

仏教、神道、キリスト教における汚染と純度*

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Pollution and Purity in Buddhism, Shinto, and Christianity

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1. Introduction

When one speaks of “religion” it is difficult to be all-inclusive when it comes to the various belief systems, philosophies and sects that exist even within established religious groups. “Religion” is an over-generalized term. Much like “sports” is over-generalized when one considers the differences between team sports, gymnastics, marathon running, martial arts and figure skating, etc. With this in mind, it is often difficult to separate Shinto from Buddhism in Japanese society. Japanese society members liberally switch between religions. One who is considered a self-declared Buddhist in Japan might visit both Buddhist temples *otera* (御寺) and Shinto shrines or *jinja* (神社). Both Shinto and Buddhist beliefs are readily acknowledged in Japan. Many Japanese make their yearly pilgrimage or *hatsumoude* (初詣) to the Shinto shrine during *shogatsu* (正月), but might also attend a Buddhist funeral or *soshiki* (葬式) and have a Christian wedding (キリスト教の結婚式). The traditional religion of Japan is Shinto; however, the modern religious landscape is debatably *Ryobu Shinto*—a merge of both Shinto and Buddhist belief. This author further argues that Confucian ideology also permeates as ancestor worship is not a Buddhist concept since every living thing is on its own cycle of reincarnation and such kinship does not exist in Buddhist doctrine in neither Hinayana nor Mahayana sects. Moreover, reincarnation was adopted from Hinduism to provide a meaning for death.

All cultures have standards of proper behavior. Individuals are expected to be responsible in relations with other members of society, as within the socialized culture of organized religion, one is required to maintain an appropriate relationship with deity or God(s). To violate either relationship could result in exclusion from the social order or from the religious group. In relationship to deity, ceremonial cleanliness is often important. A person may become impure or polluted in various ways. Some impurities may result from conscious acts which violate sacred codes. Impurities may also be a product of accidents, or contact with death—such situations cannot be controlled. Regardless of the reason, impurity happens. The removal or avoidance of impurity is a concern for certain religions—specifically, for the religions of traditional Judaism, Hinduism, and Shinto. Impurity is also a concern in Catholicism. The Catholic faith takes great importance in the virginity of Virgin Mary as virginity is also a measure of purity.

2. Connotations of Pollution and Purity

Pollution and contamination are similar in meaning. The semantic differences could open a debate on meaning. The opposite of purity is impurity which also implies being polluted or contaminated. pollution is a commonly accepted term used to describe religious impurity or taboo. A taboo is something to be avoided, either because it is so sacred that to come into contact with it will harm the person, or because it is so evil that it brings pollution to members of the faith. Because of this, a taboo is set apart or

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separated to avoid being approached and cause pollution to an individual.

According to the Old Testament laws of cleanliness found predominantly in Leviticus, an individual who becomes unclean makes everything which one comes into contact unclean also. Individual impurity was a very serious matter because it endangered the whole community. Almost everything that came out of or was connected with the body was considered to be unclean—semen, menstrual blood, saliva, sweat, childbirth, and leprosy are examples of impurity. Similarly, there were unlawful mixtures which created an impure state, such as using the same dishes to cook meat and wild products, or planting different seeds in the same field. Certain animals such as the pig, the lobster, and the shrimp were thought as being unclean because such creatures were considered scavengers. Contact with death also created uncleanness. Touching a taboo holy object could result in serious consequences or even death, as Uzzah discovered when he reached out to stabilize the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:6-7). Every state of impurity had to be removed by certain rituals before a person could be allowed back into the worshipping community.

Similarly, uncleanness among the Hindus is considered a serious matter. The Hindus are sometimes considered to be a “pollution-phobia” people, since virtually every part of life may lead to pollution of some sort (Palmer & Keller, 1990). The sources of pollution are very much the same as those among the Old Testament Jews. For example, bodily emissions, death, and childbirth are all examples of causes of pollution. However, in addition to these, caste plays a role. To come into contact with a person of a lower caste, as well as anything touched or used by such an individual causes pollution. Even smoke from the fire of Sudra contaminates, as do animals or fish which contain blood or certain root or stem vegetables shaped like a head such as onions, garlic, or mushrooms.

