

The Dharma Breeze

December, 2025

Volume XXXII

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Shinran's View of the Two Types of "Bodhicitta (the Starting Point)"

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Introduction

In this essay I want to discuss Shinran's view of the two types of *bodhicitta*. Although Shinran discussed all kinds of ideas in his teaching, he considered *bodhicitta* (the starting point) the most important issue in Buddhism. He teaches us that if we have a wrong starting point in Buddhism, all the things that follow, such as practice and attainment, will be wrong. No matter how many practices we may perform or how long we may perform them, all our efforts will be in vain. He also teaches us that if we have the true starting point, all the things that follow will be all right.

Bodhicitta (i.e., a Sanskrit word referring to "aspiration [*citta*]" for attaining "Buddhahood [*bodhi*]" means the starting point in Buddhism. Buddhist scriptures often say that when a person meets a buddha, he awakens *bodhicitta*, aspiration for attaining Buddhahood. Then, he becomes a *bodhisattva* (i.e., a Sanskrit word referring to "a person [*sattva*]" seeking "Buddhahood [*bodhi*]." When a *bodhisattva* goes through the Buddhist path, he becomes a buddha.

Usually people think that there is only one type of *bodhicitta*, one starting point, in Buddhism. But, Shinran believed that there were two types of *bodhicitta*: provisional (or wrong) *bodhicitta* and true *bodhicitta*. The two types of *bodhicitta* that Shinran talks about are as follows:

1. "Self-power *bodhicitta*" (or "Path of Sages *bodhicitta*"): provisional *bodhicitta*, the basis of provisional Buddhism
2. "Other-Power *bodhicitta*" (or "Pure Land *bodhicitta*"): true *bodhicitta*, the basis of True Buddhism (i.e., Shinshu or Shin Buddhism)

When Shinran embarked on the Buddhist path on Mt. Hiei, he awakened the first *bodhicitta*. He thought that this *bodhicitta* was the authentic one. But, he could not attain his goal on the basis of it. Later after he met his teacher Honen, he awakened the second *bodhicitta*, true *bodhicitta*, and experienced spiritual liberation. He realized that the *bodhicitta* that he initially awakened on Mt. Hiei was a wrong one that was based on dualistic human thinking. He also realized that the second *bodhicitta* was based on the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom. He learned that the second *bodhicitta* had such tremendous power that it necessarily assured the attainment of the ultimate goal in Buddhism, i.e., unsurpassed Buddhahood. Thus, he teaches us that the transition from the first *bodhicitta* to the second one is the most important issue in Buddhism.

Many of us believe that we have already awakened true *bodhicitta* and do not doubt its validity. On the basis of it, we perform various practices and strive to attain Buddhahood. But Shinran, who believed that the first *bodhicitta* that we awaken is a provisional (or wrong) one, challenges us to examine the validity of the first *bodhicitta* and recognize its mistake. He tells us that we must further awaken the second *bodhicitta*, true *bodhicitta*.

The outline of this essay is as follows. In Part One, I will discuss an outline of Shinran's schema called the "Three-Stage Transition." This schema shows us the three stages that Shinran went through as a Buddhist. By examining Shinran's spiritual growth through these three stages, I want to show that Shinran experienced the awakening of the two types of

bodhicitta, self-power *bodhicitta* and Other Power *bodhicitta*. The former was the basis of the first and second stages, and Other Power *bodhicitta* was the basis of the third stage.

In Part Two, I will first discuss Shinran's doctrinal evaluation schema called "Two [Bodhicitta] Categories that Each Have Two Sub-Categories (*Niso-shiju*).” In this schema, Shinran classifies all Buddhist schools into four categories that are based on the two types of *bodhicitta*. He says that the first three categories that include all non-Shinshu schools, such as Tendai and Shingon, are based on self-power *bodhicitta*. He also says that only the fourth category, the Shinshu, is based on Other-Power *bodhicitta*.

After discussing Shinran's doctrinal evaluation schema, I will discuss the three major differences between Buddhism that is based on self-power *bodhicitta* and Buddhism that is based on Other-Power *bodhicitta*.

Part One

The Three-Stage Transition: Shinran's Experience of the Two Types of *Bodhicitta*

The three-stage transition is one of the most important and unique teachings that Shinran teaches in his main work, the *Kyogyoshinsho*. I believe that this schema is one of the greatest teachings in world religions. In this schema we can see Shinran's view of the two types of *bodhicitta* and the two types of Buddhism, provisional Buddhism and True Buddhism, which are based on the two types of *bodhicitta*.

When Shinran was writing the *Kyogyoshinsho*, he reflected upon his life and came up with the schema of the three-stage transition. This schema is a conclusive summary of Shinran's life as a Buddhist. It shows us the spiritual transition Shinran experienced; it shows the process by which he critically examined himself. Thus, we can say that this schema is an expression of his self-criticism or confession. We can also say that it is designed to criticize other Buddhist schools.

Shinran explains these three stages in terms of the three vows of the 48 Vows—vows that Bodhisattva Dharmakara made to become a Buddha—found in the *Larger Sutra*, the most important textual basis of the Shinshu. The three vows are the 19th, 20th, and 18th Vows. Shinran calls the first stage “the 19th Vow stage”; the second stage “the 20th Vow stage”; and the third stage “the 18th Vow stage.”

These three vows described the three types of practitioners. Shinran called the practitioners that the 19th Vow described as “the falsely settled”; the practitioners that the 20th Vow described as “the unsettled”; and the practitioners that the 18th Vow described as “the truly settled.” He identified himself with these three types of practitioners. He was initially the first type of practitioner, then became the second type, and eventually became the third type. The first two types of practitioners awaken self-power *bodhicitta* and the third type awakens Other-Power *bodhicitta*. Now let me discuss the contents of the three stages, or the three types of practitioners.

