

The Mahayana Structure of Shinran's Thought

PART II

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NONDUALITY OF CAUSE AND RESULT IN MAHAYANA TRADITION

In Shinran, the term "birth" (*ōjō*) encompasses two meanings: attainment of the stage of non-retrogression at the moment one realizes shinjin, and attainment of enlightenment or buddhahood at the moment of death. His concept of birth, therefore, is inherently self-contradictory: the person who has attained birth (non-retrogression) has not yet attained birth (enlightenment); the one who has already been born (attained the cause) will be born in the future (result, buddhahood). In fact, it may be said generally that if the experience of becoming a buddha is expressed intellectually, this self-contradiction results. Stated conversely, an experience that can be expressed in terms that are not self-contradictory is not attainment of buddhahood. Self-contradictory thought arising from the complex structure of wisdom outlined in Part I—the identity of samsara and nirvana or sentient being and buddha simultaneous with the transformation of the former into the latter—is one of the hallmarks of the Mahayana tradition. The idea that result (nirvana) at once differs and is non-

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different from its cause appears in the Prajñāpāramitā sutras, Nāgārjuna's concept of śūnyatā, and Maitreya, as we have seen earlier. Below, I will consider representative formulations of this concept in Hua-yen and T'ien-t'ai thought.

In *Hua-yen wu-chiao-chang* (On the five teachings according to Hua-yen), Fa-ts'ang (643–712) divides the One Vehicle teaching into two gates—the special teaching and the common teachings. Concerning the former, he states:

The [special teaching] may be further divided into two. First, the result, the ocean of reality. This is inexplicable, for it is not tied to the teaching. It is the realm of the ten Buddhas. Therefore Vasubandhu's commentary on the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* states: "Cause is explicable, result is inexplicable." Second, the cause, co-dependent origination; this is the realm of Samantabhadra. These two [aspects of the teaching] are nondual; there is the total inclusion of each in the other. They are like waves and water.²⁵

The special teaching, the Hua-yen One Vehicle teaching, takes as fundamental a nonduality of two aspects: the nonduality of explicable and inexplicable—what Nāgārjuna terms worldly truth (*samvṛti-satya*, truth expressed in terms of human discourse) and supreme truth (*paramārtha-satya*)—and that of cause and result. The nonduality does not deny the distinctive natures of these elements; rather, it has a self-contradictory structure in which they are two and not-two, not-two and two. (The two meanings of birth correspond to the nonduality of cause and result. I will take up Shinran's treatment of the explicable and the inexplicable in connection with his contrast of form and the formless.)

The distinction between cause and result is based upon the difference between buddha and sentient being, the distance between them, and expresses the path or process that leads from one to the other. Every person at any point along this path is called a "person in the causal [stage]," or in the passage quoted above, "Samantabhadra." A commentary states concerning this passage that Samantabhadra is a mahāsattva of perfect enlightenment (*tōgaku*), at the head of all "people of the causal [stage]." It further states that he also signifies "all practitioners as Samantabhadra":

²⁵ T45, 477a.

Without distinguishing the ordinary person and the sage, all are called Samantabhadra—because they have faith in the universal dharma, because they understand the universal dharma, because they practice the universal dharma, because they realize the universal dharma.²⁶

Those of the stage of faith on the path toward buddhahood, as well as those of the stages of understanding, practice, and realization, are all called Samantabhadra. Even the place furthest from buddhahood, the first step along the path, is nondual with the goal. This is expressed, “the moment one first awakens the mind [of enlightenment], one attains perfect enlightenment.” From the opposite perspective, the result is nondual with every point of the path toward it. This means that “buddha” is nondual with every sentient being—whether it be an ordinary person, a sage, or a mahāsattva of perfect enlightenment.²⁷ This nonduality of cause and result implies a negation of the path from sentient being to buddha and any basis upon which practice can be established. Sentient beings, without awaiting the fulfillment of practice, are from the very beginning buddhas. We are, however, unaware of this. To become a buddha is none other than to awaken and return to the original self. Buddha, as a marker showing the direction in which the sentient being should advance, does not exist apart from the sentient being; buddha is none other than the sentient being who has awakened to his true self. For the establishment of this “awakening” our unenlightened thinking must be eradicated; this is the significance of practice. When, through the elimination of nonenlightenment (ordinary being), attained enlightenment (buddha) is established, one awakens to the fact that one has possessed this enlightenment from the beginning. The nonduality of cause and result is identical in structure to the concept expounded in the *Awakening of Faith* of nonenlightenment-acquired enlightenment (the path from cause to result) and original enlightenment (result that is nondual with this path).

²⁶ *Tsūroki* 通路記 by Gyōnen 凝然 (1240–1321), T72, 306b.

²⁷ Shinran interprets the *īdō* 等 of *īdōgaku* (perfect enlightenment) to mean “equal,” and states that a person of shinjin in the stage of the truly settled has attained the equal of perfect enlightenment (*īdōshōgaku*)—that is, has become the equal of a perfectly enlightened one; hence, he may be seen as the same as a mahāsattva of perfect enlightenment. Shinran also states that he is the same as Maitreya, who has reached the fifty-first of fifty-two stages, the final stage being the supreme enlightenment.

Nāgārjuna states that both *prajñāpāramitā* and *śūnyatā* are different names for the reality of things. In *śūnyatā*, the sense of "breaking form and making it empty" and that of "form is originally empty" are united. "Original emptiness" corresponds to "original enlightenment" in the *Awakening of Faith*, and "making empty" to acquired enlightenment. In each instance of "emptying" there is original emptiness. Since every point of the path is originally empty, discrimination of places along the path is meaningless. Every step from sentient being to buddhahood has the significance of returning to the origin, that is, of dissolving the path. It has been common to interpret *śūnyatā* to mean that when all forms have been broken through, and further *śūnyatā* has also been broken through and made empty, so that true emptiness in which nothing at all remains has been attained, then wondrous existence manifests itself. Such an understanding is mistaken. As Chi-ts'ang (549–623) of the San-lun school states, breaking through the false is itself the manifesting of the true; that is, each instance of breaking through falsity is always simultaneously the immediate manifestation of truth.

