

Shin Buddhism

At the heart of the Shin Buddhist teaching lies a vision of true reality as alive with wisdom and compassion, working to bring all beings to the highest fulfillment of human life, the attainment of Buddhahood.

Shinran teaches that this activity manifests itself as Amida Buddha, who resolved to save all beings by bringing into his Pure Land, the realm of enlightenment, all who say his Name, entrusting themselves to his Vow. He thus performed practices for long eons and fulfilled this Vow, so that his Name, *Namu Amida Butsu*, came to resound throughout the universe, awakening all beings to the reality of great compassion.

Saying the Name results in birth into the Pure Land, not because it is a good act that people perform, but because it is the activity of Amida Buddha himself giving the virtues of his own practice to them. Shinran therefore stresses that genuine nembutsu arises naturally and spontaneously from the Buddha's mind that unfolds itself in us and transforms our minds into wisdom and compassion.

As long as we perform religious practices or say the nembutsu contriving to achieve Buddhahood, our acts are based on attachment to our own goodness. In fact, we constantly cling to imagined selves that we take to be permanent and real, seeking to enhance and protect ourselves by erecting barriers against all that we see as standing apart. Thus arise the feelings that poison ordinary life - desire, envy, anger, fear. Acts rooted in such anxiety and self-attachment can only lead to further pain.

A mind of true sincerity and authentic trust arises when we genuinely hear and are grasped by Amida's Primal Vow, and realize that our own designs are futile and unnecessary. Seeing ourselves with the Buddha's wisdom, we perceive for the first time that all our acts arise from egocentric passions. Nevertheless, this is at the same time to know that Amida's light and life pervade our existence just as we are.

When karmic bonds to this life end with death, people of the nembutsu go to the Pure Land. But with their fulfillment of perfect wisdom-compassion, they return immediately to this world in the dynamic activity of bringing all beings to awakening.

The following passages, although brief, reveal the essential elements of Shinran's religious awakening: the realization of the Buddha's wisdom-compassion working in one's existence in the immediate present, coupled with insight into the actual nature of the bound and ignorant self.

Words of Shinran

"Saved by the inconceivable working of Amida's Vow, I shall realize birth in the Pure Land": the moment you entrust yourself thus to the Vow, so that the mind set upon saying the nembutsu arises within you, you are immediately brought to share in the benefit of being grasped, never to be abandoned.

Know that the Primal Vow of Amida makes no distinction between people young and old, good and evil; only shinjin is essential. For it is the Vow to save the person whose karmic evil is deep and grave and whose blind passions abound. Thus, for those who entrust themselves to the Primal Vow no good acts are required, because no good surpasses the nembutsu. Nor need they despair of the evil they commit, for no evil can obstruct the working of Amida's Primal Vow.

Tannisho, 1

Even a good person attains birth in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that an evil person will.

Though it is so, people commonly say, "Even an evil person attains birth, so it goes without saying that a good person will." This statement may seem well-founded at first, but it runs counter to the intent of the Primal Vow, which is Other Power. This is because people who rely on doing good through their self-power fail to entrust themselves wholeheartedly to Other Power and therefore are not in accord with Amida's Primal Vow, but when they overturn the mind of self-power and entrust themselves to Other Power, they will attain birth in the true and real fulfilled land.

It is impossible for us, who are possessed of blind passions, to free ourselves from birth-and-death through any practice whatever. Sorrowing at this, Amida made the Vow, the essential intent of which is the evil person's attainment of Buddhahood. Hence, evil persons who entrust themselves to Other Power are precisely the ones who possess the true cause of birth.

Accordingly he said, "Even the good person is born in the Pure Land, so without question is the person who is evil."

Tannisho, 3

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