

# The Dharma Breeze

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## Loneliness and Aloneness

Nobuo Haneda

### Introduction

In this essay I want to talk about the differences between the two Buddhist concepts, “loneliness (孤 [ko])” and “aloneness (独 [doku]).” Although these two concepts appear very much alike, there are considerable differences between them. Loneliness, a feeling of solitude, belongs to the realm of samsara (delusion), but aloneness, a synonym for spiritual independence, belongs to the realm of Buddhahood. Buddhism teaches us that when we gain wisdom, insight into the truth of “conditional arising,” the former transforms into the latter.

Specifically, in this essay I want to discuss the loneliness and aloneness that Shakyamuni Buddha experienced. In his life we can see the prototype of how a human being moves from the life of loneliness to that of aloneness.

All of us experience a sense of loneliness. Particularly when we are separated from our loved ones, or when we have serious problems related to such things as our health or finances which we cannot share with others, we experience a deep sense of loneliness and isolation. We feel as if we are all alone in this world.

When we experience loneliness, we usually try to forget it. In order to forget it we seek companionship. We belong to various organizations and fellowships. We also enjoy things such as hobbies, sports, and entertainment. But those things that we seek outside ourselves cannot totally eliminate the feeling of loneliness. Mingling with people may be able to make us forget loneliness for a while, but it can also make us have a deeper sense of loneliness—a sense of being alone in the crowd. When our associations become annoying and bothersome, we retreat back to our private world. But the loneliness in our private world soon becomes unbearable again and we go back to the things and people outside ourselves. In this way, we cannot settle either in a private world or in a public world.

This repeated going back and forth between the two worlds is the concrete meaning of the Buddhist concept of samsara (the endless cycle of transmigration). Buddhism teaches us to put an end to it by first examining the self, the root cause of all loneliness. It also teaches us that by gaining wisdom, we must transcend loneliness and realize aloneness (spiritual independence) where we have spiritual stability and peace in both the private and public worlds.

Although loneliness belongs to the sphere of samsara, it can also be the path that connects us with the Dharma. It can make us seriously seek the meaning of our lives. It can initiate a process of intense self-examination and eventually lead us to the attainment of wisdom and the realization of *the true self*, the self of aloneness. Loneliness can be like a pang that precedes the birth of a baby. It is the necessary stage through which the true self is born.

When we study the lives of our Buddhist teachers, we learn that they experienced a deep sense of loneliness because of things such as separation from their loved ones. For example, Shinran experienced extreme loneliness when he was orphaned as a little boy. He further experienced loneliness when he abandoned his “spiritual” family on Mt. Hiei because he felt he was a failure in traditional Buddhist practices. This real world loneliness and alienation were exasperated even more when the government exiled him as a religious criminal to the snow country of Echigo. Although tormented by loneliness, our teachers examined the self. Traveling the path of self-examination, they eventually attained Awakening, in which they experienced the demise of the self to which they had been attached and the birth of the true

self, the universal (Dharma) self. The attached self is a self that is cut off and alienated from things and people; it causes us to feel loneliness. But the true self is a rich and exuberant self that encompasses all things and people.

When a person experiences the birth of the true self, he does not feel lonely when he is alone; he feels that he is always in the company of wonderful teachers and friends. When he is among people, he does not feel that they are annoying or bothersome; he has the true self that is one with others. The true self does not have any dualistic or antagonistic relationship with others. He does not feel any need to run away from the private world to the public world or to rush back from the public world to the private world. He is calm and peaceful in either world because he experiences both worlds as the same world.

### 1. Loneliness in Shakyamuni's Life

Now let me discuss the loneliness that we can see in the life of Shakyamuni. When he was young, he had no personal experience of human suffering. But as he grew up, he encountered the existential sufferings of aging, sickness, and death, which resulted from the reality of impermanence. He wondered, "How can people live peacefully knowing that all things they cherish will be lost some day? If all things are going to be lost, what is the point of my life?" He felt that he was the only person who recognized the terrible predicament of the human situation. He felt himself totally alone.

When Shakyamuni was twenty-nine, he left his secular life and became a seeker of the Way. Then for the next six years he studied and practiced the traditional religions of his time and even engaged in ascetic practices. Since he was unable to attain liberation through these practices, he renounced them. When he departed from his fellow practitioners, some of them laughingly said, "Siddhartha is a dropout quitter who wants only an easy lifestyle!" But it was not easy because at that point he found himself at the bottom most pit of human loneliness. All the usual treatments for suffering had failed. What else was left?