One of the most telling expositions of this concept is the six *soku* (non-dualities) of the T'ien-t'ai school, which are six stages of the path to enlightenment.²⁸ "Six" here corresponds to cause in Hua-yen thought, "*soku*" to result. These two are nondual, and the term *soku* is used to express this. A commentary states:

Because of *soku*, before and after are both affirmed. Because of the six stages (*roku*), there is no confusion in the order of before and after.²⁹

Here, the nonduality of before and after—the mutual interpenetration of illusion and enlightenment—is stated. Further:

²⁸ The six stages are: original oneness with true reality (*risoku*), knowing this through words (*myōjisoku*), contemplation and practice (*kangyōsoku*), sweeping away dichotomous thinking and nearing enlightenment (*sojisoku*), elimination of the roots of illusion and partially realizing truth (*bunshinsoku*), and ultimate attainment (*kukyōsoku*). In Hua-yen thought, the "first awakening of the mind of enlightenment" is present at the very beginning of the causal element; in the scheme of the six *soku*, however, there is even a stage of those who have yet to awaken the mind of enlightenment.

²⁹ Chan-jan 湛然 (711–782) in *Chih-kuan ta-i* 止觀大意, T46, 459c.

Because reality (*ri*) is always the same, it is *soku*. Because things (*ji*) differ, there are six stages.

Here, the nonduality of *ri* and *ji* or of essence and function is explained. The nonduality of cause and result is first of all the nonduality of before and after (the negation of the path), but since "after" is result, it is nirvana, and since it is nondual with cause (things), the nonduality of before and after is also the nonduality of individual things and ultimate reality or suchness (*ji-ri funi*). It is further the nonduality of the karma-created (*ui*) and the uncreated (*mu-i*), of the impermanent (time, *mujō*) and the eternal (timeless, *jōjū*). Hence, samsara and nirvana, which are in a relation of mutual negation (with before and after distinct) are one (*soku*).

In Dōgen, this concept is taught as the oneness of practice and realization (*shu shō ittō*). Practice corresponds to cause, realization to result. In Zen, much emphasis is placed on practice after attainment of satori; this is because attaining buddhahood is conceived of in terms of the structure outlined above.

The concept of birth in the Pure Land tradition from India up through Hōnen meant ending life in this world and reaching the other world, where practice for attaining non-retrogression was possible. In Shinran, birth has two meanings, for it has come to signify becoming a buddha. That birth means both attainment of non-retrogression in the present and supreme enlightenment in the Pure Land implies the abandonment of the traditional Pure Land focus on the point of death (*rinju*) in favor of a standpoint in normal life (*heizei*). Through this change, Shinran incorporates into the concept of birth one of the fundamental conditions of Mahayana Buddhist thought, the structure of simultaneous identity and transformation that we have considered in Part I.

THE PLACE OF REALIZATION: ORDINARY LIFE VS. MOMENT OF DEATH

In *Inscriptions*, Shinran explains a passage from Shan-tao, "The practitioner who aspires to be born is grasped by the power of the Vow and brought to attainment of birth when his life ends." For Shan-tao, a practitioner is grasped by Amida at the moment of death and at that time brought to birth in the Pure Land. This understanding was prevalent before Shinran, and led to an emphasis on sustaining religious practice throughout one's life and on achieving a settled state of mind particularly at the moment of death.

Shinran rejects such an interpretation, however:

This [passage] refers to the person who has already realized shinjin in ordinary times, not to one who becomes definitely settled in shinjin and who is blessed with Amida's compassionate grasp for the first time at the point of death. Since the person who has realized the diamond-like heart has been grasped and protected by the light of Amida's heart from ordinary times, he dwells in the stage of the truly settled. The moment of death is not the crucial matter; from ordinary times he has been constantly grasped and protected, never to be abandoned, and so is said to be *grasped [by the power of the Vow] and brought to attainment of birth.* (*Inscriptions*, pp. 53-54)

Here, Shinran clearly conceives of birth as a matter of ordinary life and denies the centrality of the moment of death. It may appear that "being grasped by the power of the Vow" refers to reaching the stage of the truly settled and belongs to the present life, while "attainment of birth" refers to realization of nirvana, for which one must wait until death. Shinran, however, presents such an interpretation with implied criticism:

On the other hand, there may be people lacking true shinjin in ordinary times who, by the merit of having long engaged in saying the Name, first encounter the guidance of a true teacher and realize shinjin at the very end of their lives; at that moment, being grasped by the power of the Vow, they attain birth. But those who await Amida's coming at the end of life have yet to realize shinjin and so are filled with anxiety, anticipating the moment of death. (*Inscriptions*, p. 54)

For "those who await" the moment of death, the experience of being "grasped and brought to attainment of birth" can occur only at the very end of life. By contrast, for one who stands in the position of ordinary life, Shan-tao's words mean that "the moment of death is not the crucial matter; from ordinary times one has been constantly grasped and protected, never to be abandoned." Having been grasped by the power of the Vow, already one will never be abandoned, and becoming one who will never be abandoned is attaining birth.

To speak of reaching the stage of non-retrogression as attainment of birth is to take a stance rooted in ordinary life. From this position, the moment of death has already lost its basic significance with regard to birth.

For a person who has already been grasped by Amida's light in ordinary life, Amida's coming at the moment of death is unnecessary. This fundamentally distinguishes Shinran's thought from the traditional concept of birth attained at the moment of death. But this is not all. Shinran's position further treats the religious significance that the moment of death held formerly, the problem of transcending samsara, as an issue of normal, ongoing life to be solved in ordinary times.

To confront the question of afterlife is to take up the problem of transcending life, of what pervades and connects both life and death. The solution lies in completely severing attachments to life and parting from samsara while one still has one's physical existence. *Tannishō* states: "That both oneself and others part from birth-and-death is the fundamental intent of all the Buddhas." In Shinran, the religious significance that the future world held—transcending samsara and seeking and attaining the eternal—is to be found in the present. The true moment of death is not the death of the physical body, but the moment when shinjin becomes settled in a person. According to Shinran, this is the meaning of the phrase, "In the preceding thought-moment life ends" (see Part I, p. 74). Asahara Saichi states:

The final moment (*rinjū*) is the final moment in which I die,
The final moment in which I become Namu-amida-butsu.

