

Freedom and Necessity in Shinran's Concept of Karma

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THE CONCEPT OF KARMA existed prior to the rise of Buddhism, and though quickly adopted into Buddhist thought, its precise role in the early tradition and its relationship to such concepts as the five aggregates and dependent origination remain topics of controversy among modern scholars. It may be said, however, that in Mahāyāna tradition, the major significance of karma lies in its expression of temporal existence from the stance of the no-self nature (*anātmatā*) of all things.¹ The bodhisattva, in realizing *prajñāpāramitā*, thoroughly breaks through discriminative thinking and comes to stand in suchness. At that time, he attains *dharmakāya* or "reality-body," but he does not simply remain in the realm of the formless, where the subject-object dichotomy has been completely obliterated. *Dharmakāya* holds within itself the nonduality of the karma-created (*samskrta*) and

* Author's note: This article is based on *Bukkyō ni okeru gō no shisō* (Kyoto, 1957), pp. 7-39; its present form and much of the detail in content, however, have emerged from discussions with the translator.

¹ Various concepts are used in the history of Buddhist thought to express no-self. Among them, the five aggregates in early Buddhism and emptiness in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, while including temporal implications, do not give direct expression to the element of time. The temporal side of emptiness was clarified by Nāgārjuna through the concept of mutual dependence, by which he showed theories of time as linear succession to be untenable. In terms of the relationship of action and recompense, there can be neither simple continuity nor interruption, neither permanence nor impermanence. The positive implications of karma for the bodhisattva's temporal existence were articulated in the early Yogācāra of Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu through the concept of the simultaneous, reciprocal causation of *ālaya-vijñāna* and defiled dharmas. See my *Bukkyō ni okeru gō no shisō*, pp. 42-79.

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the uncreated (*asamskrta*), the temporal and the timeless, and thus develops from itself the subsequently attained nondiscriminative wisdom that, while never parting from suchness or the uncreated, sees and acts in the world of *samsāra*, working to save ignorant beings. The functioning of karmic causation is the foundation of the existence of the bodhisattva—who has transcended birth-and-death—in the realm of *samsāra*, and the self-realization of the karma-created (false discrimination, subjectivity and world) as karma-created is the content of, and inseparable from, nondiscriminative wisdom.

While in Mahāyāna thought in general the concept of karma is taken up from the stance of the transcendent, as an aspect of existence in the world of the enlightened being, in Shinran's thought—in his concepts of karmic evil (*zaigō*, *tsumi*) and past karma (*shukugō*)—it expresses rather the stance of the person who has awakened, through insight into the fundamental nature of human existence, to the impossibility of transcendence. Nevertheless, Shinran's concept of karma shares with that of Mahāyāna tradition the nature of being established in the immediate present, in which time is itself timelessness, as the content of the personal realization of Buddha's wisdom or of no-self—in his case, as the content of the "nembutsu of wisdom" or "wisdom of shinjin."² Below, I will discuss the central elements of Shinran's concept of karma as an expression of religious awakening in his teaching.

THE GREAT PATH OF UNOBSTRUCTEDNESS

Shinran states: "The person of the nembutsu is [one who treads] the great path free of all obstruction" (*Tannishō* 7).³ These words express the remarkable freedom of the person who has realized shinjin—the person whose blind passions have become one with the wisdom-compassion of Amida Buddha. Shinran goes on to explain, "The evil he does cannot bring forth its karmic results." Does this mean that the person of the nembutsu does not fall into karmic causation? Or is it an

² Shinjin 信心 is the "true, real, and genuine mind" (*makoto no kokoro*) in which a person's mind and the mind of Buddha have become one without their duality and mutual opposition being eradicated. This term expresses the core of Shinran's religious awakening.

³ Quotations from *Tannishō* are from Dennis Hirota, trans., *Tannishō: A Primer* (Kyoto: Ryūkoku University, 1982); portions have been adapted.

example of religious hyperbole, meant to be understood only figuratively?

Causation is a cornerstone of the Buddha's teaching. Śākyamuni states, "He who sees dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*, i.e., causation) sees me (Buddha)." Even the enlightened one is subject to the law of action-recompense and cannot violate or circumvent it. Thus, Shinran uses the term "karmic power of the great Vow" to express the strength of Amida's salvific activity. This working is not simply a matter of Amida's will or compassion; mere aspiration to save others would be futile without the aeons of practice performed as Bodhisattva Dharmākara. The working of the Vow is manifested from dharmakāya as suchness, but without the creation of karma through practice, no means to save can be devised and no results achieved.

If even Buddha must realize that all volitional acts fall within the working of action-consequence, what does it mean that the evil acts of the person of the nembutsu "cannot bring forth their karmic result"? It does not mean that a person eradicates his karmic evil through saying the Name, for Shinran rejects such practice as based on attachment to one's own powers. Neither can it be taken to mean that, because birth into the Pure Land in the future is assured, *ultimately* his evil acts will not have the effect of continuing samsaric existence. There is nothing to imply that this freedom belongs only to the future, and elsewhere Shinran states, "We have been able to encounter the moment when shinjin, firm and diamond-like, becomes settled . . . so that we have parted forever from birth-and-death" (*Kōsō wasan* 77).⁴

In addition to this assertion of the radical freedom of the person of shinjin, there is another notable passage treating karma in *Tannishō*:

Good thoughts arise through the prompting of past good; evil comes to be thought and performed through the working of evil acts (karma). These words were among those spoken by the late master: "You must realize that there is never [any act]—even so slight as a particle on the tip of a rabbit's hair or sheep's fleece—that is not evil that we commit and [the working out of] past karma (*shukugō*)."

(*Tannishō* 13)

⁴ In *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* (hereafter as SSZ; Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941), p. 510.

