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The Basis of Shinran's "Hearing Alone" —The Mind-Only Teaching of "Hearing"—

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I. Introduction

Shinran (1173–1262, the founder of Shin Buddhism) tells us that the only thing necessary for us to do in Buddhism is to hear the words of the tradition, the words of Buddhist scriptures and teachers. In this essay I want to discuss the Mind-Only (or Yogacara) teaching of "hearing" as the basis of Shinran's teaching of "hearing alone." Before I get into the main topic I will discuss the following three issues as preparation.

A. Buddhism as a Teaching of Self-Examination

The first thing I want to emphasize is that Buddhism is nothing but a teaching of self-examination. And the goal of self-examination is self-realization—realization of the true self, or the Dharma (Truth) self. I believe that self-examination is one of the most important and difficult things to do. The word self-examination may sound as if we can examine the entirety of the self all by ourselves, but the fact is that we cannot do so. It is only by hearing the words of Buddhist scriptures and teachers that we can examine the entirety of the self. As we cannot see our own faces with our own eyes, we cannot see the self by ourselves. To see our faces we must have a mirror that enables us to see them. Our teachers' words are like a mirror. Only hearing their words can make us see the entirety of the self and examine it. Thus when I say self-examination is Buddhism, I mean that hearing our teachers' words is Buddhism. It is through hearing their words that we can examine the self and eventually realize the true self.

B. Shin Buddhist Emphasis on "Hearing Alone"

"Hearing" is an important issue, not only in Shin Buddhism but also in all Buddhist traditions. All Buddhists believe that hearing teachers' words marks the beginning of Buddhism. For example, all Sino-Japanese Buddhists recite a passage from the *Garland Sutra* (*Avatamsaka-sutra*) called the "Threefold Refuges (or Treasures)." The first part of the passage says, "Difficult is it to receive human existence. But now we have already received it. Difficult is it to *hear* the Buddha-Dharma. But now we have already *heard* it." It also says, "The peerless, profound, and wondrous Dharma is rare to encounter even in many hundreds and thousands of *kalpas*. Now we have already seen and *heard* it." In this way all Buddhists talk about the importance of hearing the words of the Buddha-Dharma.

Although all Buddhists honor hearing, one crucial difference between Shin Buddhism and other Buddhist traditions is this: the teachers of other Buddhist traditions tell us that hearing is *also* important, but Shin teachers tell us that hearing *alone* is important. The teachers of other traditions say that hearing is one of many important practices we should perform. But Shin teachers tell us that hearing is the only thing necessary for attaining ultimate liberation. They tell us that we have only to perfect hearing throughout our lives. Shinran says that just by hearing (and understanding) the meaning of *Namu Amida Butsu* ("Come to the Buddha's wisdom!"), a calling voice from buddhas (i.e., our teachers), we can be totally liberated from the endless cycle of births-and-deaths. Rennyō (1415–1499, the 8th Shin abbot, known as the restorer of Shin Buddhism) also says, "The most important thing in the Buddha-Dharma is hearing."

C. What Do I Mean by “Hearing”?

Now I have discussed one crucial difference between Shin Buddhism and other Buddhist traditions. Here I want to define what I mean by the word “hearing.” “Hearing” means appreciation of the meanings of words, ideas, and concepts. It does not only mean the appreciation of the meanings of words through our auditory organ; it also means reading words in books that are in print or braille. Thus by “hearing” I mean recognition of the meanings of words through our eyes, ears, and fingers.

Hearing, or appreciation of the meanings of words, is one of the most fundamental components of human existence. We can say that when we start to appreciate the meanings of words, we become human beings. I have heard that for most people, hearing is the first faculty they develop after birth and the last faculty they lose before death.

Here I want to comment on the differences between the two words, “listen” and “hear.” These two words are generally considered synonyms. But when I compare these two words, I feel that “hearing” better translates the Shin Buddhist concept of *mon*, which contains the meaning of “understanding.” The word “hearing” seems to connote deeper appreciation of the meanings of words than “listening.” We could use the word “hear” as a synonym of “understand.” When we say, “Yeah, I hear you. I hear you,” we are indicating that “I understand you.” Thus I will use the word “hearing,” not “listening,” throughout this essay.

