According to Shinran, this describes the importance of meeting with a historical teacher who embodies the Name (i.e., the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom). It also describes the importance of hearing (or understanding) the meaning of the Name as an expression of the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom.
 - a. “All sentient beings”: This refers to all of us, deluded human beings.
 - b. Shinran says that shinjin (awakening) is realized only through the supportive power of the Tathagatas (i.e., historical teachers)—through meeting them.

The genuine difficulty is realizing true and real *shingyo* (or shinjin). Why? Because this realization takes place through the Tathagata’s supportive power; because it comes about wholly through the power of great compassion and all-embracing wisdom. (*CWS*, pp. 79-80)
 - c. Shinran emphasizes the importance of hearing the teacher’s words (or the Name) that contains the Buddha’s wisdom. He says that we attain shinjin by hearing the Name alone. (*CWS*, pp. 111-112)
2. **“...they experience even one moment of shinjin and joy”**: This means that shinjin (awakening) takes place in a moment and it is accompanied by joy.
 - a. The shinjin experience means birth of the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom in us. It means that our spiritual basis changes from dualistic thinking to the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom. (The initial tractor that is going upward is replaced by a new tractor that is going downward.)
 - b. Having been challenged by the calling voice of the driver of the Big Car, we awaken shinjin, the Buddha’s wisdom—the wisdom that we never thought we

could have. Shinjin is the original self that we had when we were small children. So birth of shinjin means regaining our original self that we have forgotten for a long time.

- c. Shinjin (awakening) takes place in a moment: In a moment we recognize the mistake of having been attached to dualistic thinking and make a U-turn into the new direction. This instantaneous attainment is different from the attainment that dualistic Buddhism teaches, which we reach through our gradual practice of self-improvement.
- d. Shinjin (awakening) is the most important thing in Shinran's teaching.

C. The Fulfillment of the 11th Vow (i.e., Returning to Original Suchness or Naturalness)

(Text)

Being commanded to aspire to be born in the Pure Land, they immediately attain birth there. They dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.

1. **“Being commanded to aspire to be born in the Pure Land”**: Shinran says that the power of the Name makes sentient beings aspire for birth in the Pure Land.
2. **“They immediately attain birth there”**: Shinran interprets this as attaining birth in the Pure Land here and now at the moment of shinjin (awakening). The moment we awaken shinjin, we are immediately born in the sphere of the Buddha's non-dualistic wisdom.
3. **“They dwell in the stage of nonretrogression”**: Shinran believes that attaining shinjin, attaining birth in the Pure Land, and attaining the stage of nonretrogression are all synonymous. They refer to the death of the old self and birth of the new (i.e., true) self. They all mark the true beginning of human life; they mean putting an end to our deluded way of living and starting the new life of a constant and dynamic seeker.
 - a. The birth in the Pure Land means becoming a participant in the true Sangha (or true Buddhist tradition) where we meet many wonderful teachers and Dharma friends.
 - b. Because we meet many wonderful teachers and Dharma friends who are passionately seeking the Dharma in the Pure Land, we are deeply influenced by their dynamic spirit and cannot help becoming passionate seekers of the Dharma, which “attaining the stage of nonretrogression” means.
4. **Because the shinjin person receives the Buddha's non-dualistic wisdom (that transforms the negative [i.e., the passions-obstacles] into the positive [i.e., virtues]), he lives his life in a meaningful way; all negative things become indispensable conditions for the fulfillment of his life.**
 - a. Shinran's view that the passions-obstacles will never disappear until the moment of our death.

Our desires are countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves. (*CWS*, p. 488)

b. Shinran's view that although the passions-obstacles do not disappear until the moment of our death, the Buddha's non-dualistic wisdom transforms the passions-obstacles into virtues.

i. Shinran's view that the Name (i.e., the Buddha's wisdom) transforms evil [passions] into virtues:

The auspicious Name embodying the perfectly fulfilled supreme virtues is true wisdom that transforms our evil into virtue. (*CWS*, p. 3)

ii. His verses describing the Buddha's non-dualistic wisdom that transforms passions into virtues

Through the benefit of the unhindered light [i.e., the Buddha's non-dualistic wisdom],

We realize shinjin of vast, majestic virtues,
And the ice of our blind passions necessarily melts,
Immediately becoming water of enlightenment.

Obstructions of karmic evil turn 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.

The ocean of inconceivable Name [i.e., the Buddha's non-dualistic wisdom] does not hold unchanged

The corpses of the five grave offenses and slander of the dharma;
The myriad rivers of evil acts, on entering it,
Become one in taste with the ocean of water of virtues.

Rivers of blind passions, on entering the ocean—
The great, compassionate Aspiration [or Vow]
Of unhindered light filling the ten quarters—
Becoming one in taste with that sea of wisdom.

(*CWS*, p. 371, with modification by N. Haneda)

5. The person who has attained shinjin, the true beginning, has the true ending of his life. He lives a very powerful and meaningful life, being full of joy and gratitude, and fulfills his life when he dies. This ending is called "becoming a Buddha," "attaining Buddhahood," "attaining nirvana (or parinirvana)," or "attaining Amida Buddhahood."

Because sentient beings of the nembutsu have perfectly realized the diamondlike mind [i.e., shinjin] of crosswise transcendence, they transcend and realize great, complete nirvana on the eve of the moment of death. (*CWS*, p. 123)

II. Conclusion

A. Shin Buddhism: A Teaching about the Transition from the Small World of Dualistic Thinking to the Vast World of the Buddha's Non-dualistic Wisdom

B. Shinran's Exclusive Emphasis on the Importance of Turning from the Dualistic Mind (i.e., the Upward Tractor) to the Buddha's Non-dualistic Mind (i.e., the Downward Tractor)