

Key terms in Mahayana Buddhism and Shin Buddhism

Conventional truth	Highest truth
Form	Emptiness
Distinctions	No distinctions
Words	Beyond words

blind passion	boundless compassion
foolish being	Amida Buddha
Namu	Amida Butsu
defiled world	Pure Land
samsara	nirvana
self-power	other-power

Shinran (1173-1262), contemporary of Zen Master Dogen (1200-1253)

Founding figure of Shin Buddhism, which is a form of Pure Land Buddhism, and the largest sect of Japanese Buddhism.

Shinran: Lay path of a married man who taught along with his partner, Eshinni, among peasants and fishermen in the countryside. This stands in contrast with the Zen monk Dogen who took the celibate path of a monk living in a monastery, Eiheiiji

Dogen: Focus on seated meditation in monastic practice

Shinran: Focus on chanting the Name of Amida among lay people

Foolish Being and Boundless Compassion

The Saying of the Name (Nembutsu):

Namu Amida Butsu, from the Sanskrit, Namā Amitābha Buddha

Namo is from Namas, as in “Namaste”

“Amitabha” is the Buddha of Infinite Light. However, the Buddha is a dynamic activity. Thus, Namu Amida Butsu, or Namō Amitābha Buddha, means:

“I entrust myself to the awakening of infinite light”

“True entrusting” (Jpn. *Shinjin*) is very close to enlightenment

Nirvana

Parinirvana (final nirvana of the Buddha Sakyamuni)

True Entrusting

Birth in (realization of) the Pure Land

Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic

This is a record of saying and teachings by Shinran compiled posthumously by his follower Yuien. Sections 1-10 are purportedly direct quotations from Shinran himself; sections 11-18 consist of commentary by Yuien interspersed with quotations from Shinran.

Section X: “In the nembutsu, no-meaning is the true meaning,” In the saying of the Name of Amida Buddha, the true meaning is beyond words (form and emptiness/oneness).

Section I: “Amida's Primal Vow does not discriminate between the young and old, good and evil - true entrusting alone is essential.” The unfolding of emptiness/oneness expresses the spontaneous movement of the deep flow of the oneness of reality to embrace all. In this realization of oneness, there is no discrimination.

Section III: “Even a good person attains birth in the Pure Land; how more so the evil person.” In order to realize this oneness, imbalanced consciousness needs to be compensated. This statement reflects a corrective on both the social level and the philosophical, universal level.