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According to this passage, in all our activity—our thoughts and feelings, words and deeds—we do not commit good and evil according to our own judgments and decisions, but merely obey the working of our past acts. Shinran here attributes absolute control over the conduct of our lives to karmic causation, implying a complete denial of moral responsibility and freedom of will in the present. Surely such an awareness of karma might be called fatalistic, for in the thorough necessity of all our acts, whether good or evil, the present self is completely powerless.

Moreover, the karma from our past that rules our lives is always evil. In the first sentence of the passage quoted above, evil indicates the opposite of good, but in the words of Shinran that follow, both “good thoughts” and “evil acts”—good and evil as determined in the moral and ethical dimensions of human life—are “evil that we commit and caused by past karma.” “Evil” in the latter sense encompasses both good and evil as we normally consider them; that is, even acts we usually deem good are seen as rooted in evil.

Karma, as a general Buddhist term, denotes both good and evil acts. According to the law of karmic causation, past acts, whether good or evil, become causes manifesting their effects in the present, and likewise, present acts become causes of results that will appear in the future. Good causes necessarily result in good and evil in evil: this necessity between cause and result is the essential characteristic of karma. For Shinran, since he states that both “past good” and “evil acts” are in fact evil, necessity leads entirely from evil as cause to evil as result. “Good thoughts” that arise through the prompting of past good are also included in the statement, “There is never [any act] . . . that is not evil that we commit and [the working out of] past karma.” This necessity from evil to evil lies at the heart of Shinran's concept of karma. According to it, we lack the potential to do anything that is not evil. If whatever we do—even acts we consider to be good and virtuous—is in fact evil, then whatever our subjective thoughts, in reality we have no moral freedom of choice. We can do no other than evil.

For Shinran, evil is not foremost an issue of social life, but rather of a person's attainment of Buddhahood. In order to realize enlightenment, one must perform various religious practices to rid oneself of false thinking and the blind passions that arise from it. The person bound about by his passions, however, cannot keep from committing

acts that they motivate and cannot, therefore, realize Buddhahood. Any act other than practice that makes Buddhahood possible—however virtuous according to our usual standards—is evil from the stance of Buddha. If it does not bring one closer to enlightenment, then it only involves one further in endless birth-and-death. Shinran terms the good we do in our daily lives “good acts variously poisoned” by falsity and passions. Even the human capacity to love, which sometimes seems a gift that brings a person to transcend himself, is seen to harbor egocentricity at its core, and only the Buddha’s “heart of great compassion is replete and thoroughgoing” (*Tannishō* 4). Perhaps the clearest expression of the extent to which Shinran’s concept of evil encompasses all aspects of life may be seen in his statement, “Not wanting to go quickly to the Pure Land, or becoming forlorn with thoughts of death when even slightly ill, is also the activity of our blind passions” (*Tannishō* 9). When a person in sickness comes to realize that death is near, it is natural—however good or evil he may be—that he should feel loneliness and pain at parting from life. Even such natural human feelings Shinran labels “blind passions.” In its depths, then, the evil we commit transcends the realm of human interaction, and extends to the very limits of human existence.

Shinran states, on the one hand, that as a human being one is so bound by one’s past acts that all that one does in the present is defiled by evil, whatever one’s conscious intentions; and on the other, that as a person of the nembutsu, one has broken free from the bondage of such karma, so that the evil one has done cannot bring about its retribution. Moreover, these two assertions do not concern two different kinds of people—for example, those who have not yet realized shinjin and those who have; nor do they describe two stages in the religious life of a single person, such as before and after the realization of shinjin. Both these statements apply to the same person—the person who has realized shinjin—simultaneously. Both articulate the nature and content of his religious awakening. How are we to understand this absolute bondage simultaneous with absolute freedom? First, let us consider Shinran’s understanding of the basic elements of the concept of karma, temporality and causality.

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TEMPORALITY: KARMA IS ALWAYS PAST KARMA

In Shinran's concept of karma, all that we do, think, or feel is instigated by past action; in other words, all that we are in the present has been determined by the past. What does this mean for the future? Most Buddhist and Shin scholars state that the concept of karma differs from a kind of fatalism in that one can freely exert one's will in determining the course of the future, so that it is possible, through effort in the present, to anticipate betterment. Though this may be acceptable in general Buddhist thought, it does not represent Shinran's thinking. Whatever we may seek to do in the present, our future is determined, and there is no room whatever for any change or improvement through our present activity. Our acts, whether morally good or evil, are all seeds that send us to hell, and there is nothing we can do to change this and direct ourselves toward attainment of Buddhahood.

According to the general Buddhist concept of karma, all the painful or happy circumstances that we experience in this world are the results of past volitional acts; only our present good and evil thoughts are not caused by past karma. Acts are classified into good, evil, and neutral, with the first two types bringing recompense. The pleasant and painful circumstances in the present are the results of past good and evil acts, but they themselves are karmically neutral with regard to the future. Concerning karmic causation, "Causes are good or evil; results are neutral": this is an ironclad rule in both the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna traditions. Shinran, however, teaches not this general Buddhist insight, but rather that the good and evil we commit in the present are brought about by past karma. This clearly departs from the fundamental Buddhist concept of causes as good and evil but results as karmically neutral.

That our physical, mental, and verbal acts in the present are all induced by past karma means that not only the present but the future also is determined by the past. In the general Buddhist concept of karma, the present holds both the results of the past and the causes of the future. If, however, the present thoughts and actions that become the cause of the future are all determined by past acts, then not only the present but even the future is encompassed within past karma. There is no power in the present to give birth to the future.

Fundamentally, the future is distinguished from the past in its potentialities in contrast to the determinedness of the past, but if the present is completely conditioned by the past and there is no possibility in the present newly to give rise to the future, the present holds no meaning as the present and, accordingly, the future also lacks the significance of the future. Not only the present, but even the future into its furthest reaches is controlled by past karma and lies within its determinedness, and good or evil acts performed in the present lack the power to alter this. Thus, only the acts committed in the past possess the original significance of karma as an act—a free exercise of will—influencing later life and circumstances. By contrast, acts committed in the present or the future do not possess the significance of new karma. Since there is no creation of karma in the present, there is no present as we usually think of it.