II. The Mind-Only Teaching of “Hearing” as the Basis of Shinran’s “Hearing Alone”

Now let me start my discussion of the main topic of this essay. First I want to talk about a Mahayana Buddhist tradition that is known as the Mind-Only school (or Yogacara school). This school regards “hearing” as one of its most important teachings.

From approximately the second to the seventh centuries in India, there were two major Mahayana traditions, the Madhyamika school and the Mind-Only school. Nagarjuna (ca. 150–250) systematized the doctrine of the former; and Vasubandhu (ca. 4th century) systematized the doctrine of the latter. (Shinran called these two teachers the first and second patriarchs of Shin Buddhism.) The Mind-Only school came after the Madhyamika school and perfected it. Thus, the Mind-Only tradition is generally known as the climax of Mahayana Buddhism in India. Japanese Buddhist scholars have pointed out that there are some deep doctrinal connections between Mind-Only doctrine and Shin Buddhist doctrine. Many Shin scholars often discuss Mind-Only concepts when they explain Shin Buddhism. The Mind-Only tradition talks about the importance of “hearing.” Thus, when Shin teachers explain the Shin Buddhist meaning of “hearing,” they often discuss the Mind-Only teaching of “hearing.” In this essay I want to discuss the Mind-Only teaching of “hearing” as the basis of Shinran’s “hearing alone.”

III. Shakyamuni’s Enlightenment and Teaching

Since the issue of “hearing” is inseparably connected with the issue of “a teaching” or “the Buddha’s words” to which “hearing” is directed, I want to discuss the meaning of “a teaching” or “the Buddha’s words” in Buddhism. In order to explain how the Buddhist teaching came into being, let me talk about how Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, how he decided to share his teaching with the people of the world of suffering, and how he started his teaching activities.

A. Shakyamuni’s Enlightenment

When Shakyamuni was young, he did not think that his life was full of suffering. But as he grew older, he realized the fact that things such as aging, sickness, and death were inevitable and that he eventually had to lose everything he had cherished. Finally, he became depressed and could no longer live his life like before. Then, one day he encountered a traveling monk whose face was shining with wisdom. This meeting made him awaken the aspiration to seek truth and become a person like this monk. He renounced his secular life and became a seeker of liberation from suffering.

Then Shakyamuni engaged in all kinds of practices that included asceticism, but he could not succeed in his efforts. Having renounced the practices that he had performed for six years, he sat under a tree and meditated. He intensely examined the self. Then, he attained enlightenment at the age of thirty-five. When he attained enlightenment, he gained insight into the truth of impermanence and learned that everything was moving, changing, and flowing. He learned it was wrong to think that he had something permanent in his being. When he

recognized the absoluteness of the truth of impermanence and became one with it, he was liberated; he was no longer intimidated by that truth. He identified the basic cause of suffering as ignorance of the truth of impermanence, his view that he could maintain something fixed.

Thus Shakyamuni moved from the world of suffering (or samsara) to the world of the ultimate truth. The two worlds are as follow: (i) The world of suffering (samsara) or delusion, where human words, which inherently have dualistic nuances, are used; (ii) the world of the ultimate truth (*tathata*), or of nondualistic truth, that transcends human words.

When Shakyamuni attained enlightenment and moved to the world of the ultimate truth that transcended human words, he was quite happy. Then he was immersed in samadhi in which he enjoyed a peaceful state of mind. However, legend tells us that when he had spent twenty-eight days in samadhi, Brahma, the highest god of Brahmanism, appeared before him and asked him to return to the world of suffering and teach people—to use human words to guide them and liberate them from suffering. But Shakyamuni refused to do so, saying, “Even if I teach people, they will not understand me. They will only become confused.” This conversation between Shakyamuni and Brahma symbolizes the debate that was going on in Shakyamuni’s mind. Brahma’s request for him to return to the world of suffering people symbolizes the voiceless voice of suffering people that he was hearing in his mind. Although he refused to teach, he was debating whether he should return to the world of suffering people or not.

