

The Salvation of the Unsaveable

IWAMOTO YASUNAMI

I

I HAVE BEEN involved through the years in a comparison of Christianity and Buddhism.¹ Lately, however, the thought often crosses my mind whether indeed going straight to Shinran's teaching alone and embracing it singlemindedly might not be the only way open to me. Still, when, for example, I find in Paul's Letter to the Romans thoughts in many respects so similar to those of Shinran, I have trouble seeing how or where they could differ. For example, Paul says in regard to the deep proclivity for evil in man:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. (Romans 7:15). . . . I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. (Romans 7: 19)

In this confession expressing his innermost feelings, there is to be found portrayed an extremely deep mental struggle. And at the very end of this chapter, he says in words of utter despair:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me out of this body of death? (Romans 7: 24)

* The original Japanese version was published as "Sukui naki ningen no sukui," *Shinshi* (Kyoto: Higashi Honganji, September 1976). Footnotes are by the translator.

¹ See the author's *Kirinoto-kyō to bukkyō no taiki*. A Comparison of Christianity and Buddhism (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1974), 471 pp.

This despair is also evident when he says:

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but
sin which dwells in me. (Romans 7: 20)

When the striking words of Paul, "sin which dwells in me," are compared with the Buddhist term *shukugō*, "evil karma dwelling in me," a notion that, for instance, is contained in the words of Shinran in *Tannishō* 13:²

Good thoughts are harbored because of the karma of past good
deeds (*shukuzen*); so is it with the harboring of evil thoughts
which is due to the evil karma (*akugō*) of past deeds.

we become aware of the similarity of the two ideas. They could, it seems, even be said to be identical. How, then, and where could a distinction exist between them? This has been a central question for me for some thirty years now.

It might even be supposed that a far more intimate relation exists between Shinran and Paul than, say, to cite Buddhist examples, does between Zen and Nembutsu, or between figures such as Lin-chi and Shinran, or Dōgen and Shinran. But it is problematic whether that could really be so. This is another issue which has occupied me.

For instance, Shinran and Dōgen appeared successively in the same Kamakura era, and spoke moreover from within the same Buddhist tradition. On the other hand, Paul spoke from within the utterly different Christian tradition which is geographically and otherwise totally different from Buddhism. It hardly seems possible then for Paul and Shinran to be substantially more closely related than Shinran and Dōgen. The only conclusion is that there must exist some kind of basic difference between the above-mentioned "evil karma dwelling in me" and "sin which dwells in me."

In the thirty years or so since I began to consider these questions, I have come to understand somewhat more clearly the deep-rooted affinity shared by the two figures Dōgen and Shinran, who after all lived in the same stream of Kamakura Buddhism. At the same time, I have come to

² See *Tannishō* translation in Daisetz Suzuki, *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism* (Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society, 1973).

THE SALVATION OF THE UNSAVEABLE

feel that there is something completely heterogeneous between Paul's "sin which dwells in me" and Shinran's "evil karma dwelling in me."

II

Chapters 9, 13, and 2 of the *Tannishō* have a special format in that in these sections Shinran and a few people who are accompanying Yuien engage in "dialogues." When I read these passages, I feel as if I myself am there alongside Yuien, sitting with his head reverently lowered before Shinran, and actually hearing the words from the Master's own mouth.

As I ponder over the sacred book called the *Tannishō*, I never fail to find its depths simply fathomless. Although its first ten chapters relate the words of Shinran, they were not written by Shinran himself, as was, for example, the *Kyōgyōshinshō*.³ It is the work of a person named Yuien, in whose mind the words of Shinran were deeply imbued. Those words of Shinran were infused into this work in their original vigor and this makes for its special significance.

In the foreword to the *Tannishō*, Yuien writes:

For this reason I note down some of the sayings of the late Shinran Shonin which are still alive in my memory.

We often read expressions of similar sentiments, but it seems to me that in Yuien's case the words of Shinran were imbued in him to the extent that they became one with his very being and functioned as an active and vital part of him. This we should think ourselves no less capable of. It suggests some deeper realm, something which is not only felt in this chapter but throughout the entire *Tannishō* as well. Reading and rereading the *Tannishō*, I feel its power to draw us beyond the context of time into the charged atmosphere in which we here and now are with Yuien listening to the words of Shinran. Yuien in his desperate struggle for salvation was willing "to cross through more than ten provinces even at the risk of his life" in order to meet Shinran and ask him questions. On the strength of Yuien's enquiry, it is made possible for us too to encounter

³ See Daisetz Suzuki, trans., *The Kyōgyōshinshō* (Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society, 1979).

the words of Shinran. This illustrates the extremely important Buddhist concept of *en*, conditional causations: the words of the Tathagata, having taken the form of the *Tannishō*, fulfil within the readers his Great Compassionate Vow as his compassion breaks through their delusions.

