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ALL OF THAT TO HONOR SHINRAN SHONIN.

SHINRAN SHONIN WAS A GREAT RELIGIOUS LEADER AND A REMARKABLE MAN. HIS STATURE IS AT THE SAME LEVEL AS MARTIN LUTHER AND CALVIN, AND

OTHER SPIRITUAL LEADERS WHO RISKED THEIR LIVES TO START NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS. SHINRAN'S GREATNESS IS BEING RECOGNIZED IN THE WEST

ONLY RECENTLY, AS HIS NAME APPEARS MORE AND MORE IN BOOKS AND ARTICLES. HE STARTED A NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT ALTHOUGH THAT WAS NOT HIS INTENT.

BUT, BECAUSE HE WAS SO ARDENT AND COMMITTED TO HIS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, BECAUSE HE HAD SUCH MISSIONARY ZEAL, THAT HIS GRASSROOTS EFFORTS TO

SPREAD HONEN SHONIN'S TEACHINGS CAUGHT FIRE AND A NEW RELIGIOUS SECT WAS BORN. HE HAD SUCH CHARISMA THAT EVEN TILL THIS DAY IN NIIGATA

WHERE HE FIRST BEGAN HIS MISSION, THERE REMAINS THE "NANATSU NO FUSHIGI" THE SEVEN MYSTERIES OR THE SEVEN MIRACLES ATTRIBUTED TO SHINRAN.

THE HONGWANJI DOES NOT OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZE THEM, BUT THE BELIEFS REMAIN INGRAINED IN THE FOLKLORE OF THE COMMON PEOPLE.

*@. Awkward
Hoosling
Becomes
an Eagle*

Shinran's RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS ARE UNIQUE. IT IS NOT A RELIGION OF GIVE ME THIS OR GIVE ME THAT -- NOT A RELIGION PRIMARILY OF PETITIONARY

PRAYER, BUT OF A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING. IT IS A RELIGION OF THANKSGIVING FOR HAVING OUR DEEPEST WISHES FULFILLED. *It is*

a religion OF AWAKENING TO OUR SHINJIN OR BUDDHA NATURE WITHIN, WHICH GIVES IMMEASURABLE WORTH AND VALUE TO

OUR LIVES JUST AS WE ARE.

WE WHO ARE MADE OF FLESH AND BONES WHICH WILL FALL AWAY EVENTUALLY,

HAVE DEEP WITHIN OUR HEARTS, THE BUDDHA-NATURE WHICH IS ETERNAL. IN JODO SHINSHU WE SAY, THE SHINJIN OR BUDDHA NATURE IS THE HEART OF

AMIDA BUDDHA WITHIN OUR HEARTS. SHINRAN SAID, "RECOGNIZE OUR MORTALITY, THAT OUR PHYSICAL LIFE IS LIMITED, BUT DISCOVER, OPEN OUR EYES, TO

OUR BUDDHA -NATURE. IN BARNYARD TERMINOLOGY, OR IN THE REALM OF BIRDS, IT'S LIKE SAYING, WE SHOULD FOCUS ON THE MAJESTIC EAGLE WITHIN, RATHER

THAN THE COMMON GOOSE.

7 6 53

There is a story from Norway that gives us this message. A boy walking in the woods found an egg in a nest. He took it home and placed it in with the eggs under a goose. When it hatched, out appeared a creature strange to the goose. Its feet seemed deformed, it had claws rather than webbed feet and it stumbled as it tried to follow the rest of the baby geese, the goslings. His beak was not flat, it was pointed and twisted like a hook. Instead of having lovely cream-colored down, it was an ugly brown color. And to top it off, he made terrible squawking sounds! He seemed to be a genetic freak to the geese---so ugly and disfigured.

Then the following spring, a giant eagle flew across the barnyard. The eagle swept lower and lower until the strange awkward bird on the ground, now grown large, lifted his head and pointed his crooked beak into the sky. The misfit creature then stretched his wings out and began to hobble across the yard. He flapped his wings harder and harder until the wind picked him up and carried him higher and higher. He began to soar through the clouds. He had discovered who he was---he was born an eagle!! And he had been trying to live like a goose.

We must discover the eagle within us and begin to let go of the goose. Once we have discovered the eagle within us, ^{ie., our buddha-nature} which is the same as discovering that we are loved and supported by Amida Buddha, then we can live our lives meaningfully and fully..... In other words, live the best we can. We can live our lives to fulfill our self worth, the self worth which is a gift from Amida Buddha.