If Shakyamuni had just enjoyed his individual attainment in the world of the ultimate truth that transcended human words, Buddhism would not have existed. No one could have understood the contents of his awakening experience. Shakyamuni would have ended up as a pratyeka-buddha (a loner buddha), a Hinayana Buddha.

B. Shakyamuni’s Decision to Teach: His Becoming a Dynamic Buddha

After some thinking, Shakyamuni finally decided to return to the world of suffering people and share his insight with them. This decision was a crucial dividing line between two types of Buddhahood that Shakyamuni experienced. The two types of Buddhahood are as follows:

1. The first type of Buddhahood: a static Buddha

This was the Buddhahood that Shakyamuni experienced before he decided to return to the world of suffering to teach. He was a static (or sitting) Buddha—a Buddha that symbolizes wisdom; he was meditating alone without any intention of returning to the world of suffering. He was in the world that was beyond human words.

This type of Buddha is also called a Tatha-gata (Suchness-gone), i.e., a person who has gone from the world of suffering where human words are used to the world of the ultimate truth (i.e., suchness) that transcends human words.

2. The second type of Buddhahood: a dynamic Buddha

This was the Buddha that Shakyamuni became after he decided to teach. He became a dynamic (or standing) Buddha—a Buddha who symbolized compassion. He could no longer be immersed in the happiness of individual attainment. He could not help standing up, returning to the world of suffering, and sharing his insight with suffering people through the use of human words.

This type of Buddha is called a Tatha-agata (Suchness-come), i.e., a person who has come from the world of the ultimate truth (i.e., suchness) to the world of suffering where human words are used.

It is because Shakyamuni came back to the world of suffering and verbalized his awakening experience with human words that Buddhism came into being; people were able to hear him, understand him, and eventually experience the same awakening.

IV. An Unbridgeable Gap between Shakyamuni’s Words and Our Understanding of Them

A. Difficulties Involved in Shakyamuni’s Use of Words

Tradition tells us that after returning to the world of suffering Shakyamuni started to share his insight with the five practitioners with whom he had practiced earlier. Now he spoke words and the five practitioners heard them. He guided the practitioners to recognition of the truth he had attained. Now Buddhism that consists of the three treasures (i.e., the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha) came into being for the first time in history.

Here let me talk about the difficulties Shakyamuni had in teaching deluded people.

When Shakyamuni was twenty-nine, he left his secular life, the world of suffering. Having opened his eyes to the ultimate truth, he clearly recognized that human beings were totally ignorant of it. Thus he was able to view human beings in the world of suffering as “totally upside-down (or deluded) beings.” This is a view of people that only awakened ones can have.

Since the people in the world of suffering were totally ignorant of the truth that Shakyamuni embodied, it was an extremely difficult task for Shakyamuni to share his insight with them. In order to communicate to them the ultimate truth—nondualistic truth—that transcended human words, he had to use human words that inherently have dualistic nuances. He had to use the same words that people used. Otherwise, people could not understand what he wanted to tell them. Human words were the only tool he could use to explain the truth.

People could hear Shakyamuni’s words either in a positive way or in a negative way. The positive way meant that if people heard his words correctly, those words could guide them to the world of the ultimate truth. The negative way meant that if they heard his words incorrectly, they could become further deluded. Since human words originally belonged to the world of delusion, the latter was more likely. It was inevitable that people misunderstood his words.

The Mind-Only tradition calls Shakyamuni’s words “the flow from the world of the purest truth (*dharma-dhatu-nisyanda*)”—something that comes from the ultimate truth. This means that his words were a verbalization of the ultimate truth that transcended words. He who embodied the ultimate truth was attempting to communicate the ultimate truth, nondualistic truth, to people with words that inherently have dualistic nuances. Each one of his words was a challenge to those who were totally upside-down and were attached to dualistic thinking. They were designed to realize the turning round of their upside-down-ness.

B. Difficulties Involved in Our Understanding of Shakyamuni’s Words

I have discussed the difficulties involved in Shakyamuni’s use of words. Now I want to discuss the difficulties or problems that are involved in our understanding of Shakyamuni’s words.

