

The Genealogy of Sorrow

Japanese View of Life and Death

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THE TRADITIONAL JAPANESE attitude to life and death, when viewed from a broad perspective, has two basic sources. First is the original experience of the Japanese people initially expressed in ancient mythology and lyric poetry. It is reflected, for example, in the story of Izanagi, Izanami, and the land of Yomi (underworld) in the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, 672–712 C.E.) and in the many elegies found in the *Man'yōshū* (Collection of Countless Leaves, 661–732). The second is Mahāyāna Buddhism introduced from the Asian continent. After its official introduction into Japan in 538 C.E., the thirteenth year of Emperor Kinmei's reign, Buddhism became an integral part of Japanese life and culture with amazing rapidity. By the time of Saichō (764–822) and Kūkai (774–835), principal figures in Heian Buddhism, it had become a major source of influence leaving an indelible impact on the Japanese view of life and death. The Buddhism of the Kamakura Period, especially the Pure Land tradition of Hōnen and Shinran and the Zen Buddhism of Dōgen, may be regarded as the convergence of these two streams. Japan's encounter with the West in the Meiji Period (1868–1912) also wrought a immense transformation on Japanese civilization, but at the deepest level of spiritual life, touching on the concerns of life and death, we continue to draw on these two fundamental sources.

I

The primitive view of life and death of the ancient Japanese is found in the opening section of the *Kojiki*, which begins with the birth of

THE GENEALOGY OF SORROW

various *kami* involved with the genesis of the nation.¹ Deities appear one after another, followed by the birth of the two central figures, Izanagi and his spouse Izanami. The two together give birth to many islands and deities, attesting to a prolific and fecund generative power. However, in the midst of this drama overflowing with life a significant event occurs: the death of Izanami. She dies not of old age or illness but because of a scalding she suffered giving birth to the fire-deity. Death suddenly strikes in the very midst of procreation, the manifestation of a powerful life-force. The ancient Japanese felt the reality of death as an intimate part of life.

The general plot of the *Kojiki* unfolds as follows. Izanagi, who lost his beloved Izanami, wept in grief as he crawled around her head and feet. From among the flood of tears was born a daughter, Nakisame-no-kami. Izanami is buried in the Hiba Mountain, located on the border of the provinces of Izumo and Hahaki. Izanagi then pulled out his sword, ten hands in length, and slayed his son, the fire-deity Kagutsuchi-no-kami. Blood dripped from the tip of the sword from which were born the deities, Iwasaku-no-kami, Nesaku-no-kami, and Iwazutsu-no-kami. And from the blood oozing from the sword guard were born Mikahahi-no-kami, Hihaya-no-kami, and Takemikazuchi-no-kami. Furthermore, the blood that dripped down from the hilt of the sword, filtering through the fingers, gave birth to Kuraokami-no-kami and Kuramitsuha-no-kami.

Desiring to meet his deceased wife once again, Izanagi rushes after her to the land of Yomi. When Izanami appears from the door of the hall, he pleads: "Oh, my beloved wife, the land which you and I created have yet to be completed, so please come back once more!" Whereupon Izanami replies, "You've come too late. Since I've eaten the food of the land of Yomi, I can't get out of here. But since you, my beloved, have come to see me, I want to return to the world once more. I'll go and negotiate with the deity who rules Yomi. While I do so, please do not look at me." Thus saying, she returns deep into the hall from which she came. But Izanagi, unable to wait any longer for his

* This is a translation of the author's "Hiai no keifu," in *Kagetsu no shisō* (Kyoto: Kōyō Shobō, 1989).

¹ *Kojiki*, translated with introduction and notes by Donald L. Phillipi (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968).

ŌMINE

spouse, breaks off the long teeth of a comb he is wearing, lights it with fire, and peers inside of the hall. He sees Izanami's corpse filled with squirming maggots, and all kinds of thunder burst forth from various parts of her body.

Seeing the dreadful figure of his wife, Izanagi filled with fear and trembling tries to flee from the land of Yomi. Crying, "He has brought shame upon me," Izanami sends the hags of Yomi in his pursuit. Escaping the rushing deities of Yomi and its martial forces, Izanagi reaches the Hira Pass of the land of Yomi. Izanami soon comes in pursuit of him.