Then Shakyamuni sat under a tree alone and began to examine the self. Not long after that, when he was thirty-five, he attained Awakening and became a Buddha. In this Awakening, he experienced the death of the self to which he had been attached and the birth of the true self. (I will discuss the contents of his Awakening in the next section, where I explain the realization of aloneness in Shakyamuni's life.) Then, for the following forty-five years, until he passed away at the age of eighty, he travelled all over India, and shared his insight with all who would listen.

As we can see from Shakyamuni's life story, the path he chose was a solitary and lonely one. First he had to sever his ties with all his loved ones. Then, after having spent six years in the study and practice of the traditional religions, he again severed his ties with his fellow practitioners. I cannot fathom the depth of his sadness and loneliness he must have felt when he left them.

But Shakyamuni was not afraid of loneliness; he courageously chose to walk down the lonely path. His loneliness made him focus his attention on the self as the basic cause of suffering. He carefully examined the self and eventually attained Awakening, in which he entered a very rich and exuberant spiritual realm.

Since loneliness guided Shakyamuni to the path of self-examination, the core of Buddhism, our teachers tell us that isolation from things and people is an unavoidable enabling condition for self-examination. Rev. Manshi Kiyozawa (1863–1903, a Japanese Shin teacher) says,

It is not imperative that all people seek the solitude of the mountains as Buddha Shakyamuni did. However, I am not criticizing life in the mountains. It does not matter where we are physically—at home or in the mountains, working in a store, going fishing or hunting, studying in school, or serving in the military. The only crucial matter is that we, *in our minds*, should be independent of our homes, jobs, families, friends, country, education, and knowledge, and single-mindedly take refuge in the spirit of the Buddha.

*(December Fan, p. 22. The emphasis is by N. Haneda)*

In a similar vein Mr. Shuichi Maida says,

Then how shall I study Buddhism? There is no other path for me apart from standing before Shakyamuni face to face, because the path of world-transcendence is the path of self-recognition, and self-recognition is related to myself alone. The path of world-transcendence is "the path for myself alone" [as Shinran says in the *Tannisho*]. When Basho (1644–1694, a Japanese *haiku* poet) spoke of "the narrow path into the interior," he meant precisely the path for himself alone, in which he endured the extreme limit of loneliness. When I stand before Shakyamuni face to face all by myself, I am all alone. I am not allowed to depend on anyone else. Yet without taking this path I cannot transcend the entirety of this world. Those who wish to study under Shakyamuni should all be aware of this.

It is not until we fully tread this path that we can, for the first time, be born in the great spiritual realm where we become one with the world, embracing all human beings. Shakyamuni left the company of the five monks, bathed alone in the Nairanjara River, and sat on the diamond seat in Buddhagaya. It is not a path that we can walk with people, accompanied by the noisy sound of conversation.

*(The Complete Works of Shuichi Maida, vol. XI, p. 5. Trans. by N.H.)*

If we sincerely desire to study Buddhism, we must not be afraid of loneliness. Our teachers, who have known the negative and positive meanings contained in loneliness, tell us that we should not fear the lonely path of self-examination and should thoroughly travel along it.

## **2. The Realization of Aloneness in Shakyamuni's Life**

Now let me talk about the process by which Shakyamuni's Awakening transformed loneliness into aloneness—how he realized the true self, the self of aloneness that was one with all things and people.

After renouncing his practices, Shakyamuni devoted himself to self-examination. He was asking, “What is the self? Do I have the right view of the self?” It was through this process that he attained Awakening and entered a rich and exuberant spiritual realm.

What did Shakyamuni's Awakening entail? It was his discovery of the Dharma (truth) of “conditional arising” and becoming one with that truth. The truth of “conditional arising” is that all things in the world exist because of causes and conditions. This truth challenged Shakyamuni's view of the self as something permanent, independent, and autonomous—the view that he held before his Awakening. This self was the attached self that was the basis of his experience of loneliness. It was a self that had a dualistic and antagonistic relationship with things and people. The truth of “conditional arising” made him recognize that the self that he thought he had was a grandiose delusion pretending to be an eternal reality.

Shakyamuni now realized that his entire being, his body and mind, was nothing but a collection of causes and conditions. He realized that the body consisted of myriad causes and conditions. It consisted of air, water, and all kinds of food he had eaten. All kinds of things outside his body happened to come together and form his body. Apart from myriad conditions, there was nothing to be called his body. His body could not exist even for a few minutes if air or the heat of the sun had not existed.

