

FEATURE: THE PROPAGATION OF SHIN BUDDHISM OUTSIDE
OF JAPAN

Sharing The Dharma: An Overview
of Shin Propagation in the West

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Introduction

BUDDHISM, including Shin Buddhism, has never had a better opportunity in its history to share the Dharma with so many highly diverse people on all levels of the Western world, despite the strength of the underlying Christian tradition. Globalized communication, travel, education, and greater religious freedom all support the spread of Buddhism. Political upheavals, together with widespread spiritual confusion, make it a paramount necessity to present Buddhism in a clear and meaningful way to the people of the world outside of Asia and Japan.

The recent Pew¹ report on religion in America indicates the decline of traditional religion and the increase in the number of unaffiliated persons. In addition, it points out that religious people are not as dogmatic about their faith, allowing that there may be other paths to salvation. This presents an opportunity for Buddhism to offer a meaningful and practical understanding of life on a sound spiritual and intellectual basis. However, despite such favorable conditions Shin Buddhism, as a transplanted and adaptable faith, has lagged behind more recently arrived forms of Buddhism in its growth in Western and American society. Shin Buddhism is, perhaps, the least known

¹ A survey of American religion by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, April 2008 (<http://religions.pewforum.org/>). The Pew Foundation is a survey group which periodically samples the population of a country on many issues and questions including religion. Through random surveys, it describes the situation of religion in contemporary American society.

or understood of the diverse forms of Buddhism in the West, though it has been present for over a century and constitutes one of the largest Buddhist denominations, mainly of Japanese ethnic descent.

In order to remedy this problem, we must begin by looking at the teaching itself as the foundation for the spread of Shin Buddhism. The Jōdo Shinshū institutions in the West, such as the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai‘i, the Buddhist Churches of America or the Buddhist Churches of Canada, have developed strong organizational bodies all of which have numerous temples and programs. However, they have not been able as organizations to open the Shin Dharma to the wider society on a scale commensurate with the capability of other Buddhist movements. I will look at the movement and teaching as I have experienced it since I became a follower of Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262) some thirty-five years ago and offer what I see as a possibility for increasing our outreach in contemporary society.

Thoughts on Institution and Teaching/Faith

I make a distinction between “institution” and “teaching/faith.” While institutions are a necessary and inevitable part of human experience, they are subject to the changing conditions of history and require adaptation to those changes. In many cases, the changes that have been made have led to the formation of large bureaucratic structures distant from the lives of the people they were intended to serve. The teaching, however, remains the same. We have the writings of the founder which provide an avenue into his thought and intentions. The emphases and interpretations of the texts may change according to the needs of the people and the changing social and cultural contexts where the teaching is transmitted and applied. Nevertheless, the texts left by the founder are the anchor and resource to which followers can appeal, even when the institution has obscured the founder’s ideals. Institutional change becomes a political issue when various factions within an organization struggle with change. On the other hand, change in the transmission and adaptation of the teaching comes about often through personal contact with people and in response to their needs and national or ethnic character, as happened historically in China, Tibet, Korea and Japan itself.

The acculturation of a tradition takes considerable time and Buddhism has been in the West for little over a century. However, when we take into account the modern advantages that facilitate the spread and adaptation of Buddhism in the West, its transformation into Western or American Buddhism has been quite slow, particularly among the Buddhist traditions brought by immigrant groups. They have tended to replicate the style of

Buddhism they experienced in the old country. This is particularly true for doctrinal expression which is often reinforced by foreign clergy or Western clergy who have received training in Japan.

