

Shinran's View of Language

A Buddhist Hermeneutics of Faith

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Part One

INTRODUCTION

In the Pure Land Buddhist tradition, particularly as developed in Japan by Shinran (1173–1263), the religious path is integrated with language. It is the “path of easy practice” (*igyōdō*), in contrast to the “path of difficult practice” (*nangyōdō*) or the “Path of Sages” (*shōdō-mon*), precisely because it provides a way to enlightenment—or contact with the real—through and in the medium of language.

In this, *Jōdo shinshū* (浄土真宗, “true essence of the Pure Land way”) as articulated by Shinran differs from Buddhist traditions in which delusional thought and conceptualization are broken through by means of practices and disciplines. The generally accepted formulations of the path enumerate the three learnings or the six pāramitās as essential elements, giving prominent place to the performance of meditation and the arising of liberative wisdom. This is not to say, of course, that language is regarded only in negative terms in those traditions, or that the sage who practices nondiscriminative wisdom abandons human speech and remains silent. On the contrary, the sutras and writings of accomplished masters are necessary means of communicating and transmitting dharma, and wisdom in fact enables the sage to guide the ignorant through language. Nevertheless, when Shinran, borrowing a phrase from T'an-luan, states that in the Pure Land path, “nirvana is attained without severing blind passions,”¹ this may be understood to mean, in its intellectual aspect, that without reaching a point at which

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dichotomous thinking (language, conceptualization) has been eradicated, one attains suchness or true reality that is beyond words and concepts.²

The importance of language in Shinran's thought may be seen in his characterizations of the central elements of the path, *shinjin*³ (信心, often translated "faith") and practice. He states that "the true cause of attaining nirvana is shinjin alone"⁴ and that "the mind that is single [i.e., shinjin] is the true cause of [birth in] the pure fulfilled land."⁵ It is easy to assume this to mean that when one "believes in" the teaching of Amida, who vowed to bring those who say his Name to his Pure

¹ 不斷煩惱得涅槃. "Hymn of True Shinjin and the Nembutsu" (*Shōshin nembutsu ge*), in "Chapter on Practice," 102 (SBTS), p. 161; original text in *Shinshū shōgyō zen-shō* [SSZ] (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō), 2: 44. Quotations from Shinran's works in this article are drawn, when available, from the Shin Buddhism Translation Series [SBTS], for which I have served as head translator, published by the Hongwanji International Center, Kyoto. References to *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way* [Teaching, Practice and Realization] (*Kyōgyōshō monrui*, also known as *Kyōgyōshinshō*) are given by chapter title and section number.

² While T'an-luan employs the expression in his *Commentary to [Vasubandhu's] Treatise on the Pure Land* to characterize the inconceivable virtue of the purity of Amida's Land, Shinran uses it, in addition, to describe the condition of the Pure Land practitioner in the present life. This does not mean, of course, that one realizes nirvana while remaining fettered within samsaric existence. Rather, one realizes the Buddha's mind as *shinjin*, so that the attainment of nirvana at death comes about naturally and necessarily. Shinran explains the phrase: when joy arises in the present, "one attains the realizing of the supreme nirvana" (*mujō dainehan o satoru o u*) in *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls: A Translation of Songō shinzō meimon* (Kyoto: SBTS, 1981) 71; SSZ 2: 601.

From the opposite perspective, while the elimination of evil karma (*metsuzai*) was a central concern in the immediately preceding Pure Land tradition, Shinran develops instead a conception of transformation (*tenzu*) of evil without nullification or eradication.

³ Since the nature of Shinran's conception of shinjin is a central issue of this study, I use the romanization of the term instead of such translations as "faith" or "trust," which carry connotations concerning subject-object and temporal relationships that must be qualified and brought into perspective with dimensions of nonduality when applied to Shinran's thought. In quotations, "shinjin" will render not only the original term, but also, on occasion, such related terms as *shin* 信 and *shingyō* 信業 when they are used synonymously.

⁴ "Chapter on Shinjin," 19 (SSZ 2: 59).

⁵ "Chapter on Shinjin," 65 (SSZ 2: 72).

Land, one will be saved. For Shinran, however, realization of shinjin is expressed in the *Larger Sutra* as “hearing the Name.”⁶ Further, practice, which indicates the nexus between our lives in the world and true reality, is “to say the Name of the tathagata of unhindered light.”⁷ The religious path, then, is to hear Amida Buddha’s Vow and to say the Name. The moment one hears the Vow and says the Name—whatever else one may or may not do in one’s life—one’s realization of enlightenment or Buddhahood at the time of death becomes completely settled. The pivotal role of the linguistic medium is apparent.

Shinran’s delineation of the path in linguistic terms raises a number of questions concerning the relationship between word and realization, and the nature both of the language that functions as the medium of such realization and of its apprehension and use. While these questions also arise in other Buddhist traditions, the adherence to language as the medium of the path in Shinran’s thought thrusts them beyond the solutions found in other forms of Buddhism.

Briefly stated, the language of the path must be accessible to people who perform no practices to break through ordinary (in the Buddhist view, delusional) modes of thought, and at the same time it must possess the power to transform their existence by severing the bonds of delusional thought. That is, language, which normally functions as the medium of false discrimination, also serves to lead people to break through the horizons and conceptual frameworks of the world and the self constructed through our cultural and social conditioning and our ordinary, egocentric use of language. How does the language of the path differ from ordinary language, and how does our engagement with it (hearing and saying the Name) differ from our usual, delusional linguistic activity, so that it becomes the cause and the activity of enlightenment? In terms of the path, how are its two dimensions—its linguistic medium and its transcendence of language—integrated?

These questions are significant partly because the issues surrounding faith and language provide an avenue for understanding the nature of

⁶ In the passage on the fulfillment of the Eighteenth Vow: “Sentient beings, as they hear the Name, realize even one thought-moment of shinjin and joy.” Shinran explains: “*Hear* means to hear the Primal Vow and be free of doubt. Further, it indicates shinjin.” See *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling: A Translation of Ichinen tanen mon’i* (Kyoto: SBTS, 1980), 32 (SSZ 2: 604–605).

⁷ “Chapter on Practice,” 1 (SSZ 2:5).

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shinjin as developed in the Buddhist thought of Shinran. But more broadly, they provide a means for bringing Buddhist expressions of religious engagement into a comparative perspective with other world religious traditions.

This article will discuss the relationship between shinjin and the language of the path, and will in particular seek to clarify the nature of that language and of authentic engagement with it, including the interpretation of it. Part One will consider:

1. general Mahāyāna Buddhist ideas concerning the relationship between language and reality that appear in Shinran's writings and that form the foundation for both his critique of ordinary language and his view of the language of the path as arising from true reality;

2. Shinran's own distinctive understanding of the nature of ordinary language, including the boundness of human life to its delusional use, and of the structure of the language of the path, which offers within itself the possibility of liberation from samsaric existence through its nonduality with reality; and

3. the nature of the corresponding transformative engagement with the true language of the path as an interpretive shift in which one moves from an appropriation of the teaching within ordinary frames of reference to a breaking into awareness by true reality, through language, from beyond the horizons of usual thought and perception.

Part Two goes on to consider Shinran's interpretive methods on the model of authentic engagement with the path, taking up questions concerning Shinran's focus on the interpretation of texts in Chinese as the means of articulating the nature and significance of genuine engagement for the Pure Land practitioner.

I. SHINRAN'S ADOPTION OF GENERAL MAHĀYĀNA VIEWS CONCERNING LANGUAGE

In considering Shinran's views of language, we will first take up general concepts he inherits from the Buddhist tradition and then point out emphases and developments that reflect his own particular understanding.⁸ Concerning the former, we find from a review of statements

⁸ I have discussed the characteristics and variety of Shinran's own literary works in *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought* (with Yoshifumi Ueda) Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989, 42–55. These writings provide other evidence for his under-

about language in Shinran's writings—both quoted passages and direct statements—that he adopts fundamental attitudes toward language widely present in the Mahāyāna tradition. These include both negative and positive assessments—that is, language both as the speech of unenlightened beings, which informs and expresses delusional thinking, and as the speech of enlightened beings, which arises from wisdom and guides the ignorant to awakening.

A. Limitations of Language

1. *Reality as Inexpressible*

With regard to negative attitudes toward language, Shinran shares, not only with Mahāyāna tradition in general, but with other religious traditions as well, a firm recognition of the limitations of language to describe or represent true reality. This basic critique of language involves the view that reality (suchness, dharma-body, dharma-nature, wisdom, nirvana, Buddha-nature, etc.) completely transcends the thought and conceptualization⁹—and therefore the language—of unenlightened beings. Shinran clearly states this position: “Dharma-body as suchness [or dharma-nature] has neither color nor form; thus, the mind cannot grasp it and words fall short [of describing it].”¹⁰ Literally, this passage states that the mind cannot “reach” (*oyobu*) it and words are “cut off” or “interrupted” (*tayuru*). These phrases express not only the conjunction of thought and language and the coextension of their fields, but also their discursive quality, which cannot frame or encompass true reality.

Further, it is not simply that reality is unavailable to our thought or speech; rather, ineffability and inconceivability are understood to be of its very nature. This idea is also found in passages Shinran quotes in *Teaching, Practice and Realization* such as the following from the *Nir-*

standing of the possibilities of language; I will consider the implications of their methods in a discussion of Shinran's interpretive practices in Part Two of this article.

⁹ “Nirvana is called extinction of passions, the uncreated, peaceful happiness, eternal bliss, true reality, dharma-body, dharma-nature, suchness, oneness, and Buddha-nature.” *Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone’: A Translation of Yuishinshō mon’i* (SBTS: 1979), 42; SSZ 2: 630.