Shakyamuni also realized that his mind was nothing but a collection of myriad ideas given to him by the people he had met in his life. If those people had not existed, his mind could not have existed. Thus, he realized that his entire being, his body and mind, was formed by multifarious things and people.

In this way, the truth of “conditional arising” made him recognize not only the emptiness of the attached self that he thought he had, but also the richness of the true self that was one with all things.

Thus Shakyamuni learned that so-called subjective reality and objective reality were not two separate entities. He learned that the true self did not have a dualistic (i.e., subject-object) relationship with things and people. There was oneness between the true self and others. The true self encompassed all. He realized, “I am they and they are me.” This is philosophically known as “one is many and many are one”, i.e., an expression that originally comes from the *Garland Sutra*. This self that is one with all things and people is the self of aloneness.

To show the wonderfully rich world of oneness that Shakyamuni attained, Buddhist sutras contain the following expressions: “When Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood, all things such as mountains, rivers, grasses, and trees, also attained Buddhahood” and “When Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood, the entire earth and all sentient beings simultaneously attained Buddhahood.”

Shakyamuni moved from the realm of loneliness to the realm of aloneness where he was one with all. When I think of the rich contents of the concept of aloneness, I think of Rev. Haya Akegarasu's (1877–1954, a Japanese Shin teacher) interpretation of the legendary birth cry of the baby Buddha. When the Buddha was born, he stood up and took seven steps and declared, “Above heaven and below heaven, I alone am most noble (天上天下唯我独尊 [*ten-jo ten-ge yui ga doku son*]).” Although the second half of this sentence, 唯我独尊 (*yui ga doku son*), is usually read as “I alone am most noble,” Rev. Akegarasu read it as “*my being alone* is most noble.” Reading the phrase this way, Rev. Akegarasu wanted to say that Shakyamuni, in his Awakening, realized the self of aloneness—the self that was singular but was quite rich and exuberant in encompassing all. Rev. Akegarasu believed that Shakyamuni appeared in this world with the single mission of teaching the importance of realizing the self that was one with all, having no dualistic relationship with anything.

## Conclusion

Loneliness is inherent in human existence. Particularly when we experience things like separation from our loved ones, we feel deep loneliness. When we experience loneliness, we usually try to forget it by seeking such things as distraction, companionship, and entertainment. But if we just hate loneliness and try to forget it, we are wasting a wonderful opportunity to be connected with the Dharma. Loneliness can lead us to self-examination. Without self-examination we will never be able to discover the true self.

Shakyamuni went down a lonely path of self-examination. It was “a narrow path that is only four or five inches wide” [i.e., an expression in the “Parable of the Two Rivers and the White Path”] on which no two people can travel together. But by traveling the lonely path, Shakyamuni reached the wonderful world of the Dharma, where he experienced the death of the attached self and the birth of the true self. When he experienced the birth of the true self that was one with all, he found himself at peace no matter where he was, in a private or in a public place. When he was all by himself, he was not lonely; he could feel that he was with all sentient beings—with wonderful teachers and friends. When he was among people, he did not feel the loneliness in the crowd, either. He felt peace and harmony between the self and others. In privacy he discovered people in the self. In being with people, he discovered the self in them.

Loneliness or alienation from things and people is a serious issue, particularly for those living today. The advancement of science and technology has made us become more and more alienated, not only from things and people but also from ourselves. I believe that Buddhism provides the basic solution to this serious problem that we now have. We are fortunate that we have many wonderful predecessors like Shakyamuni and Shinran, who initially experienced a deep sense of loneliness but who, without fearing it, advanced along the path of self-examination and eventually entered the rich and exuberant world of aloneness.

(4/26/2017)

## An Excerpt from *Face to Face with Shakyamuni* by Shuichi Maida

[The translator’s note: *Face to Face with Shakyamuni* is Shuichi Maida’s commentary on the first and fourth chapters of the *Sutta Nipata* (A Collection of Sutras), one of the earliest Buddhist scriptures. The following excerpt is Maida’s commentary on the two verses of “The Sutra of Rhinoceros’s Horn,” a sutra that is contained in the first chapter of the *Sutta Nipata*.]

(3)

If you pity your friends and comrades, your mind will be bound and you will lose the benefit (of freedom).

Detecting this dreadfulness in intimacy,

Let us walk alone like a rhinoceros’s horn.