1. Attachment to dualistic thinking (i.e., human wisdom, or self power)

The basic obstacle that prevents us from correctly understanding Shakyamuni’s words is that we are attached to dualistic thinking. Dualistic thinking divides things into subject and object, good and evil, pure and impure, happiness and suffering. Because we are attached to fixed dualistic values created by dualistic thinking, we end up living our lives in samsara (i.e., the endless cycle of births and deaths [of our dreams]).

Although some Buddhist teachers say that dualistic thinking (or human wisdom) is erroneous and should be eliminated, it is not dualistic thinking itself that is a problem. It is our *attachment* to it (or our *overestimation* of it) that causes serious problems in our lives. Our dualistic thinking is indispensable in our lives and we cannot eliminate it. Thus we should rather say that our attachment to dualistic thinking (or overestimation of it) must be eliminated, not dualistic thinking itself.

People base their understanding of Shakyamuni’s words on their attached dualistic values, such as good and evil, and pure and impure. Shakyamuni’s wisdom, however, is called “nondualistic wisdom,” or “the wisdom of oneness.” All his words come out of nondualistic wisdom. If people correctly understand his words, they experience their fixed dualistic values being challenged and negated. But, when they hear Shakyamuni’s words, they do not correctly understand them. They think that he is using his words in the same dualistic way that they do.

2. Examples of misunderstanding Shakyamuni’s words

Shakyamuni and deluded people use the same words, but they use words in totally different ways. Although Shakyamuni uses words to refer to the world of the ultimate truth, deluded people base their understanding of words on dualistic thinking.

Here I want to cite two examples of deluded peoples’ misunderstanding of Shakyamuni’s words. I will discuss the different ways that Shakyamuni and deluded people understand the two words, “happiness” and “purity.”

a) “Happiness”

When deluded people hear Shakyamuni using the word “happiness,” they understand it in terms of the duality of happiness and suffering. They love happiness and hate suffering. Thus when they hear Shakyamuni’s word “happiness,” they think that Shakyamuni is talking about a happy life where one no longer is suffering. People think the word “happiness” means the absence of suffering. But the word “happiness” that Shakyamuni uses does not mean that. When he experienced enlightenment, he transcended his attachment to dualistic thinking (in which he loved plus values and hated minus values) and attained nondualistic wisdom. His

word “happiness” means that he can now accept all things, not only pluses but also minuses, finding meaning in all. Accepting reality as it is and being able to learn from all positive and negative situations is the “happiness” that he is talking about.

b) “Purity”

When people hear Shakyamuni’s word “purity,” they understand it in terms of the duality of purity and impurity. They think that his word “purity” means the absence of impurity. But when Shakyamuni uses the word “purity,” he is not talking about that kind of dualistic “purity.” When he mentions the word “purity,” he means that human attachment to dualistic thinking (i.e., loving plus values and hating minus values) is impurity, and transcending such attachment is purity. When Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, he gained nondualistic wisdom. With this wisdom Shakyamuni saw impurity in attachment to dualistic thinking and saw purity in transcendence of dualistic thinking.

3. Misunderstanding of Shakyamuni’s words in the initial stage of studying Buddhism

I have discussed the problems contained in our understanding of Shakyamuni’s words. We are so attached to dualistic thinking that we do not doubt its validity. So long as we are attached to it, we cannot possibly understand his words in the right way. Thus, there is no approaching the world of the ultimate truth from the human side. If we make efforts to bridge the gap between the two worlds with dualistic thinking, we will just widen the gap.

Thus I must say that when we start to study Buddhism, we all misunderstand it. We initially approach Buddhism by misunderstanding it. Since the only tool we have is dualistic thinking, it is inevitable that we misunderstand it. We use dualistic thinking to understand words that are designed to make us transcend dualistic thinking.

If we come to the point where we feel that we cannot correctly base our understanding of Shakyamuni’s words on dualistic thinking, that is the climax of human thinking. But coming to that point is quite difficult. Most of us think that we understand Buddhism correctly because we have deep faith in dualistic thinking.