¹⁰ *Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone’*, 43; SSZ 2: 630.

vana Sutra: "Because it is inexpressible and inconceivable, it may be termed great, complete nirvana."¹¹ Moreover, Shinran himself strongly asserts formlessness or inconceivability as an essential characteristic of supreme Buddha or nirvana: "The supreme Buddha is formless, and because of being formless is called *jinen*. When this Buddha is shown as being with form, it is not called the supreme nirvana."¹² Thus, for Shinran, as for the Mahāyāna tradition in general, true reality—whether it is termed supreme Buddha or nirvana or dharma-body as suchness—is completely without form; it cannot be expressed in words or conceived in any way or as any thing.

This assertion that supreme nirvana is formless derives in part from the idea that it cannot be identified as any transient and finite thing of the world and therefore cannot be defined or limited by mundane conceptions. As Shinran states, "All things in the world are limited; hence, they are said to be finite (literally, "subject to quantification"). Buddha-dharma is without any limit or bound; hence, it is said to be without measure."¹³ Shinran's idea of measure or quantification (*ryō* 量) here is precise. Reality cannot be confined within the spatial and temporal frameworks that inform our usual understanding and perception of the world. In other words, there is a fundamental qualitative difference between the world that we speak of and perceive, the things and qualities of which we determine and define with our concepts and words, and true reality, which cannot be circumscribed and limited. This is a distinction between that which can be measured and represented by the functioning of the human mind and language, and that which cannot.

From these passages we see that for Shinran: (1) thought and language are intertwined; (2) they are understood to delimit and define; and (3) reality transcends the scope of thought and speech, for it is beyond such circumscription.

2. *Invertedness*

We must note that the limitations of language do not imply that reality stands apart from the world in which we carry on our lives or exists

¹¹ "Chapter on True Buddha and Land," 14; SSZ 2: 126.

¹² *Letters of Shinran: A Translation of Mattoshō* (SBTS: 1978), 30; SSZ 2: 664.

¹³ Note (*sakun*) to *Hymns of the Pure Land: A Translation of Jōdo wasan* (SBTS: 1991), hymn 4; *Teihon Shinran shōnin zenshū*, Volume 2 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1969), 8.

as a substratum underlying the ephemeral and accidental features of things that we speak of and perceive. In general Mahāyāna thought, including that of Shinran, the critique of language turns not merely on the idea that language is limited, but on a view that true reality is radically nondichotomous, beyond the dualities of subject and object and the objectifying discrimination of things. In this case, our ordinary, unenlightened use of language is in fact delusional, a play of false conceptions that informs and expresses the attachments of an imagined self and a world distorted by its anxieties and desires.

In Mahāyāna writings, the term “invertedness” (*tendō* 顛倒) is used to characterize this false grasp of the world in ordinary thinking and speech. The unenlightened see things upside down, imagining what is impermanent to be everlasting, what actually brings pain to be worthy of pursuit, what is defiled by egocentricity to be pure, and what is egoless and nonsubstantial to possess a permanent identity. Shinran employs the term “invertedness” to characterize a fundamental falsity at the basis of all human action:

Evil karma is from the beginning without [real] form;
It is the result of delusional thought and invertedness.
Mind-nature is from the beginning pure,
But as for this world, there is no person of truth (*makoto*).¹⁴

Delusion and invertedness, then, lie at the roots of our thinking and perception—of all our use of language—so that what we conceive and feel is not so much limited as basically askew.

This hymn, though atypical of Shinran in its emphasis on the unreality of evil karma,¹⁵ expresses his view of human existence as characterized by thought and speech that objectifies, discriminates, reifies, and distorts (“there is no person of truth”) while reality is nondichotomous (“mind-nature is from the beginning pure”).

¹⁴ *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, 107: *zaigō motoyori katachi nashi / mōsō tendō no naseru nari / shinshō motoyori kiyokeredo / kono yo wa makoto no hito zo naki* (SSZ 2: 528).

¹⁵ Perhaps the closest parallel in Shinran's works may be found in the passage from the *Nirvana Sutra* quoted in “Chapter on Shinjin,” 116, in which Śākyamuni seeks to assuage the despair of King Ajātaśatru, who has committed grave crimes.

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B. Language as Dharma

Despite this negative assessment of the limitations and functioning of language, it is still upheld as the vehicle of the teaching, the means by which truth may be communicated. Thus, while true reality that is beyond conceptualization is termed dharma, those who have awakened to it become able to guide others to awakening by using language, and their words are also termed dharma. There are various concepts in the Mahāyāna tradition employed to account for this capacity of enlightened speech to guide the unenlightened toward awakening, but at their heart lies the Mahāyāna conception of wisdom, which possesses a double character: it is one with reality that is beyond all dualities—subject and object, samsara and nirvana, blind passions and enlightenment—and further it perceives the things of the world as they are. We find in a note by Shinran a concise statement of this fusion or simultaneity of the nonduality of subject and object together with their dichotomy:

Wisdom (*chi-e* 智慧): *Chi* refers to thinking by reflection and judgment, discriminating this as this and that as that. *E* refers to no-activity attained through stilling such thought, so that there is no mental activity grasping this and that; it is samadhi of no-activity.¹⁶

By dividing the term “wisdom” (*chi-e*) into its two component characters and explaining *chi* as discriminative and *e* as nondiscriminative, Shinran indicates the dual character of wisdom as both one with true reality and yet active in this world, perceiving beings. Further, in this view of reality, attainment of wisdom necessarily unfolds in compassionate activity, which includes linguistic expression as a means to guide unenlightened beings. In terms of language, it may be said that wisdom as “no-activity attained through stilling the mind” implies the cessation of conceptualization and language, while wisdom as “reflection and judgment” implies the use of words and concepts in the perception of the things of the world and the compassionate guidance of beings. Since in the former aspect the subject-object dichotomy has been eradicated, wisdom is nondual with reality; from

¹⁶ Note to *Hymns of the Pure Land*, hymn 4, *Telhon Shinran shōnin zenshū*, Volume 2, (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1969), 8.

the stance of wisdom, there is no objectification, and from the stance of reality, there is no form. Thus, the two aspects of wisdom—stillness and activity—may be expressed in terms of formlessness and form, wordlessness and words. The bond between these two aspects is expressed in a passage by Seng-chao, which appears in *Teaching, Practice and Realization* in a quotation from T'an-luan:

The dharma-body, being formless, takes on all forms. Further, it conforms with the ultimate expression. It being without words, profound writings spread more and more widely. Deep and subtle means, being without calculation, work to bring about the benefiting of beings.¹⁷

Here we see that reality that is beyond conceivability manifests forms (words, concepts, things) to “bring about the benefiting of beings,” that is, to awaken them to itself.

1. *Reception of the Teaching*

We have seen that reality or wisdom, which is attained by breaking through the false discrimination of ordinary thought and speech, works to disclose itself to beings through language. This emergence into words, then, must bring about the reverse movement, in which unenlightened beings awaken to and enter formless true reality through the words of the teaching.

i. *From Words into No-Word*

Shinran employs an expression of such “entrance” through language in his conclusion to “Chapter on True Buddha and Land,” which completes his treatment of true and real teaching, practice, and realization. There, he cites a passage from *Awakening of Faith* together with a commentary by Fei-hsi, both drawn from Fei-shi's *Treatise on Nembutsu-Samādhi*. *Awakening of Faith* states:

To realize that even though one expresses it in words, there is no one who can express it, and that in thinking there is no one who can think it—this is called “being in accord [with reality].”

¹⁷ *Chao-lun*, quoted by T'an-luan in “Chapter on Realization,” 17 (p. 374); SSZ 2: 111.

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Freedom from thought is called "attaining entrance."¹⁸

In the original context, this passage speaks of "all things"¹⁹ (*issai hō*): though they are thought of and spoken about, it is realized from the stance of nondiscriminative wisdom that all is formless and inconceivable; this is to be "in accord with reality." To be utterly free of all thought is to "attain entrance" into reality. In Fei-hsi's text, however, the phrase "all things" is omitted, and when read in the context of *Teaching, Practice and Realization*, it is natural to take the object of thought and language as Buddha-nature. In his preceding comments, Shinran states:

Delusional and defiled sentient beings cannot, here [in this world], see [Buddha-]nature, for it is covered over by blind passions. The [*Nirvana*] *Sutra* states, "I have taught that bodhisattvas of the tenth stage see a little of Buddha-nature."²³

Shinran's point here is that beings will, through the power of the Primal Vow, attain genuine, supreme Buddhahood in the Pure Land. He quotes the *Nirvana Sutra*: "Sentient beings will, in the future, possess a body of purity adorned with virtues and be able to see Buddha-nature." Thus, through and in form (Amida, Vow, Pure Land) they enter the formless (Buddha-nature).

Fei-hsi, in his commentary on "attaining entrance" quoted in *Teaching, Practice and Realization*, also says that the state of no-thought, which includes knowledge of the first arising of thought, "cannot be known even by bodhisattvas of the tenth stage." He concludes, therefore,

Such people as ourselves . . . have not yet attained even the ten stages of understanding; hence, we must rely on Āśvaghoṣa Mahāsattva [and his teaching in the *Awakening of Faith*] and enter from words into no-word, from thought into no-thought. (ibid.)

¹⁸ Quoted from *Treatise on Nembutsu-Samādhi* (*Nembutsu-zammai hōō ron*, 念仏三昧宝王論) by Fei-hsi (飛錫 Hishaku, eighth century) in "Chapter on True Buddha and Land," 38; SSZ 2: 141.

¹⁹ T32, 376a.

²⁰ "Chapter on True Buddha and Land," 37; SSZ 2: 140.