The previous verse dealt with the “desire to have children” (mentioned in the first verse); and this verse deals with the “desire to have friends” (mentioned in the first verse). In contrast to the previous verse mentioning “attachment” as something that arises in a positive situation, this verse talks about “pity”—a form of attachment that arises in a negative (or tragic) situation. “Pity” means sympathy. Is it not a good thing to pity others? But this verse says that there is “dreadfulness” hidden in pity in contrast to the “danger” mentioned in the previous verse.

In this world, sympathizing with the misery of others is considered very virtuous. But that is not the compassion that is taught in Buddhism. Buddhist compassion means something else. It is found only in a liberated person; it is different from the sympathy that unliberated people conceive of (on the basis of their secular sentiment). When an unliberated person—a person whose wisdom eyes have not been opened—patronizes a suffering person with so-called sympathy, persistently saying, “I am sorry, I am sorry,” he multiplies the person’s misery and suffering, instead of eliminating them.

Buddhist compassion is the spiritual atmosphere of a liberated person, which is replete with wisdom. It is the spiritual atmosphere of the world of liberation. It is a cool breeze that naturally comes blowing from the world. It is a feeling people receive when they come in

contact with a liberated person.

Whatever sympathy a secular person has toward others is nothing but an expression of his ignorance. When a suffering person asks for sympathy from others, he too is doing so simply out of his own ignorance. This is called “grumbling” (an action of ignorance). When these two forms of ignorance meet, the suffering person says that he is consoled. But there is no clear-cut solution for the fundamental problem. Ignorance cannot liberate ignorance. The suffering of the suffering person will just multiply.

Let me cite a counter illustration here. The Zen master Gazan was informed that the Zen master Tekisui of the Myoshinji Temple, who had been sick, was about to die. So, Gazan came to visit Tekisui. When he came to the entrance of the temple, a monk received him. Then, Gazan said to the monk, “Hey, tell Tekisui that Gazan came to inquire after his health. Tell him that he is better-off dead.”

When a person sympathizes with others, he thinks that he is doing something good. This consciousness that he is doing something good contains danger and is dreadful. To think that one is doing something good is an attachment. It is a kind of “unfreedom” that is based on secular sentiment. Thus it is better that we do not perform such good actions. Against the commonsense view of compassion, the liberated person does not express pity and sympathy for others and does not perform any good actions for them. He appears cold and ruthless. He does not do anything that secular sentiment might regard as compassionate action.

For example, Shakyamuni does not seem to have engaged in social action. Shomatsu, a lay Buddhist in Sanuki Province, did not tell the monk in a dilapidated temple to engage in social action. He told him that he should just say the *nembutsu*. The fourth chapter of the *Tannisho* clearly explains this point by saying, “There must be a transition from the compassion of the path of sages to the compassion of the Pure Land path.” The chapter concludes, “Only saying the *nembutsu* is a perfect manifestation of great compassion.”

How dreadful it is to have self-consciousness that one is doing something “good”! This is the dreadfulness of self-affirmation. It is a form of self-restraint. We should simply separate ourselves from it. Only in this separation, in this freedom, is there genuine compassion that truly liberates people from misery and suffering. Wisdom is simultaneously compassion. Wisdom is cold. Thus compassion is something dialectical.

“Intimacy” exists in a relationship in which a person joints his ignorance with that of others. “Intimacy” does not contain absolute negation. That is, there is no flash of wisdom in it. Where there is no sharp severance, there cannot be liberation. If we coldly and ruthlessly sever ourselves from “intimacy” by clearly knowing and detecting that “intimacy with friends and comrades” (which is based on secular sentiment) just leads us to “unfreedom,” then we can for the first time attain the freedom of the independent person. It is only there that “the working of great compassion (*daihi-koai*)” [i.e., Shinran’s expression] exists.

The word “benefit” in the sentence “you will lose the benefit (of freedom)” means the working, or the liberating function, that comes from the lively sphere [of Buddhahood]. It means a compassionate function like skillful means [that a Buddha uses for guiding people]. It means the liberating function of [the truth] of impermanence, the function of wisdom, in which one recognizes the truth and becomes one with it, and his life itself works as the truth. The “benefiting” of others, the working of the Tathagata, is precisely that. Thus, I have added the expression “(of freedom)” to it.

(7)

If one is with friends, he engages in amusement and pleasure.

He also feels strong attachment to his children.

Although it is difficult to separate from beloved ones,

Let us walk alone like a rhinoceros’s horn.

