

# The Dharma Breeze

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## From Twoness to Oneness — Similarities between Zen and Shin —

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### Introduction

In this article I want to discuss the similarities between Zen Buddhism and Shin Buddhism, the two major Mahayana Buddhist traditions in Japan. Since they share many of the same teachings, studying one tradition helps us to understand the other.

There are common misunderstandings concerning Zen and Shin. Many Shin Buddhists say that Zen is a teaching of self-power (i.e., overestimation of the self's abilities) and Shin is a teaching of the Power Beyond the Self, or the Dharma. On the other hand, many Zen Buddhists claim that Shin is a teaching of dualistic faith that talks about a savior called Amida Buddha and Zen is a teaching of self-examination. They say that Shin has deviated from the original teaching of Shakyamuni, who emphasized the importance of examining the self without relying on any external savior. I think both parties are wrong. They have not carefully studied their counterpart's teaching. Both Zen and Shin emphasize the importance of self-examination and reliance on the Power Beyond the Self, or the Dharma. I firmly believe that the Shin awakening called *shinjin* and the Zen awakening called enlightenment (or *satori*) are synonymous.

In this article I will mainly talk about the similarities between the Zen master Dogen (1200-1253, the founder of the Japanese Soto Zen school) and Shinran (1173-1262, the founder of Shin Buddhism). These two teachers represent Zen and Shin in Japan.

When Dogen met his teacher Ju-ching, he received teachings about non-dualistic Buddhism from him. He called it *Shobo* (True Dharma) or "Mahayana (or Tathagata) Zen." Then he criticized many of his contemporary Buddhists for advocating a dualistic Buddhism he called "Hinayana Zen." Likewise, when Shinran met his teacher Honen (1133-1212), he received teachings about non-dualistic Buddhism from him. He called it *Shinshu* (True Buddhism) or "Buddhism of the Power Beyond the Self." He also criticized many of his contemporary Buddhists for teaching a dualistic Buddhism he called "Provisional Buddhism" or "Buddhism of self-power." Thus, Dogen's *Shobo* (True Dharma) and Shinran's *Shinshu* (True Buddhism) mean the same thing: they refer to non-dualistic Buddhism. They both believed that their Buddhism captured the essence of Shakyamuni's teaching.

The greatest contribution these two teachers made in Buddhist history is that they clearly showed the differences between dualistic Buddhism and non-dualistic Buddhism. They experienced the spiritual transition from the former to the latter and considered it the most important issue in Buddhism as well as in human life.

Many Buddhists in the United States and Europe do not know that there are two types of Buddhism. Even if they know, not many of them know that there are some remarkable differences between them. I feel particularly sad about the fact that many people who claim to belong to Zen or Shin, non-dualistic Buddhism, misidentify their Buddhism with dualistic Buddhism. Thus, in this article I want to discuss the following two issues.

First, I will show that there are two types of Buddhism, dualistic Buddhism and non-dualistic Buddhism. The most important difference between them is that they deal with two different types of obstacles (or problems): dualistic Buddhism deals with "the passions-obstacles" and non-dualistic Buddhism deals with "the dualistic-thinking obstacle." I will show that Zen or Shin, being non-dualistic Buddhism, deals with "the dualistic-thinking obstacle."

Second, on the basis of my foregoing discussion of how Zen and Shin deal with "the dualistic-thinking obstacle," not "the passions-obstacles," I will discuss three major similarities between Zen and Shin.

## PART ONE

# Two Types of Buddhism: “Dualistic Buddhism” and “Non-Dualistic Buddhism”

When we start to study Buddhism, we tend to think that there is only one type of Buddhism. We expect to study one set of teachings or doctrines. Although many people believe in only one type of Buddhism throughout their lives, we have to know that there are two types of Buddhism, dualistic Buddhism and non-dualistic Buddhism. When we study the lives of our Mahayana predecessors, we realize that all of them experienced the transition from the former to the latter. For example, Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu moved from Hinayana Buddhism to Mahayana Buddhism. Sino-Japanese Pure Land masters, such as T’an-lun, Tao-ch’o, Honen, and Shinran, moved from the Path of Sages to the Pure Land Gate. They all moved from dualistic Buddhism to non-dualistic Buddhism.

## I. Two Cars and Two Types of Problems

### A. Two Cars

In order to talk about the basic differences between the two types of Buddhism, dualistic Buddhism and non-dualistic Buddhism, I will first talk about a couple of cars that are running toward the east on a highway. These two cars symbolize the two types of Buddhism. I will later explain the Buddhist implications of this metaphor.

Suppose Car A is going toward the east on a highway. As it runs, its driver discovers many defects in the car. Its radio is broken. Its window has a crack. Its seats have holes. Its floor is covered with dirt. The driver imagines an ideal car, a car without any defects, that his car should be. Thus, as he drives forward, he attempts to eliminate those defects and turn his car into an ideal one. But as he keeps going, he notices that some drivers that are coming from the opposite direction are yelling at him, “Hey, stupid! Be careful! You are a dangerous driver!” He is shocked to hear these words. He also shouts back at them, “You, crazy drivers! Stop yelling at me!” The car keeps going eastward.

Now let me talk about Car B. It is initially no different from Car A; it is also going eastward on a highway. Its driver also discovers many defects in the car. He desires to eliminate them and change his car into an ideal one. As the car keeps going, its driver also hears shouts from the drivers who are coming from the opposite direction. He also yells at them. Then, a huge truck comes from the opposite direction. Its driver shouts at him, “Hey, stupid! You dangerous driver! You are going the wrong way! Look at the sign!” Having heard these words, the driver looks at a road sign that says “One Way toward the West.” It tells the driver that he is going the wrong way. Panicked, he immediately makes a U-turn.

Now let me talk about the two different types of problems represented by the two cars. These two types of problems symbolize two types of Buddhist problems that I will discuss later when I discuss the Buddhist implications of this metaphor.

### B. The Two Types of Problems Represented by the Two Cars: “the Problem That I Have” and “the Problem That I Am”

The first driver has one kind of problem—defects in the car. The second driver initially has the same problem, but later he discovers another more serious problem—a directional problem. Let me explain these two types of problems.

#### 1. The problem of Car A: “the problem that I have”

The problem of Car A is its various defects, such as a broken radio and a broken window. The driver finds them and attempts to eliminate them. This problem is something that the driver has inside the car. It is “the problem that I have,” a situational problem that occasionally arises and disappears depending on situations, conditions, and people.

The solution to this problem is realizing an ideal car in the future by eliminating the defects. The driver alone is totally responsible for resolving this problem. He must realize a future goal by using his own abilities and resources. Solving this problem, or attaining an ideal goal in the future, takes some time; it is a gradual process.