It may be argued that the significance of physical death remains crucial, for it marks the boundary between the stage of the truly settled and nirvana, between this world and the other world, and as long as the physical body is alive, one is in the stage of the truly settled and cannot attain nirvana. This assertion raises two important problems, which are ultimately one. The first is the question of where time and timelessness touch and fuse. The second is whether death can form the boundary between form and formlessness.

Time and Timelessness

For Shinran, nirvana is synonymous with the uncreated, oneness, dharmakāya, and suchness; it is the realm in which there is no arising and perishing. In contrast to the world of samsara, which is created through causal conditions (*samskṛta*), nirvana is the world of the uncreated (*a-samskṛta*). To be created through causal conditions means to exist in time. Shinran states that the person who dwells in the stage of the truly settled

attains nirvana simultaneously with death in this world: "On the eve of the instant of death one realizes great nirvana." At the end of life, one enters the timeless realm of the uncreated. It is easy to assume that entering nirvana after death means that nirvana lies in the future, but this is not the case. The future, the present, and the past make up the Buddhist concept of the "three times," and these "three times" together comprise samsara. Since nirvana transcends birth-and-death, it transcends time itself. It does not lie in the future. Of course, neither does it lie in the present or the past. Where, then, is it? Shinran states:

The realm of nirvana refers to the place where one overturns the delusion of ignorance and realizes the supreme enlightenment. . . . Nirvana is called extinction of passions, the uncreated, peaceful happiness, eternal bliss, true reality, dharmakāya, dharma-nature, suchness, oneness, and Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is none other than Tathāgata. This Tathāgata pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood. (*Essentials*, p. 42)

The realm of nirvana exists precisely in the world of samsara where sentient beings live. It fills the hearts and minds of all beings. In temporal terms, nirvana (timelessness) fills the immediate present of time that spans the past, present, and future. Hence, it is not appropriate to say merely that nirvana transcends time; nirvana (the uncreated) fills the karmically created world of birth-and-death, so that the eternal is one with the world of impermanence. These two realms are not, of course, simply identical; they stand in a relationship of mutual exclusion and opposition. This mutual exclusion is, from another perspective, the mutually contradictory relationship of the realm of supreme enlightenment where "one overturns the delusion of ignorance," and samsara, the realm of ignorance. Further, it is the relationship between the world of eternal bliss and the world of suffering. It is also the mutual contradiction between the true and real versus the provisional and the false and empty. At the same time that they stand in these relationships of mutual contradiction, nirvana fills samsara.

Human beings dwell in samsara because they are unable to awaken to nirvana that is one with samsara. For the person of samsara, nirvana or suchness "has neither color nor form; thus, the mind cannot grasp it nor words describe it" (*Essentials*, p. 43). It cannot be seen, heard, or even

conceived. Nirvana, however, is not inactive, but is itself great wisdom. This wisdom is nondiscriminative; in it, seer and seen, buddha and sentient being are nondual. It is supreme truth, beyond verbal expression, and Buddha as dharmakāya. Such wisdom, while maintaining its nondiscriminative character, naturally gives rise to discrimination, and when it does so, it is worldly truth, and wisdom and object are distinct. At that time, the fulfilled and accommodated buddha-bodies are manifest, and great compassion works to preach the dharma and grasp beings. The nonduality of sentient beings and buddha established in dharmakāya (suchness) is the foundation upon which great compassion functions. Therefore, following T'an-luan, Shinran calls nirvana dharmakāya as suchness, in relation with which he discusses the dharmakāya as compassion (lit., skillful means):

From this oneness (dharmakāya as suchness) form was manifested; this form is dharmakāya as compassionate means. Taking this form, the Buddha proclaimed his name as Bhikṣu Dharmakāra and established the forty-eight great Vows that surpass conceptual understanding. Among these Vows are the Primal Vow of immeasurable light and the Universal Vow of immeasurable life, and to the form manifesting these two Vows Bodhisattva Vasubandhu gave the title, "Tathāgata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters." This Tathāgata has fulfilled the Vows, which are the cause of his Buddhahood, and thus is called "Tathāgata of the fulfilled body." This is none other than Amida Tathāgata. "Fulfilled" means that the cause for enlightenment has been fulfilled. From the fulfilled body innumerable personified and accommodated bodies are manifested, radiating the unhindered light of wisdom throughout the countless worlds. Thus appearing in the form of light called "Tathagata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters," it is without color and without form, that is, identical with the dharmakāya as suchness, dispelling the darkness of ignorance and unobstructed by karmic evil. For this reason it is called "unhindered light." "Unhindered" means that it is not obstructed by the karmic evil and blind passion of beings. Know, therefore, that Amida Buddha is light, and that light is the form taken by wisdom. (*Essentials*, pp. 43-44)

To summarize, human beings in samsara have no means whatever of knowing the nirvana that fills samsara. Thus the dharmakāya as com-

passion, Amida Buddha, emerged from oneness or nirvana and manifested form in the temporal world of samsara. " 'Compassionate means' refers to manifesting form, revealing a name (Namu-amida-butsu) and making itself known to sentient beings" (*Once-calling*, p. 46). Although form is manifested, this is "the form of light" which is "without color and without form"; in this respect it is "identical with the dharmakāya as suchness." The "form of light" is "the form taken by wisdom"; it has no color or shape. This wisdom, however, radiates "the unhindered light of wisdom throughout the countless worlds," "dispelling the darkness of ignorance" of sentient beings and bringing them to realization of supreme enlightenment. Sentient beings are possessed of karmic evil and blind passions, but the light of wisdom is unobstructed; it sweeps away their ignorance, and "for this reason it is called 'unhindered light.' "

Speaking from the perspective of sentient beings, Shinran states, continuing from the passage on page 37:

Since it is with this heart and mind of all sentient beings (i.e., the mind filled by Tathāgata) that they entrust themselves to the Vow of the dharmakāya as compassion, this shinjin is none other than Buddha-nature. This Buddha-nature is dharma-nature. Dharma-nature is the dharmakāya. For this reason there are two kinds of dharmakāya in regard to the Buddha. The first is called dharmakāya as suchness and the second, dharmakāya as compassion. Dharmakāya as suchness has neither color nor form; thus, the mind cannot grasp it nor words describe it. (*Essentials*, pp. 42-43)

The sentient being in samsara is brought by unhindered light to entrust himself to the Vow of dharmakāya as compassion. Since it is with the mind pervaded by Tathāgata that a person entrusts to the Vow, that entrusting mind or shinjin signifies the awakening or wisdom born when "one overturns the delusion of ignorance." Although not yet supreme enlightenment, it is what arises when the sentient being, who had been completely immersed in samsara and incapable of knowing nirvana or suchness, has his ignorance swept away by unhindered light. It is wisdom "received from the Tathāgata," and signifies having awakened, in the form of entrusting to the Vow, to the nirvana or the uncreated that fills one. In other words, it signifies having reached the dimension where mutually opposing elements—samsara and nirvana, time and timelessness, falsity and truth—fuse and mutually interpenetrate. This is for the sentient

being, who up to then has lived solely in the realm of time, to awaken to that which transcends time. Shinran states:

After long waiting, we have been able to encounter the moment
When shinjin, firm and diamond-like, becomes settled:
Amida's compassionate light has grasped and protects us,
So that we have parted forever from birth-and-death.³⁰

To have parted forever from birth-and-death means to have entered the timeless. Since the timeless fills the hearts and minds of all beings, one does not leave the world of samsara—the ocean of all beings—and go to a place where there are no beings of samsara. Rather, precisely within the realm of time (samsara) one enters the timeless (the ocean of the Primal Vow, which transcends samsara). While living in this world, one encounters “the moment when shinjin, firm and diamond-like, becomes settled,” parts completely and forever from samsara, and immediately attains birth. One does not part from one's physical existence, which must undergo death, or the passions it entails; hence, one is still in the world of impermanence. While in time one experiences that which transcends time (that which transcends time (that which pervades both life and death); herein lies the special characteristic of Mahayana Buddhist experience.

In Shinran's thought, that which transcends time is experienced as the Primal Vow and the Name of dharmakāya as compassion. The dharmakāya as compassion enters the world of time and space, but the fundamental nature of the uncreated is not lost. In *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran quotes the following passage from T'an-luan explaining the relationship between dharmakāya as compassion and dharmakāya as suchness:

Among Buddhas and bodhisattvas there are two aspects of dharmakāya: dharmakāya as suchness and dharmakāya as compassion. Dharmakāya as compassion arises out of dharmakāya as suchness, and dharmakāya as suchness emerges into human consciousness by means of dharmakāya as compassion. These two aspects of dharmakāya differ but are not separate; they are one but not identical.³¹

³⁰ Kongō kengo no shinjin no / sadamaru toki o machi-ete zo / Mida no shinkō shōgo shite / nagaku shōji o hedatekeru (*Kōsō wasan* 77).

³¹ From T'an-luan (562–645), Commentary on Vasubandhu's Treatise on the Pure Land, *Ching-t'u-lun-chu* 淨土論註, T40, p. 841b.

The two aspects of dharmakāya cannot be wholly identical, for dharmakāya as suchness completely transcends time, and the unenlightened are incapable of knowing it, while dharmakāya as compassion has entered into time as that which can be known by human beings. In their relationship, there is difference together with their being one and "inseparable."

The dharmakāya as compassion that has entered time has not become simply temporal. If it did, its significance as dharmakāya would be lost and it would only be a part of samsara. It can be called "dharmakāya as compassion" because while remaining as it is, transcendent of time, it has entered time:

Since Amida's attainment of Buddhahood
Ten kalpas now have passed, it is taught;
But he seems a Buddha more long lived
Than kalpas countless as particles.³²

The ocean of Amida's Vow transcends time, for Amida is "one" with and "inseparable" from timeless dharmakāya as suchness. Thus, a person living within time naturally and spontaneously enters that which transcends time through entering the ocean of the Vow. In this way, to realize shinjin is none other than to enter the realm of nirvana. This takes place in the immediate present, not at the moment of death. In the realization of shinjin, timelessness and time mutually interpenetrate and fuse. This is the "one thought-moment of [the realization of] shinjin" (*shin no ichinen*), which Shinran explains as "time at its ultimate limit" (*Once-calling*, p. 32). One need not reach the end of present time (ongoing life) in death for time to become one with the realm of nirvana that transcends time:

When the waters of blind passion turn and enter
The ocean water of the great compassionate Vow
Of unhindered light filling the ten quarters,
They become one taste with the ocean water of wisdom.³³

The heart-waters of blind passions—the entire working of our minds and

³² Mida jōbutsu no konokata wa / ima ni jikkō to tokitaredo / jinten kuon gō yori mo / hisashiki butsu to mietamō (*Jōdo wasan* 3).

³³ Jinjippō muge kō no / daihi daigan no kaisui ni / bonnō no shuryū kishinureba / chie no ushio ni ichimi nari (*Kōsō wasan* 42).

bodies—become one with the ocean water of wisdom, the ocean of the Primal Vow, in which the flow of birth-and-death is “one” with and “inseparable” from the timeless. This “oneness” is termed “the oneness of the mind of Buddha and the mind of the foolish being” (*busshin to bonshin no ittai*).

It is often held that entrance into nirvana takes place at death, and that as long as the physical body is alive, the world we exist in is a defiled world and not the Pure Land; in that case, it would seem that entrance from time into timelessness in fact occurs at physical death. Though the hymn quoted on page 40 states that when one encounters the moment of realizing shinjin, one parts forever from samsara, it is impossible to deny that as long as the physical body lives, one exists in samsara. *Tannishō* 15, after quoting this hymn, states:

At the moment shinjin becomes settled, a person is immediately grasped, never to be abandoned, and therefore he will not transmigrate further in the six paths; thus, “We have parted forever from birth-and-death.” Should realizing this be confusedly labeled “enlightenment”? Such misunderstanding is indeed pitiful. The late master said, “According to the true essence of the Pure Land way, one entrusts oneself to the Primal Vow in this life and realizes enlightenment in the Pure Land; this is the teaching I received.”