III

In *Tannishō* 2 we read the words of Shinran:

Your only intention of coming here after a long journey through more than ten provinces even at the risk of your lives is to ask and hear from me the way of rebirth in the Pure Land.

There is in these words something which will not allow us to pass over them as being relevant only to that particular time and situation. Rather, in the light of Yuien's sincere mind earnestly seeking the Way, the very presence of Shinran is brought before us. We cannot help but feel ourselves permeated by his mind and seated before him alongside Yuien. In the ensuing passage, Shinran states:

It would be a great mistake on your part, however, if you should believe I know some way of being born in the Pure Land other than reciting the nembutsu, or that I covet knowledge of some sutra texts, and envy me on that account. If you hold such beliefs, it is best you go to Nara or Mount Hiei, for there you will find many scholars learned in Buddhism from whom you can hear the essential means of deliverance.

Here we can sense the veritably piercing compassion of Shinran for Yuien who has come to him in his desperation to implore him for resolution of his question. Then, in answer to Yuien, Shinran declares in the final passage of this chapter:

In short, such is the mind of faith of this ignorant person. Beyond this you are at liberty as to whether you would believe in the nembutsu or discard it altogether . . .

Some might feel a kind of coldness in Shinran's answer. But in truth, the

latter passage corresponds perfectly to the preceding one: this is exactly where the quintessence of Shinran's mind of compassion is revealed. Compassion means that we are *already* embraced within the compassion of the Tathagata; it is immanent in every aspect of the fact that we are living. Despite this, due to the depth of our ignorance and delusions, we remain unaware of it. It is precisely because of this that compassion becomes ever deeper so as to embrace even the most insignificant of men.

The compassion of the Tathagata Amida excluding no one is truly the "great compassion knowing no weariness" which casts its light upon us in every thought and moment of our life. In the final words of the above passage, "you are at liberty . . .," Shinran is saying that there is nothing for us to do other than to encounter, each in his own way, the Great Compassion which commits itself tirelessly to us, and that just there is found an inconsolability in the same Compassion dedicating itself completely to each of us. It is not at all as if Shinran were abandoning Yuien by retorting, "What is that to me? See to your own salvation."

At the same time, Shinran makes clear in the above passage that the path of faith is a personal matter for each individual. The most important point found expressed here is that salvation comes only from the Tathagata and not from Shinran; Shinran is himself saved along with us by the compassion of Amida. The whole of chapter 2 of the *Tannishō* tells of the extraordinarily profound world of Shinran. It is made especially apparent in the following words:

As far as I, Shinran, am concerned, the sole reason for my saying the nembutsu lies in its teaching having been given to me by a good teacher, and in my believing it: that I only should do the nembutsu to be saved by Amida.

I think what must be called the substance of this passage—it is also my central theme—is at the same time the unfathomably profound meaning contained in the passage which immediately follows it:

I am entirely ignorant as to whether the nembutsu is really the cause of rebirth in the Pure Land, or whether it is the deed meant for hell. I should never regret even if I were to go to hell by being deceived by my teacher Hōnen Shōnin. The reason is that

if I were so constituted as to become Buddha by performing some other deeds of merit and would instead fall to hell by reciting the nembutsu, I might regret I was deceived. But I am surely one who is incapable of observing any deed of merit, and for that reason my ultimate abode is no other than hell itself.

Just how are we to understand "my ultimate abode is no other than hell itself"? At the heart of the above passage is a meaning inconceivably difficult to appreciate fully. We are made to feel they are words with almost fearful, unknowable depths.

IV

At this point, I wish to introduce a figure said to be the most wicked person in the New Testament: Judas Iscariot. Judas sold Jesus into the hands of his enemies for thirty pieces of silver. In spite of having been selected as a disciple by Jesus out of his large following, Judas betrayed his master, the savior of mankind. In the Buddhist tradition, he has his parallel in the malicious figure of Devadatta.

On the whole, one can find a number of similar features in Buddhism and Christianity; for example, "salvation," "faith," or the Christian "grace of God" and the Buddhist "specially selected Vow." At the same time, in spite of such points of similarity, that at their basic root there exists a difference is I think a matter of great significance. One difference between Christianity and Buddhism—particularly Shin Buddhism—is found in their conceptions of man as reflected in their differing views of the evil-doer. A comparative look at this point will help us elucidate what Shinran has to teach us about faith.