Here, we see expressed the movement, through the words of the teaching, to true reality that transcends all words.

ii. *The Four Reliances*

Shinran also refers, again in the context of his own exposition, to the concept of the "four reliances" (*shi-e*), which sets forth the proper stance in reading the sutras. In "Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands," he stresses that "monks and lay people of the latter age should practice the dharma with clear awareness of the four reliances" after quoting the discussion of the four reliances in Nāgārjuna's *Commentary on the Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sutra*:

When Śākyamuni was about to enter nirvana, he said to the bhikṣus, "From this day on, (1) rely on dharma, not on people who teach it. (2) Rely on the meaning, not on the words. (3) Rely on wisdom, not on the working of the mind. (4) Rely on the sutras that fully express the meaning, not on those that do not."²¹

For our concerns here, the chief among these reliances are the second and third. Concerning the second, "rely on the meaning, not the words," Nāgārjuna gives as Śākyamuni's explanation:

"With regard to relying on the meaning, meaning itself is beyond debate of such matters as like against dislike, evil against virtue, falsity against truth. Hence, words may indeed have meaning, but the meaning is not the words. Consider, for example, a person instructing us by pointing to the moon with his finger. [To take words to be the meaning] is like looking at the finger and not at the moon. . . . Hence, do not rely upon words." (ibid.)

The analogy of the finger pointing to the moon suggests an instrumental use of language, but in fact the central point is an admonishment against attachment to words of the teaching that one has locked into ordinary frameworks of understanding. To do so is to reduce the teaching to one's own delusional speech and to rob it of its power to point

²¹ "Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands," 71; SSZ 2: 166.

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beyond to reality. Since the intent of the words is beyond our unenlightened, discriminative perceptions of "like against dislike, evil against virtue, falsity against truth," one must not grasp the words as ordinary language, but must see that "the meaning is not the words."

The attitude of genuine reliance, then, demands that we understand the language of the teaching to differ in nature from unenlightened speech. This is also expressed in the third reliance, "rely on wisdom, not on the working of the mind":

"As to relying on wisdom, wisdom is able to distinguish and measure good and evil. The working of mind always seeks pleasure and does not reach the essential. Hence it is said, 'Do not rely on mind.' " (ibid.)

Since the words arise from wisdom, one must apprehend them through wisdom. To encounter them with our ordinary thinking, dominated by attachment to a delusional self, is to fail to grasp the meaning.

The importance of this passage on the four reliances for Shinran is revealed by its placement in *Teaching, Practice and Realization* following an exposition of his own shifts in engagement with the path, in which he first "departed everlastingly from the temporary gate of the myriad practices and various good acts"—the attempt to attain birth in the Pure Land through performing practices—and "entered the 'true' gate of the root of good and the root of virtue," that is, the recitation of nembutsu as a means of gaining merit. He then "departed from the true gate of provisional means and, [his self-power] overturned, . . . entered the ocean of the selected Vow," or Other Power.²² As will be discussed below, Shinran's spoken words to followers who came to him with doubts and questions may be seen as an effort to bring them through the shift that he describes here, and so he adopts the concept of the four reliances partly to express the need to arrive at an engagement with the teaching that differs from ordinary modes of understanding (characterized by self-power).

²² Ibid., 68; SSZ 2: 166.

II. FALSE AND TRUE WORDS: LINGUISTICALITY OF HUMAN EXISTENCE AND THE PATH

While Shinran employs general Mahāyāna concepts concerning both the critique of language and the necessary emergence of language from the attainment of nondichotomous wisdom or reality, his views are distinctive in the extremity to which he pushes both of these positions, reflecting his understanding of the inescapable linguisticity of human existence, and hence of the necessary centrality of language in the path.

In other forms of Buddhist tradition, engagement with the teaching is understood to deepen through performance of practice, as one gradually cultivates the insight that, being identical with the wisdom from which the teaching emerges, genuinely apprehends the meaning behind the words. Thus, understanding of the teaching and performance of practice progress and deepen together and finally lead beyond the bounds of language.

In Shinran's thought, beings do not themselves accomplish such practice and achieve such wisdom. The teaching, then, is not to be grasped as a guide to practice, and comprehension is not deepened through meditative exercises and disciplines. Rather, practice and wisdom are given to beings by Buddha (wisdom, reality) through the medium of language. This radically altered conception of the dynamics of the path involves a distinctive understanding of the nature of engagement with the teaching, which requires a reorientation within language, rather than the overcoming of it.

A. Reformulation of Religious Awareness in Linguistic Terms

Shinran's emphasis on language may be seen by considering the following passage from Shan-tao's *Hymns of Birth in the Pure Land*, which sets forth a version of the Chinese master's exposition of the "two kinds of deep mind" (translated here according to Shinran's interpretation):

Second [of the three minds taught in the *Contemplation Sutra*] is deep mind, which is true and real shinjin. One truly knows oneself to be a foolish being full of blind passions,

with scant roots of good, transmigrating in the three realms and unable to emerge from this burning house. And further, one truly knows now, without so much as a single thought of doubt, that Amida's universal Primal Vow decisively enables all to attain birth, including those who say the Name even down to ten times, or even but hear it.²³

Shan-tao here delineates two aspects of the outlook of Pure Land practitioners: profound self-reflection on one's lack of good ("deep mind with regard to the practitioner," *ki no jinshin*), and complete trust in the power of Amida's Vow ("deep mind with regard to dharma," *hō no jinshin*). This exposition became for Hōnen and his followers a fundamental formulation of religious awareness in the Pure Land path.

In a prominent passage recorded in *Tannishō*, Shinran takes up this twofold scheme of the practitioner's awareness—borrowing the phrases "foolish being full of blind passions" and "burning house"²⁴—and reformulates the two aspects of human existence and Amida's Vow:

With a foolish being full of blind passions, with this fleeting world—this burning house—all matters without exception are lies and gibberish, totally without truth and sincerity. The nembutsu alone is true and real.²⁵

From the similarities in expression, it appears likely that Shinran had Shan-tao's passage in mind when he spoke these words in *Tannishō*.²⁶ But while Shan-tao's passage expresses the necessary outlook in practice in relation to one's own powers and the power of the Vow, Shinran's words recast this concern into linguistic terms of false and true language and the involvement with them, presenting a sharp dichotomy between the world of ordinary speech and thought and the

²³ Quoted in both "Chapter on Practice," 76 (SSZ 2: 34), and "Chapter on Shinjin," 15 (SSZ 2: 58), indicating the importance of this passage for Shinran.

²⁴ Shinran uses the *Lotus Sutra* image of this world as a "burning house" only once in an original writing, in a hymn based on another work of Shan-tao.

²⁵ *Tannishō*, "Postscript," 19 (SSZ 2: 792-793). See my translation, *Tannishō: A Primer*, Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1982.

²⁶ The compiler of *Tannishō* suggests this similarity also by moving from a quotation of Shan-tao's explanation of "deep mind with regard to the practitioner" (from *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*) to Shinran's words quoted here.

world of the nembutsu.

Shinran characterizes the self and the world as lies (or “hollow words,” *soragoto* 虚言) and gibberish or delusions (*tawagoto*), and states that the nembutsu alone is true and real (*makoto*). We should note that in each of these Japanese expressions, the term *koto* (-*goto*) implies both “matter” or “affair” (*ji* 事) and “words” (*gon* 言). These terms suggest the unity of the things of the world that are perceived and the words and concepts with which they are discerned and spoken of. In his choice of terms here, Shinran indicates the fundamental linguisticity of human existence. This reformulation of deep mind—the “mind of deep trust”—in terms of false and true language is neither fortuitous nor inconsequential, but points to the core of his development of the Pure Land tradition, which turns on a distinction in modes of engagement with the language of the path.

B. Blind Passions and False Language

The conceptual world of the unenlightened may be thought of as a circle, the circumference of which represents the horizon of thought and conscious experience. For Shinran, this circle is coextensive with the world of false language, the medium of perception colored by blind passions and self-attachment.

The meaning of the common Japanese word *soragoto* (“hollow words”) in the context of Shinran’s statement in the passage quoted above may be grasped by considering it together with *tawagoto*, which is used as a synonym and which has a narrower range of reference. *Tawagoto* basically means nonsensical talk, spoken either out of sport, for amusement, or because one is not in a normal state of mind. It includes, therefore, jokes and prankish humor, and also delirious speech. As a negative term, it identifies speech as out of accord with reality, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Such speech is not to be taken “seriously,” as reflecting the actual state of affairs or a reliable perception of things. *Tawagoto*, like *soragoto* and *makoto*, is used to characterize speech, its content, and also acts or behavior. In Shinran’s passage, then, “hollow” and “nonsensical” point to the delusional and distorted world of ignorance and blind passions, the universe within the horizons of unenlightened thought and feeling.

Although the word *tawagoto*—“word-play” or “delirious verb-

iage"—does not appear in Shinran's writings, he does use the term *soragoto*, with the meaning of "lie," "deceit," "untrue statement," or "false report." An explanation of the concept "hollow" or "empty" 虚 is found in Shinran's commentary on the following passage from Shan-tao (again, translated according to Shinran's interpretation):

We should not express outwardly signs of wisdom, goodness, or diligence, for inwardly we embrace falsity (*koke* 虚仮, what is hollow and transitory).²⁷

Shinran's explains:

Inwardly means "within"; since within, the mind is possessed of blind passions, it is "hollow" (*ko*), it is "transitory" (*ke*).

Hollow means "vain," "not real or sincere."

Transitory means "provisional," "not true."

For this reason, in the tathāgata's teaching, this world is called the evil world of the last dharma-age.²⁸

We see here that "hollowness" as a Buddhist term is the antonym of true reality (*shinjitsu*). It describes the delusional agitation of blind passions, and further points to the fundamental falsity of human existence, the inexorability of which the Buddha refers to as "the evil world of the last dharma-age." We should understand here that for Shinran, the prevalence of blind passions, and hence of falsity, transcends the merely private sphere. In his explanation, Shinran carefully distinguishes two forms of disparity implied by *koke*:

Everyone, whether in secular or religious walks of life, is possessed of "Heart and tongue at odds," and "Words and thoughts both insincere."