Thus the fact that people get excited about Buddhism in the initial stage of studying it is no guarantee that they are correctly understanding it. Some people get quite excited about Buddhism. They say, “Wow, Buddhism is a wonderful teaching. I have been looking for this kind of teaching. I am happy I found a teaching that agrees with my ideas.” When I hear those words, I am usually skeptical about them. Those words are no guarantee that people correctly understand Buddhism; on the contrary, those words often mean people are excited about “their type of Buddhism” that matches their dualistic expectations. I say this cruel thing because all of us initially use dualistic thinking as a criterion for evaluating religions. When a teaching matches our dualistic expectations, we get excited about it.

Although many of us search for a Buddhism that is comfortable for us, that is not right. If we encounter true Buddhism, we cannot be excited about it because it challenges our spiritual basis, dualistic thinking. Rev. Rijin Yasuda (1900–1982, a Japanese Shin teacher) said, “If a person says ‘I love Buddhism’ or ‘I enjoy hearing the Dharma’, there is something wrong. If we encounter the true Dharma, we feel rather uncomfortable. We feel ourselves challenged.”

Here I recollect the words of Dr. Iwao Hosokawa (1919–1996, a Japanese Shin teacher). He once said that when he was a college student, he had many student friends who studied Buddhism together under the same teacher. When they started to study Buddhism, some of them got quite excited about it. Dr. Hosokawa said that those students who were initially quite excited about Buddhism eventually stopped studying it, and their interest in Buddhism did not last for a long time. But those students who were not so much excited by their initial encounter with Buddhism but kept on studying it eventually gained deep understanding of it. Dr. Hosokawa said he was one of the latter type of students. He jokingly said, “It’s better if you are not so excited about Buddhism.”

4. Teaching of “nothing special” or “ordinariness”

Here it is important to know that the ultimate truth that true Buddhism teaches is nothing special or extraordinary. The ultimate truth (*tathata*) that is also called suchness, naturalness, oneness, or nirvana is nothing special. It is so different from the things we expect on the basis of dualistic thinking. Our dualistic thinking always expects something unusual or extraordinary.

True Buddhism teaches us to see things as they are. It does not give us anything special. Our dualistic thinking believes that religion gives us wonderful and positive values (i.e., things of the other world, such as divinity, holiness, and heavenly bliss) and eliminates negative

values (i.e., things of this world, such as sinfulness and earthliness). Using dualistic thinking, people expect plus (or religious) values that are the opposite of minus (or secular) values. But true Buddhism, or the ultimate truth, does not give us any of the values that are expected by dualistic thinking.

Let me talk about the ordinariness that true Buddhism teaches by talking about air and water. Talking about air, we love fragrant air and hate stinky air. Talking about water, we love sweet water and hate bitter water. We think Buddhism gives us fragrant air and sweet water—plus values. But true Buddhism does not give us fragrant air or sweet water. It just teaches us to appreciate air itself whether it is fragrant or stinky. It teaches us to appreciate water itself whether it is sweet or bitter. The goal that true Buddhism teaches is totally different from the dualistically conceived goal that we anticipate at the initial stage of learning. Thus, the Zen master Dogen (1200–1253, the founder of Japanese Soto Zen) said, “If enlightenment has turned out to be as you expected it to be, it is a very dubious enlightenment.”

People usually believe that Buddhism gives them some kind of tangible things such as belief, –ism, perspective, opinion, view, or doctrine. But true Buddhism does not give us anything; it just tells us to see things as they are. It teaches us, “All human views are deluded views. No view is the right view.”

C. Two Options after Recognition of the Difficulty of Understanding Buddhism

True Buddhism is something we cannot easily understand. It is quite natural that we feel frustration about understanding it. At the initial stage of learning Buddhism, it is better for us to say, “I don’t understand it” than “I understand it,” because if we say we understand it, we are misunderstanding it in most cases.

If we are on the right track, that is, if we have encountered true Buddhism that challenges our dualistic thinking, we must feel that Buddhism is very difficult to understand. If we have such a feeling, I think that we are on the right track. When we become frustrated, we have two options. One is to completely stop studying Buddhism. The other is to keep on hearing the Dharma although we feel we do not understand it.