In this essay, I want to discuss propagation in terms of the teaching and the needs of modern society. It is well known that in Japan religion has been generally a family matter. Children will generally follow the religion of their family and observe traditional, ancestral rituals. In many cases, the eldest or a younger son of a temple priest also becomes the priest of the temple and carries on the family tradition. The ancestral emphasis that pervades Japanese Buddhism is illustrated in the *Raisanka* 礼賛歌 (Hymn of Worship). In one strophe of this hymn the term for Buddha (*mihotoke* 御仏) is read *mioya* みおや, which means parent.² When family tablets (*ihai* 位牌) are also placed on the family altar, confusion can easily arise as to what the object of reverence is. Western people, on the other hand, view religion more as a personal matter, as an issue of individual conviction and commitment. Ancestor reverence or respect is not confused with the worship of God. Further, the first question that we Buddhists often encounter when we are introduced is “What do you believe about afterlife,” or, “What do you Buddhists believe about creation?” Individual, personal faith and belief are the major issues.

Consequently, a major consideration for the propagation of Shin Buddhism in the West is its personal meaning as a faith. It may seem self-evident that Shin Buddhism means to have faith or belief in Amida’s Vow and the nenbutsu, to recite it, pay respects to ancestors, and eventually go to the Pure Land where we expect to meet our beloved family members. This is common belief among followers. They also believe that recitation of the nenbutsu, hearing the Dharma, and enjoying the Sangha bring peace of mind and happiness.

There is nothing to criticize or deny in such popular beliefs. If there is a problem for propagation, it is that they do not go far enough to meet the highly competitive religious environment of modern society. Despite differences in vocabulary, one can find similar beliefs in other traditions which promise that they will make the believer happy, perhaps wealthy, and provide a blissful afterlife. There is nothing compelling or challenging in such beliefs. They console and soothe troubled spirits in a turbulent world. They

² Written by Ōtani Kinuko 大谷絢子 (1893–1974), the strophe reads:

Yasukarishi / kyō no ichinichi o / yorokobite

mioya no mae ni / nukazuki matsuru

安かりし 今日の一日を 喜びて 御仏 (みおや) のまえに ぬかずきまつる。

(Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai‘i 1990, p. 125.)

are true to the extent that they assist people to find order and stability for their lives and enjoy their brief lives. Every religious group tries to defend or prove their claims concerning the truth or benefits of their religion. That is, they have to justify their own existence as a religious tradition.

On the other hand, religion must also be challenging; challenging the worldly values and materialistic attractions so appealing to modern people. Religion must focus attention on human relations that make life meaningful and rich. It must challenge the competitive and egoistic spirit that dominates much of our life, whether politics, business or personal relations. Buddhism must maintain the critical spirit of the ancient *Kalama sutta*. In this text, Gotama urged people not merely to accept what he said, but to test it in their experience and in their thought. Thus he stated:

Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon one's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher'. Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness', enter on and abide in them.³

It is my firm belief that Shinran's teaching must be revitalized and re-interpreted in a challenging, critical and personal manner within the Hongwanjis, if it is to make a significant impact on the spiritual environment of Western people. Shinran declared that all the world is a lie and only the nenbutsu is true. We must rediscover Shinran's critical perspective in the context of individual and social life as a major task during this period of the 750th commemoration of his death, if we are to truly propagate Shin Buddhism. Shinran is the lens through which we must view Amida Buddha and His Vow which is the basis for meaning in our modern situation. The 750th commemoration in Nishi Hongwanji has been focused on the phrase: "Let peace and tranquility prevail in the world" (*Yo no naka annon nare* 世の中安穩なれ). This commemoration has also been presented as a time for propagation. The second part of Shinran's quote is "May Buddhism prosper in the world." We must seriously consider what the relationship between these

³ Soma 1963, p. 8.

two phrases means for the presentation of Shin Buddhism. Shin Buddhists must work for peace and justice in the world, if propagation is to succeed.

In order to consider this issue, we must note again that we live in a very religiously competitive world and society. Recently, a friend sent me an article on Christian missionary efforts to displace and defeat Buddhism throughout the world. When Buddhists do not know or understand their faith well or only see it as a family or cultural tradition, Buddhists will find it difficult to counter modern criticism or avoid the attraction of other religious alternatives which are more doctrinally and individually oriented. There is much to do to revitalize Buddhism. If we can agree that Buddhism is a personal faith as the basis of propagation, we must then inquire into its content and implications or meaning in our society. We live in a world where there are many political, social, economic, and cultural issues, which all have religious aspects and involve all religions.