Not only did Judas sell Jesus to his enemies, he personally pointed him out to them. After his last prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, while Jesus was speaking with the other disciples, Judas identified him by going up to him and kissing him. How ironic that a kiss, the expression of deep affection, should be the sign of such betrayal.

Karl Barth among others regards Judas as the most deeply sinful person in the New Testament. After perusing Matthew and the other books, I

THE SALVATION OF THE UNSAVEABLE

myself doubt whether he was as fundamentally wicked as he is made out to be. That is to say, in doing what he did for thirty pieces of silver, he is certainly shown to have been a man of deep greed. But when he realized the events he had started had taken an unexpectedly serious turn, he became frightened. Although Judas could not have been totally unaware of the possible consequences of his action, when Jesus was put up on the cross, his terror grew as he realized how horrible it was to have sold his lord. He went to the priests to return the thirty pieces of silver, but they refused to hear him, saying, "What is that to us? See to that yourself." Unable to bear it any longer, he threw the coins into a shrine and then hung himself after having said, "I have committed the crime of selling the blood of an innocent man." Taking into consideration that Judas repented his sin to the point of committing suicide, I have to think basically he might not have been such an evil man after all.

If we were to ask, however, whether Judas sincerely regretted his misdeed, the answer would have to be negative. His act of repentance does not qualify as true repentance. The decision to end his life was reached when he could no longer endure the punishing reproach of his conscience for the sin of having betrayed Jesus. It was the outcome of his desperate need to evade suffering. By killing himself, he sought to escape the judgment of God by making what was in effect a self-judgment. It was a desperate last attempt at a kind of self-realization. Since in hanging himself Judas fixed within him a mode of being for all eternity, it was, in every respect, a form of self-attachment. It was not in any way an emptying of his self before God and a confessing of his sins in true penitence.

Therefore Judas cannot be said to be a man who truly repented before Christ. We thus find no record of his salvation in the New Testament. Rather, there is a brief passage in the Acts of the Apostles—a version which is at variance with that of Matthew—which relates the terrible judgment of God striking Judas. It tells that he bought a field with his ill-gotten gain, but that he fell headlong into it, burst open in the middle, and his bowels gushed out. This account of his horrible end must, I think, be understood as a graphic description of God's dreadful judgment for Judas's evil.

The question of this kind of judgment, however, does not appear in

Buddhism, not even in the case of Devadatta. I think that here there is a great difference between Christianity and Buddhism.

V

Devadatta, an extremely able man in many ways, was a cousin of Sakyamuni and he was constantly at odds with him over such things as the establishing of the sangha. Probably, Devadatta had his own group and as its leader ardently cultivated his disciples and spread his doctrines. But of course he could not achieve the power someone of Sakyamuni's rare stature commanded. As Sakyamuni's sangha continued to grow ever more prosperous through the years, it can be imagined that Devadatta with his jealousy-ridden hatred of Sakyamuni must have suffered great personal anguish. He no doubt brooded for a long time over the notion that if only Sakyamuni were no longer around, his own order would prosper.

It is said that on one occasion Devadatta loosed a boulder from a mountain as the Buddha was passing below. According to the sutras, the boulder split in two and the Buddha was not harmed, though a fragment of stone struck his foot and drew blood. To draw the blood of a Buddha is one of the five grave sins, the commission of any of which condemns one to fall into the deepest of the hells. So with this, in addition to his other misdeeds, Devadatta came to be known as an evil man, guilty of the five grave sins.

Failing in his first try, Devadatta made subsequent attempts on the Buddha's life. After feeding intoxicants to an elephant of a ferocious nature, he drove the drunken beast towards the Buddha. But the sutras say when the elephant saw the august presence before him it fell to its knees, lowered its head, and its eyes filled with tears.

In another attempt, he enlisted the help of outlaws to assassinate the Buddha. A large group of these assassins went forth to kill him, but they too, upon hearing his words, all became his disciples.

As these events transpired one after another, Devadatta's mind suffered through such great anguish he finally lost the will to live and fell sick. But even this did not stop him. He went to pay his respects to the Buddha, seated on his disciples' shoulders, but this time with a deadly poison

THE SALVATION OF THE UNSAVEABLE

applied to his fingernails. As it was the custom in India to pay homage by prostrating oneself before one's lord, Devadatta's kneeling before the Buddha would seem nothing other than a customary sign of homage. His true intention was to kill the Buddha with his poisoned nails. But the results were far from what he expected, for when he struck out at the Buddha's feet, he found them as hard as diamond and his fingernails were torn off. Excruciating pain began to assail him as the poison started to spread through his own body.