Ordinarily we conceive time as existing objectively as a regular, linear progression that transcends our subjectivity. It forms a framework within which we and all things exist, and all our thoughts and acts arise within it. From the Buddhist perspective, however, such time, like the other aspects of the dichotomized, objectified world that we see standing apart from us, is the product of false thinking based on egocentric discrimination. If we seek to grasp time at its very ground-source—time in which we as true subjectivity are actually living—we must abandon objectified concepts of time. The self as true subjectivity takes now—the immediate present—and actual existence to be identical; objective time cannot enclose it. In other words, our true subjectivity cannot be illuminated through such concepts of time. The self that exists within conceptualized time is not the actually living and thinking self, but nothing more than the objectified self or subjectivity. Linear time advancing mechanically and inexorably apart from ourselves is merely a conception of genuine time, a shadow projected by it. Actual time is that time in which the subjectivity itself stands. There is no framework existing beforehand; rather, time is established and moves moment by moment through the activity of the subjectivity. Our thoughts, words and deeds do not occur within time; rather, time is established where the three modes of activity take place. Where acts are being performed is the present, where they have ended is the past, and where they have yet to begin is the future.

If the present is robbed of all sense of our performing acts, there is

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nothing to be called present karma, and the present cannot be established. Without the present, nothing different from the past can be created; hence, the progression from the present into the future becomes a continuation of the past, and the future also fails to be established. In this concept of past karma, present and future are meaningless; the past alone dominates all. For all eternity there is only the past. Further, where there is no meaningful present and future and all is merely the burden of the past, neither can there be a past in the ordinary sense. The pastness in Shinran's concept of karma—the endless future being controlled by the past—is not a past relative to present and future, but is eternal, pervading the temporality called past, present, and future; it is beginningless and continues endlessly. It is, in other words, samsaric existence that is essentially unchanging however far one goes into the past or future. The eternalness of past karma is none other than this samsaricness. In this way, Shinran's concept of past karma expresses the temporal dimension of the total lack of any condition for salvation in human beings.

KARMIC CAUSALITY AND FREE WILL

The concept of karma is commonly understood to teach that one reaps the fruits of one's own acts. Through good acts one obtains favorable life-conditions, through evil acts one undergoes pain. As the subject of moral freedom, one accepts as one's own responsibility that present pain is the consequence of evil karma created through one's decisions and acts of will in the past and, at the same time, seeks to accumulate good karma in the present in order to gain happy conditions in the future. This popular conception of the working of karma may not be mistaken with regard to Buddhism in general, but, as we have seen, it differs from Shinran's understanding.

At the foundations of the popular conception of karma lies the subject that exercises free will. An example of this thought may be seen in *Dhammapada*, which belongs to early Buddhism:

An evil act that has been committed, like milk, does not congeal immediately. It is like fire covered with ash; smoldering, it accompanies the foolish one. (71)

The foolish person commits evil acts but is unaware; dull and

ignorant, he suffers according to his own acts, just as though burnt by fire. (136)

It is not clear whether such sayings are spoken with focus on the past, present or future. They may be taken as teaching the relation of past to present, or again of present to future. But their general intent concerns the present; it is the message that we should refrain from evil acts and strive to perform good:

Like the wealthy merchant with few companions who shuns dangerous roads, like the person who, cherishing life, shuns poison, so you should shun evil acts. (123)

Be prudent in speech, control your will, and do not commit evil with the body. Purify these three kinds of activity. [In this way] you will attain the path taught by the sages. (281)

Shinran, however, states, “Good acts are not necessary . . . nor is there need to despair of the evil one commits” (*Tannishō* 1). Our moral decisions in the present are irrelevant; good and evil are not at issue. In fact, there is no question of the nature of the acts we perform, and no room for any intervention of personal effort and ideals. As we have already seen, both the “good” and “evil” committed in the present are prompted by past evil acts. The karmic evil of the self is fathomless and forms the core of the self itself. However we might strive, it is impossible for us to improve our circumstances in the future. This concept of past karma is established in the realization that the self as the subject of free will cannot extricate itself from falsity, delusional thinking, and fierce attachment to an unreal self, and that it is powerless in any efforts to awaken to true reality.

Since good and evil thoughts in the present all arise determined by past karma, our decisions and efforts in the present—and, indeed, the subject of free will seeking to suppress evil and nurture good thoughts—are completely bereft of meaning. This denial of the self of free will applies to the past also, for any point in the past when an act was performed was, at that time, the present, and was already conditioned by what preceded. Past karma has been accumulated from the depths of the past, and together with ignorance extends back into the beginningless past. Hence, our good and evil acts in the past were also prompted by past karma that existed from before, not the free will of

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our subjectivity. However far back we go, no acts escape the fundamental character of dependence on preceding evil past karma. The unfolding of this abysmal pastness expresses in temporal terms the delving into the depths of the self. This negation of the self and its potential for good in the past and present reaches, of course, into the future as well. In this way, the concept of past karma denies the validity of the self-determining ego and its attachment to its own goodness and moral judgment throughout the past, present, and future.

In the case of reaping the fruits of one's own acts, karmic causality functions as the basis for the continuity of the freely acting self as temporal existence. The present forms the nexus of the past and future, and there the subject of free will stands, acting as the central axis of causality. Facing the past, the person sees good and evil acts as the causes of the happy or painful results of the present, and facing the future, he sees pain and pleasure as the result of present good and evil acts. What integrates and sustains these two aspects of causality—from past to present and from present to future—and forms their pivot is the subject existing and freely exercising its will in the present. On the basis of these two aspects of causality, time as past, present, and future is established.