The former means that what is in the heart and what is said are at variance, and the latter means that what is spoken and what is thought are not real. (*ibid.*)

²⁷ In the original context, Shan-tao's statement is an admonition to sincerity: Do not display signs of wisdom and goodness while being false within. *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*, "Chapter on Non-meditative Good Acts," T37, 270c-271a.

²⁸ *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, 49 (SSZ 2: 635).

With regard to the disparity between inner thoughts and outer speech, *koke* implies a moral dimension of falsity as deceit. Shan-tao's original admonishment basically asserts the importance of sincerity in one's performance of religious practices, and Shinran also expresses this aspect:

Those who wish to be born in the Pure Land have only thoughts of deceiving and flattering. Even those who renounce this world have nothing but thoughts of fame and profit. (ibid.)

Lack of sincerity is not, of course, confined to the realm of religious practice. Shinran also speaks more generally:

All beings lack a true and sincere heart, mock teachers and elders, disrespect their parents, distrust their companions, and favor only evil. (ibid.)

In addition to the disparity between thoughts and words, however, Shinran points to a disparity between what is spoken or thought, on the one hand, and reality, on the other: "People of this world have only thoughts that are not real." In the term *koke*, *ko* implies "hollow," "unfounded," or "insubstantial," and *ke* implies a similar sense of unreality in the temporal dimension, meaning "merely temporary," "evanescent," or "apparitional." Thus, when Shinran states that "what is spoken and what is thought are not real," he means that although we believe the world to be as we perceive and speak of it, in fact our conceptions of ourselves and the things around us are delusional and false, fabricated out of our own fears and attachments. Because our thoughts and words arise from passions and ignorance, the world of our ordinary existence must be said to be "empty and transitory." Thus, Shinran speaks of this world as a "burning house," and as "lies and gibberish."

We see, then, that *koke* or *soragoto* signifies falsity with a broad range of meaning, including an "ontological" aspect in which the world as experienced by unenlightened people is unreal and apparitional, an "epistemological" aspect in which the perceptions of the ignorant and their conceptions of the world are untrue and fabricated, and a "moral" aspect in which beings of blind passions speak and act with pretense to good, and with flattery and deception.

Shinran extends the Buddhist critique of language so that it comes to

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express the boundness of human existence to delusional thought and perception as embodied in the medium of language. Thus: "As for this world, there is no person of truth and sincerity (*makoto*).²⁹" In this recognition of the inescapable linguisticity of human existence, his thought differs from other Buddhist paths.

C. Reality as True Language

Despite the thoroughness with which Shinran applies this concept of falsity, he allows a single exception: "The nembutsu alone is true and real (*makoto*)."

As in the case of false language, Shinran carries Mahāyāna thinking concerning wisdom to extreme, so that true language does not merely arise as words employed by enlightened beings who, awakening to formless true reality, gain the power to see sentient beings in samsaric existence and guide them by language. It is not merely, or not essentially, the medium of language skillfully used to draw beings to enlightenment. According to Shinran, the Name is not simply language that provides a relation to Buddha, such as an invocation or prayer, or that communicates a truth which enables one to move toward enlightenment. Rather, the Name itself is reality or wisdom. As he states:

The great practice is to say the Name of the tathāgata of unhindered light. . . . It is the treasure ocean of virtues that is suchness or true reality.³⁰

Further:

The auspicious Name embodying the perfectly fulfilled supreme virtues is true wisdom that transforms our evil into virtue.³⁰

As we have seen, Shinran carefully distinguishes two implications of falsity or *koke*: disagreement between one's thoughts and one's words, and disagreement between one's thought or words, on the one hand, and reality, on the other. Concerning the antonym, "truth" (*makoto*, *shinjitsu*), the same standards may be applied, for in these passages we

²⁹ "Chapter on Practice," 1 (SSZ 2: 5).

³⁰ *Teaching, Practice and Realization*, "Preface," p. 57 (SSZ 2: 1).

find the nonduality of word (Name) and reality (suchness, wisdom). Moreover, Shinran also asserts that in nembutsu, there is accord between thought and speech:

Know that "thinking" (*nen*) and "voicing" (*shō*) have the same meaning; no voicing exists separate from thinking, and no thinking separate from voicing.³¹

It is not, then, that one cultivates an inner attitude and then expresses it in utterance of the Name.

What do these nondualities signify, and how is it possible to attain them? In order to consider these questions, we must first take up the issues of (1) the structure of true language in Shinran's thought, and (2) the nature of religious existence as engagement with the language of the path.

D. The Structure of True Language

1. Word and Reality

The most direct expression of Shinran's fundamental thinking about the relationship between the language of the path (in particular, the Name of Amida) and reality is found in two passages in Japanese treating dharma-body as compassionate means (*hōben hosshin*). (These two passages are, in fact, the only places in which Shinran presents his own discussion of this concept.) The central passages for our discussion here are the following, the first [A] from *Notes on*

³¹ *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, 52 (SSZ 2: 638). Behind this assertion lies a tension between contemplative and vocal nembutsu in the long history of interpretation of the Eighteenth Vow. A decisive development came when Shan-tao paraphrased the Vow, substituting "voicing" 声 for *nen* 念. To reconcile the Vow and Shan-tao's paraphrase, Hōnen declared, "Thinking on (*nen*) and voicing are one 念声是一" (*Sen-jakushū*, 3; SSZ 1: 946). This appears to mean that *nen* in the Vow simply indicates vocal nembutsu. But elsewhere he states, "To recite with the lips is the Name, and to think in the heart is the Name," suggesting the possibility of two elements of utterance and thought that are identical at their roots, even while stressing that the act indicated in the Vow is vocal nembutsu (*Jūni mondō, Hōnen shōnin zenshū*, 635). It is in Shinran, who refines the notion of "being in accord with the Vow" that lies at the foundation of Hōnen's nembutsu with an exploration of shinjin, that the full significance of the Name underlying both thought and utterance is disclosed.

'Essentials of Faith Alone' and the second [B] from *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*:

[A] Dharma-body as suchness has neither color nor form; thus, the mind cannot grasp it nor words describe it. From this oneness form was manifested; this form is called dharma-body as compassionate means. Taking this form, the Buddha proclaimed his name as Bhikṣu Dharmākara and established the forty-eight great vows that surpass conceptual understanding.³²

[B] From this treasure ocean of oneness form was manifested, taking the name of Bodhisattva Dharmākara, who, through establishing the unhindered Vow as the cause, became Amida Buddha. . . . This tathāgata . . . is the "dharma-body as compassionate means." "Compassionate means" refers to manifesting form, revealing a name, and making oneself known to sentient beings. It refers to Amida Buddha.³³

We find it stated in these passages that true reality (suchness, dharma-body) is formless, completely beyond conception and speech. Nevertheless, this reality acts to make itself known to ignorant beings. As we have seen, such thinking about reality is rooted in general Mahāyāna conceptions of wisdom. Shinran bases his discussion of the two dimensions of dharma-body on the Chinese master T'an-luan, who asserts that they "differ but are not separable; they are one but cannot be regarded as identical."³⁴

Shinran goes on, however, to state that formless reality moves into the awareness of beings by "manifesting form and revealing a name." In other words, reality takes specifically linguistic form to disclose itself to ignorant human beings. Thus, as in the case of religious awareness—the "deep mind of trust"—we find with regard to the content of awareness also a recasting into linguistic terms.

To apply T'an-luan's description of the relationship between the two dimensions of dharma-body to the linguistic forms manifested by dharma-body as suchness, we may say that true reality and name, while

³² *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, 43 (SSZ 2: 630–631).

³³ *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, 46 (SSZ 2: 616).

³⁴ Quoted in "Chapter on Realization," 17 (p. 376); SSZ 2: 111.

differing as that characterized by formlessness (inconceivability) and that characterized by form (word, concept), interpenetrate each other and are inseparable. This interfusion of formlessness together with form or nonduality of subject and object together with their duality is the central feature of true language in Shinran's thought.

2. *True Language as the Fusion of Dynamics*

In order for the language of the path to be the medium through and in which unenlightened beings attain and become one with that which is true and real, it must possess the two dimensions of formlessness and form simultaneously. From the perspective of beings, it must first of all be meaningful; that is, it must be accessible to their conceptual understanding.³⁵ Second, it must manifest the two relationships of nonduality with reality and with thought mentioned above, which implies that it is also beyond the dichotomous functioning of conceptual understanding; in other words, it must also be inconceivable.

Thus, true language as the Name is characterized by both conception and inconceivability, form and formlessness. It may be understood in terms of the concepts of Vow and Amida Buddha and, at the same time, it is nondual with suchness or formless true reality. This does not mean that the Name may be comprehended as simply the form of that which is formless, or as a word that refers to Buddha or reality. In such an understanding, the Name as word becomes an instrument appropriated within our ordinary modes of thought and speech, and is considered a means (invocation, prayer, practice) by which a relationship with the real may be established.

Shinran carefully avoids this single-dimensional understanding by delineating a complex structure that informs the Name, the basic elements of which are dynamic movements or processes that integrate the formless and form while resisting objectifying understanding. He employs two narrative motifs in which the qualities of duality (conception) and nonduality (inconceivability) are conjoined in active pro-

³⁵ A clear indication that the Name possesses this aspect is seen in Shinran's use of equivalents and translations in addition to "Namu-amida-butsu." See, for example, *Letters of Shinran*, 14 (p. 46), where he dismisses criticism of utterance of *kimyō jin-jippō mugekō nyorai* (I take refuge in Tathāgata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters), stating that "Vasubandhu, exhausting all his resources, created this expression in order that we might know Amida's form with perfect certainty."

cesses of attainment (resulting in the fulfilled Buddha-body, which, as light or wisdom, is said to be formless) and emergence of form from formlessness (resulting in dharma-body as compassionate means). Attainment may be grasped as a process along a horizontal vector of temporal and causal progression; emergence, as movement on a vertical vector from the timeless into time.