Shinran's Teaching and Propagation in the Context of Contemporary Society

As we have noted above, there are several good things in the recent Pew report on religion in America. As a consequence of the changing religious environment, the present society provides a good opportunity to share Buddhism. People are more open to the teachings of Buddhism. In another sociological study of Buddhism in American society, two sociologists of religion (Dr. Robert Wuthnow and Dr. Wendy Cadge at Princeton University) discovered that there are about four million Americans who actively identify themselves as Buddhists. Further, about 12.5% of the population or 26,125,000 adults indicate that they include some element of Buddhism in their lives. 12% or about 25,080,000 people say that there has been some Buddhist influence in their lives. As the researchers point out, "Buddhism is exerting an influence far beyond the relatively small number of people who claim Buddhism as their primary religious identity." The gap between those who have encountered Buddhism, and those who have adopted some Buddhist elements into their lives, is small. Using Wuthnow and Cadge's figures, we learn that 87.5% of people who have encountered Buddhism believe it has had some effect on them, and 85.7% report a substantial impact. It also scored high with more positive than negative associations.⁴

This report is both good news and bad news for Shin Buddhism which is but a fragment of these figures. The largest branch, Buddhist Churches

⁴ "Measuring Buddhist Influence in America," The Buddhist Channel, <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=70,774,0,0,1,0>.

of America, consists of about 100,000 people in American society.⁵ It is a comparatively small community. Nevertheless, it has a national organization, with numerous temples and a seminary and graduate school in affiliation with a leading Christian seminary consortium, the Graduate Theological Union, in Berkeley, California. It has now initiated on-line or distance education with a comprehensive correspondence course. The scholarly dimension of Shin Buddhism has been enhanced and amplified by the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies through research and conferences. The *Pure Land* journal and *Pacific World*, a publication of the Institute of Buddhist Studies, have disseminated the fruits of research and discussion. Together with the spiritual formation of leadership through their educational institutions, there is a growing body of popular and scholarly literature which interprets Shinran's teaching in the context of contemporary thought and, as well, there is an active presence on the Internet where many temples have webpages.

The denomination has a well-educated clergy and even one military chaplain. In addition, in Hawai'i the Shin Sangha possesses an educational system from kindergarten through high school. There are many leaders in temples who are involved professionally in various areas of society, education and business, together with a body of devoted lay people. There are Buddhist Study Centers in Honolulu, Berkeley and New York which hold seminars and classes. Many ministers hold study classes. In recent years, programs have developed to train lay people to assist ministers and administer temple programs, creating the basis for recruiting native ministers. Women participate more widely in leadership positions in every Shin Sangha.

As a result of these varied activities, the potential for the outreach of Shin Buddhism to grow and develop in Western societies has significantly

⁵ This figure is based on the membership records submitted by temples. Since membership is often by families, we multiplied by three for a general or approximate number. Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i lists thirty-four temples with 7,101 families as members. We can estimate this figure as roughly 25,000 individuals who have some connection to the tradition. The Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) in its latest directory and annual report (2008) lists sixty temples and six fellowships with 16,500 temple members who are said to be individuals. However, when participants in various affiliated activities are taken into account, it is judged that there may be anywhere from 75,000 to 85,000 individuals, though they do not appear on temple rolls. Statistics are enormously difficult, but we can suppose that perhaps between the BCA and the Hawai'i mission, there may be roughly 100,000 members or affiliated persons. Not included here are the Buddhist Churches of Canada and the Higashi Honganji denomination. These two communities are a fraction in size of the BCA.

increased. Further, there has been expanding interest in Shin Buddhism among non-Japanese people. Many seekers are attracted to Shinran's teaching after practicing other forms of Buddhism. They find his perspective on Buddhism and life relevant to their own experience and lives. They appreciate that Amida Buddha accepts them as they are, personally and culturally. Some Shin Buddhists participate in interfaith and Buddhist-Christian dialogue programs.