I. The First Stage (i.e., the 19th Vow Stage)—the Stage of the Falsely Settled Who Awaken Self-Power *Bodhicitta*

At age nine Shinran went to Mt. Hiei, the center of Buddhist learning in his time, to embark on studying and practicing Buddhism. He stayed there for twenty years, until he was twenty-nine. Later in his life, probably in his late fifties, he started to write the *Kyogyoshinsho*. He reflected on his past and identified this twenty-year period on Mt. Hiei as the first stage in his Buddhist life. He thought that he was one of the practitioners, the falsely settled, that the 19th Vow described.

A. Shinran's View of the 19th Vow

Let me first quote the 19th Vow and see how Shinran interpreted it.

If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters—awakening the mind of enlightenment [i.e., *bodhicitta*] and performing meritorious acts—should awaken aspiration with sincere mind and desire to be born in my land, and yet I should not appear before them at the moment of death surrounded by a host of sages, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment.

(*Collected Works of Shinran* [hereinafter abbreviated as *CWS*], p. 208, with modification by Nobuo Haneda)

Let me discuss how Shinran interprets the three points, i.e., (1) the starting point (or *bodhicitta*), (2) the practice, and (3) the attainment, which this vow describes, in terms of his own life.

1. The starting point (or *bodhicitta*) of the falsely settled

Shinran identified his twenty-year life on Mt. Hiei with the first stage; he identified himself with the practitioners that the 19th Vow described. He thought that he awakened *bodhicitta* just like the practitioners who “awakened the mind of enlightenment [i.e., *bodhicitta*].” He calls it “self-power *bodhicitta*.”

Shinran further says that “self-power *bodhicitta*” and the three minds—“sincere mind [*shishin*],” “awakening aspiration [*hotsugan*],” and “desiring to be born [*yokusho*]” (that the 19th Vow mentions)—are synonymous. He calls these three minds “the self-power three minds.” He says that both “self-power *bodhicitta*” and “the self-power three minds” are based on dualistic thinking.

2. The practice of the falsely settled

Shinran interprets “performing meritorious acts” that the 19th Vow mentions as “sundry practices” that are performed on the basis of self-power *bodhicitta*. Self-power *bodhicitta* is synonymous with dualistic thinking that divides things into plus values and minus values, seeing meaning only in the former. Thus, these practitioners view blind passions as negative and attempt to realize their ideal goal of Buddhahood by eliminating them. They engage in sundry practices to realize an ideal goal that is full of plus values.

Shinran performed sundry practices, such as keeping precepts, various forms of meditation, and saying the Name of the Buddha. He attempted to become a buddha, a sage, by eliminating his blind passions. But he was unable to become a buddha through those practices. He felt more and more frustrated as he intensified his efforts. His practices did not liberate him from blind passions. Instead, they made him recognize that the evil and impurity in him were not so shallow as he had thought. His efforts to root out his blind passions simply made him recognize their bottomless depths. He realized that his practices were no match for them. Shinran hit a dead end.

3. The attainment of the falsely settled

The 19th Vow describes the attainment of these practitioners: “[they] desire to be born in my land... I appear before them at the moment of death.” Shinran calls their attainment “birth under the twin sala trees.” By this expression Shinran means that these practitioners desire to emulate the peaceful demise of a sage that Shakyamuni experienced under the twin sala trees.

Shinran says that the self-power *bodhicitta* he awakened on Mt. Hiei could not lead him to true spiritual liberation; he stayed in the world of delusion. Self-power *bodhicitta* that is based on dualistic thinking is so idealistic that Shinran could not pursue it. In the following two verses, he talks about the limitations of self-power *bodhicitta*:

Self-power *bodhicitta* taught in the Path of Sages
Is beyond my mind and words;
I, a foolish being, ever sinking in transmigration—
How could I awaken it?

Under the guidance of buddhas who appeared in this world,
Three times the sands of the Ganges in number,
I awakened the aspiration for supreme enlightenment [i.e., self-power
bodhicitta],
But my self-power failed, and I continued to transmigrate.

(*CWS*, pp. 402-403, with modification by N. H.)

Thus the first stage was the period in which Shinran eventually became a failure at all traditional practices. Although he performed all kinds of practices to attain Buddhahood by eliminating blind passions, he failed in that attempt. Now let me discuss the doctrinal basis of the first stage: dualistic thinking.

B. The Basis of the First Stage: Dualistic Thinking

1. What is dualistic thinking?

Dualistic thinking means the regular way of thinking that we use in our daily lives. It is the way of thinking that people such as our parents and schoolteachers have taught us. It means that we divide things into two—plus values (such as good, right, pure, beautiful, and happy) and minus values (such as evil, wrong, impure, ugly, and unhappy).

After dividing things into two types of values, we become attached to plus values, considering plus values meaningful and minus values meaningless. Dualistic thinking itself is not wrong, but our *attachment to it* is the problem; it becomes the cause of human suffering. (Dualistic thinking is useful and beneficial because it has developed many wonderful things, such as culture, technology, and science. But it cannot realize ultimate spiritual liberation and cannot realize the fulfillment of our lives because it sees meaning only in plus values, not in minus values. It is the basis of objective knowledge, not of subjective wisdom.)

