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A Very Brief Introduction to Shin Buddhism

Once, the story goes, in old Japan, a troupe of actors succeeded in training a monkey to the point that the monkey was able to play the role ordinarily acted by a human being.

The monkey became so believable, the audience would greet his performance with shouts of approval and applause. One day, a mischievous onlooker in the front row threw some peanuts onto the stage, whereas to everyone's great surprise, the monkey . . . who up to that time had been gesturing and walking upright, much like a human being . . . all of a sudden scampered toward the peanuts and sitting on his haunches, and shoved the peanuts into this mouth.

This story is told here to illustrate a key point in **Shinran's Shin Buddhism**. Namely, that one cannot change one's true and basic nature, which is often covered over by the appearance, e.g., or egolessness or its counterpart, compassion for other beings.

Buddhism is fundamentally not an "ism" but a form of practice. Thus Theravadins (of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, etc.) attempt to attain the ultimate goal of egolessness by first, stopping all distracting thoughts and then, by going inward and seeing that there are all sorts, e.g., of thoughts but that there is no "Thinker" having these thoughts.

Zen Buddhists attempt to achieve that same state by simply sitting in meditation (*shikan taza*) and letting thoughts and emotions arise and disappear, much like the bubbles in a cup of 7-Up. Or they struggle with questions or problems that cannot be resolved by one's thinking mind. Upon reaching the point of absolute exhaustion, the Zennist abruptly breaks through to a state of egolessness, in which all such conundrums are spontaneously resolved.

Now, **Shinran Shonin** (*Shonin* simply means "a holy being"), the Founder of Shin Buddhism, sat in meditation for 20 years, specifically in the Tendai tradition, which inculcates many features from both the Theravada and Zen traditions; i.e. there are distinct similarities between and among these traditions.

Shinran Shonin's conclusion after 20-years of arduous meditative practice was very simple: That is, he concluded that (for him, not necessarily others) the outward appearance of egolessness and compassion was a distinct possibility, but inwardly, the hard core of his egocentricity and the concomitant lack of not seeming but true compassion remained unaffected, untouched and unchanged.

It was at this critical point that he sought his refuge in a ***Power Other than His Own Ability or Power to Save Himself***. That *Power* is known in Shin Buddhism, as **Tariki** in Japanese, and **Other Power** in translation. That *Power* emanates from a salvific Wisdom and Compassion that is Absolute and Infinite that is known as Amida Buddha.

In the spirit of the Shakyamuni Buddha and of his Dharma, Buddhism itself, Shin Buddhism offers itself to all beings, who, in the search for salvation and enlightenment, find themselves in the same predicament as Shinran. On the other hand, those who possess that potentiality to attain full Enlightenment on their own are encouraged to follow their respective Paths.

Gassho,
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