#### 2. The problem of Car B: “The problem that I am”

The problem of Car B is a directional problem, a problem that concerns the entirety of the car. This problem is much more serious than the first one. When the second driver hears a truck driver shouting at him, he recognizes this problem. In contrast to the first driver who does not doubt the direction of his car at all, this driver suddenly recognizes his mistake of going the

wrong way. This problem is not a *situational* problem that occasionally appears and disappears depending on situations, conditions, and people; it is an *existential* one that exists at any time, in any place, and for everybody.

The second driver cannot resolve this problem all by himself. He must meet with a truck driver who makes him know his mistake. The solution to this problem takes place immediately here and now, not in the future. It is a matter of sudden realization and immediate action. This solution does not require gradual efforts or practices.

In summary, these two cars symbolize all human beings. The Buddha teaches us that we are initially totally upside-down—that we are mistaking a wrong way for the right way. In other words, we are totally like the first driver who is concerned with “the problem I have.” We are trying very hard to make ourselves better and perfect by eliminating our defects or shortcomings. We think if we succeed in eliminating them, we will be happy. But the Buddha tells us that we must move away from that way of thinking and living.

Here I am not saying that we should not be like the first driver. All of us are initially like the first driver. That is inevitable. In a sense, there is nothing wrong with the first way. But the Buddha teaches us that no matter how successful we may be in resolving the first type of problem—“the problem that I have,” we cannot experience the ultimate fulfillment of human life. He tells us that there is another bigger and more serious directional problem—“the problem that I am” that all of us are initially not aware of having. He tells us that unless it is identified and resolved, we cannot experience the fulfillment of our lives.

## II. The Differences between the Two Types of Buddhism: “Dualistic Buddhism” and “Non-Dualistic Buddhism”

Now let me explain the Buddhist implications of the metaphor that I have just discussed. The two cars symbolize the two types of Buddhism: dualistic Buddhism and non-dualistic Buddhism. Car A symbolizes the former and Car B symbolizes the latter.

Our teachers, such as the seven Shin patriarchs (i.e., Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, T’an-luan, Tao-ch’o, Shan-tao, Genshin, and Genku [or Honen]), Shinran, and Dogen were initially like the first driver. They were on the path of self-improvement, of becoming a sage or saint. They followed a path that was based on dualistic thinking. They deeply trusted the dualistic values that their dualistic thinking created, such as good and evil, pure and impure, or secular and religious. But, they started to doubt their initial orientation. When they met with their teachers, men of non-dualistic wisdom, they received a powerful message from them. They immediately realized that they were going the wrong way. Simultaneously they gained insight into the right direction, and made a U-turn. The new direction or path was based on non-dualistic wisdom that transcended dualistic values, such as good and evil. They moved from dualistic Buddhism to non-dualistic Buddhism.

Now I want to discuss the differences between the two types of Buddhism. As I said earlier, the Zen master Dogen calls dualistic Buddhism “Hinayana Zen” and non-dualistic Buddhism “the True Dharma (*shobo*),” or “Mahayana (or Tathagata) Zen.” Shinran calls the former “Provisional Buddhism” or “Buddhism of self-power,” and the latter “True Buddhism (*shinshu*)” or “Buddhism of the Power Beyond the Self.”

### A. They Deal with Different Obstacles.

#### 1. Dualistic Buddhism deals with “the passions-obstacles”—“the problem that I have” and non-dualistic Buddhism deals with “the dualistic-thinking obstacle”—“the problem that I am.”

In our discussion of the differences between the two types of Buddhism, it is crucially important that we know that Buddhism talks about two types of obstacles (or problems). The two types of Buddhism deal the following two types of obstacles:

- a. “The passions-obstacles (*klesa-avarana*)”—passions, such as greed, anger, ignorance, doubt, and conceit. These obstacles accompany our life; they are inherent. Although we can easily identify these obstacles as a problem, we cannot easily destroy them. They are like lotus roots that have many fine fibers, which are difficult to cut.
- b. “The dualistic-thinking obstacle” or “to-be-known obstacle” (*jneya-avarana*)—views, such as a dualistic view, a prejudiced view, and a taboo-based view. We acquire this obstacle after our births. Although we cannot easily identify this obstacle as a problem, we can cut it easily. It is like a roof tile that we can easily break.

Of these two types of obstacles, dualistic Buddhism deals with the first type of obstacles, “the passions-obstacles.” It regards the first type of obstacles as the cause of human suffering and tries to eliminate it, whereas non-dualistic Buddhism deals with the second obstacle, “the dualistic-thinking obstacle.” It regards the second obstacle as the cause of human suffering and tries to eliminate them. Earlier I talked about the cars and the two types of problems. The first driver’s “problem that I have” symbolizes “the passions-obstacles.” The second driver’s “problem that I am” symbolizes “the dualistic-thinking obstacle.”

The first driver has no doubt about his eastward direction. Thinking that the defects in the car are the cause of his unhappiness, he tries to eliminate them and realize his goal, i.e., a perfect car, in the future. Likewise, followers of dualistic Buddhism take dualistic thinking—the eastward direction—for granted as the basis of their Buddhism. On the basis of dualistic thinking, they consider passions negative, impure, and evil—the cause of suffering and unhappiness. Thus, they try to eliminate them and realize their goal, Buddhahood or the Ultimate Truth, in the future.

In contrast to dualistic Buddhism that deals with “the passions-obstacles,” non-dualistic Buddhism deals with “the dualistic-thinking obstacle.” Just as the second driver who was initially concerned with the defects in the car recognizes a more serious directional problem and makes a U-turn, followers of non-dualistic Buddhism recognize “the dualistic-thinking obstacle” as a problem and make a U-turn.

When we start to study Buddhism, most of us think that dualistic Buddhism is true Buddhism. We think that “the passions-obstacles” are the main problem that Buddhists have to deal with in their lives. However, we don’t realize that there is another more serious problem, i.e., “the dualistic-thinking obstacle.” In contrast to “the passions-obstacles” that we can easily identify as problems, we cannot easily identify “the dualistic-thinking obstacle” as a problem. Since passions, such as anger and greed, make us feel uncomfortable, frustrated, and depressed, we can easily recognize them as the cause of suffering. But, since we take our dualistic thinking for granted and do not doubt its validity, it is very difficult for us to see it as the cause of suffering.

As I said earlier, it is perfectly all right for us to follow dualistic Buddhism initially since we have only dualistic thinking as the basis of our Buddhism. But it’s so important to know that dualistic Buddhism is provisional Buddhism and non-dualistic Buddhism is true Buddhism. We must transition from the former to the latter.