Here again I interpret “friends” in a broader sense as the secular world. The first line talks about the amusement and pleasure of the secular world. They are something like art. Art is thoroughly based on the secular point of view. For example, people look at the *Last Supper* painted by Leonardo da Vinci and say, “What a great genius he was!” But the artist was only looking at Jesus. The person who bows his head and kneels before Jesus cannot look at him. There was no world of religion in Leonardo da Vinci. He was like Paul before his conversion. According to Acts, Paul held the coat of a young man who was throwing stones at Jesus. By offering to hold his coat, he incited the young man to throw as many stones as possible at such a despicable person. This was the time when Paul was looking at Jesus. Leonardo da Vinci takes the same attitude toward Jesus in the *Last Supper*. The fact that one has the complacency to look at Jesus and observe him indicates that he is not kneeling before him.

Paul later, on his way to Damascus, saw a vision of Jesus. On this occasion Paul prostrated himself before Jesus. A meeting with Jesus took place in this manner. Here there is

no room for the picture of the *Last Supper*. We must know that Leonardo da Vinci does not touch Jesus at all. People admire and praise such a person as a genius. We must know that a so-called genius only exists within the relative sphere of the secular world. A human being is just looking at another human being and is simply saying that he cannot compete with him.

Dante wrote the *Divine Comedy*. This is also a work of art. Thus Dante was having a sightseeing tour in hell. There is not a fragment of religion there. There is no Christianity at all, because hell is a place into which Dante must fall all by himself. The hell into which others are complacently seen by Dante to be falling is not the real hell at all. When compared with the statement in [Genshin's] *Records of the Dharma Talks of Hyakujo*, "I am the only evil person in this world. In going to hell, I am alone," the *Divine Comedy* that people admire as one of the greatest and deepest epics is blown away. Such is the frailty of the secular point of view. Art is basically something like that. It does not penetrate into the reality of human beings. People, secular people, are just amusing themselves in such a lukewarm, halfway place.

Another example is the tea ceremony of Senno Rikyu (1522–1591, a Japanese tea master). Its meaninglessness can be known if we think of the life of Shakyamuni. Even when Shakyamuni reached the age of eighty, he traveled to various places and shared the Dharma, clothed in rags and enduring hunger. When we revere this dignified life of Shakyamuni, how can we amuse ourselves in a tea ceremony? A tea ceremony is a secular amusement. It does not penetrate into the reality of human life. People are indulging themselves in a halfway place. The same thing can be said about the Noh play of Zeami (1363–1443, the systematizer of the Noh play). It is a secular amusement. Something in us cannot possibly allow us to settle in such a lukewarm, halfway place. When we think seriously about human life, we cannot possibly be complacent about things such as art.

The first line of the seventh verse talks about secular amusement and pleasure, i.e., art. The "children" mentioned in the second line refers, as it were, to a living art. There is something in life itself that amuses us. In children we see life itself. Children offer us deeper pleasure than art does. Thus it is quite natural that people are attracted to them. They deeply enjoy the beauty of life itself. It is indeed difficult for them to be separated from children. Here children bind them firmly to the secular world and make them unable to depart even a step from it. Consequently people believe that this attachment to their children is the only possible way of living for them.

But is there freedom there? In our submissive devotion to our children, can our own lives truly shine? Our own lives are unique and individual. So are our children's lives. There is originally an absolute, unbridgeable gap between our own lives and our children's lives. The children are, as it were, the children of the Tathagata. They are not our own property. We cannot own them. When we truly desire independence and freedom in our children's lives, we cannot be complacent in loving and enjoying their lives. Children should be independent as individual lives. We should meet them as noble and dignified lives. Hence we cannot have a mere complacent loving relationship with them. And we cannot help becoming independent in our own lives. Since life exists as unique and individual lives, independence is inevitably demanded by life itself. Anybody's life contains within itself an urge for independence. Independence is precisely the aspiration of all people. Their lives demand it.

In that sense, the forty-one verses of this "Sutra of a Rhinoceros's Horn" describe the aspiration for independence, for the independence of life, that all people seek. The expression "let us walk alone" describes the desire to realize independence, which exists at the depths of all human hearts. (The forty-eight vows of the Bodhisattva Dharmakara that are described in the *Larger Sutra* refer to this desire.) This is, in a sense, a sad human desire. Does not even a baby seek freedom trying to get out of the strapper its parents use?