Pushing a huge boulder, said to require the strength of a thousand people to move, Izanagi closes off the pass, and, confronting her with the boulder between them, he proclaims the ending of their relationship. When Izanami hears this, she threatens, "If you, my beloved, say such a thing, I will strangle and kill daily a thousand people of your land." Izanami replies, "If you, my beloved spouse, do such a thing, I'll make possible the birth of 1,500 babies a day." Since that time, it is said, every day a thousand people die and 1,500 people are born. And this is the reason why Izanagi is called Yomotsu-no-ōkami (great deity of the land of Yomi) and Chishiki-no-ōkami (great deity who pursues). The boulder that closed the pass is called Chigaeshi-no-ōkami or Sayarimasuyomido-no-ōkami.

In this legend we can discern the manner in which the ancient Japanese understood death. The first obvious fact is the profound grief expressed by Izanagi at the death of his spouse. Crawling around her corpse, he wails with uncontrollable sorrow, and from the tears that gush forth are born many deities. Stricken with pain and distress, he brandishes his sword unintentionally killing the newborn fire-deity. The blood, dripping from the sword, gives birth to one deity after another.

Here we see an innocent, frank expression of sorrow. It is not simply a subjective emotion, as some people may think; rather, sorrow is a fundamental state of being. Izanami loses himself in profound sorrow and, in fact, becomes the concrete manifestation of sorrow itself. Such a sorrow fills heaven and earth; it embraces the entire universe of being. The image of countless deities being born from tears and blood is evidence that sorrow is a reality basic to life itself. Moreover, the sorrow is not simply of this world, for Izanagi's pursuit of his spouse to

THE GENEALOGY OF SORROW

the land of Yomi suggests that the transcendent nature of sorrow surpasses the confines of this life.

This profound sense of sorrow, however, disappears with the fearsome sight of a disintegrating corpse. Izanagi's grief is replaced by an instinctual fear of death, a repulsion filled with terror of the land of the dead. His sorrow is ultimately unable to break through the barrier that separates this world from the next. Izanagi, who pursued his wife to the land of the dead, hoping to retrieve her, ends up running back to this world with Izanami chasing after him. What does this mean? I believe that sorrow is incarnated in the pursuing wife, and the pursuit itself is a projection of Izanagi's sorrow which knows no end, an extension of his fathomless grief. It is the sorrow of one who could not remain with the deceased spouse's corpse in the land of the dead.

The *Kojiki* view of life and death is symbolized by the huge boulder at Hira Pass that blocked Izanami's pursuit of her spouse. With the boulder sitting between them Izanagi proclaims the finality of separation, and Izanami, defeated and broken, returns to the land of Yomi. The distinction between life and death, a distinction made from the side of life, is expressed symbolically here. The route from the world of the dead back to this world is blocked by the boulder. There is absolutely no way that Izanami can return to this life.

While it is true that Izanagi's powerful experience of sorrow was able to thrust him from this world to the land of Yomi, he failed to break through that which separates life from death. If he had been able to successfully break through, the barrier would no longer exist, enabling him to return from death back to life. But he blocks off the path connecting the two by means of the huge boulder. This means that we can go from life to death but the reverse movement, from death to life, is absolutely impossible. While death seems to exist together with life, it is in fact a distant reality for many of us. In the *Kojiki* we cannot find any idea that transcends this opposition of life and death, and we have yet to see the affirmation of death as part of life.

Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), the great commentator on the *Kojiki*, affirms this opposition of life and death as a major theme in the text. He interprets Izanami's threat to Izanagi at the Hira Pass, "I will each day strangle to death a thousand people of your country," as follows:

ŌMINE

'Your country' refers to this land; she speaks of this land to which she gave birth as something completely other. It is an especially sad pronouncement that divides life from death.²

Between the land of the living and the land of the dead is an impassable boulder, considered to be a deity known as Yomotsu-ōkami. This world characterized by the inevitability of death is a sorrowful place. The sorrow, arising from the fact that no return is possible from the land of the dead, is deep and abiding. This is the basic message of the mythology of the land of Yomi.

Where, then, was the land of the dead, according to the ancient Japanese? Some hints can be gleaned from the lyrical elegies of the *Man'yōshū*.

In the autumn mountains
The yellow leaves are so thick.
Alas, how shall I seek my love
Who has wandered away?—
I know not the mountain track.³

This is the lament of Kakinomoto Hitomaro (ca. 680–700), trembling with grief at the death of his wife. She has lost her way deep in the autumn foliage blanketing the mountains, and the poet does not know which way to go in search for his beloved. But the land of the dead to which she has departed is not a heaven or another world completely disjunct from this life. In fact, it is a separate realm but still within this life, a continuation of this world, even though one does not know the way to reach it.