3. Pollution and Purity in Shinto

With this background, the Shinto stress on

purity is hardly unique. However, it may be one of the most unique codes in the form of purification. There are several methods of purification. The *oharai* (御祓い) method, which means the exorcising of polluting spirits. This is usually accomplished by a Shinto priest or *danka* (檀家) who waves a *haraigushi* (祓い串) from right to left. This ceremony of blessing is performed not only for people, but also for automobiles, homes, and public places. Emperors have commonly performed *oharai* ceremonies twice yearly for the entire nation.

Another method of purification is *misogi* (禊), or purification by water. According to the legend found in the *Kojiki*, upon returning from the realm of death, Izanagi washed himself. By his example, bathing as a method of ritual cleansing became a Japanese way of life. The third method of purification is *imi* (忌), which means avoidance of contact with taboos such as sickness, death, and mourning. *Imi* is practiced especially by priests prior to conducting religious ceremonies. Also, as one enters a shrine, there is always a *temizuya* (手水舎), or purification pavilion. Here the worshipper purifies himself by pouring water over his fingers and hands and by rinsing his mouth with water. During the formal ceremonies, a priest will recite a prayer and wave the purification wand over the participants.

4. References to Salt for Purification

Sometimes salt or salt water is used in purification ceremonies. Salt is a potent symbol since it is a potent mineral compound. The powerful flavor of salt can be overwhelming if overly used or equally noticed as “missing” from a dish if used too little. In Shinto, from the legend in the *Kojiki*, Izanagi is said to have washed himself in the salty sea in his own act of purification (Ellwood, 1973). Salt is used for sacred rituals of purification or exorcism in Shinto. A Shinto priest will place salt called *morijio* (盛り塩) in the corners of the doorway or *genkan* (玄関) of a house in order to exorcise evil spirits. Salt is used as an offering and during certain ceremonies such as burning prayer boards known as *ema* (絵馬) or for land dedicating ceremonies before a building is constructed. Salt is sprinkled

on participants attending a funeral in a ritual to purify the individual from the pollution of death (Picken, 1980). The Japanese sport Sumo also uses salt called *kiyomeshio* (清め塩) to purify the ring between matches.

Christianity also uses salt as a spiritual emblem. Excluding the reference in Genesis 19:26, when Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt upon looking back to Sodom and Gomorrah, there are numerous scriptures in the Bible mentioning the symbolism of salt, which this author finds remarkably similar to Shinto religious ceremonies. Especially, scriptures in the Old Testament which describe the ritual of salt as an offering and as a connotation of purification. The following are a few specific references to salt mentioned in the Bible:

Old Testament:

- *with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt* [Leviticus 2:13]
- *covenant of salt* [Numbers 18:19] / [Chronicles 13:5]
- *priests shall cast salt upon them* [Ezekiel 43:24]

New Testament:

- *ye are the salt of the earth* [Matthew 5:13] / [Luke 14:34]
- *everyone shall be salt with fire* [Mark 9:49]

Pollution and purity play a major role in Japanese life and religious beliefs. Shrines and temples in Japan are kept ceremonially clean and pure by sweeping and washing and by posting sprigs of the evergreen *sakaki* tree (*cleyera japonica*), bamboo, paper ornamentation, and braided straw ropes which are all symbols of purification. This emphasis on cleanliness crosses over into everyday life. Keeping clean and neat is a national pastime in Japan. Bathing is culturally embedded custom in Japan where bath houses or hot-springs *onsen* (温泉) are found throughout every prefecture in the country and public baths or *senjo* (銭湯) can be seen in almost every community. Both of which are easily recognized on maps by the ♨ symbol. Japanese also wash and sweep the entrances to business and the

genkan entrances to their houses—an act that also carries connotations concerning pollution and purity.

The concept of “kosher” in Judaism which determines what foods are proper for consumption also could be correlated to pollution and purity. The act of washing hands to symbolize a separation from responsibility is also based in pollution and purity. Once a literal act, now washing hands has been reduced to an expression in the English language such as, “I wash my hands of the situation.” The list of examples could be extended to a more comprehensive research. When one considers the doctrinal similarities between religions it is also important to consider the concept of pollution and purity.

5. Conclusion

Individuals who call themselves *Christian* or *Buddhist* make the claim under a broader definition that includes a full range of faith groups under both schools of philosophy. Although the author's intention is to write at length concerning the similarities, it must be known that Buddhists do not *share* the core beliefs of Christianity much less the culturally critical beliefs accepted by some Christians. However, the author feels that there is great correlation concerning purity and the use of salt as a purifying agent in the doctrines of Buddhism, Shinto and Christianity. Perhaps there is some truth in the adage that “cleanliness is Godliness”.

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