

## A Comparison between Shinran and Nichiren

### *Similarities*

<b>Shinran</b>	<b>Nichiren</b>
Shinran, a man of intelligence, had made a thorough study of traditional teachings at Mt. Hiei, Kyoto.	Nichiren, likewise intelligent, spent years in study and training at the great monastic center of Mt. Hiei. During his years of exile or enforced seclusion, he intensively studied scripture and doctrine.
Shinran was expelled from Mt. Hiei, Kyoto (at the same time as Hōnen).	Nichiren was similarly forced to depart from Mt. Hiei (which became a stronghold of Esoteric Buddhism).
During his lifetime, Shinran did not organize a new sect around his own creed. His followers formed the Jōdo-shin-shū, or 'True Pure Land school'.	Nichiren's charisma, his stern evangelism, and personal courage attracted many. They then formed the Nichiren school.

### *Differences*

<b>Shinran</b>	<b>Nichiren</b>
Shinran lived among the people, <i>not</i> as an outspoken preacher boldly proclaiming his mission, but as one condemned, a social outcast – one who only had a fugitive existence.	Nichiren embarked upon a preaching career of hardship, conflict, and persecution. Through it all, he became more convinced of his mission to save his country, and Buddhism.
For Shinran, Amida's Original Vow was critically important. In fact, the Three Treasures were transformed into one: Amida's Original Vow. Little remained of the Buddha's teachings as manifested by Shākyamuni.	For Nichiren, the <i>Lotus Sūtra</i> was the key to everything – it is the final and supreme teaching of the Buddha Shākyamuni, revealing the one and only way of salvation. So it is the name of the <i>Lotus Sūtra</i> , not the name of Amida Buddha, which should be on the lips of every Buddhist.
Although Shinran had thoroughly studied the traditional teachings (his writings on doctrinal questions show this), he grounded himself in the tradition only to overturn it. The Buddhism he spread bore little resemblance to the original creed.	Nichiren's erudition only served his conviction (from early in life and held to throughout his career) that faith in the Lotus of the Wonderful Law was all one needed for salvation.
Shinran felt that if salvation depended solely on Amida's grace, it was needless to act as if one's conduct could have any bearing on ultimate redemption. He did not accept any implication that there was something a person could do to win salvation, which was only another manifestation of relying on "one's own power".	Unlike Shinran, Nichiren stressed the importance of one's own efforts – and he became deeply convinced that he was destined to fulfill a unique mission in the world. He had a forceful and charismatic personality.

<p>Shinran had seen that the Tendai path as too difficult for awakening in a degenerate <i>mappō</i> age – and so adopted the ‘easy path’ of reliance on Amida and his ‘original vow’ to save all. In fact, he taught that one sincere <i>nembutsu</i> recitation was sufficient – repetition to aid salvation was ‘self power’.</p>	<p>As a prophet, Nichiren's approach was different – based on the <i>Lotus Sūtra</i>, he sternly and fearlessly denounced the errors of his day, including those of all other sects, and called on the government to implement the Truth.</p>
<p>Shinran exemplified the simple faith of devotion to the Buddha Amitābha and his all-embracing, all-helping compassion. Shinran was ready to dispense with all the sūtras, except that which revealed Amida’s Original Vow. His focus was exclusive reliance on Amida.</p>	<p>Nichiren promoted a ‘self-power’ method that was easy for all to practise – it was to chant the formula <i>Na-mu myō-hō ren-ge-kyō</i>, ‘Honour to the <i>Lotus Sūtra</i> of the True <i>Dharma</i>’, and to contemplate a wooden plaque or scroll, known as a <i>gohonzon</i>, on which an invocation was written.</p>
<p><b>Sources:</b>  de Bary, W.M. (ed.) (1969) <i>The Buddhist tradition: in India, China &amp; Japan</i>. New York: Vintage Books. (pp. 327-329; 331-335; 345-354.)  Harvey, P. (2013) <i>An introduction to Buddhism: teachings, history and practices</i>. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (pp. 229-230; 233-234.)  Williams, P. (2009) <i>Mahāyāna Buddhism: the doctrinal foundations</i>. London: Routledge. (pp. 165-171)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Alexander Peck (20 May 2015)</p>	