Whereas references to Judas in the New Testament are limited to some verses in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, there is no dearth of references to Devadatta in the early Buddhist canon, or in such works as the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sāstra*.⁴ One is in fact surprised by the number of times he is mentioned.

In the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sāstra*, attributed to Nāgārjuna, it is written that Devadatta, the poison coursing throughout his body, sought to get away from Sakyamuni. Before he reached Rajagrha, however, the earth ripped open of itself, wheels of fire rose up to meet him, and he fell alive into hell. The picture of Devadatta "falling alive into hell" is the early image given to him in the sutras and commentaries.

Attention should be drawn to the important distinction in the ways in which he and Judas died. In another work on the precepts, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinayavastu*, is this passage from "The Disruption of the Sangha":

Truly, at the time this fierce anger appeared [within Devadatta], it was the spell of evil karma having come to its own perfection, and it was already impossible to prevent its incessant fire from scorching his body all over. Devadatta cried out in a loud voice, "Reverend Ananda, I am now being burned, I am now being burned!"

When the fierce anger arose in Devadatta, who until the very end harbored an abnormal hatred for the Buddha, it was the consummation

⁴ See E. Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna*, 2 vols. (Louvain, 1944, 1949).

of the evil karma within him, manifesting an evil beyond human proportions. In the depths of this torment, he called in the voice of a madman to Ananda, the constant companion of Sakyamuni who is also reported to have been Devadatta's brother. Ananda, who was perhaps even present at Devadatta's fall, must himself have experienced great agony watching his brother's suffering.

When I call to mind the terrible manner of Devadatta's death, for some reason I cannot help feeling it is not an event which has occurred in a time long past to someone named Devadatta. I cannot help thinking Devadatta is burdened with such a deep evil karma that Judas of the New Testament cannot even be compared to him. The latter ought to have gone to God and submitted himself to His punishment for the crime he committed, yet he refused to do so. He chose to render a judgment on himself and execute the punishment with his own hands. This reveals the depth of Judas's sin, as well as the kind of sin all mankind represented by Judas has to bear. Such is the content of the highly complex sin of man that Christianity would teach. In Buddhism, however, Devadatta falls *alive* into hell—his way of dying, in all its horror, is at once his way of living. Thus Devadatta's suffering in hell is no other than the vivid expression of the actual state of our life, that is, of the fact that within us evil karma is so deeply engrained we are totally helpless, to the degree that even suicidal, self-inflicted punishment becomes meaningless.

VI

Buddhist works such as the *Ōjōyōshū* and the *Saddharma-smṛty-upasthāna*⁵ contain detailed descriptions of *Naraka*, the Buddhist Hell. The *Ōjōyōshū* by Genshin (942–1017) is a compendium drawing skilfully from a number of works in the Buddhist canon. When the hells depicted in the *Ōjōyōshū* are compared with those of the *Saddharma-smṛty-upasthāna*, we are immediately impressed by the depth of insight Genshin possessed. There is in

⁵ See Allan A. Andrews, *The Teachings Essential for Rebirth* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1973); and, Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga, *The Buddhist Concept of Hell* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971).

THE SALVATION OF THE UNSAVEABLE

fact a vast literature in the Buddhist canon describing the realms of Hell. The voluminous *Saddharma-smṛty-upasthāna*, for example, gives a very detailed explanation. It describes Hell as being divided into various descending levels, with the sufferings in each level increasing in proportion to its depth:

1. *Samjīva*, the hell of repetitive reincarnation
2. *Kālasūtra*, the hell of black ropes
3. *Samghāta*, the hell of many tortures
4. *Raurava*, the hell of screams
5. *Mahāraurava*, the hell of great screaming
6. *Tapana*, the hell of burning
7. *Pratāpana*, the hell of fierce burning
8. *Avīci*, the hell of incessant suffering

The suffering one encounters in the deepest of hells, *Avīci*, is said to be ten times the total suffering of all other hells combined. While it is found at the bottom of the realm of desire, there is no bottom to the sufferings one must undergo there. They are beyond our imagination.

No karmic suffering, however, is ever inflicted by an outside agent. The turnkey of *Tapana* hell taunts his shrieking inmates by saying:

The burning you feel is not the burning of fire. It is your own evil karma burning you. The burning fire can be blown out, but you cannot extinguish the burning of karma. The force of the raging flames is no other than the energy of evil karma made by man.

Every suffering in hell must therefore be considered the retributive outcome of one's own evil. The burning hell-fire thus stands for the same deep karmic evil that is illustrated by the story of Devadatta falling alive into hell.