Since dualistic thinking and pragmatic thinking are synonymous, we believe that Buddhism should satisfy our practical needs—it should be useful in enhancing plus values and eliminating minus values. This pragmatic mentality is all right in the initial stage of learning Buddhism. But as we advance in the Buddhist path, we must recognize the mistake of having this mentality.

Shinran identifies dualistic thinking with terms such as “self-power,” “twofold mind,” and “calculating mind.”

2. Where there is dualistic thinking, there is a practice.

On the basis of dualistic thinking we feel that our present life is unsatisfactory because it has negative values, such as blind passions. We envision an ideal goal in the future, a goal full of plus values. In order to realize this ideal goal in the future, we engage in various practices. We attempt to better ourselves by eliminating minus values, such as blind passions. Where there is dualistic thinking, there is always a practice because a practice is designed to realize plus values by eliminating minus values.

3. Attachment to dualistic thinking ends up in samsara (i.e., an endless cycle of births and deaths”).

Attachment to dualistic thinking (or fixed dualistic values) is the basic cause of human suffering and samsara (i.e., “an endless cycle of births and deaths”). Those who are attached to dualistic thinking cannot appreciate both plus values and minus values; they keep seeking only plus values. They are ignorant of the truth of conditional arising—that everything arises because of causes and conditions. Being ignorant of the truth, they overestimate the ability of dualistic thinking. They inevitably encounter situations in which they cannot control things and people. They experience tremendous *duhkha* (“suffering” or “unsatisfactoriness”).

Pursuing only fixed plus values makes people have difficulties. When a dream (or plus value) that people pursue on the basis of dualistic thinking disappears, they come up with another dream. They experience an endless cycle of births and deaths of a dream. Their life becomes samsara (i.e., an endless cycle of births and deaths). Always chasing an ideal goal in the future, they cannot settle in the present.

Shinran says that only the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom that appreciates both plus values and minus values can realize ultimate spiritual liberation and can make us settle in the present.

II. The Second Stage (i.e., the 20th Vow Stage)—the Stage of the Unsettled Who Awaken Self-Power *Bodhicitta*

On Mt. Hiei, Shinran found himself a failure at all practices and experienced a dead end. He felt tremendous despair. The self-power *bodhicitta* he awakened failed him. It was then that Shinran met his teacher Honen. Shinran was deeply moved by him. His meeting with his teacher was the most important event in his life. Through this meeting, he was liberated. He became a follower of the Jodo-shu, the school that Honen founded. The teaching of this school was based on the *Contemplation Sutra* (which together with the *Larger Sutra* and the *Amida Sutra* formed the triple Pure Land sutra). Honen taught the one practice of “saying the Name” (or the nembutsu).

A. Shinran’s View of the 20th Vow

Let us first cite the 20th Vow and see how Shinran interpreted it.

If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, on hearing my Name, should place their thoughts on my land, cultivate the root of all merits, and direct their merits with sincere mind desiring to be born in my land, and yet not ultimately attain it, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment.

(CWS, p. 229, with modification by N. H.)

Let me discuss how Shinran interpreted the three points, i.e., (1) the starting point (or *bodhicitta*), (2) the practice, and (3) the attainment, which this vow describes, in terms of his own life.

1. The starting point (or *bodhicitta*) of the unsettled

This Vow says, “on hearing my Name, [they] should place their thoughts on my land.” These words describe what happened to Shinran when he met Honen. When Shinran met Honen, the teacher was constantly saying the Name of Amida Buddha. (This saying of the Name is also called the *nembutsu*.) Having heard the Name said by his teacher, Shinran awakened aspiration to be born in the Pure Land, which the words, “place their thoughts on my land,” imply. Shinran calls these practitioners’ aspiration to be born in the Pure Land “self-power *bodhicitta*.”

Shinran further says that “self-power *bodhicitta*” and the three minds—“sincere mind [*shishin*],” “directing merits [*eko*],” and “desiring to be born [*yokusho*]” (mentioned in the 20th Vow)—are synonymous. He called these three minds “the self-power three minds.” He thought that self-power *bodhicitta* and “the self-power three minds” were based on dualistic thinking.

2. The practice of the unsettled

The Vow says, “[they] cultivate the root of all merits and direct their merits.” Shinran thought that these words refer to “the practice of saying the Name.” Honen taught Shinran that since Amida Buddha gave the practice of saying the Name specifically to those who failed at traditional practices, as a last resort for their salvation, Shinran should take it up. The teacher also taught him that saying the Name alone assured birth in the Pure Land and other practices were not necessary for birth. Honen chanted the Name hundreds or thousands of times a day. When Shinran met his teacher, he renounced the sundry practices of Mt. Hiei and took up the one practice of saying the Name. He continued this practice for two or three years before he entered the third stage.

3. The attainment of the unsettled

Shinran said that the practitioners of the second stage attain “birth that is noncomprehensible,” i.e., birth in the Pure Land after death. He said that the Pure Land where these practitioners initially sought to be born was the provisional Pure Land, not the True Land, because their practice was based on self-power *bodhicitta*. But if their self-power practice of saying the Name turns into hearing the meaning of the Name, Other-Power practice, they would “ultimately” (i.e., a word mentioned in the 19th Vow) attain birth in the True Pure Land. Shinran said that the practice of saying the Name was a provisional means that Amida Buddha gave to people in order to guide them to the attainment of Other-Power *bodhicitta* (or *shinjin*) in the third stage.

B. The Basis of the Second Stage: Dualistic Thinking (See above, pp. 3-4)

As far as the doctrinal basis of the second stage is concerned, it is no different from that of the first stage: It is dualistic thinking. Being deeply attached to dualistic thinking, the practitioners of the second stage do not doubt its validity. Being attached to dualistic values, such as good and evil, pure and impure, this world and the other world, they engage in practices in which they pursue plus values, hating minus values. They cannot get out of *samsara*.