The third line, "Although it is difficult to separate from beloved ones," describes the process by which the aspiration that lies at the basis of human life severs attachment. The desire for separation, for independence, which is inherent in the individuality of individual lives, severs the sadness and difficulty of separation. Thus we can say that this verse shows that our desire for independence is the *higan* [literally, "sad aspiration"], i.e., sincere aspiration. By the irrepressible power that comes from the innermost part of our lives, we are made to transcend the secular world. In that sense, we cannot say that all people are simply enjoying the pleasures of this world. Did we not see earlier in the "Sutra of Dhaniya" [also contained in the *Sutta Nipata*] that a fire was ignited in the hearts of Dhaniya and his wife? All human beings without exception store in themselves this sincere aspiration. Although the ignition and realization of this aspiration depend upon each person's karmic conditions, all human beings store in themselves the potential for ignition and combustion. That is why Shakyamuni kindly and untiringly teaches us using the forty-one verses of this "Sutra of Rhinoceros's Horn."

(*The Complete Works of Shuichi Maida*, Vol. I, pp. 278-280, 284-286. Tr. N.H.)

## “Completely Alone”

Shuichi Maida

I am the only evil person in this world. In going to hell, I am alone. In going to the Pure Land, I am alone. I have awakened to the fact that I am *completely alone* in everything.

—Genshin, the *Records of the Dharma Talks of Hyakujo*

Spiritual liberation is all about recognition of the self. By saying, “I have awakened to the fact that I am completely alone in everything,” Genshin (942–1017, a Tendai monk) indicates that liberation concerns recognition of the self.

Here “everything” means both hell and the Pure Land—both suffering and the transcendence from suffering. Everything, the entirety of human life, is suffering. There is nothing in human life that does not become a cause of suffering. We human beings, however, have an irrepressible aspiration to transcend suffering. This is desire for liberation. The word “everything” comprises all of our suffering and desire to transcend it. If “everything” in our lives is in fact suffering, the central issue in “everything” is our aspiration for liberation. All things in human life are reduced to this one issue—liberation from suffering. Genshin says that what resolves this central issue—liberation from suffering, which ultimately means all things in human life—is recognition of the self.

Genshin uses the word “everything” to say that all of human life is the one issue of liberation. He expresses that with the words “I have awakened to the fact that I am completely alone.” These words are synonymous with recognition of the self. The sentence, “I am completely alone,” means that the issue is recognition of the self. Recognition of the self must mean recognition of the self’s aloneness. Recognition of the self as something absolutely unique and singular—this is the deepest form of recognition of the self.

It is in recognition of the self’s aloneness that we can, for the first time, stand up on the ground on our own feet. Liberation is not a matter for other people. This specific self of mine must be liberated now. The more urgent my desire for liberation becomes, the more important the now moment becomes. I must be liberated now. If not in my self-recognition, where else could I grasp the now moment? Thus Genshin says that liberation is related to self-recognition.

The now moment refers to recognition that I am alive now. The now moment is clearly recognized when I, who am determined by circumstances, attempt to determine circumstances and fail in the attempt.

A person has so far been optimistically thinking that his liberation depends on changed circumstances. But now he realizes that changing circumstances is like “waiting one hundred years for the waters in the Yellow River to become clear.” Being shocked by this realization, he starts to ask with a sense of urgency, “How can I attain liberation?” The moment in which he asks this question is the now moment. The now moment is the moment in which his concern switches from objective circumstances to his subjective self.

If we want to restructure circumstances we must act upon them. This effort is called “practice.” For the true self, the body is also a circumstance. The bodily actions that form our character through their habitual forces are also circumstances. The effort to change and improve those bodily actions is also called “practice.” This effort is no different from the above-mentioned “waiting one hundred years for the waters in the Yellow River to become clear.” Here we cannot find the liberation of the self that exists at the now moment. We cannot be liberated by a practice. The transition from the deluded self to the true self is realized by *shin* (awakening), not by a practice. The only issue here is the change in one’s position. It is simply a matter of recognition.

The self’s liberation in the now moment is reached by recognition. We can talk about the two ways of realizing human liberation: one is changing our circumstances and the other is a change in the subjective self. If we cannot possibly realize liberation through changing our circumstances—through practices, the only way for us is through the self being made to change. Since it is impossible for us to change the self through practices, the only way for us is through a change in our position. This is an issue related to recognition. It is a matter of perspective, or “how we view things.” The change in our perspective takes place immediately in a flashlike moment. It does not require any passage of time. (This is in stark contrast to religious practices that require time.) When our perspective changes, our liberation is realized immediately in the present moment.

There are two perspectives. One is seeing only others; the other is seeing only the self. The former is the position of object recognition; the latter is the position of introspection (or

self-recognition). The change in our perspective moves from the former to the latter. Our original position is the former, which may be called a normative, commonsense position. Thus if there is a change, it must be a change toward the latter—toward the position of subjective recognition. That liberation means self-recognition refers to this change. When we have this self-recognition, our perspective goes through a total transformation. We become new beings. This is liberation.