## **2. Which is the basic cause of human suffering, “the passions-obstacles” or “the dualistic-thinking obstacle”?**

Followers of dualistic Buddhism think that “the passions-obstacles” are the cause of suffering. But followers of non-dualistic Buddhism believe that “the dualistic-thinking obstacle” is it. Then, which of the two obstacles is the basic cause of human suffering? Let me answer this question by discussing a metaphor.

Suppose that two types of fire, a small candle fire and a large campfire, are burning. Then, the same gust of wind attacks them. What happens to the small candle fire? As soon as the strong wind attacks it, it is immediately extinguished. Then, what happens to the large campfire? When the wind attacks it, it is not blown out. On the contrary, the wind enhances the campfire and makes it grow larger and larger.

Here “a small candle fire” symbolizes a person who trusts “dualistic human wisdom” and “a large campfire” symbolizes a person who trusts “the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom.” “The gust of wind” symbolizes “the so-called negative things we experience in our lives, such as poverty, sickness, accidents, and passions.”

Thus, when so-called negative things attack our dualistic human wisdom, we are immediately devastated because we are attached to positive things, such as wealth and health, and cannot accept the negative ones. But when the same things attack the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom, we are not devastated because non-dualistic wisdom makes us accept both positive and negative things. Those things rather make us grow spiritually. Thus, as people of dualistic wisdom, we are easily devastated by an unexpected incident. But, with the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom, any incident makes our spirits grow.

People usually think that “the gust of wind” (i.e., poverty, sickness, or passions) is the cause of suffering because it extinguishes a small candle fire. Is it really so? If “the wind” is the cause of suffering, the same thing should happen to the large campfire; “the wind” must extinguish it, too. But the same thing does not happen to the campfire.

Things do not have any inherent or intrinsic meanings or values. If things, such as sickness and poverty, have inherent “negative” meanings, then all people must suffer from them. Although some people suffer from poverty and complain about it, others don’t. For example, Catholic monks don’t suffer from poverty; they rather enjoy it. Although many people suffer if they have a serious sickness and call it an enemy or a devil, I have met some religious people

who have the same sickness and express their gratitude to their sickness because they consider it their teacher.

Thus the real cause of suffering is not “the wind,” or the so-called negative things that attack us from outside. The actual cause of suffering is within us. Whether we have a small fire (i.e., dualistic human wisdom) or a large fire (i.e., the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom) determines whether we suffer or not. Thus, we know that so-called negative things are not the basic cause of human suffering but conditions that could be good or bad depending on the nature of the wisdom we trust. It is not events or incidents that attack us from outside, but how we view them or interpret them, that is the basic cause of suffering.

If we are attached to dualistic thinking and put “positive” or “negative” labels on things, we have to suffer because of the “negative” labels we put on them. We suffer *because of our attachment to dualistic evaluation or interpretation*, not because of the so-called negative things themselves. Dualistic human wisdom is afraid of things, such as poverty and sickness, and regards them as “enemies.” But, non-dualistic wisdom is not afraid of them and does not give them any negative labels. It rather regards them as “friends” and “encouragers.”

## **B. Differences between the Two Types of Wisdom**

### **1. Dualistic Buddhism is based on “dualistic thinking (or human wisdom).”**

Dualistic Buddhism is based on dualistic thinking. Dualistic thinking divides things into positive values (such as good, right, pure, and happy) and negative ones (such as evil, wrong, impure, and unhappy). We generally consider positive things meaningful and negative ones meaningless. We love positive things and hate negative ones. All of us initially create a small cocoon of fixed dualistic values and seclude ourselves in it. Like the first driver who is unhappy with the defects in the car, we are unhappy with the negative things (such as passions and shortcomings) that we find within us. Since we view them as the cause of suffering, we try to eliminate them and realize happiness.

Here is an important point to know about dualistic thinking. Although Buddhist teachers appear to be negating dualistic thinking, they are not. What they negate is not so much dualistic thinking as *attachment to it*. Our teachers tell us that *our attachment to it* is the cause of suffering. They know the limits of dualistic thinking and do not overestimate it. They are not attached to dualistic thinking and can use it freely in their teaching activities. Dualistic thinking is actually useful and beneficial because it has developed many wonderful things, such as civilization, culture, science, and technology.

There is nothing wrong with our efforts to improve and better ourselves on the basis of dualistic thinking. But, it’s important to know the limits of dualistic thinking. Dualistic thinking cannot realize our spiritual liberation or the ultimate fulfillment of our lives because it sees meaning only in what is positive and cannot see any meaning in what is negative.

Further, since dualistic thinking and pragmatic thinking are synonymous, we initially believe that Buddhism should serve and satisfy our practical needs—that it should be useful in enhancing what is positive and eliminating what is negative in our lives. This pragmatic mentality is all right in the initial stage of learning Buddhism. But, as we advance on the Buddhist path, we must recognize the mistake of trusting such a mentality.

### **2. Non-dualistic Buddhism is based on “the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom.”**

Non-dualistic Buddhism is based on the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom. This wisdom means insight into non-duality, transition from twoness to oneness, or the truth of “neither arising (i.e., plus) nor perishing (i.e., minus).” This wisdom is intuitive insight into the truth of original suchness (*tathata*), “things as they are.”

In contrast to dualistic thinking, or human wisdom, that finds meaning only in what is positive, not in what is negative, the Buddha’s wisdom enables us to find meaning not only in what is positive but also in what is negative. This wisdom teaches us that there is nothing meaningless in our lives and that all things are indispensable conditions for the fulfillment of our lives. This wisdom alone can realize the fulfillment of our lives.

Although dualistic Buddhism satisfies our pragmatic desires, non-dualistic Buddhism does not serve any of our pragmatic needs. It challenges and negates our pragmatic mentality.

## **C. The Nature of the Goal Is Different. So Is How Long It Takes to Attain the Goal.**

### **1. In dualistic Buddhism, the goal is something that we do not have now; we attain it in the future through gradual practices.**

Just like the first driver who hoped to realize an ideal goal, a perfect car, in the future, followers of dualistic Buddhism desire to realize a wonderful goal, such as Buddhahood, the Ultimate Truth, and “birth in the Pure Land,” in the future. Their goal does not exist now and it

becomes reality when they attain it in the future through gradual practices. On the basis of dualistic thinking, they believe that their present life is unsatisfactory because of “the passions-obstacles.” Thus they attempt to realize their ideal goal, Buddhahood, in the future by eliminating them.