From my webpage *Shin Dharma Net*,⁶ I can only give a hint of the varied experiences that bring people to Shin Buddhism in the hope that they will encourage our efforts for wider sharing of the teaching:

Following are some of the reasons I find Shin the most attractive school of Buddhism. The fact that it is a lay rather than a monastic path. I have always felt strongly that the religious person is not the one who flees life, but rather the one who is deeply involved in life. I like the fact that there is a non-celibate priesthood since this means that the spiritual leaders are not separated from the experiences of the lay members of the congregation. . . .

Jodo Shinshu seemed to be the form of Buddhism which left the door open to all. I then began to read Shinshu texts and commentaries, and found additional reasons for admiring Shinran, Rennyo, and the forms of spirituality which had developed within the Shinshu tradition. In this way I came increasingly to think of myself as a Shinshu Buddhist. . . .

I practiced Zen for many years. I was a total failure. My evil self was too powerful to overcome, too cunning to subdue. I came to know that—despite my best intentions—I had not a single sincere and selfless thought in my body. I truly lived in misery. When I found the teaching of Shinran it saved my life. . . .

Moreover, the Buddha Amida makes his Pure Land available to all beings, regardless of how good or bad or how high or low their I.Q. He only asks that they have faith in His Original Vow.⁷

⁶ <http://www.shindharmanet.com/>.

⁷ "Personal Stories: Responses to Shin Buddhism," Shin Dharma Net, <http://www.shindharmanet.com/stories/page1.htm>.

Despite the developments within the Sangha and the eloquent accounts of encounters with Shinran's teaching, there is a problem, as we have noted, that Shin Buddhism is hardly known in American society and its principles are not well understood, while temples do not seem inviting. The source of this problem lies in the fact that Shin Buddhism has been centered in the Japanese American community and is regarded in the wider society more as a Japanese or ethnic religion. The universality of Shinran's teaching is obscured by the communal character of the temples. There are few programs directed specifically to instruct the non-Buddhist. For propagation in the future, it is urgently important to make clear the universal meaning of Shinran's understanding of Buddhism and its adaptability to modern life as a lay-oriented religion. However, above all, we must present the social, cultural implications and potentiality of the teaching in the context of American society, which is confused on its own principles of what a modern, democratic society should be.

For instance, recently the United States Supreme Court restored the principle of *habeas corpus* in relation to the prisoners at Guantanamo in Cuba. This is an issue relating to religion because our Declaration of Independence says that God created all men equal and with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Human rights are a spiritual issue, whether we have a specifically Christian concept or not. The principle of *habeas corpus* means that in order to punish a person for a crime, the government must present evidence to a judge or jury that would show the person's guilt beyond reasonable doubt. We call it "due process of law." It is a basic principle in our legal system which has till now been denied to the prisoners at Guantanamo. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that such prisoners have a right to "due process," and the government must prove its case or let the people go. Though many people may not be aware, this principle lies in the background of Shin Buddhism. Shinran himself suffered exile, according to his own testimony, because he was not given "due process."⁸ He was sent to distant Echigo province where, in effect, he should die, because the government did not produce or investigate evidence in making their judgment.

In spite of the limitations on religion in Japanese history, Shin teachers were in the forefront of the movement for enlightenment and modernization of Japan, including religious freedom, especially figures such as Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911) and Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919). In

⁸ See the *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信証, postscript (*Collected Works of Shinran* [hereafter CWS], vol. 1, p. 289).

the Taishō period (1912–1926), a Higashi Honganji priest Takagi Kenmyō 高木顯明 (1864–1914) was jailed for sedition because he supported human rights. He was a Buddhist socialist and his temple Jōsenji 浄泉寺 was located among the outcaste people. He also strove to abolish prostitution. He eventually committed suicide in prison.⁹ The second Bishop of Nishi Hongwanji in Hawai‘i, Imamura Yemyō 今村恵猛 (1866–1932), wrote essays on the compatibility of Buddhism and democracy¹⁰ and worked with the laborers in the 1920 sugar strike. In an essay on the social ideal of Buddhism,¹¹ he gave clear expression to the principle of complete equality of all people in the concept of “all are brothers and sisters within the four seas”¹² and Shinran’s statement in the *Tannishō* 歎異抄 that we all have been mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters to everybody. We are all connected in the great flow of life. With the reception of true entrusting (信心 *shinjin*), we are equal companions and fellow practitioners on the path to enlightenment (同朋同行 *dōbō dōgyō*).