How sorrowful to see
The road across the river-shallows
By which departed the lady
Of Shigatsu of Sasanami!⁴

² From *Kojiki-den* in *Motoori Norinaga Zenshū*, Volume 9 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1968), p. 255.

³ *The Manyōshū*, The Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai Translation of One Thousand Poems (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

THE GENEALOGY OF SORROW

This is also by Hitomaro, composed in remembrance of a court-attendant (*uneme*) from Kibi. This woman died somewhere near Ōtsu, and the funeral rite was held along the shallow banks of a river. Although the land of Yomi cannot be seen with the human eye, the passage to it was felt in the sparkling wavelets and the sound of the rippling water. The land of Yomi was somehow connected to this world.

From to-morrow ever
Shall I regard as brother
The twin-peaked mountain of Futagami—
I, daughter of man!⁵

This poem by Princess Oku was composed on the occasion of the entombment of Prince Ōtsu at Futagami Mountain. For her the majestic figure of this twin-peaked mountain is none other than her dead younger brother. That which is eternal is placed not in a transcendent realm or the so-called other shore but on some reality within this world, yet not of this world. The twin-peaked mountain is the eternal incarnation of one who is no longer of this life. A similar sentiment is expressed in the following poem:

In the Mirror Mountain in Toyo
With its rock-doors shut,
Has he hidden himself?
However long I wait, he never returns.⁶

In essence, death for the people of the *Man'yōshū* period meant departing from this world or disappearing from this world, as found in the expression, "hiding behind the clouds" (*kumokakuru*). The dead neither vanishes into nothingness nor becomes transformed into another form of life; the dead simply cannot be seen by the living. But what kind of world is the land of Yomi to which the dead depart?

When Izanagi returns from the land of Yomi, he cries, "I have been to a horrible, unclean land," and undertakes ritual purification in the river. Motoori Norinaga, following this view of the *Kojiki* states: "The land of Yomi is an unclean, evil place. But when we die, we must go there. Nothing in this world is to be more pitied than death and dying"

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

ŌMINE

(*Suzuyatōmon-roku*).⁷ For the ancient Japanese the land of the dead was without question an evil place; no deliberation was necessary to reach such a conclusion. How did such a thought come about? It probably appeared as the projection of the sorrow experienced in the face of death. The overwhelming grief and lament surrounding death and dying eventually led to the idea that the land of the dead was an unclean, evil place.

II

In its initial phase Buddhism brought a luminous presence into the darkness covering this land of Yomi. The Buddhism of this earliest period, during the reign of Empress Suiko (592–628), was not that of the philosophy of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) or the religious practice of liberation of the later Heian and Kamakura Periods; rather, the focus was on brilliant architecture, such as that of the main sanctuary of Hōryūji, and the awe-inspiring images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, such as the Kannon of Yumedono, Kudara, and Chūgūji. Buddhism entered into the hearts and minds of the people not as a religious path to be trodden by individual seekers but as the object of worship and veneration by the populace.

As long as the destination of the deceased was an “unclean, evil place,” the pain and sorrow of human existence could never be truly healed. The sting of death could be transcended only by a belief in a realm free of death. Early Japanese Buddhism guaranteed such a deathless realm by speaking of “the other shore,” a transcendent realm beyond *both* life and death. But at this stage such a realm was understood simply as the next world after death, an extension of this life. The deceased would go to a realm where death was nonexistent, a world full of light with countless Buddhas, unlike the land of Yomi. The beautiful and serene Buddha images which were ensconced in the temples and monasteries attested to this fact. Whatever insecurities and sufferings one experienced in the present life, they could be overcome by faith in such a world of the Buddhas in the next life. Clearly this was a new and revolutionary experience that the Japanese had not known in the period of *Kojiki* and *Man'yōshū*.

⁷ Iwanami Bunko Edition (Tokyo, 1934), p. 90.