In Shinran's thought, however, the causal relationship of karma is single: from past to present *and* future. Here, causality has a twofold significance. Negatively, it breaks through the common notion of "reaping the fruits of one's own acts" based on the subject performing acts of moral judgment and free will in the present. It is the past, not the present, that forms the center of causality. The ego-self in the present, as the result of past karma, is dominated completely by the working out of past acts and possesses no freedom. However far back into the past one goes, it is impossible to say "I do this" in the sense of the self acting freely according to one's own intents. The focal point of causality in past karma is not the subject of personal will. Rather, past karma transcends the time termed past, present, and future in the direction of the past, and thereby transcends the self as temporal existence. There is a similarity here with the concept, or realization, of original sin in Christianity. While original sin is founded on the common ancestor of all individuals, however, the concept of past karma points directly to the individual himself. Herein lies its positive significance. Although past karma transcends the self as the subject of free will, it

works to bind the self to its own past acts; hence, its significance as the acts of one particular individual is never lost. In past karma as “karmic evil that I have performed,” “I” points not to a freely acting subject, but rather to the bonds of one’s own karmic evil. Since one is brought to act through the past karma one bears, there is no act one commits that does not arise from one’s own karmic evil.

Causality in Shinran’s concept of past karma, then, is related not to the self as the subject performing acts in the present, but rather to the self as the bearer of karmic evil from the past. Its fundamental nature is not temporality, as in the case of the two aspects of causality in general Buddhist thought, but rather the bond between oneself in the present and immeasurable karmic evil in the past. Thus, its significance lies not in the moral action of the self committing good or evil, but rather in the awakening to the self as karmic evil.

TRANSFORMATION: KARMA IS NO-KARMA AND NO-KARMA IS KARMA

The person who has realized shinjin is fettered by his past evil and, at the same time, is free and unobstructed, for his past acts cannot bring forth their results. This does not mean that he stands apart from the working of causation. To borrow phrases from the Zen kōan of Hyaku-jō and the fox, “he does not obscure karma” (*fumai inga*)—he abides in its working and is clearly aware of this—and yet “he does not fall into karma” (*furaku inga*). Shinran articulates the nature of karma as experienced by the person of shinjin through the concept of “transformation”:

Without the practitioner’s calculating in any way whatsoever, all his past, present, and future karmic evil is transformed (*ten-zu*) into good. To be transformed means that karmic evil, without being nullified or eradicated, is made into good, just as all waters, upon entering the great ocean, immediately become ocean water.⁵

⁵ Ueda Yoshifumi, ed., *Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone’: Yuishinshō mon-i* (Kyoto: Shin Buddhism Translation Series, Hongwanji International Center, 1979), pp. 32–33. Many of the quotations from Shinran in this article are from other volumes

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Our karmic evil remains just as it is, and at the same time it is transformed into the Buddha's virtues; hence, we are bound to the world of birth-and-death, and yet we do not experience the unfolding of our karma as bondage, but rather as the free activity of wisdom-compassion in genuine self-awareness. Freedom here is not a matter of being able to exert our egocentric will. Such freedom is in reality the constraint of blind passions and false self, what Jaspers calls "self-will" (*Ich Will*) or "apparitional freedom" (*Scheinfreiheit*). True freedom lies rather where the demands of ignorant self-will fall away in the awakening to the working of karma; hence, Shinran states, "It is when one simply leaves both good and evil acts to karmic recompense and entrusts wholeheartedly to the Primal Vow that one is in accord with Other Power" (*Tannishō* 13). Here, the natural working of karmic causation (*gōdō jinen*), by which we live leaving all to karmic recompense, and the natural working of the power of the Vow (*ganriki jinen*), by which we tread the path of necessary attainment of enlightenment guided by the Buddha's wisdom, function as a single natural working.⁶ True freedom—the power to act in accord with things as they truly are—can only be the activity wisdom-compassion taking what stands opposed to itself (necessary working of karmic evil) as itself. As D. T. Suzuki states, "Karma is no-karma and no-karma is karma."⁷

The awareness that karma renders us incapable of doing other than evil—that all our thoughts, whether normally judged good or evil, arise through the prompting of immense karmic evil from the past—is not fatalistic, for it is not attained through intellectual reflection, as an objective truth about the world around us, but only through the wisdom of Buddha unfolded in us in the realization of shinjin. Thus, it does not spawn resignation or passivity; rather, vital and positive life is born

of this series: *Letters of Shinran: Mattōshō* (1978; hereafter as *Letters*), *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling: Ichinen-ianen mon'i* (1980), and *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way: Kyōgyōshinshō* (Volume I, Chapters on Teaching and Practice, 1983; Volume II, Chapter on Shinjin, 1985). Portions have been adapted.

⁶ For a discussion of the working of *jinen*, see my article, "The Mahayana Structure of Shinran's Thought," Part II, *Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. XVII No. 2 (Autumn 1984), pp. 51-52.

⁷ *The Essence of Buddhism* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1968), pp. 30-32.

from it, for awareness of one's karmic evil is also awareness of one's salvation, and is established only as the Buddha's wisdom-compassion taking the defiled as itself. In abandoning one's clinging to a relative freedom, which is in fact subjugation to evil, one becomes aware that the necessity of evil is encompassed by the freedom of wisdom-compassion. As the T'ang dynasty Pure Land master Shan-tao teaches, the deep mind of shinjin has two aspects: that with regard to the practitioner or self (*ki no jinshin*), in which one realizes that there is no condition within oneself for release from saṃsāra, and that with regard to dharma or Primal Vow (*hō no jinshin*), in which one entrusts oneself to the necessary attainment of birth through Amida's wisdom-compassion. These are two faces of a single religious awakening.