III. The Third Stage (i.e., the 18th Vow Stage)—the Stage of the Truly Settled Who Awaken Other-Power *Bodhicitta*

A few years after Shinran entered the second stage, he seriously read the *Larger Sutra*. Then, he realized that the Jodo-shu teaching that was based on the *Contemplation Sutra*, and was generally known as Honen’s teaching, was actually not the true teaching of Honen. Shinran now realized that the teaching that was based on the *Larger Sutra* was what Honen was really teaching. Shinran called the teaching “Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land Buddhism)” and identified it with the Buddhism of the third stage. In the third stage Shinran understood the Pure Land teaching in a totally different way from traditional Pure Land masters.

At the outset of the second volume of the *Larger Sutra*, we find a passage that says that Dharmakara fulfilled the three vows (i.e., the 17th, 18th, and 11th Vows) and the liberation of all people was realized. The passage is known as “the Three-Vow Fulfillment Passage.” Shinran thought that this passage is the most important doctrinal basis of his teaching. He thought that it described the spiritual liberation that he experienced in the third stage. He also thought that it talked about the universal way all human beings are saved. It is not an exaggeration to say that all his writings are commentaries on this passage.

Many Shin teachers say that the textual basis of the third stage is the 18th Vow. Their view is not wrong but is not complete. Shinran would say that the textual basis of the third stage is “the Three-Vow Fulfillment Passage.” This passage talks about the *fulfillment* of the 18th Vow together with that of the 17th and 11th Vows. The main difference between Shinran and other

Pure Land masters is this: Shinran viewed the *fulfillment* of the 18th Vow (together with the *fulfillment* of the other two vows) as the basis of liberation, and other Pure Land masters viewed the 18th Vow alone as the basis of liberation. Shinran said that the liberation of all human beings that Dharmakara vowed (or promised) in the 18th Vow *had already been fulfilled* in actual historical reality. Shinran also said that the 18th Vow *had already been fulfilled* in his personal life. But, other Pure Land masters' teachings were based on the 18th Vow, i.e., words of promise, indicating that people *would be saved*, i.e., *would be born in the Pure Land, after death*, not in this life. If a teaching is based on a vow, a promise of attainment after death, we cannot know if the vow is true or not until we experience birth in the Pure Land after death. In such a teaching, there remains doubt and uncertainty in the minds of believers.

Compared with other Pure Land masters' teachings that were based on the 18th Vow, a promise of future attainment, Shinran's teaching is quite powerful because he is talking about Buddhism from personal experience, as a person who has already experienced a wonderful spiritual liberation here and now in this life.

A. The Doctrinal Basis of the Third Stage: the Three-Vow (i.e., 17th, 18th, and 11th Vows) Fulfillment Passage

Now let me discuss Shinran's view of "the Three-Vow Fulfillment Passage," his most important text that describes the contents of the third stage. Shinran read the text in a unique way. No other Pure Land masters ever read the text in such a way. (For the traditional way of reading this text, please see *CWS*, p.474, footnote.)

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. All sentient beings, as they hear the Name [that is being said by all Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters], realize even one moment of shinjin and joy, which Amida directs to them with his sincere mind. Desiring to be born in that land, they then [i.e., immediately] attain birth [in the Pure Land] and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.

(*CWS*, pp. 296-297, 474-476, with modification by N. H.)

1. The fulfillment of the 17th Vow—the realization of the calling voice (or the Name), "Come to the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom (*Namu Amida Butsu*)!"

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.

Shinran says that the expression, "The Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters," refers to historical teachers, such as Shakyamuni and the seven patriarchs that include Honen.

The expression, "praising the majestic power and the virtues, inconceivably profound, of the Buddha of immeasurable life," means that historical teachers are saying the Name (i.e., "Come to the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom [*Namu Amida Butsu*]!"). This means that historical teachers are telling people that they should leave reliance on the world of dualistic thinking and desire to be born in the world of the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom (i.e., the Pure Land). When Shinran met Honen, the teacher was praising the virtues of Amida, i.e., telling Shinran, "Come to the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom [*Namu Amida Butsu*]!"

Since Honen's "praising the virtues of the Amida" or "saying the Name" is encouraging Shinran to take refuge in the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom, our discussion of the nature of nondualistic wisdom is in order.

Nondualistic wisdom means insight into true reality or the truth of suchness (or things as they are). It also means insight into oneness or the truth of "neither arising nor perishing" (or "neither plus nor minus"). This wisdom does not divide things into plus values and minus values, such as good and evil, pure and impure, happiness and suffering, samsara and nirvana. Unlike dualistic thinking that finds meaning only in plus values, this wisdom enables us to find meaning not only in plus values but also in minus values. Since this wisdom makes us see positive meanings in negative things, it is called "the wisdom that transforms minus into plus." This wisdom alone can realize the fulfillment of human life.

2. The fulfillment of the 18th Vow: awakening of shinjin (or Other-Power *bodhicitta*) by hearing the Name

All sentient beings, as they hear the Name [that is being said by all Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters], realize even one moment of shinjin and joy, which Amida directs to them with his sincere mind. Desiring to be born in that land, they then [i.e., immediately] attain birth [in the Pure Land] and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.

