

# The Dharma Breeze

---

December, 2022

Volume XXVIII

Maida Center of Buddhism

2609 Regent Street, Berkeley, CA 94704

Tel/Fax: (510) 843-8515 E-mail: [MaidaCenter@sbcglobal.net](mailto:MaidaCenter@sbcglobal.net) Website: [www.maida-center.org](http://www.maida-center.org)

---

---

## “Their Buddhahood First, My Buddhahood Last” —The Self-Forgetting Spirit of Bodhisattva Dharmakara—

Nobuo Haneda

### Introduction

In this essay I will discuss one of the most important teachings of Shinran (1173-1262, the founder of Shin Buddhism). It is his emphasis on the exclusive importance of the Mahayana concept of *bodhicitta* (i.e., the spirit that seeks to benefit both self and others). He identified it with the Shin Buddhist concept of *shinjin*.

Although many Pure Land Buddhists believe that the Buddhist goal of Shinran is attainment of birth in the Pure Land, individual salvation, they are wrong. Shinran thought that seeking birth in the Pure Land as the only goal of Buddhism was not an authentic form of Mahayana Buddhism. Seeking individual liberation, or benefiting one’s self alone, was a feature of Hinayana Buddhism. Shinran wanted to say that Shin Buddhism, the teaching of Honen, was Mahayana Buddhism that taught both self-benefitting (or wisdom) and others-benefitting (or compassion).

Thus, Shinran was not so much a *Pure Land aspirant* who simply sought birth in the Pure Land (i.e., self-benefitting) as a *Mahayana Buddhist* who desired to attain Buddhahood by seeking the two types of birth—(i) birth in the Pure Land (i.e., self-benefitting) and (ii) birth in the world of *samsara* to save suffering people there (i.e., others-benefitting) after having been born in the Pure Land.

Mahayana Buddhism consists of three basic principles: (i) awakening *bodhicitta*, (ii) becoming a bodhisattva and traveling the bodhisattva path that perfects both self-benefitting (or wisdom) and others-benefitting (or compassion), and (iii) realization of Mahayana Buddhahood. Of these three, Shinran believed that awakening *bodhicitta*, the starting point of Mahayana Buddhism, is the most important issue in Shin Buddhism. He believed that if one awakens *bodhicitta* (or *shinjin*), all other issues, such as (ii) and (iii) above, are necessarily or automatically realized without one’s attempt to realize them.

Shinran identified *bodhicitta* with the *Hongan* (“the Innermost Aspiration [or Vow].”) The *Larger Sutra*, the textual basis of Shinran’s teaching, talks about the Innermost Aspiration (or Vow). This sutra has a story in which a bodhisattva by the name of Dharmakara (who symbolizes “the Innermost Aspiration”) becomes a Buddha by the name of Amida Buddha, which means the fulfillment of his Innermost Aspiration. Dharmakara embodies the spirit that says, “Their Buddhahood first, my Buddhahood last.” He is concerned with the happiness of all sentient beings, forgetting his own. Shinran believes that this compassionate spirit of Dharmakara alone can make fundamental changes in human lives. When we meet this spirit, we are deeply moved by it. Then, the same spirit inadvertently comes out of us and it takes over our lives. It enables us to travel the bodhisattva path (which symbolizes living a powerful and meaningful life) and eventually realize Mahayana Buddhahood (which symbolizes the fulfillment of human life) at the end of our lives.

In this essay, I will focus on Dharmakara’s Innermost Aspiration (or *bodhicitta*) that says, “Their Buddhahood first, my Buddhahood last.” I will explain the teaching—“When our individual happiness ceases to be an issue, that’s actually our happiness.”

This essay consists of seven sections. In the first section, I will discuss Shinran as a Mahayana Buddhist who desired to realize both self-benefitting (or wisdom) and others-benefitting (or compassion). I will explain how he differed from traditional Pure Land Buddhists, who sought only birth in the Pure Land (i.e., self-benefitting).

In the second section, I will discuss the Zen master Dogen’s definition of Buddhism. He defines it as self-examination in which one forgets the self (or one’s individual liberation and

happiness). In the third section, I will cite an article by Shuichi Maida (1906-1967, a Japanese Buddhist teacher) that says, “When our individual liberation ceases to be an issue, that’s our liberation.”

In the fourth section, I will discuss the doctrinal basis of Shin Buddhism by explaining the words of T’an-luan (476-542, a Chinese Pure Land monk, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Shin patriarch). T’an-luan says that Bodhisattva Dharmakara’s desire in his 18<sup>th</sup> Vow in the *Larger Sutra* (i.e., “Their Buddhahood first, my Buddhahood last”) was the realization of his own Buddhahood.

In the fifth section, I will outline Shinran’s view of shinjin—how it is awakened in our minds. He emphasizes the importance of meeting with teachers and hearing their words. This discussion prepares my readers for my discussion of the sixth and seventh sections.

In the sixth and seventh sections, I will discuss the shinjin experiences of two historical individuals, King Ajatasatru and Shinran. They experienced liberation by encountering teachers who embodied the Innermost Aspiration, the spirit that says, “Their Buddhahood first, my Buddhahood last.”

## I. Shinran as a Mahayana Buddhist

Many Shin followers have not fully understood the Mahayana aspects of Shinran because they have confused his Shin Buddhist teaching with the Jodoshu teaching that Shan-tao (613-681, a Chinese Pure Land monk, the 5<sup>th</sup> Shin patriarch) and Honen (1133-1212, a Japanese Pure Land monk, the 7<sup>th</sup> Shin patriarch) systematized. In order to show the basic differences between Shin Buddhism and the Jodoshu, let me first outline the basic teachings of the Jodoshu and then show how Shinran’s Buddhism differs from them.

The Jodoshu talks about two Buddhist gates: the Gate of the Path of Sages and the Pure Land Gate.

1. The Gate of the Path of Sages: This Buddhism is designed for bodhisattvas, superior practitioners. It is a way to attain Buddhahood by travelling the bodhisattva path. It is called “the difficult path” in which practitioners strive to attain Buddhahood by performing sundry practices (such as the six *paramita* practices)—practices that are based on “the power of the calculating self (*jiriki*).”
2. The Pure Land Gate: This Buddhism is designed for inferior practitioners such as foolish ordinary people (*bombu*). It is a way to attain birth in the Pure Land after death. It is called “the easy practice” in which practitioners attain birth in the Pure Land by performing the practice of saying the nembutsu (or saying the Name of Amida Buddha)—a practice that Amida Buddha gave to inferior practitioners out of his compassion. It is the practice that is based on “the Power Beyond the Calculating Self (*tariki*).”

Shinran thought this two-gate schema was not complete; he developed it into a three-gate schema. Shinran’s three gates are: (1) the Gate of the Path of Sages; (2) the Provisional Pure Land Gate (i.e., the Jodoshu); and (3) the True Pure Land Gate (i.e., Shin Buddhism). In other words, Shinran further divided the above Pure Land Gate into another two gates: the Provisional Pure Land Gate (i.e., the Jodoshu) and the True Pure Land Gate (i.e., Shin Buddhism). (In his *Kyogyoshinsho* Shinran calls the three gates by his own names: [1] the Essential Gate [*yo-mon*], [2] the True Gate [*shin-mon*], and [3] the Broad-Vow Gate [*gugan-mon*]). (For a discussion on Shinran’s three gate schema, see below, VII, pp. 11-13)

Why was it necessary for Shinran to come up with the third gate? From his experience, Shinran thought the first two gates were provisional stages that prepared him to reach the third gate that was authentic Buddhism. He thought that the first two gates were still based on dualistic human wisdom (i.e., “the power of the calculating self [*jiriki*]”); and the third gate, Shin Buddhism, was based on the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom (i.e., the Power Beyond the Calculating Self [*tariki*]).