**2. In non-dualistic Buddhism, the goal is something that we already have here and now; it is immediately attained when we rediscover it.**

In contrast to followers of dualistic Buddhism who seek to attain a goal in the future, followers of non-dualistic Buddhism attain a goal that they already have here and now. The Buddhahood (i.e., the Ultimate Truth) that they seek already exists here and now. Buddhahood refers to the original reality that we already are. It also refers to the original self that we already are. The original self is the non-dualistic self that is one with the Dharma of oneness. It is the true self—the self as life itself. When we were babies, we were one with this self. But, as we grew up, the dualistic (or conceptualizing) self has developed and has covered up the original self. Although the true self has been covered up and we have forgotten it, it has always existed at the basis of our beings.

Buddhahood, our original reality or self, has been waiting for us to rediscover it. The problem here is that dualistic thinking has so thickly covered up the original reality or self that we are no longer cognizant of it. Thus, “attaining the goal” or “realization of Buddhahood” in non-dualistic Buddhism means not so much “attaining something anew” as “regaining what is forgotten.” It means recovering what we already have or what we originally are. It means recovering the original reality or self that precedes dualistic thinking. Non-dualistic Buddhism teaches us that we do not have to add anything to ourselves. The only thing necessary for us is to be liberated from attachment to dualistic thinking that is covering the true self. It does not require a long time or gradual practices to rediscover the original self, or to attain Buddhahood. We can attain it immediately here and now in a flash-like moment.

**D. Differences Concerning the Two Types of Practice**

**1. In dualistic Buddhism we actively engage in gradual practices to eliminate “the passions-obstacles” all by ourselves.**

Just like the first driver who tries to eliminate defects in the car in order to attain an ideal future automobile, followers of dualistic Buddhism engage in practices to eliminate “the passions-obstacles” in order to attain an ideal future self.

In this Buddhism we seek liberation all by ourselves. By trusting our own dualistic wisdom, we try to eliminate what is negative. We believe that dualistic wisdom can realize spiritual liberation and resolve the most important problem in human life. We are not aware that the Buddha (or our historical teachers) is (are) constantly challenging us in order to liberate us from our attachment to dualistic wisdom. Since eliminating what is negative takes time, this is a gradual process.

**2. In non-dualistic Buddhism we immediately attain the goal by becoming passive—by receiving the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom.**

Just as the second driver is awakened by a truck driver, followers of non-dualistic Buddhism meet a teacher who challenges them. Since the teacher tells them that their direction is totally wrong, they recognize the mistake they are making, and make a U-turn.

The Buddha knows that we are so deluded by our dualistic human wisdom that we cannot realize spiritual liberation—that we cannot resolve the most important problem in human life—all by ourselves. Even before we come to recognize our existential problem, the Buddha has already prepared the solution and has been offering it to us. Thus, the only thing necessary for us is to stop actively engaging in practices and to become passive listeners to what the Buddha is telling us.

The Buddha knows that “the dualistic-thinking obstacle,” not “the passions-obstacles,” is the cause of suffering. He also knows that our efforts to liberate ourselves on the basis of dualistic wisdom are futile. Out of compassion for us, the Buddha is constantly challenging us from outside our cocoon of dualistic wisdom in order to break the cocoon and liberate us from it. He teaches us that dualistic human wisdom cannot realize the fulfillment of our lives. He teaches us that only the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom can do so.

## PART TWO

### Similarities between Zen and Shin

#### **I. Both Seek the Elimination of “the Dualistic-Thinking Obstacle,” Not “the Passions-Obstacles.”**

In Part One I talked about two types of Buddhism: dualistic Buddhism (represented by Hinayana Buddhism) and non-dualistic Buddhism (represented by Mahayana Buddhism). I have said that our predecessors, such as Dogen and Shinran, experienced the transition from the former to the latter. The sentence, “By severing passions (i.e., by severing ‘the passions-obstacles’), one attains nirvana,” expresses the theme of the former. The expression, “Without severing passions (i.e., without severing ‘the passions-obstacles’ and by severing ‘the dualistic-thinking obstacle’), one attains nirvana,” expresses the theme of the latter.

Both Zen and Shin, being part of Mahayana Buddhism, emphasize the importance of immediately recognizing the mistake of being attached to “the dualistic-thinking obstacle.” It is for this reason that Dogen teaches us “Just sit!” and Shinran teaches us “Just shin [awaken (to the Dharma)]!” Both teachers tell us that we should immediately become passive recipients of the Dharma, or single-minded listeners to it, recognize the mistake of being attached to “the dualistic-thinking obstacle,” and receive the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom.

In the following section of this article, I have selected three similarities between Zen and Shin from among many similarities and will discuss them. These three similarities concern Zen and Shin emphasis on the elimination of “the dualistic-thinking obstacle.”

#### **A. Zen: “Without Severing Passions (i.e., without Severing ‘the Passions-Obstacles’ and by Severing ‘the Dualistic-Thinking Obstacle’), One Attains Nirvana.”**

Now let me discuss Zen emphasis on the elimination of “the dualistic-thinking obstacle,” not “the passions-obstacles.” There is a famous Zen story entitled “The Polishing of a Clay Tile.” This story is about a conversation between a student of Zen and a Zen master. It shows the difference between dualistic (or Hinayana) Zen and non-dualistic (or Mahayana) Zen.

One day a Zen student was doing Zen meditation. Then, his Zen master asked him, “What are you doing?” The student answered, “I am doing Zen.” The teacher asked, “What do you want to accomplish by doing Zen?” The student answered, “I want to become a buddha, an enlightened one, by doing Zen.”

The Zen master picked up a dirty clay tile and started to rub it with a stone. The student was curious about what he was doing and asked him, “Master, are you polishing a clay tile? What are you trying to do?”

The master answered, “I want to turn this dirty clay tile into a brightly shining mirror by polishing it.” Having heard those words, the student was surprised and asked further, “How could you turn that dirty clay tile into a brightly shining mirror by polishing it? That’s impossible.”

The master immediately responded, “Aren’t you trying to accomplish the same thing? Isn’t turning yourself into a buddha the same thing as turning a dirty tile into a brightly shining mirror?” Having heard the master’s words, the student could not reply.

I think that my story of two cars and this story of a Zen student and a Zen master are very much alike. The Zen student is like the first driver and the Zen master is like the shouting truck driver. In this story we can see the two types of Zen: dualistic Zen (or Hinayana Zen) and non-dualistic Zen (or Mahayana [or Tathagata] Zen). The Zen student was performing the former and the Zen master the latter.

The student believed that he could turn himself, a deluded person, into a buddha, an enlightened one, through Zen. This is the Zen in which one tries to eliminate “the passions-obstacles” and become a buddha, a pure being that does not have any passion defilements. The novice monk was trying to attain an ideal goal in the future through his efforts.