I have met many people who took the first option; they completely stopped studying Buddhism. I sincerely hope people take the second option—to keep on hearing the Dharma in spite of their inability to understand it. In order for us to keep on studying Buddhism, we must have any one of the following four conditions:

1. A feeling of spiritual communion with a Dharma teacher

It is not so much intellectual understanding of the Dharma, but a feeling of being moved—of our life resonating with the life of a teacher—that is crucial. We must feel, “I don’t understand what it is, but I feel something moving me.”

2. A Dharma friend who encourages us to keep on studying Buddhism

3. Respect for the tradition (i.e., teachers and their teachings)

We must feel respect for the tradition (i.e., teachers and their teachings) that has been transmitted to us through many centuries.

4. Insight into one’s ignorance

A teacher’s words that we are hearing must cause us to know our own ignorance. We must have a sense of encountering something very profound and unfathomable.

If we do not have any one of these conditions, I do not think we can continue our study of Buddhism. I think that these conditions are necessary for true appreciation of the Buddha’s words. Here, having a Dharma teacher or a Dharma friend is particularly crucial; it can eventually lead us to true appreciation of the Dharma.

V. How Can We Truly Hear Shakyamuni’s Words?

A. Continuous Hearing

I have said that so long as we are attached to dualistic thinking, it is impossible for us to understand Shakyamuni’s words in the right way. All our efforts to grasp his words are in vain. Then, how can we understand his words in the right way? I must say this: “Hearing is the only way. You must make every effort to keep on hearing his words. If you keep on hearing them, you will be eventually led to the right understanding of them.”

B. Hearing-Smoking/Perfuming (*Sruti-vasana*)

I have now said that hearing that is based on dualistic thinking cannot make us understand Shakyamuni in the right way. I have also said that the only thing that can make us understand him in the right way is continuous hearing of his words. Then, am I saying something contradictory here? It may sound contradictory, because on one hand I am saying that dualistic thinking, or dualistic hearing, cannot realize true appreciation of the Dharma, and on the other hand I am saying that continuous hearing is the only thing that can realize true appreciation of the Dharma.

Although it may sound contradictory, there is no contradiction here. It is not because our thinking is good and capable, but because the Buddha's words we hear have the power to lead us to the right understanding. The power of the words to which we are exposed in hearing can lead us to the right appreciation of the Dharma. *Being exposed* to the words of the Buddha's wisdom is important. This exposure can transform our wrong understanding into a right understanding.

Here I must discuss the teaching of "hearing-smoking (*sruti-vasana*)" that the Mind-Only tradition teaches us. Only "hearing-smoking" can realize our true appreciation of the Dharma. The teaching of "hearing-smoking" is closely connected with "the flow from the world of the purest truth," a concept that I discussed earlier. This concept means that the Buddha's words are the flow that is directly coming from the world of the purest truth—the ultimate truth. When we hear the Buddha's words that contain strong influencing power, they gradually transform our wrong understanding into a right understanding.

1. Making a smoked salmon

The best way to explain "hearing-smoking" is to talk about the process of making a smoked salmon. "Hearing-smoking" is like the process by which a fresh salmon becomes a smoked salmon. We know that when a fresh salmon is placed in a smoke box and exposed to smoke for some time, it will be smoked without fail. Just like that, if we are placed in a good learning environment where we are constantly exposed to the Buddha's words, we will be permeated and transformed by their influencing power.

Thus the term "hearing-smoking" means we are gradually influenced and transformed by the Buddha's words. Our teachers also explain "hearing-smoking" by telling us that if a man constantly associates with a woman who wears heavy perfume, he will be inadvertently "perfumed" and his body will start to smell like the perfume. Or, if a person walks in a mist for a long time, his whole body becomes totally drenched.

2. Skin-pore Buddhism

Our teachers tell us that whether we understand the Dharma or not is not a crucial issue, because our idea that we are understanding the Dharma is no guarantee that we are correctly understanding it. More often than not, we are misunderstanding it because of our attachment to dualistic thinking.