In Shinran's view, the interfusion of these two vectors or moments comprises the basic structure of true language. Neither vector is in itself adequate, for alone it would tend to be frozen within the coordinates of our calculative thought. Each at once undercuts the other—proceeding in opposite directions between the poles of form and formlessness or time and timelessness—and at the same time serves as the source of the other's fulfillment, operating within disparate parameters. This structure allows for accessibility while denying an objectifying grasp; it accounts for transformative power while rejecting the imposition of ordinary frames of reference.

We can consider further this structure by turning once more to Shinran's discussions of dharma-body as compassionate means (*hōben hosshin*) and the fulfilled (or recompense) Buddha-body (*hōjin*). Shinran applies both of these concepts to Amida, and uses both terms in both passages. Nevertheless, each passage tends to be dominated by one term or the other, for while they are similar in content, both indicating that Amida is characterized by both form and formlessness, they have distinct implications.

i. *"Horizontal" Temporal-Causal Attainment: Dharma-Body as Compassionate Means as "Fulfilled Buddha-Body"*

Passage [A], from *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, is part of a commentary on the first line of the following hymn from Shan-tao:

The land of bliss is the realm of nirvana, the uncreated;
I fear it is hard to be born there by doing sundry good acts
according to our diverse conditions.
Hence, the tathāgata selected the essential dharma,
Instructing beings to say Amida's Name with singleness,
again singleness.³⁶

³⁶ *Hymns of the Nembutsu Liturgy* (法事讃, *Hōjisan*) T47, 433b.

Shinran's chief concern in his commentary is to reveal the foundation for the rejection of self-power and the advocacy of the nembutsu expressed in the second half of Shan-tao's verse. He accomplishes this by setting forth, in his interpretation of the first line, the concrete, active aspect of reality in the Pure Land path.

As we have seen, Shinran first mentions the concept of the emergence of dharma-body as compassionate means early in his discussion, applying it to Dharmākara Bodhisattva as well as to Amida Buddha. By doing so, he emphasizes it as a general principle underlying the entire Dharmākara-Amida narrative. Nevertheless, because his aim is to disclose the active significance of the potentially static concept of "the uncreated," he brings his discussion to focus on Amida as the dynamic "fulfilled Buddha-body":

[A] This tathāgata has fulfilled the Vows, which are the cause of his Buddhahood, and thus is called "tathāgata of 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. . . . "Unhindered" means not obstructed by the karmic evil and blind passions of beings. Know, therefore, that Amida Buddha is light, and that light is the form taken by wisdom.³⁷

In the concept of "fulfilled body," "fulfilled" means that "the cause for enlightenment has been fulfilled." The cause of enlightenment refers to Amida's Vows to bring all beings to birth into the Pure Land. The fulfilled body therefore is described in terms of activity to save beings, such as manifesting bodies that radiate light throughout the cosmos and dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

ii. *"Vertical" Emergence from Timeless Reality: Fulfilled Buddha-Body as "Dharma-Body as Compassionate Means"*

The reverse relationship between the concepts of "dharma-body as compassionate means" and "fulfilled Buddha-body" is seen in the ex-

³⁷ Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone', 43-44 (SSZ 2: 631).

position presented in *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*. In this context, Shinran's concern is to show that Amida's Primal Vow is indeed the true One Vehicle by which all beings attain enlightenment, and that it is in order to teach the Vow that Buddhas appear in the world. Thus, Shinran emphasizes here the relationship between the Vow and nondualistic true reality:

[B] Since the wondrous principle of true reality or suchness has reached its perfection [in the Primal Vow, this Vow] is likened to a great treasure ocean. . . . [T]he Buddha's non-discriminating, unobstructed, and nonexclusive guidance of all sentient beings is likened to the all-embracing waters of the great ocean.

Thus, just the reverse of passage A, Shinran first presents the narrative elements of Amida's Vow in temporal sequence, introducing the concept of fulfilled body, and then guides his discussion to an elaboration of Amida's nature employing the concept of dharma-body as compassionate means:

[B] This tathāgata is also known as "Namu-inconceivable light-buddha" (*Namu-fukashigikō-butsu*) and is "dharma-body as compassionate means." "Compassionate means" refers to manifesting form, revealing a name, and making oneself known to sentient beings. It refers to Amida Buddha.

This tathāgata is light. Light is none other than the form of wisdom; wisdom is the form of light. Wisdom is, in addition, formless; hence this tathāgata is the Buddha of inconceivable light.³⁸

The concept of dharma-body as compassionate means points to the relationship between formless true reality and Buddha as form and name. "Compassionate means" here signifies both accessibility to beings and beings' encounter with reality, and as Shinran states earlier in this passage of *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, "'To encounter' implies form." Thus, for Shinran, the light of wisdom is characterized by both form and formlessness, and the Name is also, for Amida is above all Buddha as Name.

³⁸ *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, 46 (SSZ 2: 615–616).

3. *Dialectic of Temporal/Causal and Emanational Frameworks*

We see, from the two passages on the origins and nature of Amida Buddha, that in Shinran's thought, the concepts of dharma-body as compassionate means and of fulfilled Buddha-body are held in an irresolvable tension.

On the one hand, the concept of the two dharma-bodies comprises a framework that encompasses the concept of fulfilled Buddha-body achieved through the completion of the Vow. This is a unique aspect of Shinran's teaching, for Hōnen and his predecessors accepted a historical framework for viewing the narrative of Dharmākara Bodhisattva becoming Amida Buddha.³⁹ In Shinran, dharma-body as suchness emerging as dharma-body as compassionate means—"announcing the name Bhikṣu Dharmākara and establishing the forty-eight great vows that surpass conceptual understanding"⁴⁰—stands as a prior movement of an emergence into history or time from beyond time. (This corresponds to the emphasis in passage B.)

At the same time, the concept of fulfilled Buddha-body embraces that of dharma-body as compassionate means in the sense that it shapes the emergence from formlessness. Without the causal, historical narrative of Dharmākara-Amida or Vow and fulfillment, the emergence into the awareness of beings cannot be accomplished. Thus, it is not Amida who appears and announces a name, but Dharmākara. In fact, it is the narrative of the fulfilled Buddha-body—the process of Dharmākara becoming Amida—that is the emergence into form of that which is formless. (This corresponds to the passage A.)

Thus, the two conceptions of Amida are in essence embodiments of dynamic movements, and they maintain their dynamic quality by remaining in dialectical tension with each other. This is a tension between the vertical movement of the timeless into time and the horizontal movement of causal, temporal process. It is because the "forty-eight great Vows that surpass conceptual understanding"—the "unhindered Vows"—have arisen from true reality that the fulfilled body can radiate "the unhindered light of wisdom throughout the countless

³⁹ Unlike Shinran, T'an-luan does not apply his concept of two dharma-bodies specifically to Dharmākara-Amida, but rather to all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, who have attained formless dharma-body by traversing the bodhisattva path.

⁴⁰ *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, 43 (SSZ 2: 630–631).

worlds.” Further, it is because the fulfilled body has appeared “in the form of light called ‘tathāgata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters’ ” that dharma-body as suchness has emerged into human awareness as dharma-body as compassionate means.

What is central for our concerns here is that Name and Vow share this character of the intersection of dynamics—of interfused movements between form and formlessness rooted in their nonduality—and it is precisely this character that enables them, as the language of the path, to possess both accessibility and transformative power.

E. Linguisticity of Engagement with the Pure Land Path

Rather than the eradication of false thought as embodied in ordinary language, the path that Shinran sets forth turns on engagement with language in which word is one with reality, and thought and spoken word are nondual. This may be said to be an engagement in which reality as liberative practice enters the existence of beings as language.

This does not mean that engagement with the path is a matter of accepting the teaching within the frameworks of our ordinary thought, conceived as doctrines and concepts to be grasped intellectually. Rather, the language of the path is liberative because it is informed by the structure we have seen above, and it requires a mode of engagement entered as a shift away from comprehension and appropriation within ordinary frames of thought. We can begin a consideration of this by turning once more to the passage quoted above from *Tannishō*.

The significance of Shinran’s words is further illuminated by the place given them by Yuien, the compiler-author of *Tannishō*. The main body of *Tannishō* consists of records of statements made orally by Shinran, either in response to questions or during conversations (sections 1–10), followed by discussions by the compiler of various misunderstandings of the teaching (sections 11–18). Following these sections is a postscript in which Yuien explains the concerns that have compelled him to make his record.

In his postscript, he expands on his “lamentation over departures from the true shinjin that Shinran conveyed orally,” which he mentions in his preface and which gives *Tannishō* its title, by relating a debate that took place among Hōnen’s disciples. According to Yuien,

Shinran stated that his shinjin was the same as Hōnen's. Others challenged this statement as presumptuous, comparable to boasting of the same level of learning and wisdom as the master, and it was decided that the matter should be brought to Hōnen for settlement. Hōnen declared: "My shinjin has been imparted by Amida; so has Shinran's. Therefore they are one and the same. A person with a different shinjin will surely not be born in the Pure Land to which I will go."

We should note here that Yuien's narrative differentiates genuine shinjin and variants of it. We may say that different modes of engagement with the teaching are distinguished. Further, he continues:

When you are confused by people who discuss among themselves such views as those noted above, carefully read the sacred writings that accord with the late master's thought and that he himself used to read.

In the sacred writings, the true and real and the accommodated and provisional are mixed. That we abandon the accommodated and take up the real, set aside the provisional and adopt the true is Shinran's fundamental meaning.