The transformation of karma is, at its core, the transformation of awareness. It is the awakening of the true subjectivity free of egocentric will or, in general Buddhist terms, the realization of no-self. Shinran clearly expresses this transformation in the following verse:

- 1) When, into the vast ocean of Amida's Vow of wisdom,
 The waters of the foolish beings' minds, both good and evil,
 Have returned and entered, then immediately
 They are transformed into the mind of great compassion.
 (*Shōzōmatsu wasan* 40, SSZ II, p. 520)

Shinran annotates this verse: " 'Transform' means that the evil mind becomes good." "Evil mind" refers to blind passions and embraces both the good and evil, morally and ethically judged, mentioned in the verse. "Good" refers not to moral goodness, but to complete freedom from blind passions. It is "the mind of great compassion" or, in the verses quoted below, the "ocean water of virtues" and "ocean water of wisdom." Transformation is not, however, simply a conversion of blind passions into enlightenment; hence, Shinran also uses the expression "become one taste":

- 2) The ocean waters of the inconceivable Name are such
 That even the corpses of grave offenders and slanderers of
 dharma do not remain as they are;
 When the myriad rivers of all evils have returned,
 They become of one taste with the ocean water of virtues.
 (*Kōsō wasan* 41)

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- 3) When, to the ocean waters of the great compassionate Vow
Of unhindered light filling the ten quarters,
The streams of blind passions have returned,
They become one taste with the ocean water of wisdom.

(*Kōsō wasan* 42, SSZ II, p. 506)

Our blind passions are transformed into great compassion—they become wisdom-compassion—and in the mind that results, blind passions and wisdom are of “one taste.” If blind passions have become wisdom, however, there should be only wisdom; it should not be necessary to speak of the two as becoming “one taste.” We see here that the mind in which blind passions and wisdom-compassion have become one has two aspects. First, it is the Buddha’s “good” mind. Our “good and evil” mind, on returning to and entering the ocean of the Vow, becomes the “mind of great compassion,” which is also great wisdom. Second, this good mind is not good alone, but at the same time embraces within itself the “evil mind,” the blind passions. Thus the two—wisdom-compassion and blind passions—while they stand opposed as pure and defiled, form the single “good” mind, which is *shinjin*, or the mind that is true, real, and sincere (*makoto no kokoro*).

This self-contradictory structure of transformation on the one hand together with oneness that includes duality on the other is also clarified by Rennyō. He states, concerning the aspect of becoming one (transformation):

Already the practitioner’s mind of evil is made the same as the Tathagata’s good mind. This is what is meant when it is said that the Buddha’s mind and the mind of the foolish being become one.
(*Gobunshō* II, 10; SSZ III, p. 440)

Our minds become the same as Amida’s good mind; nevertheless, our blind passions do not simply disappear or change utterly into wisdom-compassion. To clarify this point, Rennyō states:

Amida Buddha mends sentient beings. “To mend” means that, while leaving the mind of the sentient being just as it is, Amida adds the good mind (Buddha’s mind) to it and makes it good. It does not mean that the mind of the sentient being is completely replaced, and is distinguished and taken in as Buddha-wisdom only. (*Go-ichidaiki kiki-gaki* 64, SSZ II, p. 548)

Here, there is both wisdom and blind passions. The mind of the foolish being, before becoming one with the Buddha's mind, is blind passions, and on realizing shinjin, it changes into the same mind as the Buddha's. This transformed mind, however, has not ceased to be blind passions, for it holds within itself the mind of the foolish being. For this single mind, blind passions are not something other than itself. That is, the good mind (*shinjin*) that is the same as the Buddha's mind, established through the Buddha's mind and the mind of the foolish being becoming one, has awakened to itself as blind passions and karmic evil. Stated conversely, the mind that has been able to awaken to itself as blind passions is the same good mind as the Buddha's. To know oneself as blind passions is to become one with the Buddha's mind.

The following two verses articulate the whole of what we have seen above: Buddha's mind and the mind of the foolish being becoming one, and the complex structure of the one mind—the good mind—thus established.

4) Through the benefit bestowed by unhindered light,
 One realizes the shinjin of vast transcendent virtues:
 Unfailingly the ice of blind passions melts
 And immediately becomes the water of enlightenment.
 (*Kōsō wasan* 39)

5) Obstructing evils have become the substance of virtues;
 It is like the relation of ice and water:
 The more ice, the more water;
 The more hindrances, the more virtues.
 (*Kōsō wasan* 40, SSZ II, pp. 505–506)

Through the working of the Vow, we realize shinjin, and our blind passions become the Buddha's mind of great wisdom and great compassion (verse 4). In this mind, blind passions and the good mind make up one whole (verse 5: our "obstructing evils have become the substance of virtues"), but they do so while standing in a relationship of mutual opposition ("the more hindrances, the more virtues"); hence, our passions, just as they are, have become one with great wisdom and, in addition, through the working of that wisdom, they are gradually transformed like ice melting to become water. *Tannishō* 16 also speaks of this interaction after the realization of shinjin:

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If shinjin has become settled, birth will be brought about by Amida's working, so there must be no designing on our part. Even when our thoughts and deeds are evil, then, if we thereby turn all the more deeply to the power of the Vow, gentleheartedness and forbearance will surely arise in us through the working of jinen.