Although one “has parted forever from birth-and-death,” as long as one has one’s physical existence and continues one’s present life, one cannot be said to have attained enlightenment. As Shinran states, “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*, p. 48). Clearly one is not a person dwelling in the Pure Land. Notwithstanding a full realization of this, however, the hymn states: “We have been able to encounter the moment when shinjin . . . becomes settled . . . so that we have parted forever from birth-and-death.”

In the present, one still has one’s existence as a human being. But because one has realized shinjin and entered the ocean of the Vow, one’s life has fundamentally parted from the world of birth-and-death. Since a person still possesses bodily existence full of blind passions, he lives in the causal stage facing outward from birth-and-death. At the same time, however, he has reached the point of nondifference with the result;

he has cast off birth-and-death forever and immediately attained birth. Moreover, he experiences such life not as fraught with contradiction, but as harmonious and complete: "When one has boarded the ship of the Vow of great compassion and sailed out on the vast ocean of light, the winds of perfect virtue blow softly and the waves of evil are transformed" (*Kyōgyōshinshō*). When a person has entered the world of the Primal Vow, the waves of evil, which up to then had raged furiously in him, turn calm, becoming one with the winds of virtue.

From Form to Formlessness

In his "Letter on Jinen-hōni," Shinran states:³⁴

[Amida's] Vow is the Vow to make us all attain the supreme Buddhahood. The supreme Buddha is formless, and being formless, is called jinen. When this Buddha is shown as having form, it is not called the supreme nirvana (Buddha). In order to make us realize that the true Buddha is formless, it is expressly called Amida Buddha; so I have been taught. Amida Buddha is the medium through which we are made to realize jinen. (*Letters*, pp. 29–30)

Amida's Vow is intended "to make us all attain the supreme Buddhahood," which is synonymous with nirvana, dharmakāya as suchness, or oneness. As we have seen, "From this oneness was manifested form, called dharmakāya as compassion (Amida)" (*Essentials*, p. 43); hence, Amida Buddha "is the medium through which we are made to realize jinen." Jinen here signifies true reality or formlessness, and thus is a synonym for supreme Buddha. To entrust oneself to the Primal Vow of the dharmakāya as compassion is itself to become formless jinen or supreme Buddha with one's entire existence. Through that which has form one is made to attain that which is beyond form. This is Amida's Vow.

The progress from foolish being (*bombu*) to supreme Buddha, from form to formlessness, has two levels. First, one enters the ocean of Amida's Vow. Amida is form manifested from the oneness without form. This dharmakāya

³⁴ *Jinen hōni* 自然法爾. Shinran defines jinen: *Ji* means "of itself" (*onozukara*)—it is not through the practitioner's calculation; one is made to become so. *Nen* means "one is made to become so" (*shikarashimu*)—it is not through the practitioner's calculation; it is through the working of the Vow of Tathāgata (*Letters*, p. 29). Shinran uses jinen to express both suchness or true reality and the working of dharmakāya as compassion to save each being.

as compassion, however, "is the form of light; it is without color, without form; it is the same as dharmakāya as suchness." The form of the dharmakāya as compassion is not the form and color that can be perceived by foolish beings. Hence, to take refuge in Amida's Vow is the first level in going from the world of forms to the world of formlessness. Compared with dharmakāya as suchness, however, the Vow is still possessed of form. One can know the significance behind *Namu-amida-butsu* and sense the compassion of the Vow. The light of wisdom cannot be seen with the eyes, but it is possible to "receive the wisdom of Amida" (*Tannishō*). This takes place when the Buddha's mind and the mind of the foolish being become one in the realization of *shinjin*. At the second level, then, through entering the world of the forms of dharmakāya as compassion, which can be felt and thought, one enters the dimension of dharmakāya as suchness. We cannot know or perceive the formless dharmakāya as suchness; nevertheless, Shinran teaches that dharmakāya as compassion and dharmakāya as suchness "are one but not identical, different but not separable," and that therefore to become one with dharmakāya as compassion is to become one with dharmakāya as suchness.

On the path extending from present life toward the formless supreme Buddha, the final overcoming of form comes at the moment of death. Nevertheless, the movement from dharmakāya as compassion (ocean of the Vow) to dharmakāya as suchness (nirvana) occurs not through the effort and calculation of the foolish being, but through the inconceivable working of the Buddha's wisdom. We cannot know how or when the movement from the ocean of the Vow to the formless supreme Buddha takes place. It is impossible to determine a boundary line, such as the moment of death, to that which is formless. For Shinran, who had truly and profoundly entered the ocean of the Vow, the world of dharmakāya as suchness was known and experienced. From "Letter on Jinen-hōni," a record of Shinran's words made when he was eighty-six, it is apparent that his religious awakening had matured so fully that it reached the dharmakāya as suchness. Through the experience he called realization of *shinjin*, Shinran came to know *jinen*. Hence he states, "Shinjin is Buddha-nature; Buddha-nature is dharmakāya (suchness)." Further: "Great *shinjin* . . . is the ocean of *shinjin* that is suchness or true reality."

What Shinran calls *shinjin* transcends even the "forms" of Amida Buddha, Primal Vow, and Name, and reaches the supreme Buddha that is without form in any sense. Therefore Shinran is able to assert that Amida

"is the medium through which we are made to realize jinen." Through entering the ocean of the Primal Vow, he went beyond the Primal Vow (form), and through deepening his experience of "hearing the Name" (realizing shinjin), he transcended the "form" of Namu-amida-butsu and attained the true and real existence (jinen) that works without forms. While saying the nembutsu, he transcended its "forms" (the voice audible to the ears, the meaning or concept of Namu-amida-butsu grasped by the mind) and came to carry on his life within true and real existence itself. For this reason, although Shinran was still in this saha world—in the stage of the truly settled—and had not yet attained nirvana, he states that "necessarily to attain nirvana is eternal bliss," in this way asserting with conviction the nondifference of shinjin and suchness.