Having witnessed the student’s Zen, the master started to polish a clay tile in order to show the mistake that the student was making. The master wanted to teach him that true Zen was not a way of improving or changing the self by relying on dualistic thinking, but a way of eliminating dualistic thinking. He wanted to teach him that true Zen was recognizing a dirty clay tile as a dirty clay tile, i.e., a deluded person as a deluded person. He wanted the student to gain immediate insight into the basic nature of his being here and now. This immediate insight is the Buddhahood (or enlightenment) that the master teaches him to attain. For the master, the self that the clay tile symbolizes was something that the Dharma of conditional arising made to exist. The “clay-tile-ness” symbolizes the unpredictable manifold ideas that the Dharma of conditional arising enables to exist in our minds. Since the Dharma, not us, is controlling our

minds, we have no choice but to accept any ideas that come into our minds, whether they be good or bad, impure or pure, disturbed or peaceful. As the Zen master Dogen says, “Passions are inherently equipped with the law of eliminating themselves,” so we have no choice but to let any idea appear and disappear in our minds without being attached to it. The true self that precedes dualistic thinking is something beyond dualistic thinking—beyond positive and negative, pure and impure. There is nothing that needs to be improved or changed by us. This story shows us the basic difference between dualistic Zen and non-dualistic Zen.

Further, I want to cite a couple of Zen passages that talk about eliminating “the dualistic-thinking obstacle.” The Zen master Lin-chi says, “When you love sages and loath common mortals, you’re still bobbing up and down in the sea of birth and death.” (*The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* [hereafter abbreviated as *ZTML*], p. 52)

In his “Song of Enlightenment (*Shodoka*),” the Zen master Seng-t’an says, “The liberated person of the path, who is no longer interested in scholarship, does not take any action [of his design]. He never eliminates deluded ideas or seeks truth.” (Tr. by N. Haneda)

Here Lin-chi and Seng-t’an tell us to eliminate “the dualistic-thinking obstacle” like “loving sages and loathing common mortals” or “eliminating deluded ideas or seeking truth.”

### **B. Shin: “Without Severing Passions (i.e., without Severing ‘the Passions-Obstacles’ and by Severing ‘the Dualistic-Thinking Obstacle’), One Attains Nirvana.”**

In his writings Shinran often talks about the Mahayana teaching of “Without severing passions (i.e., without severing ‘the passions-obstacles’ and by severing ‘the dualistic-thinking obstacle’), one attains nirvana.” For example, in his *Shoshin-ge* he says, “Nirvana is attained without severing blind passions.” (*Collected Works of Shinran* [hereafter abbreviated as *CWS*], p. 70). He also says, “When such shackled foolish beings—the lowly who are hunters and peddlers—thus wholly entrust themselves to the Name embodying great wisdom, the inconceivable Vow of the Buddha of unhindered light, then while burdened as they are with blind passions, they attain the supreme nirvana.” (*CWS*, p. 459)

Probably the most important place where Shinran talks about this Mahayana teaching is the following section in his *Shoshin-ge*:

The light of compassion that grasps us illumines and protects us always;  
The darkness of our ignorance [that symbolizes “the dualistic-thinking obstacle”] is already destroyed.  
Still the clouds and mists of greed and desire, anger, and hatred [which symbolize “the passions-obstacles”],  
Cover as always the sky of true and real shinjin. (*CWS*, p. 70, with modification by N. Haneda)

Here Shinran is talking about the shinjin awakening experience in which the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom liberates him from his attachment to “the dualistic-thinking obstacle.” Shinran likens “the passions-obstacles” to “clouds and mists” and “the dualistic-thinking obstacle” to “darkness.” “The darkness of our ignorance” here refers to our attachment to dualistic thinking. It specifically means our conceited idea that we are wise and that we can clearly discriminate between good and evil, right and wrong, and pure and impure.

Shinran says that it is not necessary for us to deal with “clouds and mists” (or “the passions-obstacles”) and that the only crucial issue in Buddhism is to have the “darkness” (or “the dualistic-thinking obstacle”) broken by the Buddha’s light (or non-dualistic wisdom). Once the darkness is dispelled, clouds and mists (or passions) are no longer scary. When clouds and mists are in darkness (i.e., are seen on the basis of dualistic thinking), they are scary. But, when the darkness is broken by the Buddha’s light, they are no longer scary. They have lost their “negative” meanings that dualistic thinking gave them. They are even shining now, being illumined by the Buddha’s light. The Buddha’s light turned them into the positive. They have now become a medium through which we can receive the Buddha’s wisdom. Thus, Shinran says that “the passions-obstacles” will go through a transformation and cease to be a problem.

Shinran says that although darkness (“the dualistic-thinking obstacle”) should be and can be destroyed, clouds and mists (“the passions-obstacles”) cannot and need not be destroyed. Thus, he says, “Still the clouds and mists of greed and desire, anger, and hatred cover as always the sky of true and real shinjin.” Passions will remain with us until we die.

Shinran emphasized the importance of knowing the fact that passions will stay with us until the moment of our physical death as follows,

*Foolish beings*: as expressed in the parable of the two rivers of water and fire, we are full of ignorance and blind passions. Our desires are countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves. (*CWS*, p. 488)



## II. In Both We Can See the Two—Negative and Positive—Aspects of the Awakening Experience.

In both the Zen and Shin awakening experiences we can see two—negative and positive—aspects. The negative aspect is the recognition of the unreality (or emptiness) of the dualistic self and the positive aspect is the recognition of the reality of the Dharma, or the reality of the non-dualistic self.

We can see these two aspects in Shakyamuni's awakening experience. When he attained enlightenment, he declared, "My [dualistic] self is already spent. The Universal Working [i.e., the Dharma] is already established." His recognition of the emptiness of the dualistic self was simultaneously his recognition of the reality of the Dharma. Thus the negation of the self was simultaneously the affirmation of the Dharma; selflessness was the Dharmafulness.

Shan-tao, the fifth Shin patriarch, came up with the definition of the two aspects of awakening. (*CWS*, p. 85) The negative aspect is traditionally known as "deep understanding of the self" and the positive aspect as "deep understanding of the Dharma." The Pure Land masters after him, such as Honen and Shinran, often discussed this definition in their writings.

### A. Zen

Now let me discuss the twofold content of Zen awakening. In Zen the negative aspect is the recognition of the emptiness of the dualistic self and the positive aspect is the recognition of the reality of the Dharma and of the non-dualistic self that is one with the Dharma.

First, I will discuss the negative aspect. Here let me quote a passage from Dogen's *Genjo-koan* where the Zen master defines Buddhism as follows:

Studying the Buddha-Dharma is studying the self. Studying the self is forgetting the self. Forgetting the self is being attained [or permeated] by the myriad dharmas [things]. Being attained [or permeated] by the myriad dharmas [things] is letting both the body-mind as subject and the body-mind as object drop off.