The extraordinary depth of evil in Devadatta is the point I would like to emphasize here. The word "alive" in the phrase "falling alive into hell" is urgent and personal. We are compelled to realize that it is we ourselves being spoken of. And in comparing the evil of Devadatta with that of Judas, we feel immediately how much deeper the understanding of human nature is in Buddhism.

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

At the same time it should be noted that, as mentioned above, Judas's salvation is nowhere found in the New Testament. In the Acts of the Apostles, moreover, he is described as having fallen headlong into the field he bought. This is followed by the terrible account of his demise, in which we must read deeply the terror of the fact that, always and without exception, judgment for human sinfulness descends from without, from God.

VII

Devadatta, in the grips of extreme suffering, called to Ananda for help. But the situation was beyond Ananda, for no matter how desperately he were to try to put out the flames enfolding Devadatta they could not be extinguished, for they were flames of evil karma springing from his very self. Ananda then appealed to the now delirious Devadatta to affect a change of heart. Even in this wretched state, however, Devadatta displayed his sophistry and did not want to be converted. For a second time Ananda strove to persuade him:

You must give yourself to the World Honored One from the bottom of your heart.

But then, in the unbearable agony of the ever-increasing flames Devadatta's suffering reached its limit through the thorough realization of his karmic retribution.

When he underwent suffering in its very extremity, he intoned with deep mind: "From this moment on until my body is reduced to pieces of bone, I devote myself with sincerity to the Bhagavat."

We naturally think these words show a sincere and whole-hearted repentance. But the strange thing is that the sutra only says in a cold blunt tone:

After saying these words, he plummeted in his physical body down to the deepest hell of *Naraka*.

THE SALVATION OF THE UNSAVEABLE

The above version belongs to "The Disruption of the Sangha" found in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinayavastu*. A similar story is found in a great many other sutras. In the *Ekottarāgama-sūtra*, for example, it appears in a little more detail. Here also Devadatta approached the Buddha with fingernails coated with poison:

At the moment Devadatta's foot chanced to touch the ground, a great firewind issued from the earth [which engulfed his entire body]. . . . Devadatta, when scorched by the flames, immediately put forth a mind of repentance, and desired to properly intone "Hail Buddha" at the Buddha's feet. But he could not complete it. He only managed to cry out "Hail (*Namu*) . . ." and then he entered deepest Hell.

This passage must be read carefully since it touches upon a most important matter. Driven by a perverse compulsion, Devadatta had approached the Buddha with evil intention. Now engulfed by searing flames and in the midst of unbearable physical and mental suffering, he wished to repent his intended misdeed. At this point, stimulated by the advice of his brother Ananda, the will appeared in his mind to call "Hail Buddha." But, unable to complete the phrase, he could only say "Hail . . ." and, consumed by flames, he fell into Hell. Here it seems to me we come upon a very crucial problem.

Let us first in this connection consider what is written in the opening chapter of the *Tannishō*:

When the thought is awakened in your heart to say the *nembutsu*, believing that your rebirth in the Pure Land is attained through the inconceivable power of Amida's Original Vow, you are to share in his grace which embraces all beings, forsaking none.

Needless to say, these words of Shinran at the beginning of the *Tannishō* are extremely important. They express a motif recurring later throughout the entire text. It took a great deal of thought before I could figure out how this differed from Devadatta's case. Devadatta had clearly declared to the Buddha, "From this moment on until my body is reduced to pieces

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

of bone, I devote myself with sincerity to the Bhagavat." In that ultimate situation, although unable to complete the utterance "Hail Buddha," he seems to have given clear evidence of a mind sincerely seeking refuge in the Buddha. Is this not directly related to what Shinran says about the condition for salvation in the *Tannishō*?

When the thought is awakened in your heart to say the nembutsu, believing that your rebirth in the Pure Land is attained through the inconceivable power of Amida's Original Vow . . .

It must naturally follow that

You are to share in his grace which embraces all beings, forsaking none.

I think it can be said therefore that, allowing for the difference between Sakyamuni Buddha and Amida Buddha, Devadatta here receives salvation and enters fully the world of faith. For what reason then do we find the sutra stating "he could not complete [saying 'Hail Buddha']" and then pronouncing coldly that "he entered deepest Hell"?

