

Jōdo Shinshū: A Total Life Process

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INTRODUCTION

The message of Jōdo Shinshū in the 21st century will touch the minds and hearts of countless persons in all walks of life. Jōdo Shinshū, the life of *shinjin-nembutsu* [serene faith and oral recitation of Amida's Name in gratitude] endowed by Amida Buddha, will be a religious force which will change the course and influence the various religious movements in the English-speaking world.

The reason is simple. Jōdo Shinshū teaches the equality of all sentient beings within the Great Compassion.¹ The Great Compassion is the Buddha of infinite light-life, wisdom-compassion, enlightenment-truth itself, or as we know it, Amida. This Great Compassion prevades all life regardless of their circumstances.

The 21st century, as it is even today, will be a time of complexity and change in which many will feel the frustration and dehumanization of the human mind and spirit. The vast majority of humanity, caught in the secular problems and issues of everyday living and bound to the ties of their self-imposed responsibilities, will not have the energy, will, and circumstances to follow strict religious practices and precepts, or to deal with religious traditions that fragment their lives. They will seek meaning for their lives in a teaching that gives them a sense of individuality-universalism within their daily lay-oriented life setting. If they turn to Buddhism, they will find Jōdo Shinshū, which is a lay-oriented Buddhist tradition within the concept of "Oneness of Buddha and the Person" (*butsubon ittai*).

THE PROBLEM

To assure the future of Jōdo Shinshū in the English speaking world, it is critical to formulate an educational process of discovery, and to clarify how the Great Compassion works within the life process of the individual's everyday life experience.

Within the Western context, how is the doctrine of "Oneness of Buddha and the Person" possible? To clarify the inter-relationship of the two, we have in the past approached the issue from the Buddha's side, mainly the doctrinal view of how the Buddha's mind expands the person's mind. The virtues of the Buddha were emphasized and doctrinally explained.

Here we need to make sure that the doctrinal explanation does not minimize the serious study from the person's side.

What we must do, within the Western context, is to clearly show how the person's mind is expanded by the Buddha's mind through its everyday lay-oriented life process. In the past, we have been reluctant to consider how the life process of the person and the Primal Vow interacts. Persons live in a world of constant process, Buddhistically speaking as a world of "change."

We must come to the realization that Truth does not diminish because it works within the life process of an individual. Rather, Truth's ultimate virtue is affirmed within the life process of the human condition.

It is critical that we establish a process of study from the above perspective. We would call it Jōdo Shinshū Religious Education Studies. The

task of the study is to see how the Primal Vow through the endowed *shinjin* inter-relates with a person in his/her process.

Can Jōdo Shinshū be taught by showing the relationship of the Buddha and a person by taking into account the life process of the human experience and have one become awakened to one's true inter-relationship? The task is to find a point of reference within the call of Amida, through the endowed *shinjin*, and the life experience of the person. The point of reference or common ground must come forth from the meaning of *shinjin*, yet, that meaning must inter-relate with the life process of the individual's varied life experiences and give it meaning.

In this paper, it is my intent to show that relationship with the introduction of the Six Aspects.²

The Six Aspects is a basic description of the content or characteristics of the one-mind of *shinjin* originating from Amida Buddha—enlightenment-truth, wisdom-compassion, and infinite light-infinite life. These aspects are: Expanding, Self-reflection, Great Compassion, Great Joy, Gratitude, and Life of Meaning and Growth. These six aspects provide a process whereby the focus is neither exclusively on the Buddha's mind, nor solely on the mind of the individual. It thereby is a process by which one is able to overcome the limitations of the traditional study of Jōdo Shinshū doctrine, as well as the person-centered disciplines.

The Six Aspects clarifies the inter-relationship of the Buddha's Mind and the life of the individual. That inter-relationship is expressed as the embrace of Great Compassion and is manifested as *shinjin*. Again, it may be used as an educational device for aiding one's understanding of the central teaching of Jōdo Shinshū as it relates to the human life process. It gives a person a point of reference for one's own experiences to see how one inter-relates with the Buddha.

SUPPORTING TEXT

The Six Aspects was developed as a result of seeing the religious growth of cancer patients faced with the hopelessness of death. From these patients, a process of discovery was clearly evident as they began from despair and progressed to realize their Oneness with Amida. In searching for documentation to support the Six Aspects, we discovered countless statements which supported each aspect from the point of Shinran. One text clearly articulated the Six Aspects as a discovery or educational process. The text is the twentieth letter of the *Mattōshō*. The focus of my presentation will be on this particular text.

In the text³ we can identify each of the aspects as follows:

Expanding: "When people first begin to hear the Buddha's Vow, they wonder,

Self-reflection: having become thoroughly aware of the karmic evil in their hearts and minds, how they will ever attain birth [in the Pure Land] as they are.

