

PERCEPTION RECEPTION

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One of the themes of this year's European Shin Buddhist Conference (20th – 24th Aug 2018) was the perception of Shin by other Buddhists and non-Buddhists. I don't think that is the problem: rather, the problem is **our** perception of Shin Buddhism.

It has been said, that if we tell someone that we don't meditate and that our practice is to simply 'say the nembutsu' they become confused. So do I!

What is the Jodo Shinshu Service Book if not a practice? I practice it every day. The Buddhist Churches of America include meditation as part of their temple services and many other Shin Buddhists include meditation in their daily lives. Not, perhaps, in the belief meditation will turn them into Buddhas: it has other uses – coping with stress, clearing the mind to help us focus on our chanting, etc.

Saying these things are not a "practice" is playing sleight of hand with semantics. In the precise technical sense Shinran uses it, yes, we do not believe by doing these things we can turn ourselves into Buddhas. We have a very profound and deep understanding of the power of ego, instincts and passions. What are traditionally called Greed, Anger and Ignorance. No human can ever completely eradicate these things. (That includes the historical Buddha; a man not a god.) But they are a practice, I think. When I recite the "*Three Treasures*" I hope to mean what I read and hope what I read means what it says: "If we do not receive awakening in this life, in what life shall we do so?"

Shin Buddhism fits squarely into the definition of the Perennial Philosophy as defined by Leibniz, a religious understanding that goes back at least as far as the Vedas:

PURE LAND NOTES

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1. There is an infinite, changeless reality beneath the world of change;
2. This same reality lies at the core of every human being;
3. The purpose of life is to discover this reality experientially.

Every form of Buddhism, and every form of Hinduism believes these propositions. We are no different. We believe this eternal reality lies at the core of every one of us. Our only difference is that we don't believe we can use the ego (our will power) to eliminate itself. We do believe "infinite, changeless reality beneath the world of change" can become active in our present life ("If we do not receive awakening in this life, in what life shall we do so?") if we have faith in its reality. After all, Shinran himself says in the *Shoshin Nembutsuge*:

*When foolish beings of delusion and defilement awaken shinjin,
They realize that birth-and-death is itself Nirvana.*

We can disagree on our interpretations of this, but it is almost identical to Nargajuna's maxim "Samsara is Nirvana: Nirvana is Samsara".

And for this life, and this other reality within us, we express our gratitude. We practice gratitude daily, in formal and informal ways. We recite the *Three Treasures*, we chant sutra, we recite *Eko*. (Myself, while I know that in Shin *Eko* is Amida sending virtue to us to help us towards enlightenment, I still cannot do other than want that sent to everyone else as well. To wish otherwise would be self-centred). All Buddhists of every persuasion do these same things. And we might or might not meditate. Some of the Nichiren denominations do not meditate -Nichiren Shu, Nichiren Shoshu, Reyukai, Rissho Kosei Kai – and they see themselves and are seen by others as proper Buddhists.

When we encounter a new person in ordinary life we do not try, at first impression, to establish how different we are from them. We look for common ground. Let us as Shin Buddhists do just that. If we can accept we are regular Buddhists, others will too. We shouldn't make it difficult for them.