In my view, Shinran synthesized the previous two gates—the Gate of the Path of Sages and the Pure Land Gate; he accepted some of the two gates’ premises and rejected their other premises. Shinran agreed with the followers of the Path of Sages in their view that the ultimate goal of Buddhism was not birth in the Pure Land but perfection of the bodhisattva path and realization of Mahayana Buddhahood. But Shinran disagreed with them in their view that people can awaken *bodhicitta* through “the power of the calculating self (*jiriki*)” and that they can travel the bodhisattva path and realize Mahayana Buddhahood through sundry practices that are based on “the power of the calculating self.”

Shinran agreed with followers of the Pure Land Gate in their view that it was necessary to seek birth in the Pure Land through the power of the Innermost Aspiration (i.e., “the Power Beyond the Calculating Self [*tariki*]”). But he disagreed with them in their view that the goal of Buddhism was birth in the Pure Land after death. He thought that birth in the Pure Land was the start of the bodhisattva path that one should experience here and now. He thought that encountering the Innermost Aspiration made him awaken *bodhicitta* (or shinjin) that was

synonymous with birth in the Pure Land. He believed that awakening *bodhicitta* (or shinjin) or birth in the Pure Land was not a one-time experience; it had to be repeatedly re-experienced and deepened throughout one's life.

Thus, Shinran believed that the only way people can attain Mahayana Buddhahood was through birth in the Pure Land (i.e., the world of Dharmakara's Innermost Aspiration). In the Pure Land a person received the power of the Innermost Aspiration that makes him go back to the world of samsara and work for the liberation of all humanity. In this way, he realizes Mahayana Buddhahood that consists of both self-benefitting and others-benefitting.

Now let me discuss *bodhicitta*, shinjin, or the Innermost Aspiration that is the most important concept in Shinran's teaching. Let me start my discussion with the Zen master Dogen's definition of Buddhism.

## II. The Zen Master Dogen's Definition of Buddhism: "Studying the Self Means Forgetting the Self"

### A. Buddhist happiness: being able to forget one's happiness

Some time ago, a university student asked me, "Dr. Haneda, I am writing a paper on human happiness. I am comparing various religious definitions of happiness. Could you give me a Buddhist definition?" I answered, "If you can forget your individual happiness, that's the happiness defined in Buddhism. If your happiness ceases to be an issue, that's the happiness defined in Buddhism."

Then the student gave me another question, "How, then, can we forget our individual happiness?" I answered him, "If you intentionally attempt to forget your happiness, you will not be able to do so. You will just deepen your attachment to the idea of your happiness. But if you encounter something more powerful, more important, than yourself or your happiness, you will be able to forget yourself and your happiness."

Who is a happy person? A happy person is the person who can forget himself, his individual happiness. He is so fascinated with something outside himself that he can forget himself. A lover is happy because he is thinking of his girlfriend, forgetting himself. An artist is happy because he is absorbed in creative activity, forgetting himself. Who is an unhappy person? An unhappy person is a person who cannot forget himself, being always concerned with his individual happiness and welfare. The Buddhist concept of "hell" symbolizes the condition in which a person has only himself, only his self-concerns such as what he should eat and wear.

### B. Dogen's definition of Buddhism

The following definition of Buddhism by the Zen master Dogen (1200-53) accurately shows us what human happiness (or liberation) is:

Studying Buddhism means studying the self.  
Studying the self means forgetting the self.  
Forgetting the self means being attained by [the spirit that is one with]  
tens of thousands of things.

(*Genjo-koan*" Volume in the *Shobo-genzo*)

The first sentence, "Studying Buddhism means studying the self," defines Buddhism as nothing but self-examination—knowing and understanding the self. Buddhism means asking one question—"What am I?" We cannot define Buddhism in any other way.

However, two ways of understanding the first sentence are possible. Depending on which way of understanding we take, we can end up taking two totally different directions.

First way: When we are told that Buddhism is a way of self-examination, we think that we should focus our attention *only* on the self—on the pursuit of our personal happiness. We think that we should be exclusively concerned with the issue of our individual happiness (or liberation). Thinking this way, we keep on considering the self important; we deepen our self-love. Questions, such as "How can I attain Enlightenment?" and "How can I realize shinjin?," are important, but so long as we maintain our focus on "how can I...?," we cannot experience true spiritual liberation; we end up deepening our self-centeredness.

Second way: When we are told that Buddhism is a way of self-examination, we focus our attention on examining *the true nature* of the self. In the process we discover that the self is empty, nothing important or worth cherishing. Thinking this way, we become less self-attached; we are able to forget the self.

When we start to study Buddhism, we usually take the first way. We study Buddhism because we are concerned with the issue of our individual happiness. We believe that Buddhism can make us happy. However, the Zen master Dogen tells us that in the course of self-examination, our initial self-centered mentality that seeks individual happiness must gradually change; we must recognize the emptiness and futility of the self.

When we clearly understand the self to be unworthy of being cherished, we can loosen our grip on it. That is the meaning of the second sentence “Studying the self is forgetting the self.” Here Dogen indicates that true self-examination should end up discovering the self as something empty or worth forgetting

Here let me further explain the meaning of “forgetting the self.” The Buddhist concept of self-forgetfulness (or selflessness) is deeply connected with the truth of conditional arising (*pratitya-samutpada*). Shakyamuni became a Buddha when he recognized the truth. The truth made him realize that the substantial and independent self that he thought he had did not exist; he realized that the self was empty, devoid of any independent substance.

Shakyamuni learned that the self that he had considered substantial and independent actually did not exist because the self was formed by myriads of changing causes and conditions and there was no substance in it. At the same time, the same truth taught him that although the self was devoid of substance, it did not exist as mere vacuum or void; it existed as something continuously moving, impermanent, temporary, and interdependent. It existed as an assemblage of myriads of changing causes and conditions. He learned that all dynamically changing things and people were the real contents of the self.

Then, Shakyamuni realized the self and all things that existed outside him were not separate; all things and people were inherent components of the self. When he had this realization, he understood that seeking his individual happiness alone or regarding the self as separate from all existing things and people was a mistake; there was no longer any independent entity to be called the self. Now he realized that his individual happiness and the happiness of all humanity were no longer separate issues. Thus, he could not help saying, “Unless all humanity attain happiness, I cannot attain happiness. Their happiness is my happiness and my happiness is their happiness.” Mahayana Buddhism described this realization of Shakyamuni with a symbol of “Dharmakara’s Innermost Aspiration” that says, “Their Buddhahood first, my Buddhahood last.”

Thus, liberation in Buddhism can be expressed in the following paradoxical way: true enlightenment in Zen Buddhism means being able to forget one’s individual enlightenment; and true shinjin in Shin Buddhism means being able to forget one’s individual shinjin.

### C. What can make us forget the self?

When the student asked me, “How can we forget our individual happiness?,” I answered, “If you intentionally attempt to forget your happiness, you will not be able to do so. But if you encounter something more important than your happiness, you will be able to forget your happiness.” I want to explain this answer of mine in some more detail.