The sentence, “I have awakened to the fact that I am completely alone,” means that liberation must be liberation of the self, which takes place in the now moment. The liberation of the now moment means this change in one’s position—the change from the position of objective recognition to the position of introspection or self-recognition. Thus Genshin in effect said, “Liberation concerns recognition of the self.”

*(The Complete Works of Shuichi Maida, Vol. VI, pp. 628–630. Tr. N.H.)*

## The Most Certain Starting Point

Shuichi Maida

What is the most certain thing for human beings? What is the starting point from which we can take our confident first step in our lives? In short, what is the absolute fact for us?

If we answer that the starting point is the fact before our eyes, this answer is not sufficient. Or, if we just answer that it is reality or historical reality, the answer does not yet give us the sense of absolute certainty. Following Shakyamuni, I want to say, “The starting point is the fact of human *suffering* and human *desire* to be liberated from it.” Here we can see the most certain point from which we can always take the first step.

The most certain thing is not God, the Buddha, the Tathagata, or Amida Buddha. It is neither the mind for the idealist nor the matter for the materialist. In short, the most certain thing must be an intuitive fact, rather than anything the human mind can conceive of. But by the term “an intuitive fact” I do not mean artistic intuition or the intuition of objective (or scientific) facts. Those intuitions cannot be the certain point that makes us become deadly serious, desperate, and urgent.

The human fact, in its quintessential meaning, is the fact of human *suffering* and the human *desire* to be liberated from it. Shakyamuni said that the fact is the only important point to which people should be paying constant attention. We can see this exemplified in his “The Parable of a Poisoned Arrow.” Shakyamuni teaches us that the first thing we should do is to pull out the poisoned arrow that is stuck in our body. He also teaches us that extraneous questions, such as “What is this arrow made of?” and “Who is the shooter?,” are not of real concern but at best the leisurely pastime of an idle person.

Shakyamuni taught us an immediate path—the extraction of a poisoned arrow. During his forty-five years of teaching Shakyamuni did not have leisure to teach anything else. From beginning to end he simply taught and explained “What is the only problem for human beings?” and “What is the only way to solve it?” That was the only concern he had in his life. What, then, is the one immediate path he taught?

The one immediate path means a human being’s awakening to what he really is. It is no other than the teaching of *recognition of the self*. It is through recognition of the self that human beings can transcend all suffering. This was the teaching of Shakyamuni. Recognition of the self works as a power that realizes such a *transcendence*.

What, then, is recognition of the self? It means seeing the entirety of the self, not part of it. That is to say, it does not mean reflecting on our respective actions, or on various phases of our lives. It means that the entirety of our life and existence is being thrown out [before the Buddha] and is *seen* [by his eyes]. We can call this seeing of the entire self “introspection” in order to distinguish it from mere human “reflection.” Introspection in the final analysis refers to *confession* [i.e., negation of the entire self]. Furthermore, it can be said that if we have not yet reached confession, we cannot be said to have fully recognized the self.

Confession [i.e., negation of the entire self] means that the self is being thrown out before all sentient beings [i.e., buddhas], before the public, and that the self is being seen by the eyes of the people of the world. It means that *we see the self through the eyes of the people of the world*. Otherwise, the entirety of the self cannot be seen. We count on others’ eyes to see our self as it really is.



When we see the self through the eyes of people [i.e., buddhas] by becoming them, the self is already being transcended. This is what I meant earlier when I said that recognition of the self works as a power that realizes *transcendence*. When we experience this transcendence, the self and people are one. We feel the self being warmly watched by them. We discover the self that has already been embraced into the bosom of the people of the world.

When the suffering self has already been embraced into the bosom of the people, this is called salvation or the liberation from suffering. This is what I meant earlier when I said that recognition of the self is the only immediate path for liberation from suffering.

Once the Rev. Haya Akegarasu talked about the one thought that Shakyamuni had when he attained Buddhahood under the Bodhi Tree. Rev. Akegarasu declared that Shakyamuni recognized that “I am the devil.” This was Shakyamuni’s salvation, his liberation from suffering. Shinran’s path to liberation was no different from this. Shin Buddhism does not talk about any other type of salvation apart from penetratingly seeing the self as the evil person.

The only important issue in human life is the liberation of the self. There cannot be any other aim in life besides experiencing liberation from the suffering that we are facing here and now, in our actual lives.