Thus our teachers talk about what is called "skin-pore Buddhism." They tell us, "It's not crucial whether you understand the Dharma or not. The most important thing is that you keep on hearing the Buddha's words—that you keep on exposing yourself to them. If you do so, his words will gradually permeate you through the pores of your skin. So even if you are sleeping during a Buddhist lecture, that's all right. The words of the Dharma will permeate and transform you just as smoke permeates the skin of a salmon and transforms it. So, don't worry about whether you understand the Buddha's words or not! Just expose yourself to the words, and let them work on you." Here I also recollect the Zen master Dogen's words. He said, "Throw your entire being into the house of the Buddha and forget about it. Then, you will be transformed by the power of the Buddha."

It is often the case that the very efforts we make to understand the Dharma become a hindrance to true appreciation of the Dharma, because we are using the wrong resource, dualistic thinking. We are using our dualistic hands to grasp the truth while the truth is challenging the grasp of our dualistic hands.

C. The Double Structure in the Human Mind—Two Types of Consciousness (or Desire)

Here I must discuss the complex nature of the human mind. It is much more complicated than we usually think. It has a double structure—two layers of consciousness, i.e., the outer (or regular) consciousness and the inner (or latent) consciousness. We are aware of the existence of the outer consciousness, but are not aware of the existence of the inner (or latent) consciousness. The Mind-Only tradition calls the former consciousness *manas* (ego-

consciousness) and the latter consciousness *alaya-vijnana* (storehouse consciousness). The Mind-Only teachers tell us that the outer (or regular) consciousness and dualistic thinking are closely connected and that they are the basic cause of suffering (or samsara) in our lives.

Although the outer consciousness, or dualistic thinking, attempts to understand the Buddha's words, it cannot succeed. The Buddha's words are addressing themselves to the inner (or latent) consciousness. They are bypassing the outer layer of consciousness and directly influencing the latent consciousness. Since we are not aware of the existence of the latent consciousness, we do not know that the Buddha's words are influencing it.

In connection with these two types of consciousness, we can talk about the following two types of desires as synonymous with the two types of consciousness:

1. Human desires

These desires are our regular desires that are based on the outer consciousness or dualistic thinking; we can easily recognize them. On the basis of these desires, we love plus values and hate minus values. All of our daily activities are designed to satisfy these desires.

These desires, being based on subject-object duality, make us seek things that exist outside ourselves. They are also future-oriented desires. We desire to gain an object that we do not have now. It is based on the idea, "If I gain it, then I will be happy."

2. The innermost desire (or aspiration)

This desire (or aspiration) is latent in us and we cannot easily recognize it. This is the desire to go into ourselves and realize the true self within us. This is not a desire that makes us seek things that exist outside ourselves, or that makes us seek things in the future. It is a desire to discover the goal, deep appreciation of life, which exists here and now.

When we keep hearing the Buddha's words, they gradually nurture this desire (or aspiration) that is latent within us—the process that we are not cognizant of. This latent desire starts to resonate with the Buddha's words while we are hearing them. This way, we are gradually influenced and nurtured by them. (This is the "hearing-smoking" that I discussed earlier.) If we do not hear the Buddha's words, nothing happens. But if we are being exposed to the Buddha's words, there is a possibility that the latent aspiration will come to be awakened. Shinran calls the awakening of the latent aspiration "shinjin." He considers it the realization of the true self.

Rev. Ryojin Soga (1875–1971, a Japanese Shin teacher) said, "the Bodhisattva Dharmakara (i.e., the hero in the story that is told in the *Larger Sutra*) is the latent consciousness (*alaya-vijnana*)." By these words he meant that the Bodhisattva Dharmakara is a symbol of the true self and is latent in our minds."

On the basis of our regular consciousness we usually seek our individual welfare and happiness. But at the same time we have something in the deepest level of consciousness that desires to go beyond our individual welfare and happiness. Surprisingly we have an aspiration to transcend the ego-self, our regular desires and consciousness.