Here, Yuien suggests that the departures from genuine shinjin may be understood as misreadings of sacred texts. These are not simply arbitrary and random interpretations. Rather, the texts themselves allow for different understandings, "accommodated and provisional" on the one hand, and "true and real" on the other. Shinran sought to guide people from the provisional to the true. We may say, then, that there are two modes of engagement with the teaching, and that they correspond to two ways of understanding the sacred texts. The problem for the practitioner is to "abandon the accommodated and take up the real." Yuien cautions us: "You must under no circumstances misread the sacred writings."

Elsewhere, I have delineated the two modes of engagement that Yuien points to in terms of the conceptions of reality that characterize them.⁴¹ For our concerns with language here, we should note that Yuien continues:

⁴¹ "Breaking the Darkness: Images of Reality in the Shin Buddhist Path," *Japanese Religions*, 16:3 (January 1991), 17–45. Here I outline teleological and interpersonal understandings of the path that come, in fulfilled engagement, to coexist with the

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I select several crucial attestant passages and append them to this record as a standard (*meyasu*).

While this sentence has been understood in different ways, if we follow the line of Yuien's discussion in the postscript, it appears likely that the passages he speaks of here are two statements by Shinran that follow, and that these are intended to serve as a guide to the correct understanding of texts, or in other words, to the engagement with the teaching marked by genuine realization of shinjin. The second of these passages is the one, quoted above, beginning, "I know nothing at all of the two, good and evil"

In the context of *Tannishō*, then, Shinran's statement distinguishing false and true language is seen as providing a touchstone for genuine understanding of the sacred texts and for guiding readers from provisional to true engagement with the path. What, then, is the vision of language in the passage that enables it to function as a standard of understanding, and how does it manifest the shift from engagement with accommodated teachings to engagement with true?

III. INTERPRETIVE SHIFT INTO AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT WITH THE LANGUAGE OF THE PATH

As mentioned before, in Shinran's path "nirvana is attained without severing blind passions." This means that one does not traverse the path by extricating oneself from the "lies and gibberish" of ordinary life. Rather, it is an essential characteristic of the path that its language be accessible to us just as we are, "possessed of blind passions" and bound to the linguistic universe of a particular locale in the history of a culture and society.

At the same time, however, the true language of the teaching is not authentically apprehended if it is not distinct from the words of our

transcendence of the dualities they imply.

In considering the provisional mode of engagement with the path, we must keep in mind that Yuien specifically rejects the notion that such engagement is futile and leads to hell (*Tannishō*, 17). Rather, the attainment it leads to (birth in a transformed land) reflects the circumscription and narrowness of an engagement in which the complex dynamics of the path have not emerged.

ordinary life. If the words of the Buddha are grasped merely as confirming our delusional worldview or as teaching a means to improve our existence or enhance the egocentric self, we reduce them to language of ordinary life. It is here that we see the significance of Shinran's stark dichotomy of false and true language.

It may be said, then, that unlike other paths, which lead out of the world of false language into awakening to true reality, Shinran's path leads from our ordinary consciousness and thought into a world characterized by the presence of false and true language. In our ordinary awareness, we carry on our lives using speech that may, judged by our relative standards of accuracy or veracity, be true or false or of various gradings between these poles. According to Shinran, however, to enter genuine engagement with the path, or the realm of Other Power, is to move from such relative discrimination into the realm of absolute dichotomy. It is here that we become aware, simultaneously, of the falsity of ordinary speech and the reality of true language. Thus, this move entails a radical shift in engagement with the teaching.

Shinran's works present a special problem in understanding because they are largely compilations from the scriptural tradition made from within the stance of the apprehension of those texts as true language, an apprehension that includes an awareness of ordinary speech as false and delusional.⁴² In other words, true language must be accessible to us without the eradication of our false thinking and speech, but at the same time, no amount of exposition and reasoning carried on within the dimension of false language can lead to a grasp of the truth of true language. Shinran's works, then, present a version of the hermeneutic circle, in which we must already stand within the realm of true language in order to understand the texts. Once we stand within this circle, not only the various elements of the teaching, but the tradition as a whole comes to display a coherence and unity that cannot be grasped through the imposition of ordinary frames of reference.

Although Shinran's writings adopt the stance of true language and

⁴² It is not possible to set forth here a typology of true language, which would include not only the Name, but also the praise of Buddhas throughout the cosmos, the teaching of Śakyamuni, who appeared in this world to disclose the Vow, and the words of masters and people of shinjin, including Shinran. He sets forth the fundamental element of true language when he says of the *Larger Sutra* as the true teaching that "the Name of the Buddha is its essence." "Chapter on Teaching," 2 (SSZ 2: 3).

do not seek to forge a bridge by which we can move intellectually from false thought to an apprehension of truth, he is perfectly aware of the problem. His awareness is manifested in particular in his words recorded in *Tannishō*, for there, instead of seeking to present the tradition of true language directly and without mediation, he responds to questions posed to him, questions that arise from seeking to engage the teaching while remaining—without self-awareness—in the realm of false language.

We find, therefore, that Shinran's spoken words provide a glimpse of the shift in mode of engagement that is already assumed in the written works. Let us consider the following passages, which are among the best known in the work, along with the passage from the postscript, which we will refer to as passage A:

- (B) “Saved by the inconceivable working of Amida’s Vow, I shall realize birth into the Pure Land”: the moment you entrust yourself thus to the Vow, so that the mind set on saying the Name arises within you, you are brought to share in the benefit of being grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned.

Know that the Primal Vow of Amida makes no distinction between people young and old, good and evil; only the entrusting of yourself to it is essential. The reason is, it was made to save the person of karmic evil deep and immense, of blind passions that rage furiously. (*Tannishō* 1)

- (C) I have no idea whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for my being born in the Pure Land or whether it is the karmic act for which I must fall into hell. Should I have been deceived by Hōnen Shōnin and, saying the Name, plunge utterly into hell, even then I would have no regrets. The reason is, the person who could have attained Buddhahood by endeavoring in other practices might regret that he had been deceived if he said the nembutsu and so fell into hell. But I am one for whom any practice is difficult to accomplish, so hell is to be my abode whatever I do.

If Amida’s Primal Vow is true and real, Śākyamuni’s teaching cannot be lies. If the Buddha’s teaching is true and real, Shan-tao’s commentaries cannot be lies. If Shan-tao’s commentaries are true and real, can what Hōnen said be a lie?

If what Hōnen said is true and real, then surely my words cannot be empty. (*Tannishō* 2)

- (D) Even a good person can attain birth in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that an evil person will.

Though such is the truth, people commonly say, "Even an evil person attains birth, so naturally a good person will." This statement may seem well-founded at first, but it runs counter to the meaning of the Other Power established through the Primal Vow. The reason is, a person who relies on the good that he does through his self-power fails to entrust himself wholeheartedly to Other Power and therefore is not in accord with Amida's Primal Vow. But when he abandons his attachment to self-power and entrusts himself totally to Other Power, he will realize birth in the Pure Land.

It is impossible for us, filled as we are with blind passions, to free ourselves from birth-and-death through any practice whatever. Sorrowing at this, Amida made the Vow, the essential intent of which is the attainment of Buddhahood by the person who is evil. (*Tannishō* 3)

A. Basic Pattern of Response

We should first note two general points concerning these passages. To begin, we must recall that these records of Shinran's spoken words in fact represent only one-half of a dialogue or conversation—only the replies to statements or questions that the compiler did not record.⁴³

Further, when viewed in this context of dialogue, it is possible to discern a characteristic pattern of response, which provides a model for the shift from ordinary thought into genuine awareness. While this shift occurs within the context of engagement with the teaching, it arises as a breaking into ordinary awareness from beyond its horizons, or as a shift from a world-picture characterized by the discrimination of subject and object and relative judgments based on self-attachment, to another, in which these dichotomies coexist with the transcendence of them.

⁴³ The dialogic element is clear in *Tannishō*, 2, where Shinran himself restates the question, and in *Tannishō*, 9, where the compiler records a conversation of which he was a part.

The second general point to be noted concerning these passages is their uniform concern with issues of good and evil. Concerning *Tannishō*, 1, for example, Shin scholars suggest that the question posed concerned the need in the Pure Land path to perform good acts and to avoid committing evil, in addition to saying the nembutsu.⁴⁴ It seems likely that this question, in one form or another, underlies all the comments I am taking up here. It is, for example, the context in which Yuien cites passage A from the postscript, which he prefaces: "In truth, both myself and others speak together only of 'good' and 'evil,' leaving the tathāgata's benevolence out of the discussion." We must consider, then, why, in dialogic engagement with the teaching, it is this problem that arises in the path as Shinran presents it.

Let us begin with the elements of the common pattern of response.

1. *Rejection of the Question*

In the passages from *Tannishō*, Shinran does not take up the questions presented directly, on their own terms, but seeks rather to break down the assumptions that gave rise to them by speaking from beyond their frameworks. That is, the questions arise from the working of our ordinary thought, but Shinran's response is given from within his realization of shinjin. To the question, "Is it not still important to do good, knowing the teaching well, and avoid evil?" he answers:

[A] I know nothing at all of the two, good and evil.

[B] Know that the Primal Vow of Amida makes no distinction between people young and old, good and evil.

[C] I have no idea whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for my being born in the Pure Land or whether it is the karmic act for which I must fall into hell.

[D] Even a good person can attain birth in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that an evil person will.

These statements must have stunned their hearers and seemed a total rejection of their questions. (Shinran's contrast in passage D between his statement and what "people of the world"—of ordinary modes of

⁴⁴ For example, Uryūzu Takao, *Tannishō kōwa*, (Kyoto: Hyakkaen, 1959), 12.

thought—say shows that he is perfectly aware of the impact he is making on his listeners, and his choice in the order of the statements indicates his deliberateness in colliding with their questions rather than resolving them.) Such a response was necessary, for no reasoning undertaken within the realm of relative distinction and calculation can lead to its own transcendence, and it is the unfolding of this dimension of transcendence that is the crux of the problem of authentic engagement.