I find it rather difficult to come up with a ready explanation for this. But if we give close attention to the matter, I think a fundamental difference comes to appear between the limit-situation of man as expressed in Devadatta's falling alive into hell and Shinran when he says, "I am one incapable of observing any deed of merit, and for that reason, my ultimate abode is no other than hell itself," however similar they may appear superficially. Taken literally, Devadatta's inability to complete the utterance "Hail Buddha" may have been due to the suffering inflicted by the flames, or to his death. And yet I think that here in their manner of facing extreme human reality, that is, the ultimate suffering that hell represents, Shinran's "my ultimate abode is no other than hell itself" is fundamentally different from Devadatta.

Does it not come down to the fact that Devadatta decided to take refuge in the Buddha because he was unable to withstand the suffering of interminable fire? This of course would hardly make it a true conversion, merely a case of "calling to God when in need." This would also go to explain the significance of the statement about him being unable to complete the "Hail Buddha" formula.

THE SALVATION OF THE UNSAVEABLE

With Shinran, this is the realm of "instantaneous rebirth into the Pure Land," summed up in a passage from Shan-tao's (613-681) *Commentary on the Meditation Sutra*:

A sentient being, in the midst of greed, anger, and passion,
Brings forth the mind of pure aspiration for rebirth.

In Devadatta's case there is but endless confrontation, conflict, and entanglements involving greed, anger, and passion. To say "Hail Buddha" to rid oneself of unbearable suffering is one way of dealing with the distress concomitant to the human condition. If we look carefully I think we will find Shinran to be of a totally different persuasion. In short, Devadatta lacked the awakening of the religious mind, which was for Shinran the "awakening of the Great Bodhi-mind of the Other Power." He calls it "the mind resolved to say nembutsu." Close consideration shows, then, that no matter how dispassionate the words of the sutra seem at first, there certainly is no mistake in their assertion that Devadatta fell into *Naraka* hell, since it comes from an insight into the innermost dimension of his mind. Rather, the sutra's way of expressing this episode presents the core of a problem which each one of us must break his way through to at the stake of his very life.

VIII

Then was Devadatta completely beyond redemption? His story, as it is continued in the sutra demonstrates a profound understanding of man. When Devadatta fell into hell and was undergoing terrible pain, Sariputra accompanied by Maudgalyāyana went bearing a message from the Buddha. Sariputra had Maudgalyāyana call into hell, "Come Devadatta," whereupon it is said that many thousands of Devadattas appeared. How is this strange episode to be interpreted? I think the sutra wants to suggest that although we speak of Devadatta, the story is not one of a particular evil man who once existed in the past; we must rather see it as indicating the ultimate image of our own evil karma. This illustrates the extremely subtle skill with which the sutras expound their message.

Sakyamuni's message to Devadatta was the certification of his coming Buddhahood:

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

You will remain in *Naraka* hell for one kalpa, and after suffering for that period of time, you will then be able to become a Buddha.

Devadatta's joy, it is said, was profound. This does not occur in the case of Judas. (In Christianity, salvation and the actual unsaveability of Judas are in contradiction because of the eternal nature of God's judgment that condemns him beyond salvation). Devadatta at this time says:

If this is so, if I should be able to become a Buddha after one kalpa, although the time be one of unbearable suffering, I will place myself in the midst of this Hell of incessant suffering, throughout the time resting on one side (without even turning over) and in so completely relaxed a disposition, will endure the whole of suffering.

Similarly, the *Ekottarāgama-sūtra* says that when Devadatta heard the Buddha's message from Sariputra, "jumping and dancing joyfully, he brought forth a mind of goodness."

I think that, in the turnabout in Devadatta's attitude toward suffering, there is subtly brought to light the connection underlying two passages previously quoted from Shinran, one from the first chapter of the *Tannishō*,

When the thought is awakened in your heart to say the nembutsu, believing that your rebirth in the Pure Land is attained through the inconceivable power of Amida's Original Vow, you come to share in his grace which embraces all beings, forsaking none.

and the other from the second chapter,

I am the one incapable of observing any deeds of merit, and for that reason, my ultimate abode is no other than hell itself.

Although we feel it virtually beyond our capacity to plumb the depth of mind Shinran expresses in the latter passage, I think it possible that, through the light of Devadatta's way of living, we might still be able to grasp somehow the deep content of the words of Shinran. Devadatta's

THE SALVATION OF THE UNSAVEABLE

change of heart that "brought forth a mind of goodness" reveals to us what can be called the ultimate aspect of our salvation, the salvation expressed by Shinran in such terms as "receiving the benefits of Amida's Original Vow which embraces all and forsakes none," or "the instantaneous acquisition of rebirth into the Pure Land in the present world which does not retrogress into the six paths of existence and the three worlds."