What can make us forget the self or our individual happiness is the spirit of the bodhisattva. Nothing else can make us forget the self. When the Zen master Dogen says, “Forgetting the self means being attained by [the spirit that is one with] tens of thousands of things,” he indicates that when the self meets with the spirit of the bodhisattva and is overwhelmed by it, it can forget itself. (In translating Dogen’s third sentence I added the six words in square brackets, i.e., “the spirit that is one with,” because I thought that Dogen talked about the spiritual transformation in which “the self” [i.e., dualistic human thinking] is “attained” (or “overwhelmed”) by the bodhisattva’s nondualistic wisdom in which the self and all existing things are not separated.)

Then, what is the spirit of the bodhisattva that can make us forget the self? Dogen says:

Awakening “the spirit of the bodhisattva” (*bodhi-citta*) means awakening the aspiration [or vow] that says, “Before I myself cross over to the other shore, I will take all sentient beings across first.” Even if he who awakens this spirit looks shabby, he is already the teacher of all sentient beings.

(“Awakening the *Bodhi-citta* [*Hotsu-bodaishin*],” in the *Shobo-genzo*)

Dogen teaches us that when a person awakens the bodhisattva spirit that says, “Before I myself cross over to the other shore, I will take all sentient beings across first,” he is already a liberated person (who has already gone to the other shore). Dogen says, “He is already the teacher of all sentient beings.” He says that the person who says, “Their happiness first, my happiness last,” is already experiencing his true happiness. The fact that *bodhicitta* has arisen in a person’s mind is itself his liberation; he is being liberated by his own *bodhicitta*.

Such a person is concerned with the happiness of all sentient beings, forgetting his own happiness. This self-forgetting spirit is quite powerful. It alone can make us forget the self. Only when we meet this spirit and are moved by it can we forget the self and our own individual happiness. This happiness in self-forgetfulness is nothing that we can actively *attain*. It is realized by the Buddha without any recourse to our own practical abilities. That’s why Dogen uses the words *being attained* (i.e., a passive expression) here: “Forgetting the self means *being attained* by [the spirit that is one with] tens of thousands of things.”

Contrary to the common sense view that we can attain happiness by seriously focusing on it, it is actually when our individual happiness ceases to be an issue that we can attain true

happiness. I believe that this is the universal principle underlying Mahayana Buddhism. It is also the spiritual basis of authentic teachers, such as Dogen and Shinran.

In the next section, I will cite an article that Shuichi Maida (1906-1967, a Japanese Buddhist teacher) wrote. Since he wrote this article as an appendix to another article, it is not titled. Thus, I have given it my tentative title.

### III. An Article by Shuichi Maida

#### When Our Individual Liberation Ceases to Be an Issue, That Is Our Liberation.

Nowadays some people think that the concern of religion is *individual liberation* and that it has nothing to do with the country or morality. I believe they do not know what the essence of religion is. The goal of religion is not *the peace of mind of an individual*. Those people in our time who misunderstand religion in such a manner are just *privatizing the absolute* “*Power Beyond the Calculating Self (tariki)*.”

(Kitaro Nishida, *Philosophical Articles*, No. 3. Emphasis by Maida)

The idea that *I* must be saved simply comes out of the egoistic mind. For those who believe that the goal of religion is the liberation of the individual, Dr. Nishida’s words, “privatizing the absolute Power Beyond the Calculating Self,” must be the harshest blow. If we hastily conclude that Shinran’s words, “it [i.e., Amida’s vow] has been made entirely for myself, Shinran, alone,” express his concern for his own individual liberation, it would indicate that Shinran privatized the absolute Power Beyond the Calculating Self. But when we privatize the absolute Power Beyond the Calculating Self, liberation will not come to us even if we wait for it for hundreds of millions of *kalpas*.

Having faith in the Power Beyond the Calculating Self must mean *the true death of the self*.

(Kitaro Nishida, *Ibid.* Emphasis by Maida.)

“The true death of the self” means that our individual liberation ceases to be an issue. When that happens, our liberation is suddenly and inconceivably realized. Indeed, liberation does not take place as we expected by reliance on “the power of the calculating self (*jiriki*).” It is inconceivable, sudden, and even unexpected. The Zen master Dogen discusses this in the “*Yuibutsu-yobutsu*” Volume in his *Shobo-genzo*:

When we experience perfect enlightenment, it is never the case that enlightenment turns out to be what we expected it to be... If enlightenment is realized through our thoughts prior to enlightenment, it must be *an awfully dubious enlightenment*.

(Emphasis by Maida)

“An awfully dubious enlightenment” refers to a practice that sends us to hell. What makes the Mahayana authentically Mahayana is the fact that human logic cannot have any role in our liberation. That is, our liberation is inconceivable.

These great words of Mahatma Gandhi clearly show this inconceivable liberation:

I do not desire a kingdom.  
*I do not desire my liberation.*  
I do not desire heaven.  
*What I do desire is*  
The removal of the sufferings and agonies  
Of the oppressed and the poor. (Emphasis by Maida)

It is in these words that the liberation of Mahatma Gandhi existed. In his expression, “*What I do desire*,” I think of limitless life.

(*Complete Works of Shuichi Maida*, V, pp. 444–447. Trans. by N. Haneda)

### IV. “Their Buddhahood First, My Buddhahood Last”: the Self-Forgetting Spirit (or Innermost Aspiration) of Bodhisattva Dharmakara

I have said that true Buddhist happiness (or liberation) is realized when one forgets the self by encountering the bodhisattva spirit, something more powerful than the self. Now let me discuss this universal principle specifically within the context of Shin Buddhism. In order to show that Shin Buddhism is based on the same principle, let me discuss a section in the *Commentary on [Vasubandhu’s] Pure Land Treatise* that was written by T’an-luan (476-542, a Chinese Pure Land monk, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Shin patriarch). In this section, T’an-luan discusses a contradiction that seems to exist between two sections in the *Larger Sutra*: (i) Dharmakara’s words in his 18<sup>th</sup> Vow and (ii) Shakyamuni’s words about Dharmakara’s Buddhahood.

## **A. The seeming contradiction between the two sections in the *Larger Sutra*: (i) Dharmakara’s words in his 18<sup>th</sup> Vow and (ii) Shakyamuni’s words about Dharmakara’s Buddhahood**

In discussing the seeming contradiction, T’an-luan comes up with a very meaningful sentence, “In putting himself last, he [i.e., Dharmakara] is in the fore.” This sentence is directly connected with the topic of this essay, i.e., “When our individual liberation ceases to be an issue, it is our liberation.” Let me first quote the two sections of the *Larger Sutra*, which seem to contradict each other. Then I will show how T’an-luan resolves the seeming contradiction. The two sections that contain the seeming contradiction are as follows:

### **1. The 18<sup>th</sup> Vow says, “Until all sentient beings attain Buddhahood, I will not attain Buddhahood.”**

If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment.

*(Collected Works of Shinran [henceforth abbreviated as CWS], p. 80)*

### **2. Shakyamuni says, “Dharmakara already attained Buddhahood [ten kalpas ago].”**

Ananda asked the Buddha, “Has the bodhisattva Dharmakara already attained Buddhahood and then passed into Nirvana? Or has he not yet attained Buddhahood? Or is he dwelling somewhere at present?” The Buddha replied to Ananda, “*The bodhisattva Dharmakara has already attained Buddhahood [ten kalpas ago] and is now dwelling in a western Buddha-land...*

*(The Three Pure Land Sutras, tr. by Hisao Inagaki, Numata Center, p. 42)*

Let me discuss the seeming contradiction that exists in these two sections. In his 18<sup>th</sup> Vow, Dharmakara says that until all sentient beings attain birth in the Pure Land and become Buddhas, he will never become a Buddha. But in another section of the same sutra, Shakyamuni says that Dharmakara already became a Buddha ten *kalpas* ago. If Dharmakara declares (in his 18th Vow) that unless all sentient beings became Buddhas, he will not become a Buddha, and Shakyamuni says in the same sutra that Dharmakara already became a Buddha ten *kalpas* ago, it must mean that Dharmakara has already saved all sentient beings—that all of us, sentient beings, are already saved.