2. *Interior Logic*

At the same time, after responding with statements that upset our usual thought, Shinran proceeds to expand on them, presenting an exposition in the form of logical argument. Thus, in each of the sections, the statement is followed by the phrase, “the reason is” (or “that is to say,” *sono yue wa*):

[A] *The reason is*, 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.”

[B] *The reason is*, it was made to save the person in whom karmic evil is deep-rooted and whose blind passions abound.

[C] *The reason is*, the person who could have attained Buddhahood by endeavoring in other practices might regret. . . . But I am one for whom any practice is difficult to accomplish, so hell is to be my abode whatever I do.

[D] *The reason is*, a person who relies on the good that he does through his self-power fails to entrust himself wholeheartedly to Other Power and therefore is not in accord with Amida's Primal Vow. . . .

The phrase, “The reason is . . . ,” at once acknowledges the difficulty of grasping the initial sentence by itself—arising as it does from assumptions sharply differing from those the hearers are operating on—and further gives promise of a kind of logic behind Shinran's perspective.

The rhetorical power moving through the text of *Tannishō*, however, has tended to obscure the peculiarity of the logic at work in the

passages we are considering. Passage A (Postscript) states both that (1) Shinran does not know (cannot rightly distinguish between) good and evil, and that (2) for the being of blind passions, all matters of this world are lies and gibberish, that is, all is false and evil. Passage B (*Tannishō*, 1) states both that (1) the Vow does not discriminate and select among good and evil people, and that (2) it was made with the intent of saving the evil (people filled with blind passions). In Passage C (*Tannishō*, 2), Shinran transposes the question of knowing good and evil (whether one will go to the Pure Land or hell) into one of regret; nevertheless, he states there both that (1) he does not know whether he will go to the Pure Land or to hell, and will feel no regret even if he goes to hell, and (2) he is destined for hell whatever he does. Passage D, which states that (1) *even* the good can go to the Pure Land and (2) we are incapable of accomplishing any genuine good, demands a complete inversion of usual notions of good and evil.

Although the strategies of exposition in each of these sections differ, in general the second statement is prominently given as the reason for the first, but rather than providing logical explanation, it seems to contradict the initial assertion. Put simply, how can an awareness of oneself and the world as "lies and gibberish, totally without truth and sincerity," be the logical reason for the statement that one does not have any idea of what is good and what is evil? Rather, does not such awareness imply a judgment of oneself as evil? Concerning passage B, if the Vow does not choose among good and evil people, how can it have been made specifically for the evil? If it has been made to save the evil, how can it be said that *for this very reason* it does not discriminate between the good and the evil?

But to raise these questions is no more than to say that, if received as an explanation within the framework of the original question, the answer cannot be understood. The logic involved is the logic at work in the awakening termed *shinjin*, and each section might close with Shinran's comment at the end of *Tannishō*, 2, "Such, in essence, is the *shinjin* of the foolish person that I am."

In these passages, then, a fundamental rift lies between the question and the mind-set from which it arises, on the one hand, and Shinran's response, on the other. In other words, Shinran's reply is not an attempt to lead the listener logically and discursively into the realm of *shinjin*, but rather an expression that manifests the difference between

our ordinary thinking and the thinking that occurs as and through shin-jin. Thus, the response begins with a presentation of an utterly transformed vision of the issue raised and then proceeds to disclose the stance from which this perspective flows.

B. Internal Dynamics of Shinran's Response

To grasp the thinking at work in Shinran's responses, let us consider the logical movements they manifest in closer detail. As we have seen, the basic structural elements are:

1. The context, informed by the question of the need to perform good acts and avoid evil in order to accord with Amida's Vow. This problem becomes pivotal, because directly underlying it is the confidence to judge, which is itself the most deeply-rooted obstacle to awareness of the limitations and falsity of the self. Further, the teaching, when engaged in the provisional mode, gives impetus and urgency to the question of effective action, framed in terms of good and evil.

2. Shinran's choice not to work within the basic assumptions of the question—the presuppositions not only that one can perform good, but even prior to this, that one can determine what is good and what is evil: "I know nothing at all of the two, good and evil."

3. Development of the basis for this refusal in an opposition between Buddha and beings or good and evil: "If I could know thoroughly, as is known in the mind of Amida, that an act was good, then I would know good [but I cannot]."

4. A statement of coexistence of or interaction between the two sides of the dichotomy he has drawn: "The nembutsu alone is true."

Taking these elements together, we see that Shinran's words embody two basic movements or changes in perspective within the shift from provisional to authentic engagement with the path:

I. in (1) to (3) above, we find a collapsing of ordinary presuppositions, integrated with a move from relative discrimination to absolute dichotomy or opposition; and

II. in (4), the unfolding of interaction with reality that is paradoxically simultaneous and nondual with opposition.

We will consider these two aspects in order.

1. *Aspect I: From Relative Distinction to Absolute Opposition*

i. *False Language as Discrimination of Good and Evil*

In *Tannishō*, Shinran speaks across the gap between the questioner's assumptions and his own stance in the realization of shinjin. In order to grasp this difference, we should note another use of the concept of false language (*soragoto*) found in his works.

In Shinran's writings, as we have seen, false or empty language has its roots in the working of blind passions. Since, in the Shin Buddhist path, nirvana is attained without severing blind passions, such falsity in thought and speech is not eradicated through practices.

In addition to this conception of false linguisticality as an inherent element of human existence, Shinran uses the term *soragoto* with another meaning, which is illuminated in the following hymn:

While persons who do not know even the characters for
"good" and "evil"

All possess a sincere mind (*makoto no kokoro*),
I make a display of knowing the words "good" and "evil";
This is the manifestation of great falsity (*soragoto*).⁴⁵

Here, Shinran establishes the same distinction between knowledge and ignorance of "the two, good and evil," as found in his words in the *Tannishō* postscript, but speaks from the opposite side of this distinction, confessing to a "display of knowing the words 'good' and 'evil.'" What is central for our concerns is the use in this hymn of "falsity," which contrasts with that in *Tannishō*. In the postscript, "false language" expresses the self-awareness of one who is ignorant of good and evil, while in this hymn, it characterizes the conduct of the person who judges self and others on the basis of his or her own standards. Further, while falsity in the sense of blind passions cannot be eliminated in the present life, falsity as the judgment of good and evil can. There are also people who do not know the words "good" and "evil," and such people are described as "sincere" (*makoto*).

⁴⁵ *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, 115: *yoshi-ashi no monji o mo shiranu hito wa mina / makoto no kokoro narikeru o / zen-aku no ji shirigao wa / ō-soragoto no katachi nari.* SSZ 2: 531.

ii. *Falsity as Self-Power*

This conception of false thought and language as discrimination of good and evil may be seen developed in the critique of self-power as "belief in the recompense of good and evil." For Shinran, the Pure Land teachings focus on this attitude as the expression of doubt; the basic scriptural text regarding this issue is the *Larger Sutra*:

The Buddha said to Maitreya, "Suppose there are sentient beings who, with minds full of doubts, aspire to be born in that land through the practice of various meritorious acts; unable to realize the Buddha-wisdom, the inconceivable wisdom . . . , they doubt these wisdoms and do not entrust themselves. And yet, believing in [the recompense of] evil and good, they aspire to be born in that land through cultivating the root of good."⁴⁶

In this passage, clinging to the idea that one can attain birth in the Pure Land as recompense for performing good and avoiding evil is associated with doubt of Buddha-wisdom, which works compassionately and inconceivably in the form of Amida's Vow.

Further, false language (*soragoto*) as judgment of good and evil may be seen as basically synonymous, in its religious implications, with Shinran's term *hakarai* ("calculative thinking"). *Hakarai* is derived from the verb *hakaru*, meaning to measure or weigh. By extension, it has such meanings as to deliberate, to make a decision, and to manage or bring about. In Shinran's usage, *hakarai* signifies in particular the intellectual perceptions at the roots of adherence to self—to one's own goodness and capabilities—while following the Pure Land teaching.

iii. *Falsity as the Doubled Self*

A central aspect of our ordinary thought and speech is self-deception, encapsulated in the discrimination of good and evil. In our normal lives, the ego-self affirms itself as true and real by judging its own acts and determining some to be good and others to be wrong or evil. This activity strengthens the foundation for self-attachment.

In Shinran's view, this *hakarai* or false language is the dominant ele-

⁴⁶ Quoted in "Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands," 7 (SSZ 2: 145).

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ment in the affirmation of and attachment to a delusional construction of self and world. Through it, one establishes an inner self that stands apart from and judges one's acts in the world. The activity of this false subject ("mind") of calculative thinking is the focus in Shinran's definition of self-power:

Self-power is the effort to attain birth, whether by invoking the names of Buddhas other than Amida and practicing good acts other than the nembutsu, in accordance with your particular circumstances and opportunities; or by endeavoring to make yourself worthy through amending the confusion in your acts, words, and thoughts, confident of your own powers and guided by your own calculation.⁴⁷

We see here that the core of self-power lies in the will and effort to affirm one's own goodness, "guided by one's own calculation" (*waga hakarai no kokoro o motte*). "Calculation" signifies the judgment of the inner self that views and seeks to "amend one's acts, words, and thoughts." Here, the phrase, "in accordance with one's particular circumstances and opportunities," refers to our condition within the cultural and social contexts in which our images of self and our standards of judgment are formed. This is, in other words, to assume the truth of one's own conceptions of the self and the world and to affirm the stance of the ego-self.

The self standing behind and observing one's own thoughts, words, and acts implies a doubled structure that is perhaps similar to the Cartesian self in Western philosophy. Shinran uses the term "doublemindedness" (*futagokoro*) as a synonym for doubt or the mind of self-power, and as an antonym for *shinjin*. "Doublemindedness" expresses wavering and indecision, but at its core it indicates the hierarchical doubled self that is the subject of calculative thinking. It is precisely this self that would be the subject of the regret that Shinran speaks of in *Tannishō*, 2—"the person who could have attained Buddhahood by endeavoring in other practices might regret that he had been deceived if he said the nembutsu and so fell into hell"—and that he denies in himself.