THE GENEALOGY OF SORROW

Such a world of the Buddhas, posited after death, however, is not the other shore; it is not true transcendence, for it is still regarded as an extension of this life, a continuation of this world. This is clearly evident in the Paradise Mandala (*Tenjukoku-mandara*) tapestry woven in memory of Prince Shōtoku (574–622) after his death at the request of Empress Suiko. The other shore which can be depicted visually is nothing more than an idealized version of our mundane world. Thus, the heavenly realm was nothing more than an exalted and refined expression of this world, probably rooted in the strong this-worldly orientation of the ancient Japanese. The inscription on the Paradise Mandala, “The world is an illusion; only the Buddha is true,” ascribed to Shōtoku as epitomizing his thought, was an isolated view separate from the currents of the time.⁸

The first instance of a transcendent other shore in the Japanese experience is to be found in the Pure Land thought of Genshin (942–1017). His major work, *Ōjō-yōshū* (Essentials of Birth, 985), systematically presents the theory and practice of attaining birth in the Pure Land, laying the foundation for the development of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism and introducing a new dimension to the understanding of life and death.⁹

The central theme of *Ōjō-yōshū* is summarized in the well known phrase, “Renounce the defiled world and seek birth in the Pure Land.” In the earliest period of Japanese life, whether in the *Kojiki* or Nara Buddhism, this world and other shore were not discontinuous. Death was accepted as an inevitable, sorrowful fact of life, but this world had never been regarded as unclean or evil. It was the land of Yomi that was unclean and evil. While Buddhism in its early phase replaced the land of Yomi with the resplendant realm of the Buddhas, it was still an idealized extension of this world. The radical negation of this life implied in Shōtoku’s dictum, “Renounce the defiled world and seek birth in the Pure Land,” was not generally accepted until the time of Genshin, who regarded this world as the “defiled world.” While previously

⁸ For Shōtoku’s accomplishments, see Nakamura Hajime, *A History of the Development of Japanese Thought* (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, 1967), Volume I, pp. 1–38.

⁹ Allan Andrews, *The Teachings Essential for Rebirth* (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1973).

OMINE

the land of Yomi had been seen as unclean, now it was this world that was defiled and undesirable. But it did not stop there.

This defiled world was itself directly connected to another realm directly below it: the hell (*jigoku*) of interminable suffering. In his work Genshin describes in fearsome details all the sufferings a person could experience in the eight kinds of hell, providing ample reasons why we should forsake this defiled world. He encourages the renouncing of blind passion and evil karma which make us cling to this defiled world and urges us to devote our energies to seeking birth in the Pure Land. One attains such a birth through the saying of nembutsu and by virtue of the compassion of the Buddha. For Genshin the Pure Land is not an extension of this world; rather, it is a transcendent other.

The land of Yomi was the final destination of all beings. Whether good or evil, everyone ultimately went to this nether world. The Pure Land was different, for one could not be born therein without faith in the Buddha, expressed through the nembutsu, and the welcoming of the Buddha at death. This formed the basis for the idea of Pure Land as an absolutely disjunct reality, described as a distant other shore billions and billions of miles to the West. The consciousness of the ancient Japanese who expanded the horizon of life to embrace even life after death was now cut asunder. The stream of consciousness thereby flowed in the opposite direction. Replacing the defiled, evil world was a paradisaical Pure Land abundantly overflowing with life and light.

During the Heian Period, there were other streams of Buddhism which affirmed the this-worldly orientation of the ancient Japanese. The most prominent among them was the magico-religious beliefs and prayer rituals of esoteric Buddhism. The *Tale of Genji* contains many examples from exorcisms of vengeful and evil spirits to various kinds of magico-religious superstitions in daily life, all under the guise of Buddhism. But other currents are simultaneously evident: the gradual awakening to the limitations of such practices based on utility value, and the increasing popularity of Pure Land practice, advocated by Genshin, among the people.¹⁰ A good example is that of Fujiwara Michinaga (966–1027), one of the politically most powerful men of the times. In 1004 when he became ill, he sent a messenger to Genshin; and

¹⁰ Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), Chapter IV, Religion and Chapter V, Superstitions.

THE GENEALOGY OF SORROW

in 1005 he had Fujiwara Yukinari make a copy of the *Ōjō-yōshū*. When he approached death, he rejected all magico-religious prayers for recovery and longevity and concentrated solely on saying the nembutsu, seeking birth in the Pure Land. According to *A Tale of Flowering Fortune (Eiga-monogatari)*,¹¹ Michinaga on his deathbed opened up the screens in the westerly direction, placed nine images of Amida Buddha, and layed down facing the West with his head towards the north, following the example of the historical Buddha. And in his hand he held a five-colored string connected to an Amida image and repeated the nembutsu. This was based on the ritual of dying described in *Ōjō-yōshū*.