As far as Shinran is concerned, the first sentence here is the most important part not only of the *Larger Sutra* but also of all Buddhist literature. The expression, “all sentient beings,” refers to those who are failures at traditional Buddhist practices, or those who have been suffering because of their attachment to dualistic thinking. Shinran identified himself as one of them. When these people hear and understand the meaning of the Name, the words of nondualistic wisdom by historical teachers, they awaken shinjin, i.e., Other-Power *bodhicitta*.

Shinran says that shinjin does not arise in the minds of people without “the supportive power” of historical teachers. (*CWS*, p. 79-80) When Shinran met Honen and heard the teacher saying the Name and understood the meaning of the Name, he awakened shinjin (or Other-Power *bodhicitta*). Shinran teaches us that meeting with a historical teacher, such as Shakyamuni, the seven patriarchs, and our personal teachers, is an absolute condition for the awakening of shinjin.

Shinran says that hearing alone is necessary for awakening shinjin. He explains the reason hearing alone is necessary as follows. The Buddha knew that dualistic thinking was not the cause of human liberation but the cause of human suffering and that our efforts to liberate ourselves on the basis of dualistic thinking were futile. Thus, before we recognized our mistake of being attached to dualistic thinking, the Buddha took the initiative to liberate us; he prepared and offered a solution to our problem. To save us he came up with the Name, a calling voice, “Come to the Buddha’s wisdom!” By giving this means, he wanted to awaken in us shinjin or the Other-Power threefold mind (i.e., “sincere mind [*shishin*],” “entrusting [*shingyo* or shinjin],” and “desiring to be born [*yokusho*]”) that the 18th Vow mentions.

Since the Buddha already gave us the Name, the only thing necessary for us to do is to hear the Name, the words of nondualistic wisdom, from our historical teachers. When we hear the challenging voice, “Come to the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom,” we awaken shinjin and simultaneously recognize the mistake of being attached to dualistic thinking.

Shinran says, “The arising of shinjin is the arising of [nondualistic] wisdom in us.” (*Cf. CWS*, p.407) When we awaken shinjin, the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom, we are born in the world of the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom or the world of true reality (i.e., the Pure Land).

3. The fulfillment of the 11th Vow: the realization of the two benefits—“the true start” and “the true ending”

They then [or immediately] attain birth [in that land] and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.

(*CWS*, p. 297, with modification by N. H.)

The fulfillment of the 11th Vow means that a person receives the two benefits—“the true start” (i.e., shinjin or Other-Power *bodhicitta*) and “the true ending” (i.e., attainment of unsurpassed Buddhahood or *parinirvana*). As for “the true start” aspect, the fulfillment of the 11th Vow is synonymous with the fulfillment of the 18th Vow. The following five terms are all synonyms of “the true start”: shinjin, Other-Power *bodhicitta*, attaining birth in the Pure Land, the stage of the truly settled, and the stage of nonretrogression.

When a person awakens shinjin, he is said to “then [i.e., immediately] attain birth [in that land].” On the basis of this sentence, Shinran says that the shinjin person is immediately born in the Pure Land *here and now in this life*, not after death. It means that he lives his life dynamically and meaningfully and fulfills and completes his life; he does not need another life after death. The fulfillment of one’s life is “the true ending” (or attainment of Buddhahood).

The attainment of the practitioners of the first two (i.e., 19th and 20th Vow) stages is based on dualistic thinking. They seek ideal goals, such as birth in the Pure Land and Buddhahood, in the future or after death. In contrast, those of the third (i.e., 18th Vow) stage immediately attain birth in the world of the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom (i.e., the Pure Land) here and now in this life.

The Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom terminates our attachment to dualistic thinking; it liberates us from samsara (i.e., an endless cycle of births and deaths). We no longer live in an imaginary world in which we pursue an ideal goal in the future through practices. We become content with our present lives—with what we already are or what we already have. We start to live our lives dynamically and meaningfully, discovering meaning in all the things we experience in our lives. We will eventually attain unsurpassed Buddhahood—the fulfillment of our lives.

Receiving shinjin (Other-Power *bodhicitta*) or becoming one with the Dharma (or true reality) means that we become true seekers. Embodying the spirit of the perfect student (that “Bodhisattva Dharmakara” symbolizes), we keep seeking the Dharma without being attached to any fixed ideas. The seeking process itself becomes the goal. Because the Pure Land is the land of the Buddha’s aspiration where all its residents are passionate seekers, those who are born there dwell in the stage of nonretrogression (or the truly settled), i.e., they all become passionate seekers that are assured of attaining unsurpassed Buddhahood.

Part Two

Differences between Self-Power *Bodhicitta* and Other-Power *Bodhicitta*

I. Shinran’s View of “Two [*Bodhicitta*] Categories that Each Have Two Sub-Categories (*Niso-shiju*)”

Now let me talk about Shinran’s view of the two types of *bodhicitta* that we can see in Shinran’s schema called “Two [*Bodhicitta*] Categories that Each Have Two Sub-Categories (*Niso-shiju*).” In the Shin volume of his *Kyogyoshinsho*, Shinran discusses two categories of *bodhicitta*, i.e., “lengthwise *bodhicitta*” and “crosswise *bodhicitta*.” He identifies the former with self-power *bodhicitta* and the latter with Other-Power *bodhicitta*. He further says that “lengthwise *bodhicitta*” has two sub-categories, i.e., “transcending lengthwise” and “departing lengthwise”; and that “crosswise *bodhicitta*” has two sub-categories, i.e., “transcending crosswise” and “departing crosswise.” He says,

Further, the *bodhicitta* is of two kinds [of orientation]: lengthwise and crosswise.

The lengthwise is further of two kinds: transcending lengthwise and departing lengthwise... The crosswise is also of two kinds: transcending crosswise and departing crosswise.