For Shinran, all the acts of unenlightened beings manifest blind

⁴⁷ *Letters of Shinran*, 22-23 (SSZ 2: 658).

passions arising from self-attachment. Since, in the Pure Land path, beings attain the Buddha's mind as the entrusting of themselves to the working of the Vow, not through eradicating those passions,

you should not be anxious that the tathāgata will not receive you because you do wrong. A foolish being is by nature possessed of blind passions, so you must recognize yourself as a being of karmic evil.⁴⁸

In the Pure Land path, then, delusional acts of body, speech, and mind are not obstacles to attainment of enlightenment: "nirvana is attained without severing blind passions." The obstacle is the projected self within the self, which does not view itself "as a being of karmic evil" conditioned by the character of its existence in the world extending deep into the beginningless past, but instead, "confident of its own powers and guided by its own calculation," imagines that it stands apart from ignorance and passions and its context in the history of the world with other beings, and further that it possesses the capacity and judgment to rectify its acts and make them accord with reality. It is this doubled, inner self that is "the mind of calculative thinking" or "the mind of self-power." Thus he states:

"To abandon the mind of self-power" admonishes the various and diverse kinds of people—masters of Hīnayāna or Mahāyāna, ignorant beings good or evil—to abandon the conviction that one is good, to cease relying on the self, to stop reflecting knowingly on one's evil heart, and further to abandon the judging of people as good and bad.⁴⁹

The realization of shinjin is none other than the collapsing of this doubled self. It occurs as the shift from initial engagement with the path to fulfilled engagement.

iv. Phases in the Shift Underlying Shinran's Words in Tannishō

As we have seen, in the words recorded in *Tannishō*, Shinran speaks across the gulf of the realization of shinjin to followers whose engagement with the path is still in the initial or provisional mode.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 23 (SSZ 2: 659).

⁴⁹ Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone', 40 (SSZ 2: 628).

Those who have come to Shinran with doubts regarding the efficacy of the nembutsu and concern over the necessity of good conduct in order to attain birth in the Pure Land have engaged the teaching by drawing it into their ordinary frames of reference. They have grasped the Vow as an object or instrument within the universe of their own conceptions of cause and result and of good and evil, and seek to utilize it to affirm the self. In other words, it has become an element of their calculative thinking.

For Shinran, however, to "hear the Name" or Vow is to realize shin-jin. This means that, through engagement with the path, the horizons of our ordinary understanding and judgment have been fractured, and that the Vow stands free of egocentric appropriation. Through the narratives of the teaching, the Name becomes accessible as true language (with fused dimensions), and through hearing this Name, the narratives become authentically meaningful. The first aspect of this shift may be described in terms of the two meanings of false language that we have outlined above.

Phase (a): Collapse of the Doubled Self. When Shinran confronts the question of the necessity of good and the fear of evil by exposing and undermining its assumptions—stating that he "knows nothing at all of the two, good and evil"—he is manifesting the absence of the doubled self or of calculative thinking, which has collapsed within him. This breakdown of the inner, judgmental self is the overturning or discarding of self-power, for the confidence that one can rectify one's thoughts and acts has vanished. Here, the false language (*soragoto*) of good and evil—the language of the doubled self or the "mind of calculative thinking"—has fallen away. When Shinran states that he "has no idea whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for being born in the Pure Land or whether it is the karmic act for which [he] must fall into hell," he is expressing this absence of the determination of good and evil. The Name and the Vow have been extricated from the bounds of ordinary thought and ceased to be means operating within the parameters of the delusional self.

Phase (b): Emergence of Opposition. This falling away of calculative thinking or collapse of the doubled self is inextricably tied to Shinran's other use of false language as the operation of blind passions. On the one hand, it is only through the dissolution of falsity as egocentric calculation, so that one comes to "know nothing at all of

the two, good and evil," that falsity as blind passions emerges as an actuality into a person's awareness; here, hell is one's only abode. On the other hand, it is this emergence of "the self possessed of blind passions" that undermines the doubled self of calculative thinking.

The first phase involves the dissolution of the motive force that works through the judgment of good and evil within the framework of the dichotomy of being and Buddha. It is not that these dualities are themselves eliminated through any self-effort. Our ordinary mode of thinking is maintained and is not eradicated. From a Buddhist perspective, our false thought continues, without being broken through by means of practices and disciplines.

Instead of being eliminated, the discriminative categories of good and evil are forced to their limits, where they are brought into a mold of absolute dichotomy in which all false judgment of good and evil is seen itself to be evil. Thus, rather than governing the means by which movement from being to Buddha is seen to be possible, the dichotomy of good and evil is expanded so that it comes into correspondence with that of Buddha and being, and both dichotomies are frozen into opposing pairs. True language, when speaking of "truth," is self-reflexive ("true and real refers to the Vow") and false language characterizes the existence of beings. Here, all means for movement along the path become inoperative.

In Shinran's words in *Tannishō*, this shift is expressed by a flat rejection of the questioners' assumptions of the need and the ability to judge and perform good. Further, the basis for this rejection of the questioners' presuppositions ("the reason for this," *sono yue wa*) is that human existence is inherently characterized by blind passions:

[A] With a foolish being full of blind passions, with this fleeting world—this burning house—all matters without exception are lies and gibberish, totally without truth and sincerity.

[B] [The Vow] was made to save the person of karmic evil deep and immense, of blind passions that rage furiously.

[C] I am one for whom any practice is difficult to accomplish, so hell is to be my abode whatever I do.

With the rejection of any capability on the part of beings to deter-

mine and perform acts that might move them toward attainment of Buddhahood, the questions posed lose all significance. In the face of the correlated dichotomies of being/Buddha and evil/good, all relative discrimination is encompassed under the category of evil.

2. *Aspect II: Unfolding of Nonduality and Interaction with the Real*

It is here, where the nexus we had assumed between being and Buddha—our means of access framed by a conception of practice and assessed by our judgments of good and evil—has been dissolved through the shift described above, that a genuine locus of apprehension of one's own existence and of true reality in polar opposition is opened up and, because of the nondichotomous ("unhindered") nature of true reality, this opposition is also overcome—so that the existence of the being is pervaded by the real—without falling away. In Shinran's terms, the collapse of the doubled self is also Amida's giving his pure mind to beings as the Name, which surfaces in their existence as the living utterance of the nembutsu. Aspect I above—indicated in Shinran's words by his abrupt and disjunctive opening response—involves a new awareness, and the development of this awareness constitutes a second aspect of the interpretive shift, a disclosure of the dimension of nonduality in the language of the path.

Shinran's words expressing this second aspect in the *Tannishō* passages we have been considering are equally as abrupt as those expressing the first:

[A] All matters without exception are lies and vanities, totally without truth and sincerity; *the nembutsu alone is true and real.*

[B] [The Vow] was made to save the person of karmic evil. . . . Thus, for those who entrust themselves to the Primal Vow, no performance of good is required, for *no act can hold greater virtue than the nembutsu.*

[C] Hell is to be my abode whatever I do. If Amida's Primal Vow is true and real, . . . then *my words cannot be empty.*

Again, as with the first aspect, there is nothing that prepares us for this leap from Shinran's reflection on the limitations—in knowledge of and in capacity for good—that hem his own existence. As before, our very

dependence on and attachment to discursive logic and intellection are called into question. In fact, however, the awareness of that which is true and real—and the hearing and speaking of true language—is but the opposite face of the radical self-awareness that constitutes the first aspect, and it arises spontaneously.⁵⁰

From the perspective of our ordinary thought, the first aspect—the movement into the larger framework of absolute dichotomy—may be described as an emerging awareness of the horizons of such thought. The relative intellection that functions at the core of the conception of the self becomes aware of itself as delusional blind passions and ignorance. This self-awareness of the limitations of one's ability to know and judge emerges because such judgment finds itself within a larger context of Buddha-wisdom. In other words, the self of relative intellection (good and evil) becomes absolutely evil, and this in itself is to become aware of itself from beyond its own horizons. It is also to become aware of—and give living voice to—that which, from beyond oneself, makes oneself aware of one's own existence.

This is not a breaking through the horizons of ignorance from within; nevertheless, it is an unfolding of a new awareness. Apprehension of the horizons of one's own knowledge and conception arises only through awareness of the presence of a knowing (Buddha-wisdom) that transcends relative discrimination. For the limits of ordinary thought to rise to awareness means that the mind has come to stand beyond those limits and been able, from that new perspective, to reflect on the horizon. For all that can be conceived to come to be seen as limited and in fact falsely conceived means that there is at once an absolute dichotomy between ignorant thought and wisdom, and further that there is both an "interaction" and nonduality. Thus, the relative categories of good and evil within our world-picture are absolutized, so that all within the bounds of our ordinary judgment comes to be seen within the realm of the false and evil. For Shinran, this breakthrough is an approach or inward movement of the real that is nondiscriminative, and can never originate from within the circle of delusional thought. Further, this approach of reality ("being grasped by Amida" or the light that is wisdom) is first apprehended as the hearing of the Name,

⁵⁰ In Shinran's term, *jinen* 自然: by the working of Amida's Vow, without any contrivance by the being.

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and reality emerges in one's existence as utterance, which possesses both nondualistic and dualistic dimensions.

In Shinran's writings, the shift from provisional to authentic engagement may be seen in terms of two general aspects of his interpretive method: an analytic aspect, in which the expressions of the teaching are removed from our ordinary conceptual frameworks, and a reconstructive aspect, in which the nature and significance of the interaction and interfusion between being and Buddha are delineated. We will consider Shinran's interpretive methods and the elaboration of authentic engagement with the language of the path in Part Two.