Amida Buddha has vowed (Promised) to save all of us who have entrusted ourselves to His love and compassion. The scripture says that Amida Buddha from the eternal past knew of the human condition, that we are not perfect, that we act egotistical at times thinking only of ourselves. That, at times, the three poisons of anger, greed and foolishness may well up within us. We may have done regretful things. We may have hurt others and we in turn may have been hurt by others and we ^{may} hold grudges. In spite of all that, for those who have ^{discovered the} Shinjin, ^{ie., our buddha nature} which by the way ^{is the same as} surround us and all is accepted on the good ship, NamuAmidaButsu, without any ^{the heart that} condition, i.e. unconditionally. ^{entrusts in}

a.
Awkward
Cooing

Amida Buddha
then they will come to
realize that Amida
Buddha is already
surrounding us with His
light of love and compassion

7-21-28

Shinran Shonin at the young age of 9 went up to Mt. Hiei, the religious center of the Tendai Sect and trained for 20 long years to purify himself ^{to become a ascetic man} ~~to~~ get rid of his human frailties of being frustrated and ~~peeing~~ or getting angry, feeling conflicts, being afraid, jealous, greedy, wanting material wealth, security, ~~being foolish~~ ^{of} being human, and after 20 years he found that he could not be anything but human. He could control his behavior sometimes, but underneath he knew there always existed the potential for anger, greed and selfishness. In recent studies in stress management, psychologists have found the importance of the hypothalamus, that most primitive part of the brain, in stress reaction. This most primitive part of the brain is concerned with the most primitive human behavior which is survival--- survival at any cost. Survival behavior is expressed by emotions, e.g., anger. E.g. When you corner a rat, there is violent behavior. Survival behavior is also expressed in greed and hoarding to prevent hunger and basically, when someone is threatened, there is self-preserving and self-centered behavior. Usually it means we fight and argue or we run and escape or hide from harms way. These are basic human behaviors which are potentially always there as part of our survival behavior. If we cut off the part of the brain dealing with survival, we will die as human beings.

Shinran Shonin called these primitive survival behaviors which can go out of control from time to time, bonno, or karmic passions. After 20 years of effort, Shinran Shonin realized that you can't get rid of your karmic passions, but also you can't ignore them. He said, we must acknowledge our karmic passions (bonno) and entrust them to Amida Buddha. *give them to Amida Buddha*

Shinran's experience was very much similar to that of a later religious figure, John Newton, the Anglican ~~church~~ priest. ^{Newton} ~~Newton wrote "Amazing Grace" to express his feelings about what he had experienced.~~ He lived a difficult life and had ended up as the captain of a slave ship causing many to suffer from his cruelty. And then his life got turned around and he wrote, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see" John Newton called himself a wretch. What is a wretch? It is someone who is miserable, unhappy, but also as in his case, depraved. ^{one who is grappling w. his bonno} He said he was lost, but was found. He was blind, but ^{This is a very Buddhist attitude for} now he could see. Shinran called himself a bombu, ignorant fool, and that he was lost.

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Shinran
& John
Newton

b

And his eyes were covered with blind foolishness, he could not see from his side. But from the side of Amida Buddha, His Light made it possible for Shinran to see.

Although Newton's early life was depraved and Shinran's youthful years were surrounded by a religious environment, they both came to the common realization of their "wretchedness," shrouded in "blind foolishness" "The profound realization that the limitless compassion of the Other Power was meant for people even such as they were, affected them deeply, and in the case of Shinran, he devoted his long life to expressing gratitude for Amida's Infinite Wisdom and Compassion, ^{spent the rest of his life} and in spreading the truth he had found.

*B.
Shinran
& John
Newton*

Buddha Nature
To find the eagle within us, does not mean that we have to be perfect or be a saint.

It means that we need to know that we are human, a bombu or a wretch., but that we are, just as we are, special, precious jewel, embraced by Amida Buddha, never, never to be abandoned. *Shinran Shonin has written that the faithful are transformed in the same way as worthless pebbles and broken tiles are turned into gold*

How many of you have seen the movie, "The Sixth Sense" starring Bruce Willis? Well, ~~some of you may still go to see the movie so I won't tell you the story.~~ ^{As you know,} But it's a