In contemporary Japan, Hongwanji has participated in the struggle against discrimination of the outcaste group referred to as *burakumin* 部落民, opposed the re-establishment of Yasukuni 靖国 Shrine and has resisted re-arming Japan, while promoting peace. A large number of the people who died in Hiroshima were Shin Buddhists.

We would do well to remember Shinran’s interest in justice when he quoted a statement from the *Jūshichijō kenpō* 十七条憲法 (Seventeen-Article Constitution) by Prince Shōtoku 聖徳 (574–622) in his *Wasan* 和讃 which reads: “The petitions of the wealthy are like putting stones into water; the claims of the poor are like putting water into stone.”¹³ Justice in society is still difficult to attain even today. It is often bought and paid for by the wealthy. Shinran knew that.

In America, issues of separation of church and state in its many dimensions, abortion, capital punishment, environmental issues, views on war and conscientious objection, gender issues, racial issues, all involve spiritual perspectives and call for religious people to understand their faith and participate in resolving conflicts. Consequently, Shin Buddhism must address

⁹ Ama 2001 and Takagi 2001.

¹⁰ Moriya 2000, pp. 87–109.

¹¹ Hawai Honoruru Hongwanji 1937, pp. 222–24.

¹² This phrase, a quotation from Tanluan 曇鸞 (476–542?), appears in Shinran’s *Kyōgyō-shinshō*, chapter on realization (see CWS, vol. 1, p. 155).

¹³ See *Kōtaishi Shōtoku hōsan* 皇太子聖徳奉讃 (CWS, vol. 1, p. 446).

these issues as a world faith. It must show that it is more than just another view of salvation and the otherworld. Shinran requested his followers to throw his body into the Kamo river as food for the fish.¹⁴

In modern times Abbot Myōnyo 明如 (1850–1903) of the Nishi Hongwanji attempted to reform the Sangha and bring it more in tune with the changing times of Meiji Japan. His daughter Kujō Takeko 九条武子 (1887–1928) is noted for her social and educational work and her selfless activities in the aftermath of the large earthquake that struck the Kantō region in 1923. We need to highlight such people who brought the compassion and wisdom of Amida Buddha into society for the welfare of the ordinary person in order to illustrate how Shin Buddhism can contribute to society, as well as saving people for the next life.

As a method of propagation, it is important to use history to illustrate and amplify the teachings of Shinran. Above all, by using history and viewing texts in the light of modern thought, we can bring to Western society the principles of Shinran's teaching in a way that can reveal to them the depth of the Buddhist teachings and their meaning for the culture.

A key point in propagation will be to deal with the issue of God in Western tradition. Shin Buddhist teachers must understand the various perspectives on the nature of God among Western theologians, the limits and problems of theism.

We must stress that the basis of Shinran's principles is his awareness of the eternal, cosmic Amida Buddha, Infinite reality itself as Light and Life, which embraces us all with compassion and wisdom. We are ourselves a manifestation of that reality as the Vow works through us to open the spiritual eyes of the people we encounter with the truth for their lives. Shinran's vision of the interdependence and oneness of all beings is a challenge for us, in whatever situation we are, to become channels for that compassion to reach others even in a small way. This is the true practice of propagation.