REALIZATION OF SHINJIN

Identity and Transformation of Blind Passions and Enlightenment

The realm of time and form called samsara and the timelessness and formlessness called nirvana fuse and become one; thus, samsara is transformed. This "becoming one," however, signifies a mutual interpenetration rather than complete fusion. By time entering timelessness, their identity is formed, while simultaneously they retain their mutually contradictory character. The first point at which this transformation occurs is the moment a person realizes shinjin and enters the ocean of the Vow. This takes place when he is awakened to the utter futility of self-power. By entrusting himself to Other Power, he is grasped by and becomes one with it. This point marks the attainment of the stage of non-retrogression. While this initial attainment is central, transformation is not completed immediately but undergoes further development.

The entire process from the attainment of the stage of non-retrogression to the moment of death, when one realizes nirvana, possesses the character of "transformation" (*tenzu*), the structure of which may be seen as a dynamic opposition and interaction between samsara and nirvana simultaneous with their identity. This is expressed in terms of the relationship of karmic evil and virtues, or blind passions and great compassion:

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.³⁵

Here it is stated that with realization of shinjin, karmic evil becomes the water of enlightenment. At the same time, however:

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.³⁶

According to the first hymn, blind passions disappear, becoming the waters of enlightenment.³⁷ The second hymn appears to contradict this, for in it not only virtues are abundant, but also hindrances. In other words evil, while having been turned into good, remains as it is. As one's blind passions melt and become the same as the Buddha's virtue or wisdom, the karmic evil that had been hidden because of ignorance is brought to light; hence, one's evils are said to increase. Moreover, as obstructing evils increase, one naturally repents, and at the same time is filled with gratitude for Amida's compassion. In this way, karmic evil continues to be transformed into virtue. Thus, all our acts—the roots of our existence itself—come to be seen as characterized by karmic evil, so that all possibility of living as a person free of evil vanishes, and at the same time, this evil is transformed into good. As the identity of karmic evil and virtue broadens and deepens, so does the opposition (the sense of distance).

The Buddha, who is wisdom-compassion, becomes one with the karmic evil and blind passions of beings in order to awaken them to self-knowing, that is, to bring them to buddhahood. This oneness of Buddha and sentient being, of virtue and karmic evil, is the fundamental nature of Amida Buddha, manifested as Amida's "grasping, never to abandon" the evil person. Since Amida's virtue is not simple goodness but holds evil within itself, not only does a person's karmic evil not disappear, but it is illuminated and protected by the Buddha's wisdom and compassion, and thus it comes to

³⁵ Mugekō no riyaku yori / itoku kōdai no shin o ete / kanarazu bonnō no kōri toke / sunawachi bodai no mizu to naru (*Kōsō wasan* 39).

³⁶ Zaishō kudoku no tai to naru / kōri to mizu no gotoku nite / kōri ōki ni mizu ōshi / sawari ōki ni toku ōshi (*Kōsō wasan* 40).

³⁷ "When, into the vast ocean of Amida's Vow of wisdom, / The waters of the foolish beings' minds, both good and evil, / Have entered, then immediately / They are transformed into the mind of great compassion" (*Shōzōmatsu wasan* 40).

perform the function of virtue. The person of shinjin, the essence of whose existence is karmic evil, is nevertheless filled with the Buddha's virtues, for his karmic evil is the substance of those virtues.

Here it is possible to investigate the nature of shinjin in the light of the structure of *prajñā* or nondiscriminative wisdom in general Mahayana thought. The first hymn expresses the mind of the foolish being becoming the mind of the Buddha, while the second states that the mind of the foolish person remains as it is. The experience of realizing shinjin possesses this logically self-contradictory structure in which virtues and karmic hindrances, truth and falsity, good and evil are identical while remaining distinct. This structure corresponds precisely to the *soku-hi* structure of *prajñā*, expressed in "samsara is itself nirvana," in which samsara is negated (broken through and made empty) and simultaneously affirmed by the nirvana of no abiding place. Two elements that are mutually exclusive (*hi*) are identical (*soku*), and even while having become identical (*soku*) always remain two (*hi*).

Further, as we have seen in Part I of this article, the early Yogācāra analyses of nondiscriminative wisdom illuminate this structure by articulating the relationship between the seer and the seen that occurs in "seeing only" (*viññapti-mātratā*), and also by clarifying the relationship of nonduality between such wisdom and the defiled discrimination arising from karma and blind passions.

"Seeing only" is the true subjectivity that knows without the imposition of any objectification or subject-object dichotomization. It is the seeing of no-seeing expounded in the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras, and since there is nothing seen apart from the seer, it is true self-knowledge, or the subject knowing itself as subject. The situation of the subject knowing completely without object, however, harbors an impossibility, like the finger pointing to itself. "Seeing only" also means, therefore, that the subject appears as object (the various things of the world).

In the first meaning of "seeing only," there is only the subject and no object; that is, the subject exists as that which arises through causes and conditions, but there is no object of any discriminative thinking. In the second sense, the subject appears as object—it becomes the seen. Apart from the object there is no subject, and the object, while it is object, holds the subject within. In this way, the subject perceives the object by wholly becoming it. Thus, the subjectivity is also non-subjectivity. Without the subjectivity becoming things and in that way being known, subjectivity

is impossible, and at the same time, this means that what arises through causes and conditions (subjectivity) has its own negation or nonexistence as its nature. This concept that what arises through causes and conditions is itself nothingness follows Nāgārjuna's thought. The subjectivity that knows through becoming all things is not simply existent, but exists through its nonexistence, by dissolving into and fusing with emptiness. In the subject passing into complete negation and at the same time becoming objects, all things are known as they are, from within themselves, and this is for the subject to know itself just as it is.