IX

The Buddhist term rebirth (*ōjō*) has for some mysterious reason come in colloquial Japanese to be used in ways which distort its original meaning. It has become, for example, a common term applied to, of all things, hopeless situations. I will forgo a discussion of these distortions, for I am frankly unable to conceive how they could have come about. In any case, the *ō* 往 in the term *ōjō* 往生 means "to go forward," and *jō* 生 means "birth" or "life." Therefore the term *ōjō* properly signifies being born anew or going into a new life, that is, "rebirth" in the religious sense. The term *ōjō* (rebirth) must be restored to its original meaning of living in an active, positive way. Indeed, when Devadatta came to his decision to *live* in the face of all suffering, this was his rebirth established upon hearing the Buddha's certification of his coming Buddhahood. It is important to note that even while undergoing the sufferings of hell a mind of great joy could appear from within him. In his great revolution, occurring in the midst of deepest hell, there is in fact manifested our own true way of living, called "rebirth": a matter that can be confirmed only in one's own mind of faith.

There is no other word which could surpass the term *ōjō* in revealing to us the potential of life with such unparalleled vigor. Here is the very world in which the unsaveable is saved. Devadatta, a man thrown alive into the center of hell, was subjected to every form of suffering. But from the depths of his infinite suffering arose a salvation named Joyfulness—what Buddhism calls the salvation of the unsaveable. It is important to note his salvation has its source in the words of Sakyamuni, the Tathagata.

X

In Chapters 17 and 18 of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*⁶ appears a figure who has a close relation to Devadatta, King Ajatasatru. The Buddha, approaching the end of his life, proclaimed, "For the sake of Ajatasatru I will not enter nirvana," and hence engages in the "moon-loving" samadhi, a samadhi representing the sympathetic compassion of the Tathagata aimed at the unlimited salvation of mankind. The salvation of King Ajatasatru corresponds to that of Devadatta.

This episode from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* is quoted extensively by Shinran in the "Faith" chapter of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. Ajatasatru is found deeply lamenting having killed his father, a king of the true Dharma; he is also suffering physically with boils which have broken out over his entire body in retribution for his crime. In the midst of his agony, he hears a voice announce from above, "Follow the advice of the famous physician Jivaka and go to the World Honored One. There is no one else who can deliver you from your suffering." The sutra expresses the fear in Ajatasatru's heart:

When he heard those words, the great king's heart shuddered in fear and his entire body trembled. His entire body shook like a banana tree [in the wind].

"Who is it speaking," demands Ajatasatru. The voice replies, "Great king, it is I, your father Bimbisara. You must now follow the advice of Jivaka." At this, Ajatasatru faints to the ground. Now the stench and pustulation of his disease were so overpowering that none would come near him. No matter what poultice was applied, there was no relief. The virulent fever grew, driving Ajatasatru to the summit of pain. The sutra then says:

At that time, for the sake of Ajatasatru, the World Honored Great Compassionate Teacher entered the "moon-loving" samadhi. Once in this samadhi, he radiated a great light. This

⁶ See Kocho Yamamoto, trans., *The Mahayana Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, 3 vols. (The Karinbunko, 1973, 1974, 1975).

THE SALVATION OF THE UNSAVEABLE

pure and refreshing light drew to where the king lay, bathing his body in its rays, and at once the boils were healed.

This incident reveals by allusion the profound role the interworking of causal conditions plays in true faith. It awakens in Ajatasatru's mind the decision to pay homage to the Buddha. This awakening was due undoubtedly to the power of the "moon-loving" samadhi whose gentle glow permeated Ajatasatru's deep-seated self-attachment. But in spite of this, a terrible fear lurked in Ajatasatru's heart. He had heard of other men such as King Virudhaka or the Bhikṣu Kokalika who like himself had committed patricide or one of the other five grave evils being dropped instantly into interminable hell when they appeared before the Buddha. But as no one else could relieve him of his suffering, he was compelled to go to the Buddha. In his anguish he tells Jivaka:

Come, you ride with me on the same elephant. If I am condemned to hell, I entreat you to hold me fast so I do not fall into it.

This illustrates the zenith of man's fear, the point at which a drowning man clutches at a straw.

Here, however, a great change unexpectedly occurs in Ajatasatru as the self-attachment and habitual self-oriented way of thinking which lay at the root of his agony is shattered by the Buddha's words. Ajatasatru indeed seems penitent enough in his regret over the slaying of his father, but all anguish of this kind is in truth a manifestation of self-attachment, an inveterate searching for some way to achieve self-vindication. When, however, this last speck of self-attachment is utterly eliminated by the Buddha's words, something altogether unexpected occurs in Ajatasatru's mind. His famous declaration appears at this point:

World Honored One, as I look at this world, I see that an eranda tree grows from an eranda sprout.