(Tr. by Nobuo Haneda. Cf. *Master Dogen's Shobo-genzo* [hereafter abbreviated as *MDS*], vol. 1, "Genjo-koan," p. 34")

Dogen's words, "Studying the self is forgetting the self," means that the most important thing in Buddhism is to recognize the emptiness (unreality) of the dualistic self. He says that the dualistic self, or the substantial self that we think we have, does not actually exist. It exists only in our minds as a concept. It is something we did not have when we were babies. It gradually came to be formed in our minds as we grew up.

The negative aspect of Zen awakening also means insight into our ignorance, or insight into the limits of dualistic thinking. Dogen talks about the importance of knowing the limits of human wisdom as follows:

When the Dharma has not yet permeated the body-and-mind, we feel already replete with Dharma. When the Dharma fills the body-and-mind, we feel one side to be lacking. For example, sailing out beyond the mountains and into the ocean, when we look around in the four directions, [the ocean] appears only to be round; it does not appear to have any other form at all. Nevertheless, this great ocean is not round, and it is not square. Other qualities of the ocean are inexhaustibly many...[the myriad dharmas] encompass numerous situations, but we see and understand only as far as our eyes of learning in practice are able to reach. If we wish to hear how the myriad dharmas naturally are, we should remember that besides their appearance of squareness or roundness, the qualities of an ocean and qualities of a mountain are numerous and endless; and that there are worlds in the four directions. Not only the periphery is like this: remember that the immediate present and a single drop [of water] are also like this.

(*MDS*, vol. 1, "Genjo-koan," p. 35, with modification by N. Haneda)

Here Dogen tells us that we should not overestimate human wisdom or dualistic thinking. We cannot have any reliable criteria for judging good and evil, right and wrong. Every judgment we make is relative and tentative, nothing is absolute and certain, because we do not control the world; the world controls us. The Dharma of impermanence, or conditional arising, controls us. What we consider good now could turn to evil at any moment. If we understand the Dharma, we are humbled by it; we know the limits of human wisdom.

Now let me discuss the positive aspect of Zen awakening, the recognition of the reality of the Dharma and of the non-dualistic self.

In the words cited above, Dogen said, "Studying the self is forgetting the self. Forgetting the self is being attained [or permeated] by the myriads of dharmas [things]." Here he does not

only talk about the negative aspect of Zen awakening, i.e., forgetting the dualistic self, but also discusses its positive aspect. When he says, “being attained [or permeated] by the myriads of dharmas [things],” he indicates that the Dharma (i.e., myriads of things) empties the self and attains (or permeates) it. Now the true self that is one with the Dharma is realized.

In the following passage, Dogen talks about a wonderful power that liberates him when his dualistic self is forgotten, thrown away, or dropped off. He talks about the power of the Buddha-Dharma that realizes his Buddhahood, the non-dualistic self.

When we just throw our own body and mind into the house of the Buddha, loosening our grip on them and forgetting them, we are moved by the power that is coming from the side of the Buddha. Obeying the power, we leave birth-and-death and become a buddha without using our own power, without exerting our own minds. Why should we linger in our minds?

(Tr. by N. Haneda. Cf. *MDS*, vol. 4, “*Shoji* [Birth-And-Death],” p. 222)

The expression here, “Obeying the power, we leave birth-and-death and become a buddha without using our own power, without exerting our own minds,” reminds me of Shinran’s concept of the Power Beyond the Self. Here we can see that both Dogen and Shinran emphasize the importance of the Power Beyond the Self as the initiator of spiritual liberation.

## B. Shin

Now let me talk about the negative aspect of the Shin awakening. In Shin the negative aspect means recognition of the emptiness of the dualistic self. It means becoming a dropout from the dualistic self. It also means our becoming fed up with it. Initially Shinran thought that he could rely upon dualistic wisdom, but later when he encountered the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom, he realized that dualistic wisdom was totally unreliable. What he thought of as light turned into darkness.

In the following words, Shinran identifies himself as a failure in the world of dualistic wisdom. He also expresses his confession that his entire world that is based on dualistic wisdom is empty and false.

I know nothing at all of good and evil. If I could know good thoroughly as Amida Tathagata knows it, then I would know good. If I could know evil thoroughly as the Tathagata knows it, then I would know evil. But with a foolish person who is full of blind passions, in this fleeting world—this burning house—all matters without exception are empty and false, totally without truth and sincerity. The nembutsu (i.e., the Dharma) alone is true and real.

(*CWS*, p. 679, with modification by N. Haneda)

Here Shinran is contrasting the world of dualistic wisdom with the world of the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom that the nembutsu represents. Here he says that his dualistic self is totally unreliable. By saying, “I know nothing of good and evil,” he is confessing that his attachment to dualistic wisdom is totally negated. He says that all matters in his world, the world of dualistic wisdom, are without exception empty and false, totally without truth and sincerity. He tells us that we should rely only on the Dharma, or non-dualistic wisdom, not on dualistic wisdom.

Shinran expresses the same idea in the following verse:

While persons ignorant of even the characters for “good” and “evil”  
All possess a sincere mind,  
I make a display of knowing the words “good” and “evil”  
This is an expression of complete falsity. (*CWS*, p. 429)

People usually admire those who practice ethical self-reflection considering them good people. But Shinran indicates here that their ethical self-reflection is based on attachment to dualistic thinking. He tells us that they do not know the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom; they do not know the evilness or impurity that is contained in dualistic thinking.

As synonyms of dualistic thinking Shinran uses terms such as “self-power,” “twofold mind,” and “calculating mind.” In the following passage, he emphasizes the importance of having the dualistic mind, or the mind of self-power, challenged and negated by the Dharma and the importance of taking refuge in the Buddha’s non-dualistic wisdom:

‘To abandon the mind of self-power’ admonishes the various and diverse kinds of people—masters of Hinayana or Mahayana, ignorant beings good or evil—to abandon the conviction that one is good, to cease relying on the self; to stop reflecting knowingly on one’s evil heart, and further to abandon the judging of people as good and bad. When such shackled foolish beings—the lowly who are hunters and peddlers—thus wholly entrust

themselves to the Name embodying great wisdom, the inconceivable Vow of the Buddha of unhindered light, then while burdened as they are with blind passion, they attain the supreme nirvana. (*CWS*, p. 459)

Shinran tells us that we must abandon the dualistic mind that is attached to positive and negative values. It is remarkable that he criticizes our attachment not only to good but also to evil. He tells us “to abandon the conviction that one is good, to cease relying on the self; to stop reflecting knowingly on one’s evil heart.” Here he is criticizing so-called ethical self-reflection itself. He is telling us to become dropouts from ethical or dualistic thinking.