In terms of the three natures, on the one hand, the conceptualized objects (discriminated nature) of false discrimination have been eradicated through practice. That there is no object grasped means, at the same time, that the subjectivity that perceives (other-dependent nature) has been eliminated. This nonexistence of the discriminated object and the discriminating subject is consummated nature (nondiscriminative wisdom and suchness together). On the other hand, while being identical with consummated nature, other-dependent nature (seer) is also said to exist, for it comes into being through causes and conditions. This seeing that is one with emptiness is "seeing only." Thus, that there is no seeing and that there is only seeing are established simultaneously. In "seeing only," seer and seen are both existent and nonexistent: there is only the subject without any objectification, and this is true self-knowing in which the subject has wholly become the object. This is the discriminative seeing of nondiscriminative wisdom. It is self-realization as the interpenetration of samsara and nirvana, form and emptiness.

Thus, the nothingness that is consummated nature is not a relative nonexistence that stands in opposition to existence, but absolute nothingness in which sentient being and buddha, existence and nonexistence, and samsara and nirvana, without ceasing to be distinct, are completely non-different. Dharmakāya that is the foundation of the three bodies of tathāgata is none other than this consummated nature; therefore it is stated that dharmakāya "has as its characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) the nonduality of karma-created and uncreated" (*Mahāyānasamgraha*). The karma-created is all dharmas or discriminative mind (other-dependent nature); the uncreated is emptiness (consummated nature). Their mutual interpenetration underlies the early Yogācāra analysis of nondiscriminative wisdom.

Further, in order to clarify the realization of such wisdom, Asaṅga developed the theory of the three natures in a new direction. The structure

of awakening involves the identity of samsara and nirvana based on their nondiscrimination. This identity, however, is achieved only through the transformation of samsara into nirvana or emptiness through absolute negation. Thus, realization of nirvana includes both the identity of mutual opposing elements and a dynamic transformation in which samsara disappears and becomes nirvana.

Shinjin, as the Buddha-mind of wisdom-compassion that pervades the false, temporary mind of blind passions, may be seen to parallel in structure the analyses of early Yogācāra. The first hymn above ("ice of blind passions melts and becomes the water of enlightenment") corresponds to the movement from samsara to nirvana, from discriminative thinking to *prajñāpāramitā*. This is the transformation first clearly articulated by Asaṅga. The second hymn corresponds to samsara and nirvana having been brought, through negation, into the identity of opposites expressed by *soku* and analyzed as the mutual interpenetration, while remaining distinct, of other-dependent nature (existence) and consummated nature (absolute nothingness). Thus, karmic evil is negated and at the same time affirmed: "The more hindrances, the more virtues."

To attain Buddhahood is to awaken to one's true self. In other forms of Mahayana Buddhism, this is accomplished through the practice of the three learnings, by which one's discriminative thinking and blind passions are eradicated and nondiscriminative wisdom is realized. In Shinran's Buddhism, one's mind is transformed by the Buddha's power, so that one acquires the Buddha's wisdom. This realization of shinjin is not a union of our minds and the Buddha's mind brought about through a gradual deepening of human trust or acceptance—perhaps this is a fundamental distinction between shinjin and our ordinary conceptions of faith. Rather, it comes about through an utter negation in which all our efforts and designs fall away into meaninglessness, being found both powerless and tainted by egocentric attachments. In this negation our minds of blind passions are transformed into wisdom-compassion, and at the same time they remain precisely as they are—or rather, their fundamental nature becomes radically clear for the first time. With the wisdom that we realize as shinjin, we are enabled to see ourselves as we are—the foolish being whose every act is conditioned by eons of karmic evil and dominated by passions, thoroughly devoid of truth and reality—and also to know, and to be filled with gratitude for, the working of the Primal Vow.

Process: Negation of Human Calculation

This realization is established when our usual perspective is turned upside down and acts we normally consider good or virtuous are seen to be evil. The foundations of our judgments—law, morality, religious precepts—themselves break down and in their entirety become evil, for they are based on human consciousness and intellect and cannot escape the ego-centricity of our blind passions. Thus, there is no possibility of accomplishing good left to one, and a nihilistic void opens up. This nihilistic void is grasped as empty of truth and reality not from a moral viewpoint, for such a viewpoint has lost its validity; it is seen so only from the perspective of the Primal Vow, whose fundamental nature is wisdom-compassion. Viewed from this wisdom, both good and evil as commonly understood are karmic evil.

The process leading from our ordinary judgments to the position of karmic evil in Shinran's sense is not linear and direct; it involves a transformation by which the latter is established and affirmed through the complete disintegration of the former. That our ordinary distinctions of good and evil crumble away means that their essential nature becomes manifest. 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 with 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. (*Tannishō*, Postscript)

This nihilistic void (nonexistence) turning into evil is itself salvation, for such a transformation comes about only through the falling away of the self that judges good and evil according to its own reflection and intellect, and that chooses between good and evil according to its own will—the self characterized by egocentric intent and self-attachment. In other words, it occurs only within the realm of the Primal Vow (the Buddha's mind), which transcends morality:

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 we find two different directions expressed: that of the person who lives committing good and evil acts solely in accord with karmic recompense, and that of the person who wholly entrusts to the Primal Vow. In both of these, however, we see the absence of ego-self and freedom from self-will, and this very negation of self is Other Power. Karmic evil maintains its independence from Other Power, for it exists and functions according to its own laws. Its action cannot be altered by Other Power. Nevertheless, the foolish being is grasped just as he is, living out the consequences of his acts. His freedom from calculation and his entrusting to the Vow are united as the activity of Other Power, which is both compassion that grasps karmic evil and karmic evil grasped by compassion, and form a unified human personality.³⁸

The Dynamic: The Working of Jinen

Since our blind passions persist until death, the melting of the ice of blind passions to become the waters of bodhi is not restricted to the moment of realizing shinjin; it occurs afterwards also, continuing to the end of life. This is the Buddha's working, which Shinran calls jinen:

Jinen means "to be made to become so." "To be made to become so" means that without the practitioner's calculating in any way whatsoever, all his past, present, and future evil karma is transformed into good. To be transformed means that evil karma, without being nullified or eradicated, is made into good, just as all waters, upon entering the great ocean, immediately become ocean water. We are made to acquire the Tathagata's virtues through entrusting ourselves to his Vow-power; hence the expression, "made to become so." Since there is no contriving in any way to gain such virtues, it is called jinen. (*Essentials*, pp. 32-33)

Through entrusting oneself to the power of Amida's Vow, one is spontaneously brought to receive Amida's virtues. All one's karmic evil, past, present, and future, is transformed into good, but without the karmic evil "being nullified or eradicated"; thus, that virtues increase means at the same time that karmic evil (awareness of it) deepens. It is precisely in

³⁸ See Ueda Yoshifumi, "Muga to shutaisei," in *Daijō bukkyō no shisō*, pp. 195-216.

the awakening in which one's entire existence becomes karmic evil that absolute compassion and buddha wisdom are manifest.