*C.
Buddha-
nature*

great movie, with a great story and great acting. In the movie, it tells us that there are spirits of the dead which still hang around in this physical world because they are confused or they still have unfinished business here on earth. We call them ghosts and ~~we~~ say they are frightening, but in most cases the spirits are really not dangerous or frightening, but they have lost their way and are sad and need help to find their way to the Pure Land. They are in a state of mayoi (lost, wandering spirits) because they have not *Completed their journey on earth.*

In our case, we say that they have not found their Buddha-nature within their hearts and so they get confused and drift about in a state of mayoi. The Buddha-nature is our connection with Amida Buddha. Buddha-nature is what makes it possible for us to be in oneness with Amida Buddha. Shinran Shonin said those who entrust in Amida Buddha will be in oneness with Him and when they reach the end of their physical life here on earth, they will be reborn in His eternal world. *without fail.*

Now, Amida Buddha is a name, a name which is given to a higher power or force. This higher Power is not a man, nor a man on a cloud or an object with shape. Amida Buddha is in reality invisible. The scripture says He has no form, no color, and no smell.

So He is invisible to our limited human eye. Grammatically speaking he is not a subject, *subject* but a verb. He is a force or energy or action. Shinran Shonin called this force the Other Power, the Power that is motivated by His Vow to save all sentient beings. Dr. Hisao Inagaki of Ryukoku University call ^{him} that the Vow Power. The statue you see in the altar is a symbol of that invisible Power. The right hand raised symbolizes infinite wisdom and the left hand lowered symbolizes infinite compassion. The standing statue symbolizes immeasurable wisdom and compassion in action. And this force in the Universe is motivated by His Vow to save all beings. That is why ^{there is the} this temple is called Hongwanji. Literally ^{Hongwanji} it means the temple of the Vow. The Vow is the focal point of the Hongwanji. Shinran Shonin has written that through the Power of the Vow of Amida Buddha, we, who are beings of bonno, of karmic passions, are transformed into something of great value.

All of us are accepted just as we are by Amida Buddha, in this life and eternally, *we may look like geese, but inside we are eagles.* Just as we are, ~~we are eagles rather than geese.~~

The following children's story by Lawrence Yep I think, makes a similar point.

Once in old China, there was a boy with the saddest face in the world. Even when he was happy, he looked sad and people who saw him felt sad too. So as not to upset others he wore a big straw hat that covered his face completely. When it was time for the harvest festival, his parents wanted to keep him at home with them in order not to spoil the festival for others, but he felt it was unfair for his parents to miss the festival so he ran away from home. But, whichever village he went to, the people chased him away so he headed to the open space of the seacoast. There he met 20 giants, each one on an elephant and he asked them for a job. When he removed his large hat they felt so sorry for him and they began to cry. So they hired him and put him on the back of one of the elephants. The caravan then headed straight for the ocean and plunged underwater and strangely they could breathe underwater. Soon they came to a city of dragons and asked to buy pearls from them. But the dragon chief said that there were no pearls to sell. You see pearls were made from the tears of the dragon ladies. These ladies told each other sad stories and when they cried the tears turned into pearls. That's how they made pearls, but the sad stories the ladies told each other did not make them cry anymore because they had heard the stories so many times before. That's why they didn't have any more pearls.

D. Saddest Face

That's when the little boy stepped forward and took off his hat. When the dragon ladies saw his sad face, they also became sad and burst into tears. The tears fell into the bowls in front of them, plink, plink, plink, and soon the bowl became full of pearls. The giants roared with delight and promised the boy to reward him very well.

Soon the boy returned to his village with a sack of pearls and bolts of silk and he shared his wealth with the villagers. He did not need to cover his face any more. And no one asked him to smile. The villagers accepted him even with his sad face.

They began to see the value in him just as he was. In the same way, Namo Amida Butsu affirms our value just as we are. Let us awaken to our true self, who are embraced by Amida Buddha never to be abandoned.

And because we are loved and supported by Amida Buddha we should not waste our lives. We should live our lives meaningfully and fully. *As we celebrate Hotoke today, resolve to share the blessings we are receiving with those who are less fortunate than ourselves. let us*

In closing I wish to again read the ^{following} passage I read at the beginning of my talk: When alone, rejoice, knowing there are two. For our true parent reveals Himself when His Name is called. The Name, Namo Amida Butsu, is the true and real that illuminates the darkness of our hearts.

Namo Amida Butsu

Sadder Face

D.

Story - awkward gosling
born as eagle trying
to live like a gosse
Danno or karmic passions
John Newton, Anglican
Buddha nature Priest
Amida Buddha - higher power,
force, verb
story Day of saddest feet
Lawrence Yep