Together with Genshin, the itinerant monk Kūya (or Kōya, 901-972) also made an immense contribution to the spread of Pure Land faith and practice. A contemporary, Yoshishige Yasutane, who abandoned an official government position to become a monk, compiled the *Nihon-ōjō-gokuraku-ki* in which he gives the biographies of 45 devotees who attained birth in the Pure Land.

The primary characteristic of Genshin's Pure Land thought is "attainment of birth at death" (*rinjū-ōjō*) or "birth in the Pure Land by the welcoming of the Buddha" (*raigō-ōjō*). What is crucial for birth is the state of right mindfulness at the end of life, calling on Amida Buddha and reciting his name. In short, the most important thing in one's whole life was to be determined at the instant of death. For Genshin such a momentous event was probably lived fully in this very present, in the course of daily life. The basic spirit of his teaching was that we should live as if each moment was the final moment of our life.

But for the general populace the understanding was different. People took his teaching to mean that one's entire life was to be based on the final moment of death, postponing the purpose and meaning of life to a future time. If birth in the Pure Land is to be determined at the moment of death, one cannot but live everyday life in constant insecurity about the future. This also meant that the Pure Land is forever in a distant future. That the Pure Land is nothing but an inkling of an unknown possibility is an unsettling and even disturbing thought. Hence, insecurity hovers around the Pure Land teaching of Genshin.

¹¹ Translated by William H. and Helen Craig McCullough (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980).

ŌMINE

In the *Tale of Genji*, *Pillow Book*, and other literature of the Heian Period we find constant references to the Land of Bliss, the Buddha's Land, and Pure Land, but they are nothing more than idealized, aesthetic visions. That the Pure Land could not be fully realized in this life is expressed in such phrases as, "the longing for the Land of Bliss" and "the land where the living Buddhas reside." In sum, Genshin's Pure Land thought did not completely succeed in overcoming the dark shadows of the land of Yomi. It had yet to totally affirm the suffering and pain inherent in this life.

III

A major turning point in the evolution of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism occurs with the appearance of *Senchaku-hongan-nembutsu-shū* (Nembutsu as the Best Selected Practice According to the Primal Vow) by Hōnen (1133-1212). This turning point is rooted in Hōnen's religious experience in 1175, when he was 43 years old. After relentless search for the salvific truth of Buddha Dharma, he came upon the following passage by Shan-tao, the Chinese Pure Land master, which dissolved all the doubts that he had harbored for many years. It reads:

When one constantly focuses on Amida's Name, whether walking, standing, sitting, or sleeping, without regards to the length of time and never discarding concentration, this is called the truly settled practice, because it accords with the Buddha's Vow.

Hōnen had been tormented for a long time about the gap that existed between the saying of nembutsu in daily life and the guarantee of birth in the Pure Land. It was like a thin veil covering a dream from which one could not awaken. The problem was that his nembutsu practice was self-generated; its efficacy was dependent on human effort. But Shan-tao exploded that myth when he clarified that the saying of nembutsu is in "accord with the Buddha's Vow." This means that birth in the Pure Land is settled because it is not the result of human will power but due to the compassionate working of the Buddha. The path to the Pure Land is not opened up through human activity but has been readied already from the side of the Buddha. The saying of nembutsu is to walk the path to Pure Land, already prepared and devised by the

THE GENEALOGY OF SORROW

Buddha. Thus it is that the nembutsu is called the "truly settled practice" (*shōjōgō*). For Hōnen, then, it was only natural that all other practices beside recitative nembutsu be rejected as useless. This is the reason that the nembutsu is known as the practice selected by Amida for foolish beings living in the end-time of history.

The Pure Land, faraway and distant, taught by Genshin was thus brought closer to this world by Hōnen. In fact, the Pure Land is seen as constantly approaching our world; the future is ceaselessly arriving in the here and now. Thus, all forms of contemplative or visualization elements found in Genshin's Pure Land practice have been eliminated in Hōnen. For him the saying of nembutsu as the concrete manifestation of the working of Amida's compassion is the only necessary practice. That alone leads to birth in the Pure Land. Nevertheless, there still remains in Hōnen's thought a separation between the Pure Land and this world. Of course, the distance between the two is nothing like that found in Genshin; it is, so to speak, so close yet so distant. The overcoming of this separation had to await the original thinkers of Kamakura Buddhism. As an example of the way in which Hōnen's Pure Land thought was understood, let us turn to the following passage from the *Tales of Heike*. We see here the remnants of unfulfilled spirituality: "When I see the setting sun hide behind the mountains to the West, I feel that the sun sets in the Pure Land in the West. Someday we will be born there without having to worry about anything. Then all the more I think of the unhappy events of the past, and the only thing that remains are the tears."