Through the working of wisdom-compassion, our blind passions are transformed into the same good mind as the Buddha's; this occurs at the moment of realizing shinjin and, further, continues to occur throughout life. This is the path of perfect unobstructedness.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC PRESENT

Realization of shinjin takes place in "one thought-moment" (*ichinen*), which Shinran explains as "time at its ultimate limit" (*Once-calling and Many-calling*, p. 32). This one thought-moment, like other moments, occurs within samsaric time, but in it, the mind of blind passions becomes one with the transtemporal mind of the Vow. Hence, that which is timeless fills this moment of the practitioner's life, and for him samsaric time reaches its end: "We have parted forever from birth-and-death." Perhaps the most illuminating discussion of the structure of this one thought-moment is that of Prof. Nishitani Keiji in "The Problem of Time in Shinran."⁸ Nishitani delineates the religious nature of this moment as the emergence of true existence, unfolding it as the place of the simultaneity of 1) the time in which Amida fulfilled the Primal Vow to save all beings throughout history—this is the past prior to any being, further back in the past than any point in the historical past, 2) the time of the establishment of the Pure Land, which is the future for each being, however far into the future it exists, and 3) the historical present of the realization of shinjin. These three times, while remaining distinct and sequential as past, present, and future, are brought into simultaneity in the practitioner of shinjin through the working of the Primal Vow. Further, in the religious existence of shinjin, the practitioner delves into the depths of the present moment, which, as the place of simultaneity, opens bottomlessly into the

⁸ In *Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. XI, No. 1 (May 1978), pp. 13-26.

transtemporal that penetrates it and makes it the true present. It is such reflection that is expressed in Shinran's statement, "When I consider deeply the Vow of Amida, which arose from five kalpas of profound thought, I realize that it was entirely for the sake of myself alone!" (*Tannishō*, "Postscript"). This nonduality or simultaneity of the temporal (historical time of the practitioner) and the transtemporal (working of Buddha) is the focus of Nishitani's article.

From the perspective of our concerns here, however, it must be added that the content of the practitioner's reflection inevitably involves past karma. Shinran's statement above continues: "How I am filled with gratitude for the Primal Vow, in which Amida settled on saving *me, though I am burdened thus greatly with karma.*" To delve into the depths of the present in shinjin is none other than to delve back into the immense burden of karmic evil one has borne for beginningless kalpas into the distant past, and also to realize that this karma will continue to disclose itself in the future. "Our desires are countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves" (*Once-calling and Many-calling*, p. 48). Thus, "When the karmic cause so moves us"—when past karma functions as the cause or condition for some act—"we will do anything" (*Tannishō* 13).

Passage of time is ordinarily experienced as a progression from past into present and present into future; as potentiality, it flows out of the future and recedes into the past. For the person of shinjin, however, the course of time is not merely linear, but cyclical and repetitive—not merely historic, but samsaric—for he realizes that the working of evil past karma constrains him and deprives him of all possibility for new and free activity. His heart and mind, as great compassion established through the transformation of his blind passions, has broken free from birth-and-death, but since this mind (the good mind) includes blind passions within itself, even though he has entered the timeless ocean of the Vow and gained immeasurable life, simultaneously he lives samsaric time and has, in fact, for the first time genuinely awakened to the nature of his existence as blind passions and karmic evil. This awakening corresponds to deep mind with regard to self, which is essentially the realization that "hell is to be my home whatever I do" (*Tannishō* 2). This necessity of karmic evil is apprehended temporally as all-prevail-

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ing pastness. The relative past and present, and thus future also, conceived in terms of acts performed according to our will, are not actual time, but time encompassed within the pastness of karma. Karma, as primal, fundamental evil, transcends the good and evil acts that constitute relative existence and possesses temporal absoluteness. Thus, when past karma is seen to be evil, evil is understood to form the root-foundation of the person as relative existence. All acts of good or evil throughout the past, present, and future—that is, human life as temporal existence—through being dominated by past karma, are evil from their source. For this reason, Shinran, from his stance within the realization of shinjin, teaches not the creating of karma in the present, but only karmic recompense.

At the same time, however, the fulfillment of salvation is also seen in terms of an encompassing pastness in the establishment and fulfillment of the Primal Vow to save all beings. Dharmakara has become Amida Buddha, and the Name, *Namu-amida-butsu*, in which each being is already included and called to as “*Namu*,” pervades the ten quarters. The realization of this pastness “further back in the past than any point in the past” corresponds to deep mind with regard to dharma or Vow. The prevailing pastness of karmic evil (samsaric existence of the sentient being) and the pastness of the fulfillment of the Vow (Amida Buddha) are established for the practitioner only in self-contradictory fusion and interpenetration with each other; this fusion takes place in the present as genuine time, and its first emergence is the thought-moment of the realization of shinjin, in which the mind of the being and the mind of Buddha become one.

The person who has realized shinjin, looking to the past, finds both the fulfillment of the Primal Vow and the depths of his past karmic evil; at the same time, he apprehends his future as the certain plunge into hell, and as the Pure Land. The futurity as the Pure Land differs from the future within samsaric time, which is in fact no more than repetition of the past. It is genuine futurity or freedom, which means that in it bondage to temporal existence as birth-and-death has been broken and the oppressive burden of the past has been lifted. The future that is apprehended as the Pure Land, then, is transtemporal; it cannot be confined to the future of samsaric time. In every present moment of the life of shinjin, obstructing karmic evil is transformed into virtue, and the two aspects of the future fuse into one. For this reason,

Shinran speaks of realization of shinjin as itself the immediate attainment of birth occurring in the present.⁹ While the Pure Land remains the future, the person of shinjin immediately attains birth, and while to the very last moment of life anger and envy arise without pause, he has parted forever from birth-and-death and his heart "sports in the Pure Land."