Human beings have depths in them, but they do not know them. Humans do not know what they truly desire. At the depths of their beings they have a desire to have the ego-self challenged and negated. They have an aspiration that transcends regular desires. This is the innermost aspiration (i.e., *hongan*) that *Larger Sutra* teaches us. It is the desire or aspiration that the Bodhisattva Dharmakara symbolizes. The *Larger Sutra* deals with the most important question in human life; it gives an answer to the question before human beings ask it.

D. Gradual Transformation and Conversion of the Basis

When I explained the meaning of "hearing-smoking," I said that the Buddha's words gradually influence the latent part of the human mind and a gradual change takes place in the mind although we are not aware of the process. Here let me tell a story that I made up that explains how a gradual transformation takes place in us and we experience a total conversion of the basis of our lives. This is a story about a duck that loves drinking muddy water. It goes as follows:

There is a duck swimming in muddy water. This duck loves drinking muddy water. He enjoys the taste of mud. Although the duck does not know it, the muddy water contains tiny insects in it. Those insects also love eating mud.

When the duck drinks muddy water, it inadvertently imbibes those tiny insects together with the muddy water. The more muddy water the duck drinks, the more insects it absorbs into its stomach.

When those insects enter the duck's stomach, they devour the mud inside the stomach. Thus, the mud gradually disappears there. The insects transform the muddy water into clean water inside the duck's stomach.

Let me explain the meaning of this story. Here "muddy water" that the duck drinks symbolizes "my kind of Buddhism." The duck's imbibing of muddy water means that we are creating "my kind of Buddhism" on the basis of dualistic thinking by misunderstanding the Buddha's words. The "tiny insects" of which the duck is totally ignorant symbolize the "transforming power of the Buddha's words." Initially we are totally ignorant of the fact that the Buddha's words are influencing our latent consciousness. "The insects eating the mud within the duck's stomach and transforming muddy water into pure water" means that the power of the Buddha's words gradually transform our wrong understanding into a right understanding. The duck is not aware of the transformation that is taking place in its stomach, but the insects completely change muddy water into pure water. Similarly, although we are not aware of the transformation that is taking place within the self, the power of the Buddha's words completely change our wrong understanding into a right understanding.

The Mind-Only tradition calls the spiritual transformation that is completed by "hearing-smoking" the conversion of the basis (*asraya-paravrtti*). For the person who experiences it, it is an unexpected experience. It is something the regular consciousness, ego-consciousness, can never expect.

I have discussed the Mind-Only teaching of "hearing" as the basis of Shinran's "hearing alone." We can see how deeply Shinran learned from the teachers of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition.

(May 2, 2019)

Notes:

We will hold Maida Center summer retreat, July 26 (Fri.) to 28 (Sun.), at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley. The information and registration form of the retreat are found on the last page of this newsletter and in our website (www.maida-center.org). The website also contains articles by Dr. Haneda and back issues of this newsletter.

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

Mrs. Mariko Harumi and Mrs. Manami Wegner for transcribing Dr. Haneda's taped talks.

Mr. Steve Kaufman for valuable suggestions concerning the article in this newsletter.

The Evil Person: Essays on Shin Buddhism by Shuichi Maida (tr. by Nobuo Haneda) is now available as a paperback and e-book on www.Amazon.com

We have a weekly study class on Saturdays (2–5 pm). We are studying the *Kyogyoshinsho*. Everyone is welcome to attend. (T.H.)

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Maida Center 2019 Summer Retreat

The Differences between Hybrid Shinshu and Shinran's Shinshu

—Introduction to the *Kyogyoshinsho*—

Date: July 26 (Fri.) 6:00 p.m. – 28 (Sun.) noon, 2019

Place: The Jodo Shinshu Center, 2140 Durant Ave., Berkeley, CA 94704

Speaker: Dr. Nobuo Haneda, Director of the Maida Center of Buddhism

Text: *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. I. Available at the retreat.

Donation: \$200.00 (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 16, 2019**. 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 10, 2019**. Rooms will be available on a first-reserved basis.

REGISTRATION FORM

(Deadline: July 16, 2019)

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: \$ 200.00
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