Shinran's understanding of Amida which means Infinite, is a broader, more adequate and more inclusive understanding of reality. Amida is not an existing god, but a symbol of reality which offers hope and meaning for modern people. The reality of Amida is like an ideal which, though not an existence in the objective world separate from personal life, is, however, real as the spiritual horizon that draws us onward to greater, deeper awareness of the boundless compassion that embraces and sustains our lives, inspiring us toward deeper fulfillment for ourselves and all beings. There

¹⁴ *Gaijashō*, chapter 16 (Shinshū Seiten Hensan Inkai 1988, pp. 936–37).

are no arguments for the existence of Amida, because it is not an existent being but rather an existential truth that becomes real in our experience and in our relationships with others and the world. Amida is the relationship of all relations. As Shinran says, it is the medium-means through which we come to know the body of truth-ultimate reality (*dharmakāya*). The *dharmakāya* is the inconceivable, colorless, formless reality that underlies all experience and meaning.¹⁵ It is the context beyond the boundaries of our logic. It permits the harmony of science and religion, motivating an active and broad intellectual search. At the same time, it encourages a devotional reflection and inspires gratitude for our lives within the Infinite.

A major principle of Shinran's thought was the attainment of faith in this life and the assurance of our salvation and enlightenment immediately upon our death. Therefore, the main concern of Shin Buddhism is living and not dying. Many Western people are intimidated religiously by the fear of going to hell in their afterlife. Shinran abolishes such fears through his teaching of the all-inclusive Vow and the assurance of *shinjin* by which we enter the rightly established state. The concept of the Company of the Truly Assured (*shōjōju* 正定衆) is a very important teaching with implications for this life.

Consonant with his teaching of the equality of all people which we mentioned above, Shinran treated everyone with respect, and employed polite or honorific language in addressing them. He put himself on the same level with his followers in what today is called the "horizontal society," abolishing all forms of socially created discriminations from his community.¹⁶ There was freedom to think and question. After Shinran relates what he believes, he declares: "It is up to you to decide" what you will think and believe.¹⁷ He accepted disagreement among his followers and responded to their questions. He never demanded that they agree with him on all points.

When he declared that he had no disciples, Shinran indicated that he did not give someone faith and he could not take it away. He refused to be authoritarian in his leadership.¹⁸ He was a leader who could admit to his faults, lamenting that:

I am such that I do not know right and wrong
And cannot distinguish false and true;

¹⁵ See "Jinenhōni shō" 自然法爾章 in *Mattōshō* 末灯鈔 (CWS, vol. 1, p. 530).

¹⁶ See *Kyōgyōshinshō*, chapter on faith (CWS, vol. 1, p. 107).

¹⁷ See *Tannishō*, chapter 2 (CWS, vol. 1, p. 662).

¹⁸ *Tannishō*, chapter 6 (CWS, vol. 1, p. 664).

I lack even small love and small compassion,
And yet, for fame and profit, enjoy teaching others.¹⁹

This confession spiritually liberated his followers by his admission that he was on the same level as them, freeing them from subservience and servility. He constantly pleaded with his followers to be respectful of other people's beliefs and not create social disturbance.²⁰

Shinran freed his followers from religious intimidation through magic, superstition and fear of gods or spirits. He taught that those who were on the path of unobstructed freedom (*mugedōsha* 無碍道者) through *shinjin* were not subject to karma and that the gods revered them rather than the other way around.²¹ This was social liberation because the warlords and political authorities represented the gods in society, and they could bring divine retribution (*bachī* 罰) on rebels or disobedient subjects through their military power. The social implications of Shinran's teaching did not emerge immediately, but in the 15th century and onward there were peasant rebellions (*ikkō ikki* 一向一揆). In some cases, Shin followers refused to pay their taxes to the warlords who exploited them. Rennyō 蓮如 (1415–1499) counseled them to pay their taxes to avoid prohibition of the teachings and persecution.