Then, I will ask my readers, “Have you already been saved or become Buddhas?” Most of my readers will answer, “No, I am not yet saved. I have not yet become a Buddha.” If we, all sentient beings, are not yet saved and if the sutra says that Dharmakara became a Buddha, there seems to be a great contradiction. Then, how did T’an-luan view this problem?

## **B. T’an-luan says that there is no contradiction between the two sections, by saying, “In putting himself last, he [i.e., Dharmakara] is in the fore.”**

In his writing, T’an-luan first points out this seeming contradiction and then indicates that there is no contradiction by saying, “In putting himself last, he is in the fore.”

... the bodhisattva vows, “With the fire of wisdom, I shall consume the grasses and shrubs of all sentient beings’ blind passions. If there is even one sentient being who does not attain Buddhahood, I shall not become Buddha.” Thus, for a bodhisattva to become Buddha himself while there are sentient beings who have still not all attained Buddhahood may be likened to a pair of wooden chopsticks that, though meant to eliminate completely the grasses and shrubs, is exhausted before all the grasses and shrubs are consumed. In putting himself last, he is in the fore...

*(CWS, p. 168, with modification by Nobuo Haneda)*

Here T’an-luan compares Dharmakara to “a pair of wooden chopsticks” and all sentient beings to “grasses and shrubs (or their blind passions).” He also compares Dharmakara’s desire in the 18th Vow to the desire of the pair of wooden chopsticks—“with the fire of wisdom, I [i.e., a pair of wooden chopsticks] shall consume the grasses and shrubs of all sentient beings’ blind passions.”

Then, T’an-luan says, “for a bodhisattva [i.e., Dharmakara] to become a Buddha himself while there are sentient beings who have still not all attained Buddhahood may be likened to a pair of wooden chopsticks that, though meant to eliminate completely the grasses and shrubs, is consumed before all the grasses and shrubs are consumed.”

Here “a pair of wooden chopsticks being consumed” symbolizes Dharmakara’s attainment of Buddhahood. And “grasses and shrubs being consumed” symbolizes all sentient beings’ attainment of Buddhahood.

In this way, T’an-luan talks about the seeming contradiction: a pair of wooden chopsticks that said that they will not burn down until they completely consume all grasses and shrubs got burned down before they completely consumed the grasses and shrubs.

Then, T'an-luan tells us that there is no contradiction here by saying, "In putting himself last, he [i.e., Dharmakara] is in the fore." This short sentence contains a very important message. Let us examine it.

### **C. T'an-luan's words: "In putting himself last, he is in the fore."**

The expression, "In putting himself last, he is in the fore," is originally found in a Taoist text by Lao-tze. The expression talks about the Taoist virtue of humility: the person, who gives credit to other people instead of taking credit for himself (i.e., in putting himself last), stands out among all other people (i.e., he is in the fore).

In this Taoist sentence, T'an-luan reads the following Buddhist message: When Bodhisattva Dharmakara came up with the 18<sup>th</sup> Vow that says, "Their Buddhahood first, my Buddhahood last," his Vow (or Aspiration) saved him first before all other sentient beings.

This message is one with the theme of this essay: "When our individual liberation ceases to be an issue, that is our liberation." Thus Dharmakara's 18th Vow is identical with *bodhicitta* that the Zen master Dogen meant in his statement, "Before I myself cross over to the other shore, I will take all sentient beings across first." When a bodhisattva considers all beings' attainment of liberation most important and his individual liberation least important, he has actually experienced his liberation. His aspiration has saved him.

In the above passage by T'an-luan, we can see his emphasis on the Mahayana concept of *bodhicitta*. Shinran learned this Mahayana teaching from this Chinese Pure Land master.

## **V. Shinran's View of Shinjin (or *Bodhicitta*): How It Is Awakened in Us**

### **A. The impossibility of awakening shinjin (or *bodhicitta*) by oneself and the possibility of awakening shinjin "through the Tathagata's supportive power"**

Before I discuss the specific historical individuals, King Ajatasatru and Shinran, who experienced the awakening of shinjin by encountering the power of the Innermost Aspiration, I want to explain Shinran's view of shinjin—how it is awakened in us. I have pointed out earlier that Shinran considered the awakening of shinjin the central issue in Shin Buddhism. How, then, is it possible for us who have ineradicable self-love to awaken such a noble and compassionate spirit within us? Although I already discussed this issue when I discussed the Zen master's words in section two, I want to discuss it again now within the specific context of Shin Buddhism.

Many Pure Land followers say that human beings are so corrupted and evil to the core of their beings that they cannot possibly awaken shinjin by themselves. They also say that only Amida Buddha, who exists outside human beings, liberates them. They think that since shinjin is a gift that Amida Buddha gives them, they do not have to make any effort to awaken it.

But Shinran disagrees with them. He teaches us that awakening shinjin is "the most difficult thing among all difficult things" and that people must make all kinds of efforts to awaken it, while supported by the power of their teachers. It is only after they have experienced the awakening of shinjin in themselves that they can say it is a gift from the Buddhas, their teachers. It is a mistake to say that shinjin is a gift that they can receive without making effort to attain it.

Let us read a passage in which Shinran talks about both the impossibility of awakening shinjin and the possibility of awakening it.

The genuine difficulty is awakening true and real shingyo (or shinjin). Why? Because this awakening takes place through the Tathagata's supportive power; because it comes about wholly through the power of great compassion and all-embracing wisdom.

(*CWS*, pp. 79-80, with modification by N. Haneda)

By his words, "The genuine difficulty is awakening shinjin," Shinran implies that it's impossible for him to awaken shinjin by himself. But at the same time, he says that it is possible for him to awaken shinjin if he encounters "the Tathagata's supportive power" (i.e., the power of historical teachers such as Shakyamuni who embody the Innermost Aspiration) and "the power of great compassion and all-embracing wisdom" (i.e., the power of Amida Buddha that symbolizes limitless wisdom and compassion). Thus Shinran says here that if a person encounters the power of historical teachers who embody the Innermost Aspiration, or limitless wisdom and compassion, he can awaken shinjin.

Now let me discuss Shinran's emphasis on the importance of meeting with a teacher for awakening shinjin.

## B. Meeting with a teacher, hearing his words, and awakening shinjin

In order to talk about Shinran's emphasis on the importance of meeting with a teacher, let me talk about a mythological insect by the name of *kalaghuna* that T'an-luan mentions in his *Commentary on the Pure Land Treatise*. T'an-luan says,

Why is the nature [of the Pure Land] inconceivable? I can compare it to an insect called *kalaghuna*. Although it is minuscule, its body grows as large as a huge mountain when it encounters a huge wind. The size of its body changes according to the force of the wind. Sentient beings born in the Pure Land are like this.  
(*Taisho Daizokyo*, vol. 40, p. 837a)

T'an-luan says that the size of the insect changes according to the force of wind that the insect encounters. When it encounters a small breeze, its body inflates a little bit. When it encounters a storm, its body becomes as large as a huge mountain. With this example, T'an-luan tells us that human beings are no different—that what we become is determined by what we meet in our lives. He identifies the large wind with the power of Dharmakara's Innermost Aspiration. He indicates that meeting with a teacher who embodies the power of the Innermost Aspiration is crucial to us.