However, this consciousness of life as misfortune is overcome in the Buddhism of Shinran (1173-1262) and Dōgen (1200-1253) in the Kamakura Period. The following statement by Shinran is a sharp criticism of Genshin's Pure Land thought, heavily tinged with sadness and gloom.

The idea of Amida's coming at the moment of death is for those who seek to gain birth in the Pure Land by doing religious practices, for they are practitioners of self-power. The moment of death is of central concern for such people, for they have not yet attained true entrusting. We may also speak of Amida's coming at the moment of death in the case of the person who, though he has committed the ten transgressions

ÔMINE

and the five grave offenses throughout his life, encounters a teacher in the hour of death and is led at the very end to utter the nembutsu. The person who lives true entrusting, however, abides in the stage of the truly settled, for he has already been grasped, never to be abandoned. There is no need to wait in anticipation for the moment of death, no need to rely on Amida's coming. At the time true entrusting becomes settled, birth too becomes settled; there is no need for the deathbed rites that prepare one for Amida's coming.¹²

According to Shinran, people who on their deathbed wait in anticipation for the welcoming by Amida show a total lack of trust in Amida Buddha. Although they say the nembutsu, they still cling to their self-generated practice which they believe will bring about the desired result. More than trusting in Amida, they trust their own power. This is called "the self-power within Other Power." Due to this belief, rooted in human calculation, an abyss still remains between the self and the Pure Land. In fact, this unquestioned reliance on one's own power pushes the Pure Land further away from the self. When self-power is discarded and total entrusting to Amida is realized, in that moment the person is embraced by Amida never to be abandoned. This is known as "residing in the stage of the truly settled." Such a person now becomes the equal of the Buddha in heart and mind, although the body continues to harbor blind passion. For this reason the person of true entrusting has no need to await the coming of Amida at the end of life, for Amida Buddha is a constant presence felt in the midst of daily life here and now. In Shinran's words,

In the *Hymn of Meditation on the Presence of the Buddha Shan-tao*, the Master of Kuang-ming Temple, explains that the heart of the person of true entrusting already and always resides in the Pure Land. "Resides" means that the heart of the person of true entrusting is always in the Pure Land. This is to say that he or she is the same as Maitreya. Since being equal to enlightenment is being the same as Maitreya, the person of true entrusting is equal to Tathāgata.¹³

¹² *Letters of Shinran*, edited by Yoshifumi Ueda (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1978), pp. 19-20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

THE GENEALOGY OF SORROW

For the first time in history the fundamental standpoint of Mahāyāna Buddhism is articulated in vernacular Japanese by the founders of the Kamakura Buddhist schools. Both Shinran and Dōgen formulate the Mahāyāna philosophy of *samsara-sive-nirvana* in their own words. Dōgen speaks of “This birth-and-death is the life of the Buddha” and “Fully realizing that birth-and-death is itself nirvana, neither is birth-and-death to be despised nor nirvana to be cherished” (*Shōbōgenzō*). Shinran emphasizes the same point when he writes, “When foolish beings, deluded and defiled, awaken true entrusting, *samsara-sive-nirvana* is realized” and “When the one thought-moment of joy arises, nirvana is attained without severing blind passions” (*Shōshinge*).¹⁴ In the thoughts of these religious geniuses we see that the consciousness of life as misfortune has been overcome by the fact that Pure Land or nirvana is realized not as a matter of the next life but as a force that empowers people here and now. Eternity is neither fantasy nor anticipation; it is to be experienced in the immediate present, to be deeply felt within daily life. The life-affirming legacy of the ancient Japanese surfaces in the person of Dōgen and Shinran from the deepest level of awareness.

