

Language We Share

Rev. Jundo Gregory Gibbs

As American Buddhists we cannot help but define ourselves in contrast to Christian believers. The ability to make ourselves understood is both helped and hampered by some shared terminology, - faith, worship, conversion, etc. In each case Buddhist tradition has been using a term with the same basic meaning as the term in Christian tradition. "Faith" is used much as "Shin", "Woship" parallels the usage for "Raihai" (Skt. "vandana), "Conversion" parallels taking refuge speaking generally and, in Jodo Shinshu, is close to the meaning of "Eshin". Keeping in mind the general point, the Buddhist concepts have continuities in their usage and also discontinuities with Christian usage, allow me to look at three pairs of terms.

"Faith" clearly means what "Shin" means. But what is that again. The big problem in comparing Buddhist faith to Christian faith is that Christians have forgotten what the term really means. "Faith", Buddhist or Christian, is the actual trust in and confidence which comes from entrusting to persons and realities perceived to be trustworthy. In the past couple of hundred years Christians have more and more often used "faith" to mean believing points in doctrine. This is something there is very little of in Buddhism. Buddhists have a strong distrust of the scope of the human intellect. Our philosophical ideas, our doctrines, are therapies for wellness. We don't insist that they are true, certainly not true for non-Buddhists. But the matter of discerning who and what is to be trusted and living trustingly, this is the central concern of faith whether Buddhist, Christian, Muslim or whatever.

Worship has a very specific meaning to monotheists.