People in our lives, such as our parents, schoolteachers, and friends, have taught us that our accomplishments, such as status and academic degrees, are the most important things in our lives. And we have been living our lives to attain them. But Buddhism teaches us that the most important thing in our lives is not what we accomplish but what we meet. What we become is determined by what we meet.

Here let me cite a *Nirvana Sutra* passage that Shinran quotes in his *Kyogyoshinsho*. It talks about the exclusive importance of having a teacher.

As stated in this sutra, the cause of all pure practices is the true teacher. Although the causes of all pure practices are innumerable, if the true teacher is mentioned, they are all already exhaustively included.  
(*CWS*, p. 234)

Further, Shinran quotes another *Nirvana Sutra* passage in the Shin Volume of his *Kyogyoshinsho*. It talks about the difference between imperfect shinjin and perfect shinjin:

...there are two kinds of shinjin: one is to believe that there is the path, and the other, to believe that there are people who have attained the path.  
(*CWS*, p. 100, with modification by N.H.)

This passage says that when a person has only the path (or teaching) and believes in it, it is imperfect shinjin; and when a person meets with teachers who have attained the path, it is perfect shinjin.

Shinran also teaches us that meeting with teachers is important because it enables us to hear their words. He says that shinjin is awakened only through hearing their words. He teaches us that we all have the potential for awakening shinjin. But, simply because shinjin is latent in us, we are not even aware we have it. We cannot awaken it by ourselves. Only when we hear the words of a person who embodies the Innermost Aspiration can we awaken it.

## C. The passage describing the fulfillment of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Vows, the most important doctrinal basis of Shinran's teaching

In many places in his writings, Shinran says that hearing the words of historical teachers is the direct cause of awakening shinjin. The passage describing the fulfillment of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Vows, which is known as the most important part of Shinran's entire teaching, talks about the exclusive importance of hearing the words of the Buddhas, or teachers, as follows:

The Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters, countless as the sands of the Ganges, are one in praising the majestic power and the virtues, inconceivably profound, of the Buddha of immeasurable life [i.e., Amida Buddha]. *All sentient beings, as they hear the Name* [i.e., the virtues that are being said (or praised) by all Buddha-tathagatas in the ten quarters], *realize even one moment of shinjin and joy...*  
(*CWS*, pp. 296-297, with modification by N.H.)

According to Shinran, "the Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters" refers to historical teachers, such as Shakyamuni and Honen. Thus the first sentence here means that historical teachers are praising the virtues of Amida Buddha. Shinran identifies "the virtues" here with "the Name" (that appears in the second sentence).

The second sentence says that it is by "hearing the Buddha-tathagatas [i.e., historical teachers] praising the Name [or virtues] of Amida Buddha" that all beings realize shinjin. Shinran considers the second sentence *the most important core of his teaching* because it clearly shows that only by hearing historical teachers' words can we awaken shinjin.

Then, what is the specific meaning of "hearing historical teachers praising the Name (or virtues) of Amida Buddha" that realizes shinjin? Shinran explains the meaning of "hearing the Name" (in the above passage) as follows:



The word *hear* in the passage from the [*Larger*] *Sutra* means that sentient beings, having heard how the Buddha's Aspiration (or Vow) arose—its origin and fulfillment—are altogether free of doubt. This is *to hear*. (CWS, p. 112)

Shinran says that “hearing the Name” means “hearing how Dharmakara's Innermost Aspiration (or Vow) arose and how it was fulfilled.” The two meanings that Shinran sees in “hearing the Name” are as follows. First, Shinran says that “hearing how the Buddha's Aspiration (or Vow) arose” means understanding the fact that the Buddha came up with his Aspiration (or Vow) because of his deep compassion for miserable, unsavable people. Second, Shinran says that “hearing the Aspiration's origin and fulfillment” means that the Aspiration (or Vow) has already been fulfilled—that many people have already become Buddhas and are working for the liberation of all humanity.

Shinran says that “Namu Amida Butsu!” means “Take refuge in the Innermost Aspiration [of Amida Buddha]!” It is the absolute command from historical teachers, telling Shinran, “Go to the Innermost Aspiration of Amida Buddha.” It is also the absolute command from Amida Buddha, telling Shinran, “Come to my Innermost Aspiration!”

In this way, Shinran tells us that hearing the Name, or hearing the words of historical teachers, made him gain insight into Dharmakara's Innermost Aspiration. And the power of the Aspiration moved him and awakened shinjin in him.

#### **D. The two types of “the Power Beyond the Calculating Self (*tariki*)”**

The two most important concepts that Shinran teaches are: (i) the Name (or Nembutsu) that means the calling voice from Amida Buddha or historical teachers and (ii) shinjin that the Name awakens in us. The former comes to us from outside us and the latter is awakened from within us. Shinran calls both of these “the Power Beyond the Calculating Self (*tariki*).”

Here let's inspect Shinran's view of *tariki*. First, let us see how Shinran defines it: “The Power Beyond the Calculating Self (*tariki*)” is none other than the power of the Tathagata's Innermost Aspiration (or Vow).” (CWS, p. 57, with modification by N.H.)

Many Pure Land Buddhists believe that *tariki* is the power that only Amida Buddha, an external savior, possesses. They also believe that with such a power Amida Buddha saves sentient beings. But, Shinran does not think so. Shinran does not believe in such a superhuman or divine power that saves people from outside themselves. He teaches us that the *tariki*, which is an antonym of “the power of the calculating self (*jiriki*),” refers to the power of the spirit that transcends the calculating self; it could exist both outside and inside us. Let me explain Shinran's view of the two types of *tariki*:

1. The Power Beyond the Calculating Self—the *tariki* that exists outside us. It is the power that our historical teachers embody. It is the power of the teachings of historical teachers, such as Shakyamuni and Honen. This is what Shinran means by “the Tathagata's supportive power” that we discussed above. (See above, p. 7) Shinran says that concepts such as Dharmakara, Dharmakara's Innermost Aspiration, Amida Buddha, the nembutsu, and the three treasures all refer to the *tariki* that exists outside us.
2. The Power Beyond the Calculating Self—the *tariki* that exists inside us. Shinran uses terms such as shinjin and the single mind to refer to this type of *tariki*. This *tariki* that is awakened in us is the direct cause of our liberation or Buddhahood.

I have just said that concepts such as Dharmakara and the Innermost Aspiration belong to the external *tariki* and the concepts such as shinjin and the single mind belong to the internal *tariki*. That is the way Shinran generally sees those concepts. But, he sometimes uses concepts such as the Innermost Aspiration, *bodhicitta*, and the diamondlike mind to refer to either of the two types of *tariki*.

In the following verses, Shinran talks about the *tariki* that exists both outside and within us:

To take refuge, with the mind that is single,  
In the Buddha of unhindered light filling the ten quarters  
Is, in the words of Vasubandhu, author of the *Treatise*,  
The mind that aspires to attain Buddhahood.

The mind that aspires to attain Buddhahood  
Is the mind to save all sentient beings;  
The mind to save all sentient beings  
Is true and real shinjin, which is Amida's benefiting of others.

Shinjin is the mind that is single;  
The mind that is single is the diamondlike mind.  
The diamondlike mind is *bodhicitta* (the mind aspiring for enlightenment);  
This mind is itself the Power Beyond the Calculating Self (*tariki*).

(CWS, p. 365, with modification by N.H.)

Now as the conclusion of this essay, I want to discuss two historical individuals, King Ajatasatru and Shinran, who experienced spiritual liberation by awakening *shinjin* through their encounter with the power of the Innermost Aspiration.