This is especially true in the case of Shinran in whom we find the expansion and deepening of the Japanese ethos, not evident in Dōgen: an ever more sensitive probing into the structure of sorrow. The tears of lament shed by Izanagi for Izanami continued to flow deep within the Japanese psyche and underwent a major transformation in Shinran. To illustrate what is meant here, let us compare his thought to that of Motoori Norinaga as expressed in *Suzuyatōmon-roku* (1778). In this work Norinaga attempts a critique of Buddhism from the *Kojiki* viewpoint concerning life and death. He writes:

The faith in Shintō is that when people, good or evil, die, they all go to the land of Yomi . . . thus when one dies, one can only grieve that one must go to the land of Yomi. No one doubts this, and no one thinks of the reason for this. Now, although the land of Yomi is unclean and evil, we must inevitably go there when we die. There is no sorrow greater than departing from this world.¹⁵

¹⁴ *The Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way*, Volume II, edited by Yoshifumi Ueda (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1985), pp. 165 and 161.

ŌMINE

Everyone ultimately goes to the land of Yomi, which is a form of nothingness. There is no such thing as life after death; no room for projecting what might be awaiting us. The only way to accept this grim reality is to affirm the sorrow that is necessarily at the core of human life. The deceased disappears into the mist of sorrow. Norinaga accurately conveys the basic world-view of the *Kojiki* on the basis of which he criticizes Confucianism and Buddhism for failing to squarely see the reality of sorrowful human existence and attempting to divert our attention from it. According to Norinaga, "It is clear that both Confucianism and Buddhism are not the true path, for they try to argue in various ways how one should not be sorrowful about things which clearly makes us sad and and fill us with sorrow."

This criticism, however, would not apply to the Jōdo-shinshū teaching of Shinran. The reason is that Shinran's realization of absolute Other Power is based on a penetrating insight into the nature of foolish beings who know only the sorrow that accompanies death and dying. In the *Kudenshō*, for example, he states that to experience sorrow in the loss of a loved one is to be truly human, and anyone who thinks and acts otherwise is being hypocritical and false. Even though we may meet again in the Pure Land, it is impossible to extinguish the sorrow of separation from this life. But the compassion of the Buddha is directed to just such a foolish being. "Those who are ignorant, ill-fated, and filled with sorrow are the very beings suited for birth in the Pure Land by the working of Other Power."¹⁶ Thus, Shinran's standpoint is a thoroughgoing appreciation of sorrow as constitutive of human life. He did not view the Pure Land as an aesthetic ideal, as did Genshin. For him hell is unavoidable as the final destination of foolish beings steeped in karmic evil. No matter how much one aspires for the Pure Land, it cannot heal the pain and sorrow inherent in life. Both Norinaga and Shinran agree on this one point: the true reality of life becomes manifest in the experience of sorrow.

Where, then, do the two differ? They differ in the understanding of the source of sorrow, the depth dimension of life itself. Norinaga's sorrow laments the fact that when we die, we have no place to go but to the land of Yomi. The dying person experiences sorrow for oneself.

¹⁵ Iwanami Bunko Edition, p. 89.

¹⁶ *Shinshū-shōgyō-zensho* (Kyoto, 1957), Volume III, p. 29.

THE GENEALOGY OF SORROW

Such a sorrow is a lament within the consciousness of the ego-self. Contained within the ego shell, it fails to reach beyond its confines. It may be called a self-centered sorrow, a small-minded sorrow. In contrast, Shinran's sorrow is the sorrow of one who realizes that he can never really be free of such an egocentric sorrow. Self-pity inevitably must dissolve. Here a dialectic occurs such that sorrow, self-centered and small-minded, leads to the realization of deep-rooted karmic evil. In fact, a self enclosure and self-concern so profound that one is not even fully aware of it.

The bottom falls out of sorrow, so to speak, and one awakens to the depth of sorrow itself in which the small-minded, ego-centered sorrow is embraced. It is a dimension of sorrow which transcends sorrow without negating it; a sorrow that is no longer sorrow in the conventional sense but also affirms it. No matter how deep the tragedy of life, there is an even deeper structure in life that embraces it and never abandons it to render it meaningless. When Shinran speaks of the Primal Vow of Amida or "that which embraces and never abandons," he is referring to such a bottomless sorrow which constitutes life at its deepest level.¹⁷

TRANSLATED BY TAITETSU UNNO

¹⁷ Max Scheler speaks of *Ich-Trauer* (I-sorrow) and *tragische Trauer* (tragic-sorrow). The latter is a concrete manifestation of the structure of the world itself, while the former is limited to an individual's life. *G.W.Bd.* 3, S. 149 ff.