Great Compassion:

To such people we teach that since we are possessed of blind passion, the Buddha receives us without judging whether our hearts are good or bad. When upon hearing this, a person's trust in the Buddha has grown deep, he comes to truly abhor such a self and to lament his continued existence in birth-and-death;" and he entrusts himself to the Vow,

Great Joy:
Gratitude:

"and he then joyfully says the name of Amida Buddha."

Life of Meaning and Growth:

"That he seeks to stop doing wrong as his heart moves him, although earlier he gave thought to such things and committed them as his mind dictated, is surely a sign of rejecting this world. Moreover, since *shinjin* which aspires for attainment of birth [in Pure Land] arises through the encouragement of Śākyamuni and Amida, once the true and real mind is made to arise in us, how can we remain with our hearts and minds as they are?"

In the above text, we can see two perspectives which help us to understand how Shinran understood the nature of *shinjin* and its development:

- (a) the two aspects of expanding and self-reflection as being a process of doubt and contrivance (*hakarai*).
- (b) the aspects of expanding and self-reflection within the Great Compassion.

In the aspect of Great Compassion, we see true expanding in the words "upon hearing this" and true self-reflection in the words "he comes to truly abhor such a self." Realizing the meaning of the True Great Compassion, there is joy, gratitude and life of meaning and growth. In other words, expansion and self-reflection arise when our lamentable condition is finally discovered in Amida's compassion. Amida's embrace is consequently experienced, with deep trust in and joyous acceptance of the compassionate Vow, all of which opens a life of gratitude, of firm understanding, and of spiritual growth.

We can see that the Six Aspects can become a practical, educational approach to the

critical problem of relating our lives to an authentic understanding of the activity of the Buddha. The Six Aspects transcends the limitations of person-centered approaches. It focuses on the inter-relationship of the individual's mind contrivance and the Buddha's Mind of universal compassion.

Let us see, then, how the Six Aspects, in relation to a person-centered discipline, can provide a better understanding of that discipline.

SIX ASPECTS AND OTHER DISCIPLINES

With the *Mattōshō*, and the Six Aspects as the point of reference let us consider other disciplines to see how Shinran's teaching actually clarifies and expands those disciplines to give greater meaning to the life process of the individual.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, in her work *On Death and Dying*, lists five stages that a dying patient experiences.⁴ They are denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The process focuses around the development of hope. From the standpoint of the Six Aspects, Kubler-Ross's process falls within the aspects of expanding and self-reflection of doubt and contrivance. She does not explicitly deal with the potential life of "hopelessness" which can be found within the stage of acceptance. Kubler-Ross does not develop or articulate the potential of the other aspects which can lead to a greater understanding of the death and dying event.

Viktor E. Frankl, who developed Logotherapy, stresses the importance of the "striving to find meaning in one's own life as the primary motivational force in life."⁵ The greatest limitation of his therapy is the matter of "existential vacuum."⁶ From the standpoint of the Six Aspects, Frankl's process falls within the initial aspects of expanding and self-reflection of doubt and contrivance. Frankl does not develop or articulate the potential of the other aspects, which can lead to a greater understanding.

Jean Piaget, in discussion of the processes of intellectual organization and adaptation, sets forth four basic concepts. They are schema, assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium.⁷ Schemata refers to cognitive structures where individuals adapt to organize their environment. In assimilation the individual attempts to fit stimuli to the cognitive structures, and accommodation is where the individual is forced to change the schema to fit the new stimuli. The balance between assimilation and accommodation is equilibrium. The problem area is "disequilibrium." From the standpoint of the Six Aspects, Piaget's process falls within the initial aspects of expanding and self-reflection of doubt and contrivance. He does not deal with the potential for the individual's need for equilibrium beyond the temporary nature of that balance. Piaget does not develop the other aspects which can give the individual a broader sense of balance in life.

John Dewey, in discussing educational concepts says: "Education has been traditionally thought as preparation, as learning and acquiring certain things because they will be useful later."⁸ Then, he refutes this traditional premise by stating, "Getting from the present the degree and kind of growth there is in it is education."⁹ How to achieve that growth in the "present" is difficult to define. Dewey falls within the initial aspects of expanding and self-reflection aspects of doubt and contrivance. Dewey does not deal with the other aspects which can open the door to potential "growth in the present."

The four disciplines above are unique in themselves, but are limited in that they explain the process from two aspects, expanding and self-reflection only. However, we find points of contact. I will use the *Mattōshō's* Six Aspects as a point of reference to show how the four disciplines relate as they developed within the cancer patients.