## **VI. King Ajatasatru's Encounter with Shakyamuni, the Power of the Innermost Aspiration**

### **A. King Ajatasatru's Encounter with Shakyamuni**

King Ajatasatru was a historical example of the most evil person (*icchantika*) whom Shakyamuni liberated. The story of King Ajatasatru's liberation is found in the *Nirvana Sutra*. Shinran quotes a large section of the story at the end of the third (Shin) volume of in his *Kyogyoshinsho*. (CWS, 125-143) Shinran probably thought that all the things he wanted to discuss about shinjin (in the third volume) were summarized in this story in a very concrete manner. This story succinctly concludes his discussion of shinjin.

I have said that many Pure Land followers think that Shinran did not emphasize the importance of *bodhicitta* or the bodhisattva path. But he emphasized that true Buddhism meant awakening *bodhicitta*, living the life of a bodhisattva, and realizing Mahayana Buddhahood at the end of one's life. That's why he concluded the Shin volume with the story of King Ajatasatru, who awakened *bodhicitta* and lived the powerful life of a bodhisattva.

### **B. The background of the story of Ajatasatru's liberation as told in the Nirvana Sutra**

King Bimbisara and Queen Vaidehi of the Rajagrha Castle at Magadha had no son to succeed to the throne. The king consulted a seer, who told him that a hermit in a mountain would be reborn as his son. Since the king wanted to have a son as soon as possible, he had the hermit murdered. When the hermit was about to die, he prophesized to the king that he would be reborn as his son and kill him.

Then, the queen conceived a baby. When the baby was about to be born, the king and queen, fearful of the dying hermit's prophecies, dropped the baby boy from a high place to the ground at birth to try to kill him. But the baby escaped death with only one of his fingers broken. He grew up to be a prince by the name of Ajatasatru.

Devadatta, a cousin and disciple of Shakyamuni, was ambitious to take over Shakyamuni's sangha. He even made several unsuccessful attempts to kill him. Then, Devadatta incited the prince Ajatasatru to kill his father (who was a patron of Shakyamuni's sangha) by revealing to Ajatasatru the secret of his ill-fated birth, using as evidence his deformed finger. Devadatta thought if the prince killed the king, the prince could become a patron of the sangha and Devadatta could become its leader. When Ajatasatru heard about the reason he had a broken finger, he got infuriated; he imprisoned his father and mother, killed his father, and became the king.

Later Ajatasatru became father to a boy. When he was petting him, he recollected that his father did the same to him. Then, he started to feel remorse for having killed his father. His sense of guilt caused not only mental distress but also a serious skin disease. Then, his six ministers (who represented the six non-Buddhist teachings of the time) unsuccessfully attempted to save him. Eventually, Jivaka, a Buddhist physician, persuaded him to see Shakyamuni. The king and Jivaka started to travel to the place where the Buddha stayed. At that time Shakyamuni was about to die—to enter nirvana. (Cf. CWS, pp. 140-142)

### **C. Before and after Ajatasatru met Shakyamuni**

Now let me discuss how Ajatasatru was liberated by Shakyamuni. I will explain what happened before and after he met Shakyamuni.

#### **1. Before King Ajatasatru met Shakyamuni**

Ajatasatru was deeply depressed because of his sin. Even when he decided to go to see Shakyamuni, he was afraid of going to hell because of his sin. While he was traveling on an elephant to see Shakyamuni, he told Jivaka, "Come with me, O Jivaka! I want to ride on the same elephant with you. Even though I should with certainty plunge into Avici hell, my wish is that you grasp me and keep me from falling. For I have heard in the past that the person who has attained the way does not fall into hell." (CWS, p. 134)

Then, on his way to see Shakyamuni, the king heard of Shakyamuni's compassionate words, "For the sake of Ajatasatru, I will not enter nirvana." Jivaka told the king that although Shakyamuni was concerned with the welfare of all sentient beings, he was particularly concerned with people like Ajatasatru who had committed evil deeds.

The expression, "For the sake of Ajatasatru I will not enter nirvana" means, "Until Ajatasatru, who represents all suffering beings, is liberated, I will not attain nirvana—my individual happiness." It is synonymous with "Their Buddhahood first, my Buddhahood last" or "Before I myself cross over to the other shore, I will take all sentient beings across first." It is an expression of the Innermost Aspiration of Dharmakara. The king was deeply moved by the Buddha's words of deep compassion—by the power of his Innermost Aspiration.

## 2. After the king met Shakyamuni

The king, who was deeply moved by Shakyamuni's words, met the Buddha. Having received a teaching from the Buddha, the king experienced liberation; his physical and mental diseases were cured. Then, he awakened shinjin, *bodhicitta*. Having been shaken by the compassionate heart of Shakyamuni, the king recognized a remarkable contrast between Shakyamuni and himself. The Buddha was concerned only with the welfare of suffering beings, forgetting himself. But Ajatasatru was concerned only with his individual happiness. The king became ashamed of himself.

The king compared himself to an *eranda* tree, the tree with the worst odor, and Shakyamuni to a *candana* tree, the tree with the most exquisite fragrance. The king said, "Now for the first time I see a *candana* tree growing from the seed of an *eranda*." The king described the spiritual miracle that he experienced at having met Shakyamuni.

[Ajatasatru said,] "O World-honored one, observing the world, I see that from the seed of the *eranda* grows the *eranda* tree. I do not see a *candana* tree growing from an *eranda* seed. But now for the first time I see a *candana* tree growing from the seed of an *eranda*. The *eranda* seed is myself; the *candana* tree is shinjin that has no root in my heart. 'No root' means that at the beginning I did not know to revere the Tathagata, and did not entrust myself to the dharma and sangha."

(CWS, pp. 137-138, with modification by N.H.)

Then the king came up with the following extraordinary statement:

World-honored one, if I had not encountered the Tathagata, the World-honored one, I would have undergone immeasurable suffering for countless, incalculable *kalpas* in the great hell. Now I meet the Buddha. With the virtue I have acquired from this meeting, I will destroy the blind passions and evil mind of sentient beings!... World-honored one, if I can thoroughly destroy the evil minds of sentient beings, it is all right with me if I were to dwell in the Avici hell constantly for innumerable *kalpas*, undergoing great suffering for the sake of sentient beings. I would not consider it pain.

(CWS, p. 138, with modification by N.H.)

Initially, when the king was concerned only with his individual welfare, he was afraid of falling into hell. But, now that he had awakened shinjin, *bodhicitta*, he was concerned with the welfare of all sentient beings, forgetting his own. Now he said that he would gladly go to hell if he could be helpful to sentient beings.

This story of Ajatasatru shows us that shinjin, something inconceivable and unexpected, can come out of us when we encounter a person who embodies the power of the Innermost Aspiration. Shinran wants to tell us that if we all meet with the same power, we will surely awaken shinjin and live the dynamic and meaningful life of a bodhisattva.

## VII. Shinran's Encounter with Honen, the Power of the Innermost Aspiration

### A. Shinran's encounter with his teacher Honen

In order to talk about the significance of Shinran's encounter with his teacher Honen, let me first talk about the three Buddhist stages that Shinran went through.

The first stage of the Path of Sages started when Shinran went to study Buddhism on Mt. Hiei, the center of Buddhist learning of his time. This stage lasted until he met Honen. On Mt. Hiei, he engaged in various practices through which he attempted to attain Buddhahood. But those practices did not lead him to Buddhahood. Not only was he unable to become a Buddha, but he was also feeling more and more depressed, frustrated, and miserable as he intensified his practices. He eventually saw himself as a total failure at traditional practices. Then, at age twenty-nine, he met Honen, which marked the beginning of the second stage.

