

EXCERPTS FROM SHINRAN'S LAMENTATION AND SELF-REFLECTION

Introduction

Shinran (1173-1263) was a disciple of Hōnen, the founder of the Jōdō (Pure Land) sect in Japan, who broke free from his teacher and established the Jōdō Shinshū (The True Teaching of the Pure Land). Hōnen and Shinran were both exiled in 1207 by the government, which objected to the practice of chanting the *nembutsu*. ("Nembutsu" means "I put my faith in Amida Buddha." Practitioners believed that by chanting this they would attain salvation.) Shortly after this, Shinran abandoned the *nembutsu* practice, which he then considered self-centered and opposed to the teaching of salvation by Other Power. Shinran married and had children, thus also departing from the clerical life. His most significant treatise is the *Kyōgyōshinshō* (Teaching Practice, Faith, and Realization).

Selected Document Excerpts with Questions

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Excerpts from Shinran's Lamentation and Self-Reflection

Although I have entered the Pure Land path,
I remain incapable of true and genuine thoughts and feelings.
My very existence is pervaded by vanity and falsehood;
There is nothing at all of any purity of mind.

...

Being unrepentant and lacking in shame,
I have no mind of truth and sincerity.
And yet, because the Name has been given by Amida Buddha,
The universe is suffused with its virtues.

...

Deeply saddening is it that in these times
Both the monks and laity in Japan,
While seeking to conform with Buddhist manner and deportment,
Worship gods and spirits of the heavens and earth.

[Translated by Dennis Hirota from *Shōzōmatsu wasan* in *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. 2
(Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941), pp. 527-529]

Questions:

1. What is Shinran's view of his own capacity for spiritual realization?
2. What does he mean in referring to the "Name"?
3. What is his view of spirituality in Japan?