The aspect of expanding is found in the person having to face the reality of death. In reflecting that reality, we can see Kubler-Ross's five stages and Piaget's four concepts at work, but

the result was one of "hopelessness" and "disequilibrium." The struggle to find "growth within the present" as Dewey states was beyond the means of the patients. The patients found themselves, as Frankl states, in an "existential vacuum." In that vacuum the Great Compassion was heard and from the Buddha's mind *shinjin* was assured. The patient's experience is wholeness, joy, gratitude, and meaning. Entrusting themselves to the Buddha's Compassion, they continue to grow with each relationship and experience shared with others. In the above, we have taken the application of the four disciplines through the traumatic process of dealing with death. We must not forget that the call of the Great Compassion can be heard in the everyday application of the four disciplines.

As we study Kubler-Ross, Frankl, Piaget, and Dewey, we find the emphasis is primarily in the areas of the initial aspects of expanding and self-reflection. As to the question, of why and what before and after self-reflection much is not stated. Perhaps Frankl points to this area in describing medical ministry. He states "it lies between two realms. It, therefore is in a border area, and as such a no-man's land. And yet - what a land of promise."¹⁰

The Six Aspects gives expression to the content of *shinjin*, which is the realization and way of life that can come about in a sphere which cannot be reached by solely person-centered disciplines. It encompasses the individual's self-centered contrivance and doubt, and yet at the point of the individual's hopelessness, it clarifies the interpenetration of Great Compassion. The two spheres are shown to be inseparable. The point of their inter-relationship is *shinjin* and the life which arises from this embrace of Great Compassion is one of great joy, gratitude, and life of meaning and growth.

THE 21ST CENTURY

The 21st century will be filled with countless ethical and moral crises. Jōdo Shinshū will be

asked to define its role in each by responding to these crises.

Viewed from the *Mattōshō*'s Six Aspects, questions of morals and ethics fall into the category of doubt and contrivance within the initial aspect of expanding and self-reflection. Dewey says, "The need in morals is for the specific methods on inquiry and contrivance."¹¹ The Jōdo Shinshū position is beyond the question of ethics and morals at this point because the critical issue is one of hearing the Dharma and being awakened to *shinjin*. Within the wisdom and compassion, we are awakened to the depth of our self-centered ignorance and actions, and at the same time to the truth of the Buddhist life of interdependence.

The everyday life within *shinjin* is one of reflection and gratitude. Reflection makes us aware of the vastness of our interdependence and in that relationship we are able to live despite our limitations. At the same time there arises in us a grateful sense of responsibility to the Great Compassion within that interdependence despite our limitations.

In reflection and gratitude, we live a life in the known and unknown harmony of all life and its interdependency within the Great Compassion.

We share this teaching so that people can come to hear the call of Amida to be assured and to participate in the flow process of life which brings peace and harmony within themselves and within the world in which they live. The life of *shinjin* broadens the meaning of ethics and morals as we know it today. Shinran, in the aspect of meaning and growth in the *Mattōshō* says, "How can we remain with our minds and hearts as they were?" The task becomes one of dynamic participation in "Let there be peace in the world. Let the Buddha Dharma spread."¹²

CONCLUSION

A study of *shinjin* through the use of the Six Aspects may illuminate the essence of the

Eighteenth Vow and show how the one-mind of serene faith relates to human existence. With this understanding of the very heart of Jōdo Shinshū we can firmly establish the dynamic educational program called the Six Aspects. With it, the sincere seeker can hope to experience the *shinjin* of Amida Buddha and, with a firm understanding of the doctrine, live a meaningful life.

This natural process we experience each moment. It is real and it is personal. The experience of the Six Aspects is universal to all persons, yet personal to each person's experience. Shinran says: "When I carefully consider the Vow ... it was solely for me, Shinran, alone!"¹³ Also, any one of the six aspects can be the gate to realization; however, it will naturally embody the other five. The Six Aspects aids recognition of movement from narrow limitations to wholeness and endless growth into the infinite. The Six Aspects can be a process of education that brings individuals to the reality of "Oneness of Buddha and the Person" in the 21st century because it clarifies the meaning of "equality of all sentient beings within the Great Compassion."

FOOTNOTES

1. *Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho*, I, "Jozengi," p. 522.

2. Articles on Six Aspects. Seigen Yamaoka, *The Six Aspects of Jōdo Shinshū* (San Francisco: Buddhist Churches of America, 1982) and Hisao Inagaki, *The Six Aspects of the Shin Educational Process* (San Francisco: Buddhist Churches of America, 1987). Textual support can be found in the two publications for each aspect.

3. Yoshifumi Ueda, ed., *Letters of Shinran: A Translation of Mattōshō* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1978), pp. 61-62. SSZ, II, pp. 691-692.

4. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), pp. 38-156.

5. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), p. 154.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 167-179.

7. Barry J. Wadsworth, *Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development* (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1971), pp. 10-19.

8. John Dewey, *Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1948), p. 183.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

10. Viktor E. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* (New York: Bantam Press, 1967), p. 230.

11. John Dewey, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

12. SSZ II. "Gozokushō," p. 697.

13. SSZ II. "Tannishō," p. 792.