There is much more to the story but if Shin Buddhism is to impact our society, we must make clear its deeper teachings and implications that can contribute to more meaningful human relations and social justice. We must make clear our values, our ideals and our ability to work and share with followers of other faiths who also struggle for peace and justice in the world.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have attempted to outline one approach to Shin Buddhist overseas propagation in the West. The strategies and practical methods by which we can share Shin Buddhism with the world are numerous. I have emphasized a more intellectual approach because ideologies and theologies are given more prominence in the West. This tendency of Western culture requires that Buddhism also demonstrate its capacity for intellectual and social leadership, as well as spiritual perspectives and practical technologies in ritual and discipline.

¹⁹ *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 正像末和讃, verse 116 (CWS, vol. 1, p. 429).

²⁰ See *Shinran Shōnin goshōsokushū* 親鸞聖人御消息集, letter 2 (CWS, vol. 1, p. 560) and letter 4 (CWS, vol. 1, pp. 563–64).

²¹ *Tannishō*, chapter 7 (CWS, vol. 1, p. 665).

Western societies are undergoing great stress at the present time because of misguided wars, ecological and economic imbalance, and the like. Global warming issues have indicated the limitations of the Western outlook on life with its incessant effort to exploit nature rather than to harmonize with it and take seriously human interdependence within nature. Large numbers of people suffer poverty and even starvation, while despotisms continue to maintain their hold in large areas of the world. However, democracy and freedom, so treasured among Western people, also reveal their limitations because of their excessive emphasis on the individual without stressing the correlative sense of responsibility and interdependence. Freedom and responsibility must go together in order for democratic societies to contribute meaningfully to world peace and community.

It is in this dimension that Buddhism with its philosophical depth, egalitarian understanding, principle of interdependence, as well as its practices which give order to life can contribute an important alternative to our present dilemmas. Unless there is understanding, mutuality, dialogue, and sharing, our pressing problems cannot be resolved.

Shin Buddhism, with its realistic understanding of human nature and vision of non-discriminating, all-embracing compassion represented by Amida Buddha, has much to offer contemporary society beyond the usual pietistic, sentimental and traditional teachings shaped by Japanese culture. It must now enter the stage of world culture, bringing the richness of Mahayana philosophy and Shinran's personal religious experience to bear on contemporary issues.

The re-awakening of Shin Buddhism in the West gives us great hope that, despite its small numbers, good leadership will make a great impact in the contemporary religious environment. Overseas propagation from Japan will greatly assist this development through the continuing formation of scholar-priests in its universities. These teacher-scholars can unlock the vast store of knowledge and understanding that has been produced by generations of dedicated study and contemplation in earlier ages, as well as the present.

As we have noted, Western people who encounter Shin Buddhism are immediately struck by its applicability to their lives. It enables them to gain deep spiritual insight, while also pursuing their lives as they are in this culture. Abbot Ōtani Kōshin 大谷光真 some years ago declared that it was possible to experience the depth of Shin Buddhism without knowing a word of Japanese. Since that time, it has become even more true with the Internet and world-wide means of communication.

Now is the time for Shin Buddhists to return to the spirit of Shinran, the spirit of *jishin kyōninshin* 自信教人信 (sharing one's faith with others), with the world. It is summed up eloquently by Shinran in the chapter on faith in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*:

Supreme mind is true mind. True mind is enduring mind. Enduring mind is genuine mind. Genuine mind is mindfulness. Mindfulness is the true and real mind that is single. The true and real mind that is single is the mind of great joy. The mind of great joy is true and real shinjin. True and real shinjin is the diamondlike mind. The diamondlike mind is the mind that aspires for Buddhahood. The mind that aspires for Buddhahood is the mind to save sentient beings. The mind to save sentient beings is the mind to grasp sentient beings and bring them to birth in the Pure Land of peace. This mind is the mind aspiring for great enlightenment. This mind is the mind of great compassion. For this mind arises from the wisdom of immeasurable light.²²

ABBREVIATION

CWS *The Collected Works of Shinran*. Shinran 親鸞, 2 vols., trans. Dennis Hirota, Hisao Inagaki, Michio Tokunaga and Ryushin Uryuzu. Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanjisha, 1997.

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²² CWS, vol. 1, pp. 112–13.