Those who think that there are other aims in life are living their lives in an absentminded wasteful way. When we understand that the path of liberation lies only in recognition of the self, we must say that those, who pay attention to other things and ignore the importance of recognizing the self, are idling away the precious time of their lives. Let us clearly grasp the fact that stands powerfully before our eyes.

*(The Complete Works of Shuichi Maida, IX, pp. 838–839. Tr. by N.H.)*

## The Zen Master Dogen’s Words

Our teachers frequently warn: “Do not spend time wastefully!” and “Do not pass your time in vain!” Students today should grudge every moment of time. This dewlike life fades away; time speeds swiftly. In this short life of ours, avoid involvement in superfluous things and just study the Way.

People nowadays say: “It is difficult to discard my obligations to my parents,” or “It is difficult to disobey the orders of my master,” or “It is difficult to part from my wife, children, and relatives”... Thinking in this way, they join the worldly pursuit of wealth and property, without separating from masters or parents and without severing their ties with their wives, children, and relatives. With their whole lives wasted, they will have only regrets when they face the end.

Sit calmly and consider the principles of Buddhism; and quickly determine to arouse the mind that seeks the Way. Masters and parents cannot give you enlightenment. Wives, children, and relatives cannot save you from suffering. Wealth and property cannot free you from the cycle of birth and death. The ordinary people of the world cannot help you. If you do not practice now, claiming you are without the capacity, when will you ever be able to attain the Way? Single-mindedly study the Way without giving thought to the myriad things. Don’t put it off until later.

*(A Primer of Soto Zen [Shobo-genzo-zuimonki], pp. 83–84, with modification by N.H.)*

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### Notes:

We made a new website ([www.maida-center.org](http://www.maida-center.org)). It contains information about the Maida Center’s activities and publication. It also contains articles by Dr. Nobuo Haneda and the ten back issues of this newsletter.

We will hold the Maida Center 2017 summer retreat July 28–30, at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley. For the information and registration form of this retreat, please see p. 10 of this newsletter, or our website.

We want to express our deepest gratitude to the following individuals:

Mr. and Mrs. Roy Nakahara and Dr. and Mrs. Kiyoto Arakawa for creating DVDs of Dr. Haneda’s lectures.

Mr. Donald Bender, Mr. Steve Kaufman, and Mr. Paul Vielle for valuable suggestions concerning the articles in this newsletter.

Every Saturday (2–5pm) we hold a study class at the Maida Center. We are now studying Shinran’s “three-stage transition.” Everyone is welcome to attend. (T.H.)

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# Maida Center 2017 Summer Retreat

## Shakyamuni and Shinran

— Introduction to the *Kyogyoshinsho* —

- Date:** July 28 (Fri.) 6:00 p.m. – 30 (Sun.) noon, 2017
- Place:** The Jodo Shinshu Center, 2140 Durant Ave., Berkeley, CA 94704
- Speakers:** Dr. Nobuo Haneda, Director of the Maida Center of Buddhism  
Rev. Patti H. Nakai, Minister at the Buddhist Temple of Chicago
- Texts:** (1) *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. I, and (2) *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, tr. by Hisao Inagaki, Numata Center. Available at the retreat.
- Donation:** \$190.00 (which covers 4 meals [Saturday breakfast, lunch, supper, and Sunday breakfast] and other expenses). Please send the registration form to the Maida Center **by July 15, 2017**. Registrants will receive detailed information in mid-July.
- If you wish to stay at the Jodo Shinshu Center, see the rates in the following registration form. Please send the registration form to the Maida Center **by July 5, 2017**. Rooms will be available on a first-reserved basis.

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### REGISTRATION FORM

(Deadline: July 15, 2017)

Please print

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
first last

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
street city state zip

**Phone:** (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dietary restrictions:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Lodging at the Jodo Shinshu Center:** Rooms will be assigned on a first-reserved basis.

For double occupancy, please find a co-lodger.

#### Hotel Style

For two nights: single occupancy \$ 180.00

For two nights: double occupancy/per person \$ 90.00

#### Dormitory (with a shared bathroom)

For two nights: single occupancy \$ 100.00

For two nights: double occupancy/per person \$ 68.00

Co-lodger's name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Donation:** \$ 190.00

**Lodging:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total amount enclosed:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make a check payable to: Maida Center of Buddhism

Mail to: Maida Center of Buddhism, Attn: Tomoko, 2609 Regent Street, Berkeley, CA 94704