We commonly think that Shinran tells us to identify ourselves as “an evil person,” not as “a good person.” When he does so, he is not talking about “an evil person” on the basis of ethical or dualistic thinking. When he calls himself “an evil person,” he means that he is a dropout from the world of ethical or dualistic thinking—that he is a dweller in hell, an “amoral” one who is below “moral” or “immoral.”

When Shinran says, “I am an evil person,” or “a hell dweller,” or “an *icchantika* who is beyond salvation,” he is talking about the emptiness of the dualistic self. He is totally fed up with the smart self. He is not seeing any importance in it, considering it not worth attaching to. He is not fighting passions and attempting to eliminate them. Instead, he is bowing his head before passions. He is accepting the fact that he is nothing but a whole bunch of passions. It simply means that his dualistic self is totally emptied, humbled, and abandoned. This is how Shinran experienced selflessness—emptiness (or negation) of the dualistic self.

Not only Shinran but also other Pure Land masters talked about this selflessness or self-abandonment as follows:

In his *Yokawa-hogo* (the Dharma Talk at Yokawa), Genshin (942-1017, the sixth Shin patriarch) says, “Deluded ideas are the basic nature of a [foolish] ordinary person [like me]. Aside from deluded ideas, there is nothing that can be called the mind.” Honen says, “I have eighty-four thousand deluded ideas in one day.”

If we can maintain consistently good spiritual qualities, then we can identify ourselves as good and moral people. But if our minds are totally controlled by the Dharma of conditional arising, we cannot claim to have consistently good spiritual qualities. We cannot help but identify ourselves as foolish ordinary persons whose minds are totally deluded. Thus, Shinran has the following confession:

“I am incapable of any practice, so hell is decidedly my abode whatever I do.”  
(*CWS*, p. 662, with modification by N. Haneda)

I know truly how sad it is that I, Gutoku Shinran, am sinking in an immense ocean of desires and attachments and am lost in vast mountains of fame and wealth, so that I rejoice not at all at entering the stage of the truly settled, and feel no happiness at coming nearer the attainment of true enlightenment. How shameful it is! How miserable it is!

(*CWS*, p. 125, with modification by N. Haneda)

Shinran says that he is not even a Buddhist by saying, “I rejoice not at all at entering the stage of the truly settled.” “The truly settled” here refer to those who are assured of attaining Buddhahood.

Now let me talk about the positive aspect of the Shin awakening. It refers to the recognition of the reality of the Dharma. In Shin the Dharma is symbolized by many concepts, such as Amida Buddha, the power (or working) of Amida’s Vow, and the Power Beyond the Self, and the nembutsu (i.e., the Buddha’s calling voice, saying, “Come to the Buddha’s wisdom [*Namu Amida Butsu*]!”). In the Shin awakening experience called shinjin, Shin followers recognize not only the emptiness of the dualistic self but also the reality of the power that comes from the Dharma.

Shinran says that we cannot experience the awakening without the help of “the Tathagata’s (or Amida Buddha’s) supportive power” as follows:

...genuine difficulty is realizing true and real shinjin. Why? Because this realization 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)

It is impossible for us, who are possessed of blind passions, to free ourselves from birth-and-death through any practice whatever. Sorrowing at this, Amida made the Vow, the essential intent of which is the evil person’s attainment of Buddhahood. (*CWS*, p. 663)

Shinran talks about the Dharma's power in discussing the concept of *Jinen-Honi* as follows:

*Honi* signifies being made so through the working of the Tathagata's Vow. It is the working of the Vow where there is no room for calculation on the part of the practitioner...

*Jinen* signifies being made so from the very beginning. Amida's Vow is, from the very beginning, designed to bring each of us to entrust ourselves to it—saying “Namu-amida-butsu”—and to receive us into the Pure Land; none of this is through our calculation. Thus, there is no room for the practitioner to be concerned about being good or bad. This is the meaning of *jinen* I have been taught.

(*CWS*, pp. 427-8, with modification by N. Haneda)

When Shinran at twenty-nine met with his teacher Honen, he encountered a tremendous power coming from him. Shinran called it the power of the Hongan (Innermost Aspiration) or the Power Beyond the Self. By meeting this power, Shinran experienced the death of the dualistic self and the birth of the true self (or *shinjin*) that was one with the Dharma. This power made Shinran attain birth in the world of the Buddha's non-dualistic wisdom, where he was assured of the fulfillment of his life.

Although Shin terms, such as the power (or working) of Amida's Vow and the Power Beyond the Self, appear to refer to some mysterious power of a superhuman savior, they do not. They all refer to the power of the teachings of our historical teachers, such as Shakyamuni and Honen. There is nothing esoteric or mysterious about them. Simply because Shinran received the power of wisdom through listening to his predecessors' teachings, he experienced spiritual liberation and his life was totally turned round.

### III. Both Teach “Being an Ordinary Person.”

I have discussed the twofold aspect of the Zen and Shin awakening. Both Dogen and Shinran talk about the importance of having our attachment to dualistic thinking challenged and negated by the Dharma that is true and real. This leads us to a discussion of viewing ourselves as foolish ordinary persons. Both Zen and Shin teach us to view ourselves as such.

If we can maintain consistently good spiritual qualities in our minds, then we can call ourselves good or moral persons. But since the Dharma of conditional arising controls our minds and makes us have all kinds of deluded ideas, we cannot help but identify ourselves as foolish ordinary persons.

Non-dualistic Buddhism liberates us from all kinds of dualistic values, such as good and evil, secular and religious, profane and sacred, spiritual and nonspiritual, and mundane and supramundane. We cannot help identifying ourselves as ordinary persons whom no dualistic label or identity can be applied. The goal of Mahayana Buddhism is that we become ordinary persons who are free from dualistic values, such as secular and religious, spiritual and nonspiritual, or profane and sacred. What I am saying now is probably the most important part of non-dualistic Buddhism as far as our self-examination is concerned. This is also the part of Mahayana teaching that both Eastern and Western Buddhists so far have generally neglected to appreciate. Particularly in the countries where Christianity is predominant, people cannot easily understand the significance of becoming an ordinary person. They generally discuss religions on the basis of a dualistic, ethical, and puritanical way of thinking and emphasize the importance of becoming good religious persons.

Another reason this Mahayana teaching is difficult for us to appreciate is the fact that we instinctively desire to distinguish ourselves as religious or spiritual persons. We have a deep desire to feel superior to others by thinking we are good religious or spiritual beings. But, I believe that such a desire is misguided. The ultimate goal of non-dualistic Buddhism (or Mahayana) is that we become content with being ordinary persons.