As we have seen, the term *jinen* indicates the formless supreme Buddha and is synonymous with nirvana or suchness. In addition, Shinran uses *jinen* to signify the activity of the Vow of Amida, the dharmakāya as compassion, "to have each person entrust himself in Namu-amida-butsu and be received into the Pure Land." In this activity, four other meanings of *jinen* may be distinguished. 1) *Jinen* is said to "bring sentient beings to awaken *shinjin*," which also signifies attainment of non-retrogression. 2) *Jinen* transforms the karmic evil of the person who has attained the stage of non-retrogression. 3) Shinran states: "Drawn with the Primal Vow as the karmic cause, one attains birth in the Pure Land naturally, by *jinen*" (*Inscriptions*, p. 37). Thus, *jinen* brings the person in the stage of non-retrogression to birth in the Pure Land and to attainment of supreme Buddhahood. 4) "*Jinen* is itself the fulfilled land" (*Kōsō wasan* 82). The interrelationships between fundamental concepts of Shinran's Buddhism—Amida Buddha, Primal Vow, realization of *shinjin*, attainment of the stage of non-retrogression, Pure Land—and the places they occupy in his teaching are clearly revealed in his usage of this single term *jinen*.

Formless suchness or dharmakāya—the true Buddha—manifests itself in the world of sentient beings and grasps each being, bringing each to "the city of dharma-nature" (supreme Buddhahood). Thereupon, "with great love and great compassion immediately reaching their fullness in [the being], he returns to the ocean of birth-and-death to save all sentient beings" (*Essentials*, p. 34). Thus attainment of buddhahood is none other than return to the world of samsara. The first stage of this attainment is non-retrogression, for at the roots of the existence of the person of *shinjin* is supreme Buddha, which transcends all such distinctions as buddha and sentient being, nature and man, self and other.

The Temporal Structure of Realization

As we have seen above, "Time at its ultimate limit" means that all past, present, and future time condenses into the moment of the realization of *shinjin*. There time reaches its fullness or limit; time as we conceive it ends. To have realized *shinjin* means that one has already arrived at the point where samsaric time has ceased flowing. This is also seen in the passage on the transformation of karmic evil quoted above, which states that "all one's past, present, and future evils are transformed into good." Although

one has realized shinjin, as long as one is alive, one exists within samsara. Nevertheless, through having realized shinjin, one has entered the timeless realm of the Vow. The moment one realizes shinjin, one's bonds to samsaric life are severed in their entirety; samsaric cause and result both vanish. Hence, "the darkness of ignorance has already cleared and the long night of birth-and-death has already dawned" (*Inscriptions*, p. 72). Since one leaves samsara at this point, "The heart of the person of shinjin is always in the Pure Land" (*Letters*, p. 27). This is the meaning of "immediately attaining birth and dwelling in the stage of non-retrogression." While standing beyond birth-and-death, the person of shinjin lives out his samsaric existence within it. As long as he is in samsara, for him the Pure Land lies in the future. Nevertheless, through having realized shinjin and entered the ocean of the Vow, he has already entered the pure, undefiled land that transcends samsara; for him, the Pure Land lies also in the present.

This double-faceted temporal structure of the Pure Land is also seen in the Primal Vow, in terms of past and present. Dharmākara fulfilled his Primal Vow to save all beings ten kalpas in the past and became Amida. At that time, the salvation of all beings was fulfilled as *Namu-amida-butsu* and the Pure Land was established. That Primal Vow, however, is truly fulfilled for the first time at the moment one realizes shinjin in the present. The fulfillment of the Primal Vow has a dual structure whereby it occurred ten kalpas in the past and it also occurs with the realization of shinjin in the present. The Pure Land was established ten kalpas ago when the Primal Vow was fulfilled; for sentient beings in samsara, however, that Pure Land lies in the future. When a person in samsara realizes shinjin, that future Pure Land, while remaining in the future, becomes the present.

Amida's Primal Vow grasping beings and their salvation has this dual structure because the thought-moment when shinjin becomes settled is the point in which the flow of time and timelessness are fused. While it is one point within the flow of time from past to present to future, simultaneously it holds the timeless (Primal Vow, Pure Land, wisdom-compassion) that transcends the onward flow of time. In other words, while a person lives within samsara, he has also reached the Pure Land, and while he is evil, he is also the equal of tathāgatas. This is the self-contradictory structure of "becoming a buddha" that pervades Mahayana Buddhism all the way from the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras to Shinran, and that is expressed in Shinran as the simultaneous establishment of the two

meanings of birth. The person possessed of blind passion, "without anything of truth or sincerity," and the world of impermanence, a "burning house," while remaining devoid of truth and reality, are pervaded by that which is true, real, and sincere.³⁹

TRANSLATED BY DENNIS HIROTA

³⁹ The concept of birth which Shinran had brought to such a high level of development seems to have re-acquired a focus on the moment of death by the time of his descendant Zonkaku (1290–1373). Zonkaku states concerning "immediately attain birth" in the *Larger Sutra*: "*Attain birth* means that it is settled that one will be born" (*Jōdo shinyōshō*). Here, birth is interpreted as having only one meaning (birth in the Pure Land at death). As we have seen, in Shinran two meanings of birth are established simultaneously, but it appears that the self-contradictory character of this concept (see Part I, p. 77) has prevented its implications from being well understood. Most commentators after Zonkaku follow his interpretation, and it remains the dominant understanding among Shin scholars even today.