The fulfilled Pure Land is the land of immeasurable light and the fulfilled Buddha—Amida, or the mind of the Vow—is the Buddha of inconceivable light; both are in essence boundless light or wisdom that surpasses conceivability and transcends time. While the karmic past gives rise to samsaric time, that which transcends time—immeasurable light, or the ocean of the Vow—as the pastness of the Vow's fulfillment, penetrates and fuses with samsaric pastness to form the genuine present of the practitioner of shinjin, and as the futurity of the Pure Land, it imparts to each present moment of the life of shinjin its character as authentic time. The eternal (timelessness) does not stand solely beyond samsaric time in the future, but fuses with the present; the present (hence the relative past and future also) is not merely impermanent or temporal, but is established on the foundation of the timeless that pervades it. True time—not an objectified reflection of time, but time that encompasses the subjectivity—is established only as the interpenetration of time and timelessness. It is here—where the past is, on the one hand, samsaric existence burdened by karmic evil and, on the other, the fulfillment of the Primal Vow; where the present is the fusion of these two kinds of past in the realization of shinjin; and where the future is both bondage that leads inexorably to hell and freedom in which that bondage has been broken through—that the true subjectivity of no-self, which is free of egocentric will, lives and thinks and acts. Past and present, while remaining distinct, are one; further, present and future, while distinct, are one. This is the temporal aspect of the mutual opposition of sentient being and Buddha simultaneous with their identity, or of the grounding of karma in the working of the Primal Vow.

The present of the person of shinjin, as both past and future, neces-

⁹ For a discussion of the two meanings of "birth" in Shinran, see my article, "The Mahayana Structure of Shinran's Thought," Part I, *Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. XVII No. 1 (Spring 1984), pp. 71-78.

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sity and freedom, holds at once the two contradictory aspects of deep mind, for leaving both good and evil (temporal existence) to karmic recompense—awakening to the karmic evil that pervades the past, present, and future—takes place in the realization of shinjin. Samsaric pastness (necessity), while remaining necessity, gives itself up totally and comes to stand within the future (freedom): “The heart of the person of shinjin already and always resides in the Pure Land” (*Letters*, p. 27). Each moment of his life may be envisioned as a point on the circumference of a circle. Every act up until death is dominated by the past, and this domination moves him along the circle of samsaric time, in which nothing new can arise. Simultaneously, however, he is encompassed by the Vow, and through the Vow’s power, he is brought beyond the circle into a trajectory directed to the genuine future, which is the Pure Land. Each moment is transformed (*tenzu*), so that every new present possesses the newness or originality that cannot arise from karma. In the life of shinjin, each day is new and fresh. The future in such life lies not along the circumference of samsaric time, but in the constant transformation by which the direction of karma-ridden time is broken and the practitioner is brought to face the Pure Land. Thus, in the interpenetration of time and timelessness in shinjin, we come to know true and real time—the self-aware, impermanent existence that is living and, accordingly, that is dying. Although samsaric time merely stretches out endlessly, the time of the subjectivity, while it flows, does not flow, and while it moves, is still. It is time, and it is eternity or timelessness. Life and death do not simply stand in mutual opposition; within life there is death, within death there is life. Such life is true life, such death true death.

RADICAL SHAME: THE AWAKENING TO KARMIC EVIL

Shinran terms effort to desist from evil and perform good *hakarai* (“deliberation,” “calculation,” “contrivance”), referring to the working of intellect and will, in all its facets, to attain salvation. He states:

Sages of the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna and all good people, because they take the auspicious Name of the Primal Vow as their own roots of good (i.e., say the nembutsu out of their own judgment and will to do good), are incapable of awaken-

ing shinjin, of understanding Buddha-wisdom, and of understanding the [Buddha's] establishment of the cause [of birth in the Pure Land].

(*Kyōgyōshinshō*, "Chapter on Transformed Buddha and Land," SSZ II, 165–166)

Those who strive to be virtuous, believing themselves capable of doing good and shunning evil, are engaged in *hakarai* or designing born of attachment to their own worthiness and capabilities; hence, shinjin cannot open forth in them and they cannot understand the Buddha's wisdom. To become free of attachment to one's own powers (self-power) and to entrust oneself to the Primal Vow are no more than different expressions for the same thing.

As long as there is self-working, it is not Other Power, but self-power. . . . Self-working is the *hakarai* of the person of self-power.
(*Goshōsokushū* 10, SSZ II, p. 712)

Moreover, "Other Power means to be free of any form of *hakarai*" (*Letters*, p. 39). As long as *hakarai* remains, one does not entrust to the Primal Vow. Further, it is because one does not grasp the nature of past karma that this *hakarai* does not fall away.

Only when a person knows that he cannot do other than evil, however much he might strive to do good, does he realize that he lacks any means to extricate himself from samsaric existence; his judgment and will being poisoned by self-attachment, nothing remains to him but utter entrusting of himself to the Primal Vow. It may be thought that realization of shinjin involves a decision or personal commitment; Shinran's expressions reveal it in negative terms, not as a "leap of faith," but simply as the thorough dissolution of *hakarai*. Further, among early Shin Buddhists, there were those who felt that it was natural for the genuine practitioner to fear committing evil; such an attitude is criticized in *Tannishō* 13 as "the thought of one who doubts the Primal Vow and fails to understand the working of past karma in our good and evil acts." If the karmic conditions exist, we cannot avoid evil however we may strive to. When we grasp the nature of our karmic past, it becomes impossible for us to believe that a person must despair of his evil; finding ourselves powerless, we cannot but abandon our self-will and "leave both good and evil to karmic recompense."

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Hakarai includes both the will to cease from evil and do good and the discrimination that judges. Both aspects are accompanied by our feelings and emotions. In terms of human intellect, *hakarai* is ignorance of genuine good and evil. Although burdened with karmic evil, we are not aware of its working; believing ourselves capable of choosing good over evil, we value as essentially worthy our aspirations to perform good as best as we can. To become free of *hakarai*, then, is to awaken to our karmic evil and to our actual ignorance of good and evil. Shinran states:

I know nothing of what is good or evil. For if I could know thoroughly, as is known in the mind of Amida, that an act was good, then I would know the meaning of "good." If I could know thoroughly, as Amida knows, that an act was evil, then I would know "evil." But in a foolish being full of blind passions, in this fleeting world—this burning house—all matters without exception are lies and gibberish, totally without truth and sincerity. The nembutsu alone is true and real. (*Tannishō*, "Postscript")

In the realization of shinjin, a person awakens to his own ignorance; thus, one aspect of shinjin is wisdom: "When one has boarded the ship of the Vow of great compassion . . . the darkness of ignorance is immediately broken through" (*Kyōgyōshinshō*, "Chapter on Practice" 78).