(*CWS*, pp. 107-108. See also *CWS*, p.114.)

On the basis of this schema, Shinran classifies all Buddhist schools into four categories. An outline of these four categories of Buddhism that Shinran discusses is as follows;

- A. The Buddhism of “departing lengthwise”: Its practitioners awaken self-power *bodhicitta*. Shinran calls this type of Buddhism “provisional Buddhism.”
- B. The Buddhism of “transcending lengthwise”: Its practitioners awaken self-power *bodhicitta*. Shinran calls this type of Buddhism “provisional Buddhism.”
- C. The Buddhism of “departing crosswise”: Its practitioners awaken self-power *bodhicitta*. (According to Shinran’s words in the above quote, “crosswise” here should mean Other-Power *bodhicitta*. But he thinks that these practitioners awaken self-power *bodhicitta* because he identifies “departing” [i.e., the word in “departing crosswise”], as referring to a gradual way of leaving samsara, with self-power.) Shinran calls this type of Buddhism “provisional Buddhism.”
- D. The Buddhism of “transcending crosswise”: Its practitioners awaken Other-Power *bodhicitta*. Shinran calls this type of Buddhism “True Buddhism (*Shinshu*).”

Let me further explain Shinran’s four categories of Buddhism by comparing their practitioners to the four types of insects in a bamboo tree.

A. The Buddhism of “Departing Lengthwise”: Its Practitioners Awaken Self-Power *Bodhicitta*.

The practitioners of this Buddhism *gradually* (i.e., “departing”) attain Buddhahood through *self-power* (i.e., “lengthwise”) practices. According to Shinran, this Buddhism includes the Hinayana teaching (i.e., the Kusha school) and the two Mahayana schools (i.e., the Hosso school and the

Jojitsu school). This Buddhism is part of the first stage of the 19th Vow. Shinran studied and practiced this Buddhism on Mt. Hiei.

We can compare the practitioners of this Buddhism to an insect that attempts to get out of a bamboo tree lengthwise by eating the trunk.

“A bamboo tree” symbolizes the world of samsara. *Gradually* (i.e., “departing”) means that it takes a long time for the practitioners of this Buddhism to get out of samsara. It is necessary for them to perform various practices over many life spans to attain arhathood (i.e., sainthood) or Buddhahood. *Self-power* (i.e., “lengthwise”) means that these practitioners rely solely on their own practical abilities and efforts (that are based on dualistic thinking) to attain their goal.

B. The Buddhism of “Transcending Lengthwise”: Its Practitioners Awaken Self-Power *Bodhicitta*.

The practitioners of this Buddhism *immediately* (i.e., “transcending”) attain Buddhahood through *self-power* (i.e., “lengthwise”) practices. According to Shinran, this Buddhism includes some Mahayana schools, such as Zen, the Shingon school, and the Tendai school. This Buddhism is also part of the first stage of the 19th Vow. Shinran practiced this Buddhism on Mt. Hiei.

We can compare the practitioners of this Buddhism to an insect that attempts to get out of a bamboo tree lengthwise by flying out of it.

Immediately (i.e., “transcending”) means that these practitioners immediately get out of samsara. The practices that they perform enable them to attain Buddhahood immediately in their present lives. *Self-power* (i.e., “lengthwise”) means that these practitioners rely solely on their own practical abilities and efforts (that are based on dualistic thinking) to attain Buddhahood.

C. The Buddhism of “Departing Crosswise”: Its Practitioners Awaken Self-Power *Bodhicitta*.

The practitioners of this Buddhism *gradually* (i.e., “departing”) attain birth in the Pure Land by relying upon *Other Power* (i.e., “crosswise”). According to Shinran, this Buddhism includes the Jodo-shu (or the second stage of the 20th Vow), the school that advocates the self-power practice of saying the Name.

We can compare the practitioners of this Buddhism to an insect that attempts to get out of a bamboo tree crosswise by eating the trunk.

Gradually (i.e., “departing”) means that it takes a long time for the practitioners of this Buddhism to get out of samsara. It is necessary for them to perform the self-power practice of saying the Name in order to attain birth in the Pure Land after death. *Other-Power* (i.e., “crosswise”) means that these practitioners rely on the saving power of Amida Buddha, a personal savior. They also rely on their own practical abilities and efforts (that are based on dualistic thinking) to attain birth in the Pure Land.

D. The Buddhism of “Transcending Crosswise”: Its Practitioners Awaken Other-Power *Bodhicitta*.

The practitioners of this Buddhism *immediately* (i.e., “transcending”) attain birth in the Pure Land through *Other Power* (i.e., “crosswise”) here and now in this life. According to Shinran, this refers to the Shinshu, the third stage of the 18th Vow.

We can compare the practitioners of this Buddhism to an insect that transcends the bamboo tree while staying in the midst of it.

Immediately (i.e., “transcend”) means that these practitioners immediately transcend samsara. It is not necessary for them to perform any practice in order to attain birth in the Pure Land. *Other-Power* (i.e., “crosswise”) means that when these practitioners hear the Name (i.e., “Come to the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom [that “Amida Buddha” symbolizes]!”), they awaken shinjin and receive the Buddha’s wisdom. They immediately transcend samsara and experience spiritual liberation. Here “Amida Buddha” is not a personal savior but a symbol of the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom. Just by receiving the wisdom that transforms the negative into the positive, these practitioners are immediately born in the world of the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom (i.e., the Pure Land). Since the Buddha’s wisdom transforms samsara into nirvana—all the negative and meaningless into the positive and meaningful, they do not have to run away from the world of samsara (i.e., “the bamboo”) and seek another ideal world outside it. They can transcend samsara while staying in the midst of it. They start to live their lives meaningfully, discovering positive meanings in what they initially thought of as negative. They are like lotus flowers blossoming in the midst of muddy water.