The second stage was probably the first two or three years of his discipleship under Honen. In this stage Shinran believed that Honen taught that the practice of the nembutsu (or saying the Name) was the only way that Buddhist failures like Shinran could be liberated. Honen taught him if he said the nembutsu with a desire to be born in the Pure Land, he would be born there after death. This nembutsu practice was based on the *Contemplation Sutra*, which, together with the *Larger Sutra* and the *Amida Sutra*, formed the triple sutra of Pure Land Buddhism.

Although Shinran initially devoted himself to nembutsu practice, he gradually started to doubt its validity. Looking at his fellow practitioners who were repeatedly saying the nembutsu with a desire to be born in the Pure Land after death, Shinran wondered, "What are they thinking about in repeatedly reciting the nembutsu? Are they not thinking only about their birth in the Pure Land—about their individual happiness? If so, their practice must be that of Hinayana Buddhism." He wondered whether or not the practice of repeatedly saying the Name (that was based on the *Contemplation Sutra*) was in fact the core of Honen's teaching. Shinran started to think that the *Larger Sutra*, not the *Contemplation Sutra*, might be the primary basis of Honen's teaching. Thus, he studied the *Larger Sutra* very carefully. Then, he saw that the teaching of the

*Larger Sutra* was quite different from that of the *Contemplation Sutra*. He came to the conclusion that the teaching of the *Larger Sutra* was what Honen really wanted to teach.

The third stage (i.e., Shin Buddhism) began when Shinran realized that the teachings of the *Larger Sutra* were the primary doctrinal basis of Honen's teaching. Shinran called the third stage "Shin (i.e., True) Buddhism" and regarded Honen as its founder. (Although we generally regard Shinran as the founder of Shin Buddhism, Shinran never said he founded it. He always identified himself as a follower of Honen's Shin Buddhism.)

Although the *Contemplation Sutra* taught that people should practice the nembutsu as a means to attain birth in the Pure Land, the *Larger Sutra* did not teach that. The *Larger Sutra* taught that only Buddhas (i.e., historical teachers), not practitioners such as Shinran, could say the Name, i.e., praise the virtues of Amida Buddha. Since the nembutsu belonged to the world of the Dharma or Buddhahood, only Buddhas could do it; foolish ordinary people could not do it. The *Larger Sutra* also taught Shinran that the only thing necessary for his liberation was to hear the Name that Buddhas said. By understanding the meaning of the Name, i.e., the Innermost Aspiration, Shinran could awaken shinjin. But Shinran did not say that foolish ordinary people's saying the Name was meaningless. On the contrary, he encouraged them to say the Name because saying the Name, which itself did not liberate them, could turn into hearing the Name, which liberated them.

In other words, Shinran thought that Buddhas' saying the Name (or his teachers' praising Amida's virtues) was the external *tariki*; and shinjin was the internal *tariki*, i.e., the direct cause of Buddhahood.

Although the *Contemplation Sutra* taught the attainment of birth in the Pure Land (i.e., self-benefitting) by saying the Name, the *Larger Sutra* did not teach that. It emphasized the importance of hearing the Name—understanding Dharmakara's Innermost Aspiration that perfects both self-benefitting and others-benefitting.

In commenting on the *Larger Sutra*, T'an-luan talks about the importance of *bodhicitta* that perfects both self-benefitting and others-benefitting:

People, once born in the Pure Land of happiness, later conceive in their hearts the wish to be born in the three realms [i.e., the world of samsara] to teach and guide sentient beings; they then abandon their life in the Pure Land and receive birth [in the world of samsara] in accord with their Aspiration.

(CWS, p. 155, with modification by N.H.)

Here T'an-luan says that the attainment of birth in the Pure Land (i.e., self-benefitting) is not good enough; people who are born in the Pure Land should desire another birth—birth in the world of samsara (i.e., others-benefitting).

Now let me talk about what the shinjin experience specifically meant for Shinran. When Shinran understood that the Innermost Aspiration was *the* basis of all forms of Buddhism, he realized that Honen and all other predecessors came out of the Innermost Aspiration and they all embodied it. When Shinran recognized the Innermost Aspiration in Honen, he was shocked to see the spiritual contrast between his teacher and himself. His teacher was concerned with the welfare of other people, forgetting his individual welfare, while he was concerned only with his individual welfare, seeking birth in the Pure Land. He became ashamed of himself. Now he could see his mistake, the mistake of using Buddhism for self-love, self-enhancement. Seeing in Honen the self-forgetting spirit of Dharmakara, he was moved; the same spirit was awakened in Shinran.

Before Shinran met Honen, Shinran lived in a world of self-love, but he did not know it. Honen's spirit challenged Shinran and made a crack in his world of self-love. The teacher's spirit, like cool fresh air, started to gush into Shinran's world. It made him recognize that he had been living in a garbage can and that the entirety of the self had been nothing but stench. Even what he had considered purity in the self was another form of stench.

Thus Shinran no longer considered the self, the garbage can, important. Now for the first time in his life, he saw the self as not worth cherishing; he was able to forget the self. Being overwhelmed and permeated by Honen's spirit, Shinran shifted his focus from the self to the spirit that Honen embodied, from the garbage can to fresh air. In this way Shinran's spiritual basis was totally changed.

The shinjin experience means discovering limitless particles of dust in the self by meeting limitless light. If light is weak, we cannot see many particles of dust. The greater the light, the greater the number of particles of dust we discover in the self. One of Honen's verses says, "The brighter the light of the moon becomes, the darker the shadow of a pine tree becomes." This means that when we recognize our total unsavability, we are actually experiencing our liberation. When Shinran encountered the limitless light of the Innermost Aspiration, he could clearly see the limitless particles of dust in himself—the unsavability of the self. When he recognized the reality of the self as such, he became ashamed of it. And the self that he had cherished so far became insignificant. He was able to forget it. Thus, his recognition of the unsavability of the self was itself his liberation—liberation from self-love and self-

attachment. Shinran believed that the power of the Innermost Aspiration alone could bring about spiritual revolution in human beings and could make them fulfill their lives.

### **B. For Shinran, Honen was the power of the Innermost Aspiration.**

In the year 1201 Shinran met his teacher Honen. He describes this meeting as follows:

I, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Shakyamuni, discarded sundry practices and took refuge in the Innermost Aspiration (*hongan*) in 1201.

(CWS, p. 290)

If Shinran is here talking about a change in his practice, it would be more natural for him to say, “I...discarded sundry practices and took refuge in the nembutsu (or saying the Name).” I say so because “sundry practices” and “the nembutsu” are usually contrasted. Instead, he says, “I took refuge in the Innermost Aspiration.” Thus for him, meeting with his teacher Honen meant meeting with the Innermost Aspiration.

Further, let me first cite here a verse by Vasubandhu and then a verse by Shinran to show that Shinran identified Honen with the power of the Innermost Aspiration.