#### A. Zen

Dr. Takashi Ogawa, a modern Japanese Zen scholar, says, “The Zen Buddhist experience consists of two parts. In the first part, practitioners learn to attain enlightenment; and in the second part, they learn to forget enlightenment and become ordinary persons.” Since enlightenment means attaining non-dualistic wisdom, the person who attains enlightenment lives in the world of oneness where he is no longer attached to any fixed dualistic values, such as, secular and religious, spiritual and nonspiritual, and profane and sacred.

Dogen indicates that an awakened person is an ordinary person because the content of his awakening is his insight into the fact that he is an ordinary person, or a deluded person. He says, “Buddhas are those who are greatly awakened to their deludedness.” (Cf. *ZMD*, vol. 1, “*Genjo-koan*,” p. 33)

In the same vein, the Zen master Nan-ch'uan said, "The ordinary mind is the way." The following words by two Zen masters teach us that in the advanced stage of learning Buddhism, we should be liberated even from Buddhist concepts, such as "Buddha" and "Dharma," that contain some dualistic nuance, although it is perfectly all right for us to use them in the initial stage of learning Buddhism.

Dogen says, "If we are not directly living Buddhahood, we are not yet liberated from the fetter of "Buddha" and the fetter of "Dharma." We belong to the group of Buddha-demons and Dharma-demons."

(MDS, vol. 2, "Gyobutsu-igi," p. 33, with modification by N. Haneda)

Lin-chi says, "Follower of the way, if you want to get the kind of understanding that accords with the Dharma, never be misled by others. Whether you're facing inward or facing outward, whatever you meet up with, just kill it! If you meet a Buddha, kill the Buddha. If you meet a patriarch, kill the patriarch." (ZTML, p. 52)

Probably the following words of Lin-chi most succinctly show us the importance of becoming ordinary persons:

The way I see it, there's no call for anything special. Just act ordinary, put on your clothes, eat your rice, pass the time doing nothing. You who come from here and there, you all have a mind to do something. You search for Buddha, search for the Dharma, search for emancipation, search for a way to get out of the threefold world. Idiots, trying to get out of the threefold world! Where will you go? (ZTML, pp. 53-4)

The following is an excerpt from the *Records of the Words of the Zen Master Chao-chou*. Dogen considered the Zen master Chao-chou one of the greatest Zen monks in Zen history. The following is my translation of Chao-chou's verses. I have translated them in prose:

My belt is almost worn out. My underpants are so torn up that it's hard to put my legs in them. There is a ton of dark-brown dandruff on my head. Earlier in my life I was hoping to save people by performing my practices. Who could have imagined that I have turned into such an idle fool? This dilapidated mountain temple is terrible. I can hardly find grains of rice in a pot of morning gruel. I am just facing dust that is coming through a space between sliding doors.

There is no friend around; only sparrows that are noisily chattering. Sitting alone, I occasionally hear the sound of falling leaves. Who said that monks should transcend love and hate? When I reflect on the past, my tears inadvertently gush out of my eyes. My handkerchief is totally wet. Things that make me upset are many. Things that accord with my wishes are few.

I cannot stand Mr. Kokuoro, a guy in the East Village. He never gave a donation to the temple. But he lets his donkeys graze on the grass in the temple yard, thinking it belongs to him. The last time I ate a sweet cake was one year ago. Recollecting its taste, I vainly salivate. The time in which I have right mindfulness is very short. My mind is occupied with all kinds of grudges and complaints. There is not even one good person among temple members. Those who visit the temple just demand that I serve them a cup of tea. If I do not serve it, they are in a bad mood when they leave.

Who could have imagined that I would become this way after I shaved my head? Although I became a monk because some people invited me to do so, I am almost dying now because of humiliation and hunger. The village head, officials, and villagers do not have even the slightest respect for me. If someone unexpectedly comes to the temple, he just says that he wants to borrow some tea and some sheets of paper.

(Tr. by N. Haneda. Cf. *Chugoku-zen-goroku* [Records of the Words of Chinese Zen Masters], vol. 11, published by Chikuma-shobo)

## B. Shin

Shinran identified himself as an ordinary person who failed in all kinds of religious practices. He did not keep any one of precepts. He was married and had children. He ate meat and drank sake. He was a total dropout from the traditional Buddhism of his time, dualistic Buddhism. Probably because Shinran had a totally ordinary lifestyle, D.T. Suzuki, a Zen teacher, called Shin Buddhism "the climax of Mahayana Buddhism." Shinran said the following words:

"I am an ordinary person possessed of blind passions."

“I am neither a monk nor a lay Buddhist.” (*CWS*, p. 289, with modification by N. Haneda)

“Do not express outwardly signs of wisdom, goodness, or diligence because you are inwardly possessing falsity!” (*CWS*, p. 466)

“It would be better for you to be looked upon as a cattle thief than as a pious religious person.” (*Kuden-sho*)

Let me explain the last quote here. In Shinran’s time, stealing an ox from a farmer’s family was considered the worst offence because it made the family lose their main labor force and they all had to perish. Shinran says that behaving like a pious religious person is an offence that is worse than stealing an ox. Further, Rev. Haya Akegarasu (1877-1954, a modern Japanese Shin teacher) says, “Just as *miso* (bean paste) that smells like *miso* is not first-class *miso*, a Buddhist who smells like a Buddhist is not an authentic Buddhist.”

Under the name of religion or Buddhism, we seek something special and extraordinary—something sacred, holy, religious, and spiritual. On the basis of our attachment to such dualistic values, we seek special goals, such as enlightenment, *shinjin*, and “birth in the Pure Land,” and some special religious identities, such as “Buddhist,” “Zen Buddhist,” and “Shin Buddhist.” But, if we seek them, we have not yet departed from dualistic Buddhism. We have yet to reach true Buddhism. Dogen says, “If enlightenment has turned out to be what we expected it to be [on the basis of dualistic thinking], it is a very dubious one.”

It is so wonderful that we can be ordinary persons. Being an ordinary person is liberation from the dualistic self and religious self-love. But, it’s so difficult for us to be ordinary persons. Few people *can be* ordinary. Individuals such as Dogen and Shinran *could be* ordinary. But many of us *cannot be* ordinary. We always want to be special and extraordinary. We always try to distinguish ourselves from others by adorning ourselves with religious decorations, such as labels and identities. By the very efforts we make to seek something special and extraordinary we are moving away from our original self and our original freedom. True freedom lies in being an ordinary person. It is so crucial that we understand this core message of non-dualistic (Mahayana) Buddhism—“Ordinariness is the way.” (12/17, 2023)

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#### Notes:

We held the 2023 Maida Center Summer Retreat on July 28–30 at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley. Twenty-four people attended the retreat. Dr. Haneda spoke on “The Similarities between Zen and Shin.”

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

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