II. The Three Differences between Self-Power *Bodhicitta* and Other-Power *Bodhicitta*

We could discuss many differences between self-power *bodhicitta* and Other-Power *bodhicitta*, but here I will discuss the most outstanding differences between them in regard to three issues: wisdom, practice, and attainment (or goal). The following discussion is a kind of summary of what I have discussed so far.

A. The Differences between the Two Types of *Bodhicitta* in Regard to Wisdom

Self-power *bodhicitta* is based on dualistic human thinking (or wisdom) and Other-Power *bodhicitta* is based on the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom.

1. Self-power *bodhicitta*: It is based on dualistic thinking.

Dualistic thinking means that we divide things into two—plus values (such as good, right, pure, beautiful, and happy) and minus values (such as evil, wrong, impure, ugly, and unhappy). On the basis of this thinking, we fix dualistic Buddhist values, such as “deluded” and “enlightened,” “the impure land” and “the Pure Land,” and “samsara” and “nirvana.” Then, considering plus values meaningful and minus values meaningless, we become attached to the former.

2. Other-Power *bodhicitta*: It is based on the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom.

In contrast to self-power *bodhicitta* that is based on the dualistic thinking, Other-Power *bodhicitta* is based on the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom. Nondualistic wisdom means insight into the truth of oneness or the truth of “neither arising nor perishing” (or “neither plus nor minus”). This wisdom does not divide things into plus values and minus values. Unlike dualistic thinking that finds meaning only in plus values, this wisdom enables us to find meaning not only in plus values but also in minus values. Since it transforms minus into plus, it is called “the wisdom that transforms evil into virtue.” (CWS p. 3) It alone can complete and fulfill our lives.

B. Differences between the Two Types of *Bodhicitta* in Regard to Practice

1. Self-power *bodhicitta*: It is the basis of self-power practices.

Dualistic thinking is always accompanied by practices. Practices are designed to attain a future goal, a new condition that practitioners have never experienced before. Practitioners usually feel that their present lives are unsatisfactory because they have blind passions. Then, they envision ideal goals in the future, such as “Buddhahood,” “enlightenment,” and “the Pure Land.” In order to attain their goals in the future, they engage in various self-power practices. They attempt to better themselves by eliminating blind passions. This orientation is known as “By severing blind passions, one attains nirvana [or Buddhahood].”

Having performed self-power practices over twenty years, Shinran came to the conclusion that those practices that were based on dualistic thinking could not realize ultimate spiritual liberation or the fulfillment of human life. Thus, he renounced all of them.

2. Other-Power *bodhicitta*: “Hearing alone” is necessary.

In contrast to self-power *bodhicitta* that is always followed by self-power practices, Other-Power *bodhicitta* does not require any practice. Shinran says that if we awaken Other-Power *bodhicitta*, it alone can make us attain Buddhahood because it contains in itself tremendous power that necessarily enables us to fulfill the Buddhist path.

Having taken up various practices in the first and second stages and having become a failure at all traditional Buddhist practices, Shinran came to the conclusion that self-power based practices were totally in vain. He said there was no need of practice in the Shinshu, in the third stage. He did not perform any traditional Buddhist practices, such as keeping precepts and meditating.

Shinran said that he did not have to perform any practices because there was “the Great Practice (*daigyo*)” that was given to him by the Buddha. “The Great Practice” makes us attain Buddhahood. Shinran explains the meaning of “the Great Practice” as follows.

The Buddha knew that our self-power practices to liberate ourselves were futile and vain. Thus he came up with a means to liberate us. He gave us the Name, a calling voice, “Come to the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom!” Shinran calls the Name “the Great Practice” (in which the word “practice” refers to the Buddha's [or doctor's] practice). “The Great Practice” (or the Name), refers to the working of the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom. It destroys our attachment to dualistic thinking and awakens shinjin (or Other-Power *bodhicitta*) in us. Shinran says that the fulfillment of the 17th Vow and the realization of “the Great Practice” (or the Name) are

synonymous. They both refer to the fact that innumerable historical teachers have appeared in history and are challenging us, saying, “Come to the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom!”

Shinran says that since the Buddha already gave us “the Great Practice” (or the Name), the only thing necessary for us is to hear the Name, the words of nondualistic wisdom, from our historical teachers. We have only to become a totally *passive* hearer (or recipient) of the Dharma, a person who deeply respects historical teachers’ words, forgetting about our own *active* (i.e., self-power based) practices or efforts. Thus, for Shinran, the nembutsu is not so much “saying the Name” as “hearing the Name.” He says, “The nembutsu is not a practice [that human beings initiate].” (*CWS*, p. 665, with modification by N. H.)

All religions of the world and all Buddhist schools talk about the importance of hearing. But there is a fundamental difference between the Shinshu and all other spiritual traditions concerning hearing. All other traditions say, “Hearing is *also* important.” They say that there are many important practices in their teachings, such as praying, various disciplines, and meditating and that hearing is one of them. Thus, they say, “Hearing is *also* important.” Shinran, however, says, “Hearing *alone* is important.”