The eranda is a tree described as being so extremely foul-smelling that to encounter the smell of its small bud just sprouted in a forest forty leagues square is enough to drive one to insanity and death. Whether or not there really is such a tree, we cannot deny the reality of an incorri-

gible mankind's evil karma. So although we would expect to see an eranda tree grow from an eranda shoot, in Ajatasatru's case, amazingly enough, a sandalwood appeared. The sandalwood, a tree of wonderful fragrance, is fragrant even from the moment it sprouts. Ajatasatru describes his wonder at seeing a faith as pure as a marvellously fragrant sandalwood appear from his self, as foul-smelling as an eranda shoot:

I now see a sandalwood tree being born from an eranda shoot.
The eranda shoot is my body-self, and the sandalwood tree is
the faith grown up in my mind without root.

We must not allow the term "faith without root" to pass without due notice. In it, we see that the theme of this paper, the salvation of the unsaveable, indicates to us that the only true salvation is that which comes to us in the extreme state we witness in the cases of Devadatta and Ajatasatru. If asked in what way and form such an extreme state can come to occur, we may answer with the closing words of Ajatasatru who had himself experienced that exceptional condition:

World Honored One, if only I could crush the many evils in the
minds of sentient beings, even though I would be doomed to
remain forever in *Avīci* hell, and to undergo great torments
lasting innumerable kalpas for the sake of all sentient beings,
I would not take those torments as suffering.

In Devadatta's case, the condition was set for a period of one kalpa in hell. In Ajatasatru's case it is an eternity of innumerable kalpas. But what is of prime significance here is that a dimension was opened up to Ajatasatru such that he would willingly endure the sufferings of eternal hell in order to lead others to salvation. Surely the state of Ajatasatru accepting the torments of hell with equanimity corresponds to Shinran's deep faith when he declared his ultimate abode was no other than hell itself. I think here we find revealed the most profound way of human life, which in Buddhism is called *ōjō* (rebirth).

XI

As clues toward the understanding of Shinran's words in *Tannishō* 2, we have been considering what the sutras are teaching in the stories they relate about Devadatta and Ajatasatru undergoing great turnabouts in the extremity of their suffering. In this connection, Shinran writes in the preface to the *Kyōgyōshinshō*:

When the conditions were maturing for the Pure Land, Devadatta succeeded in persuading King Ajatasatru to commit a deadly crime; and when the occasion was becoming actual for the Pure Work, Sakyamuni induced Vaidehi to choose the Land of Peaceful Life.⁷

From this we can ascertain that for Shinran both Devadatta and Ajatasatru are not particular examples of evil men that appeared at some place in remote history. Rather, since it is impossible for us to see or to grasp in ourselves the true feature of our own evil karma, that feature is shown to us in vivid actuality through their examples, and also shown is the way in which, in true reality, our salvation is accomplished through the compassion of the Tathagata. I have been recounting in some detail the extremely deep karma of Devadatta. But every time we read such a story, we invariably think to ourselves, "What an evil man he was!" As long as this is so, the world in which a Shinran can say "my ultimate abode is no other than hell itself" will fail to arise in us.

In his *Song in Praise of the Pure Land*, Shinran, from the standpoint of his encounter with the extreme state of human existence, writes:

Amida and Sakyamuni, effectuating their (compassionate)
 expediencies,
 Ananda, Maudgalayāna, Purana, Vaidehi,
 Devadatta, King Ajatasatru, Bimbisara,
 Jivaka, Candraprabha, and others,
 These great Saints all together,

⁷ See also Suzuki, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, p. 9.

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

Each using expedient means,
Led the ignorant and base sinners
Into the Vow embracing even the worst rebels.¹

In these verses, the deepest root of mutual correlation between man and man is made manifest. Devadatta and Ajatasatru are regarded here as "great Saints." Devadatta, the most evil of men, perpetrator of the five grave evils, blasphemer of the Dharma, is viewed as a great Saint, the epitome of a Buddha. This point of view cannot be envisaged at all from outside. But only in this way of grasping matters can man's most profound way of life be attained. Only in the world here opened to us can it be made possible for man and man to live together, joining hands in the depths of their hearts. Such a world is one that becomes open at a level beyond the extreme of human existence, that is, in the Pure Land. And there, a pure and genuine association of human beings is brought to birth, and a way of truly living is attained as "rebirth in the Pure Land."

Translated by Higuchi Shōshin
and Wayne Shigeto Yokoyama

¹ See *The Jōdo Wasen*, Ryukoku Translation Series iv (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1963).