Karmic evil, however, cannot rise to self-awareness by itself, and the intellect alone cannot discern its own profound ignorance. For a person to realize that, though he had assumed he could choose between good and evil, in fact he cannot, he must first distinguish intellectually between good and evil. Animals and infants, who cannot make this distinction, can have no awareness of karmic evil. In addition, the will must be exerted in action.¹⁰ Shinran states, after instructing a disciple to kill in order to attain birth in the Pure Land:

"If we could always act as we wished, then when I told you to kill a thousand people in order to attain birth, you should

¹⁰ For a discussion of the process of realizing shinjin, see my article, "How is Shinjin to be Realized?" *Pacific World* (Institute of Buddhist Studies, Berkeley), New Series, No. 1 (1985), pp. 17-24.

have immediately gone out to do so. But since you lack the karmic cause enabling you to do this, you do not kill even a single person. It is not that you keep from killing because your heart is good. In the same way, a person may wish not to harm anyone and yet end up killing a hundred or a thousand people.” Thus he spoke, referring to our belief that the good of our hearts and minds is truly good and the evil truly evil, not realizing that Amida saves us through the inconceivable working of the Vow. (*Tannishō* 13)

The phrase, “If we could always act as we wished,” means “if it were in our power to act according to our *hakarai*.” That we do not kill means not that we will not kill because we are good; rather, we cannot carry it out merely because we lack the karmic conditions. When this is realized, it is clear that though we considered ourselves good and morally upright, in fact we cannot genuinely be called good. Acts that we judged intellectually to be good are not really so.

Our intellectual judgment of good and evil and our conviction that we can accomplish good through our will (even if not perfectly, at least to some extent) is *hakarai*. As long as we remain in the stance of *hakarai*, we cannot know that “Amida saves us through the inconceivable working of the Vow.” Unless this *hakarai*—this resolve to make ourselves morally and spiritually worthy—reaches a total impasse and all room for design and effort vanishes, entrusting to the Primal Vow will not arise. When we have exerted all our will and intellect in seeking what is good and true, and thus reached our limits—if we have earnestly listened to the teaching—a conversion or turnabout occurs. This is an awakening, a returning. Shinran calls it “the equal of perfect enlightenment” (*tōshōgaku*). Here, our intellect, will, and feelings are transformed into true wisdom that knows—and great compassion that grasps—karmic evil as itself.

It is commonly said that being human inextricably involves evil. This view does not, however, constitute realization of oneself as a “person in whom karmic evil is deep-rooted and whose blind passions abound” (*Tannishō* 1). Realization of karmic evil is not accompanied by feelings that evil is “natural” or “unavoidable”; rather, it is felt to be deeply shameful. This shame is not a form of regret that includes feeling that one can reform in the future. Rather, all expectation of moral or

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spiritual progress is gone; there is nothing but shame and lament. Regret or remorse tends to arise in the ethical and moral dimensions of human existence. The shame born of awakening to one's karmic evil goes deeper, to the roots of one's personal existence itself, and belongs to religious life; in this sense, it is radical and pervasive. Shinran states:

With our snake's or scorpion's mind of wickedness and
cunning,
It is impossible to perform good acts of self-power;
And unless we entrust ourselves to Amida's directing of
virtue,
We will surely end without shame, without self-reproach.
(*Shōzōmatsu wasan* 99, SSZ II, p. 528)

To reflect on one's own evil and be filled with regret is still to be "without shame," which is impossible without wisdom. If to feel regret means to pass judgment in the present on an act committed in the past, then the past act may be seen as evil, but the present is no longer so. From the perspective of karmic evil, however, not only the past but the present also is evil, and the future holds no possibility for anything but evil. Simple repentance over a single a past act is meaningless. In the consciousness of karmic evil, there remains no room for remorse, but only the realization that one is a "being possessed of blind passions" or "deep-rooted karmic evil."

An example of such realization may be seen in the *myōkōnin* Shichisaburō of Mikawa province. When he discovered that he had been robbed of some firewood, feelings of gratitude toward the thief arose in him. He understood the theft to be the result of his having stolen from the thief in the past. Thus, he was moved to profound shame for his past offense, and further, realizing that the person had come to take back stolen property because he, Shichisaburō, had no idea of how to return it, he wanted to thank him. He did not merely accept the theft because it was retribution for his own past misdeed; in fact, he did not see the act as a theft. Through it he was awakened to his own karmic evil, and since this awareness was the activity of great compassion in him, he felt joy rather than resignation, gratitude rather than vindictiveness. The self that takes an egocentric perspective and self-love as its fundamental nature had been transcended, as had the objectively moral or ethical stance that judges the thief as a criminal.

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In the belief that we merely reap the fruits of our own acts, there is only causality and no transcendence of it; there is never more than *sam-sāra*, and no salvation. Shichisaburō's subjectivity, however, is no-self in which egocentric will has fallen away and religious love emerges as gratitude toward the thief. As Shinran states, "Obstructing evils"—karmic recompense—"have become the substance of virtues." With a subjectivity in which blind passions that arise moment by moment are transformed into no-self through genuine self-awareness—through the mind of Buddha—the person of *shinjin* acts in accord with his nature and circumstances, manifesting the working of compassion in the occurrences and interactions of ordinary life. In awakening to his karmic evil, he carries on his life subject to causality and, further, has transcended it. Thus Shinran states that he "constantly practices great compassion" (*Kyōgyōshinshō*, "Chapter on Shinjin" 65).

TRANSLATED BY DENNIS HIROTA