In his *Pure Land Treatise* Vasubandhu has the following verse;

*Contemplating the power of the Buddha’s Innermost Aspiration,  
I see that no one who encounters it passes by in vain;  
It quickly brings to fullness and perfection  
The great treasure ocean of virtues.*

(CWS, pp. 24-25)

In this verse Vasubandhu says that whoever encounters the power of Dharmakara’s Innermost Aspiration does not pass his life in vain. On the basis of this verse, Shinran composed the following verse:

*Through countless kalpas and innumerable lives,  
I did not know the strong conditions of liberation;  
Were it not for my teacher Genku (i.e., Honen)  
This present life of mine must have been spent in vain.*

(CWS, p. 387, with modification by N. Haneda)

I believe that the italicized parts in these two verses mean the same thing. Shinran’s sentence, “Were it not for my teacher Genku...,” is grammatically in the subjunctive mood. Thus, the sentence actually means, “Since I have encountered my teacher Genku [who embodied the power of the Innermost Aspiration], this present life of mine has not been spent in vain.” Thus, we can see that Shinran identifies Honen with the power of the Innermost Aspiration.

### **C. The Innermost Aspiration of Dharmakara—The spirit that is willing to go to hell**

The others-benefitting (or compassionate) aspect of the Innermost Aspiration of Dharmakara is clearly seen in the last verse of the *Sambutsu-ge* (in the Chinese text of the *Larger Sutra*): “Even if I were to stay in the midst of poignant sufferings, I will continuously work there [to save all sentient beings] and will have no regrets.” The original Sanskrit words for “poignant sufferings” here are the words “the Avici hell.” Here we can see the spirit of a bodhisattva that says that he is willing to go to hell if he can help suffering beings there. It is the spirit in which others-benefitting is simultaneously self-benefitting.

Shinran believed that this spirit was the spirit that Ajatasatru saw in Shakyamuni. When the king encountered this spirit, the same spirit was awakened in him. That’s why the king said, “If I can clearly destroy sentient beings’ mind of evil, even if I were to dwell in Avici hell constantly for innumerable kalpas, undergoing pain and suffering for the sake of sentient beings, it would not be painful.”

Shinran saw the same spirit in Honen. Witnessing it in Honen and being overwhelmed by it, Shinran awakened the same spirit. The following words in Chap. 2 of the *Tannisho* say:

I have no idea whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for my being born in the Pure Land or whether it is the karmic act for which I must fall into hell. Should I have been deceived by Master Honen and, saying the nembutsu, were to fall into hell, even then I would have no regrets.

(CWS, p. 662)

The *Tannisho* consists of Shinran’s words that Yuien, his disciple, recorded. It recorded Shinran’s answers to the questions that his followers posed him. The above words of Shinran were probably an answer to a question like this: “My teacher, because of saying the Name, are we going to the Pure Land or hell?” Many Pure Land teachers at that time told their followers that if they said the Name, they were assured of going to the Pure Land after death. Thus, Shinran’s questioner probably expected him to answer the same way. But, contrary to their expectation, he answered, “I have no idea whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for my being born in the Pure Land or whether it is the karmic act for which I must fall into hell.”

Shinran thought that hearing the Name, not saying the Name, was the most important thing that enabled him to awaken shinjin. He did not think the practice of saying the Name was the primary cause of liberation. Nor did he think that birth in the Pure Land was the goal of Buddhism. He thought that seeking birth in the Pure Land (i.e., self-benefitting) and considering it the goal of Buddhism was not authentic Buddhism. That's why he answered, "I don't know if I am to go to the Pure Land or hell for saying the Name."

Shinran thought that shinjin and birth in the Pure Land meant the same thing; shinjin meant the death of the old self and birth of the new self. It meant being born in the wonderful spiritual world of the Innermost Aspiration. By encountering the Innermost Aspiration, Shinran had already awakened shinjin, i.e., he had already been born in the Pure Land—a wonderful spiritual realm. For such a person, seeking birth in the Pure Land, in an imagined world, in the future did not make any sense.

Shinran further said, "Should I have been deceived by Master Honen and, saying the nembutsu, were to fall into hell, even then I would have no regrets." These words mean that since the power of the Innermost Aspiration that he received from Honen was so great, he did not mind going to hell. Here we can see the same bodhisattva spirit that we saw in Dharmakara and Ajatasatru: "If I were to go to hell, I would have no regrets."

Here we can also see that Shinran lived his life as a bodhisattva (i.e., a powerful and meaningful life) and attained Buddhahood (i.e., fulfillment of his life) at the end of his life. Shinran teaches us that if we awaken shinjin, we will necessarily live our lives in a very meaningful and fulfilling way. He tells us that shinjin, the power of the Innermost Aspiration, is so great that it is necessarily accompanied by the perfection of the bodhisattva path and realization of Buddhahood.

## **“Thank You” for Your Generous Donation** (December 2021–December, 2022)

Anonymous	Mrs. Arlene Kato	Ms. Lynn Oyanagi
Mr. Roger Adams	Ms. Helen Kobayashi	Mr. & Mrs. James Pollard
Mrs. Jeanette Arakawa	Mrs. Junko Koga	Mr. Toshinori Saiki
Mr. David Belcheff	Mr. Steve Kaufman	Mr. & Mrs. Ben Shimbo
Mrs. Koko Doami	Rev. & Mrs. Kenjun Kawawata	Ms. Kiyoko Shimizu
Mrs. Merry Fong	Mrs. Kazuko Maruyama	Ms. Ellen Shimohara
Mrs. Aiko Fujii	Rev. & Mrs. William Masuda	Mr. Sei Shohara
Rev. Noriaki Fujimori	Mrs. Mary Matsuda	Mr. & Mrs. Richard Stambul
Mrs. Fumie Fjimoto	Mr. Yoshi Matsumae	Mrs. Yuko Suruki
Mrs. Shiyoko Futaba	Dr. Robin Middleton	Mrs. Mitsuko Terada
Mrs. Mariko Harumi	Rev. & Mrs. Nobuo Miyaji	Mr. & Mrs. Frank Umekubo
Rev. & Mrs. Charles Hasegawa	Mr. & Mrs. Don Miyamoto	Rev. & Mrs. Kodo Umezu
Mrs. Ann Hightower	Mr. & Mrs. Kiyoto Mizuba	Rev. Patricia Usuki
Mr. Edward Horiuchi	Mr. & Mrs. Yuhachiro Mori	Mr. & Mrs. John Veen
Mr. Dennis Houle	Mr. & Mrs. Ron Murakami	Mr. Paul Vielle
Mrs. Kimie Hoshi	Mr. Brian Nagata	Mr. & Mrs. Doyle Wegner
Mrs. Miwako Hsu	Mr. & Mrs. Roy Nakahara	Mr. Darryl Yagi
Ms. Akemi Ishida	Mrs. Junko Nakano	Mrs. Kazuko Yakumo
Mr. Haruo Iwao	Mr. & Mrs. Gene Oishi	Rev. & Mrs. Kenneth Yamada
Rev. & Mrs. Sensho Inouye	Mrs. Carol Okamoto, in memory of her husband Tom	Mr. Dennis Yamashita
Iryu Shoji	Mr. Tom Okamoto, in memory of Rev. Haruyoshi Kusada	Ms. Carole Yokota
Ms. Gail Kaminishi	Rev. & Mrs. Robert Oshita	

### **Notes:**

We will hold the 2023 Maida Center Summer Retreat July 28 (Fri.)–30 (Sun.) at the Jodo Shinshu Center.

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

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

Mrs. Setsuko Nakahara for typing about 100 pages of manuscripts into a word program.

These manuscripts are Dr. Haneda's translation of Shuichi Maida's autobiographical essays. They will be published as a book in the future.

Mr. John Veen for creating an Amazon version of *The Dharma Breeze* book; and creating videos of Dr. Haneda's lectures, which you can find in the Maida Center website.

Please welcome a wonderful new year in good health. (T.H.)

© Maida Center of Buddhism, 2609 Regent St., Berkeley, CA 94704