When we hear the Name, “Come to the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom!,” we awaken shinjin, Other Power *bodhicitta*. Shinran says, “The arising of shinjin is the arising of [nondualistic] wisdom in us.” (Cf. *CWS*, p. 407) Now the dynamic power of the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom (that is contained in the Name), i.e., the power that transforms the negative into the positive, is given to us in the form of shinjin. By receiving shinjin, nondualistic wisdom, we start to live a wonderful life in which the negative turns into the positive. Shinran says that one of the ten benefits that the shinjin person receives in this life is “the benefit of our karmic evil being transformed into good.” (*CWS*, p. 112)

Self-power practitioners seek a wonderful goal in the future through practices. Their orientation is described as: “By severing blind passions, one attains nirvana (or Buddhahood).” But the shinjin person is immediately liberated here and now through hearing the Name alone—through receiving nondualistic wisdom. This orientation is described as: “Without severing blind passions, one attains nirvana (or Buddhahood).” This expression means that we do not have to eliminate blind passions because the Buddha’s wisdom transforms blind passions, the negative, into nirvana, the positive.

C. Differences between the Two Types of *Bodhicitta* in Regard to the Attainment (or Goal)

The main difference between the two types of *bodhicitta* in regard to the attainment (or goal) is that self-power *bodhicitta* cannot make us transcend samsara but Other-Power *bodhicitta* can.

1. Self-power *bodhicitta*: It makes us attain birth in the provisional land.

Self-power *bodhicitta* that is based on dualistic thinking cannot make us transcend samsara (i.e., an endless cycle of births and deaths). If we are attached to dualistic thinking, we cannot appreciate both plus values and minus values. We take up practices to seek plus values; we seek something we don’t have. Always chasing a goal in the future, we experience an endless cycle of the births and deaths of our dreams. We cannot settle in the present.

Shinran says that self-power practices lead us to birth in the provisional land, a small cocoon-like Pure Land that is adorned with only our type of values. He calls this land “the borderland” or “the realm of indolence and pride.” He also calls it “the womb-palace.” (*CWS*, p. 207) This world is very cozy, pleasant, and comfortable, like being in a mother’s womb. But it is a lonely place; we do not have true teachers and friends. Being confined in a small world, we do not have the freedom to leave. We cannot visit many teachers to receive wisdom from them.

2. Other-Power *bodhicitta*: It makes us attain birth in the True Land.

In contrast to self-power *bodhicitta*, Other Power *bodhicitta* (or shinjin) can make us transcend samsara; it can make us attain birth in the world of the Buddha’s nondualistic wisdom (i.e., the True Land). Other-Power *bodhicitta* (or shinjin), or the Buddha’s wisdom, terminates our attachment to dualistic thinking. In the following two verses Shinran says that as soon as shinjin is awakened in us, our entrapment in samsara is eternally terminated:

Only with the diamondlike shinjin
Can we, living in the evil world of the five defilements,
Completely abandon birth-and-death forever
And reach the Pure Land of naturalness.

When the time comes
For shinjin, indestructible as diamond, to become settled,
Amida grasps and protects us with compassionate light,

So that we part forever from birth-and-death.

(CWS, p. 381)

Receiving the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom by "hearing alone" means discovery of the goal that we already have. It means having scales (i.e., attachment to dualistic thinking) removed from our eyes. If the scales are removed, we can see "the treasure" that is already ours. We recover our original suchness. Thanks to the Buddha's wisdom that transforms minus into plus, we can appreciate the ordinary as something extraordinary. The reality that we previously thought imperfect and unsatisfactory turns into an ideal. We do not have to seek any ideal in the future. We become content with our present lives—with what we already are or with what we already have.

We are born in the world of limitless light (or wisdom) and limitless life (or compassion) where we have many wonderful teachers and friends. This is in contrast to the world of self-power *bodhicitta* in which we are alone. In the True Land, we become true seekers. Embodying the spirit of the perfect student (that "Bodhisattva Dharmakara" symbolizes), we keep seeking the Dharma without being attached to any fixed ideas. The seeking process itself becomes the goal. There is no other greater way of fulfilling our lives than living our lives as perfect seekers.

Conclusion

I first discussed how Shinran experienced the awakening of the two types of *bodhicitta*. Then, I discussed how he classified all Buddhist schools into four categories that were based on the two types of *bodhicitta*. I also discussed the three major differences between the two types of *bodhicitta*. I believe that awakening shinjin (or Other-Power *bodhicitta*) is the most important issue for Shinran. He teaches us that if shinjin (or Other-Power *bodhicitta*) alone is awakened in us, we do not have to worry about other Buddhist issues, such as practice and attainment, because awakening of shinjin necessarily assures the fulfillment of the Buddhist path as well as the fulfillment of human life.

If we identify ourselves as students of Shinran, we must examine the validity of the *bodhicitta*, the starting point, which we have already awakened. Shinran teaches us that the true starting point cannot be realized by our dualistic thinking, by our *active* practical abilities and efforts. It is realized only by hearing the words of our historical teachers, "Come to the Buddha's nondualistic wisdom!" Only a person who embodies *absolute passivity* before the Dharma, a person who has deep respect for his teachers, can receive shinjin (or Other-Power *bodhicitta*).

Notes:

We held the 2025 Maida Center Summer Retreat at the Jodo Shinshu Center, July 25. (Fri.)–27 (Sun.). Twenty people attended it. Dr. Haneda spoke on "The Two Types of *Bodhicitta*."

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

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

Mr. John Veen for the following three. (1) valuable suggestions concerning the article in this newsletter; (2) creating an Amazon version of *Heard By Me*, which is now available from Amazon; and (3) creating videos of Dr. Haneda's 2025 lectures in Hawaii, which you can find in the Maida Center website. (T.H.)