DENNIS HIROTA

Asura's Harp

Engagement with Language as Buddhist Path

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FRONT COVER:
Standing image of Amida Buddha. Kiso cypress wood; joined-wood block construction.
By sculptor-priest ERI KŌKEI, Kyoto. 1997.

BACK COVER:
Image of Benzaiten (Sarasvatī), ancient Indian goddess of rivers, music, crafts, and eloquence, and protector deity of Buddhism. Sometimes depicted as having eight arms. Camphor; joined-wood block construction.
By sculptor-priest ERI KŌKEI, Kyoto. 1996.

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Great bodhisattvas, having awakened to formless reality,
constantly abide in profound samadhi. For this very reason,
they are able to display freely in all worlds numerous and diverse
bodies, supernal powers, and ways of communicating truth.
All of this arises by virtue of the Vow of the Buddha Immeasurable Life
to lead every being to enlightenment.
This Primal Vow may be likened to the harp of the god Asura,
which, though untouched, spontaneously sounds forth in music.

– T'AN-LUAN, quoted in "Chapter on Realization," 17

Prologue
A Buddhist Perspective in the Present

Toward Conversation with Recent Western Thought

The widespread development, over more than a century, of critiques of basic modernist assumptions about the isolate self, the world as object, and the transparency of genuine knowledge has opened up fresh possibilities for conversation between currents in Western thought and East Asian Buddhist traditions. As encounters between distinctive societies and civilizations deepen in intensity and consequence, such conversations hold the promise not only of insights that may broaden mutual understanding but also of resources for delineating viable ways to think about human existence and the meaning of truth in a culturally and religiously plural world. The following essay is an attempt to present a groundwork for potential dialogue between contemporary Western thought and an ancient Buddhist tradition widespread in East Asia but still little recognized elsewhere – the Pure Land Buddhist tradition. It will focus on the thinking concerning language in a form of Buddhist tradition in which language plays a central role in genuine awareness of self and world.

Underlying the convergences between Buddhist and recent Western thought is the turn in the West from models of cognition based on the consciousness of an absolute, rational subject and objective knowledge expressed as clear and empirical truth-claims. The notion of a disembodied ego viewing the surrounding world from a privileged vantage point has been challenged, and the limited, perspectival nature of human apperceptions and thought, shaped by historically, socially, and culturally conditioned attitudes and concepts, has come to be broadly recognized. Such thinking may be viewed as

congenial with basic aspects of Buddhist understandings of the human condition, in which persons in the unenlightened state are considered not perspicacious, transcendental subjects grasping what is real, but rather as painfully attached to delusional notions of the self as enduring and substantial, and to a world found meaningful only in terms of the needs of an illusory self.

In Buddhist views, and in much recent thought also, persons are not autonomous agents making judgments and initiating actions independently of others, their own past, and their location in society and history. Rather, situatedness in particular temporal and spatial circumstances within the web of existence is the governing characteristic of all life. Such points of correspondence center finally on the recognition of the finitude of the human subject. In terms of language, it may be said that shifts from metaphysical toward hermeneutical concerns in Western thought resonate with Buddhist views of our ordinary use of language as inevitably warped by attachments and informed by falsely reifying conceptualization. At the same time, both Buddhist and hermeneutical thinkers have sought to deal with problems of genuine self-awareness and how it might arise from within the condition of embeddedness within contexts of human existence, of culture and society, and of history.

In fact, at the wellsprings of Buddhist tradition, beginning with Sakyamuni Buddha (Śākyamuni, known as Gautama in some parts of the world; c. 5 c. B.C.E) and his legendary silence on metaphysical questions, we find sober reflection on the nature, functioning, and limitations of language.[1] Sakyamuni's initial skepticism,

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1 Sutras state that Śākyamuni Buddha declined, as "without profit," to answer questions of metaphysical speculation such as whether the cosmos is eternal or not, whether it is infinite or not, whether the body and soul are identical, whether the Buddha exists after death, and so on. To illustrate his point, he taught the parable of

while still beneath the bodhi tree, regarding the communication of his awakening and his subsequent rejection of abstract speculation as soteriologically fruitless have colored much of later Buddhist thought with an alertness to the hazards in ordinary language use and a centrally pragmatic orientation regarding the illumination of reality. At the same time, as seen especially in the conception of "skillful means," Buddhists have treasured the creative and adaptive use of language to provide living beings guidance to self-realization. In their attention to the diverse capacities of language in human awareness, Buddhist thinkers may be seen to share some themes and assessments in common with recent Western thinkers.

Shinran as Religious Thinker

In the essay that follows, I will seek to articulate aspects of Buddhist reflection on language in a way that allows for conversation with Western hermeneutical thought, although direct comparative considerations will be impossible here. Such dialogue might illuminate both our own contemporary situation and the awakening to self disclosed by Buddhist modes of thinking. I will focus on the writings of one eminent Japanese Buddhist figure, the Kamakura period thinker Shinran (1173-1263), tracing his insights into Buddhist engagement with language. Shinran is known for his formulation of the Shin Buddhist path (Jōdo shinshū), a thirteenth century development of the Mahayana Pure Land Buddhist tradition, and is widely recognized as among the most original and consequential thinkers to emerge in Japanese civilization. Within the diversity of Buddhist traditions, a consideration of Shinran's thought in particular in the context of

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the poison arrow, noting that for the person wounded, the matter of immediate and urgent concern is to remove the arrow, not to determine details about the circumstances of its origin.

comparison and conversation with recent Western hermeneutical thought is especially apposite for three general reasons.

First, Shinran's path stands squarely within Mahayana Buddhist tradition and reflects elemental orientations of Mahayana thought. It may in fact be seen as one of the most far-reaching developments both of the critical stance that gave rise to Mahayana tradition around the first century of the common era and of the reformulated conception of wisdom or enlightenment on which it was predicated. The early Mahayanists characterized their immediate predecessors in the Buddhist tradition as having lapsed into a false understanding of the goal of Buddhist practice and absorption in pointless scholastic disputation. In short, according to Mahayana Buddhists, while such practicers had been taught to extinguish all attachments and ultimately enter the realm of nirvana or wisdom, many had fallen into attachment to the goal of nirvana itself. In the view of Mahayanists, the very engagement with the teaching had become fundamentally skewed, and need had arisen to assert anew the genuine nature of the awakening attained by Sakyamuni.

Shinran not only inherited this critical, creative stance of the Mahayana movement, but his Buddhist path may be said to constitute precisely that stream of Buddhist tradition that most radically probed the impediments to actual engagement with the teaching and the insidious tenacity of human pride. It is in this context that we must grasp Shinran's analyses of the impulses within religious life toward self-magnification and self-attachment that he terms "self-power" *(jiriki)* and "contrivance" or "calculative thinking" *(hakarai)*, and also his efforts to delineate a form of engagement with the Buddhist path both authentic and available to persons regardless of their personal capacities or their manner and station of life. In his deepening appropriation of

fundamental Mahayana insights, Shinran was virtually alone among Japanese Buddhist leaders, including those of the Tendai, Shingon, and Zen schools, to relinquish native practices of kami worship, ancestor veneration, and purification rites aimed at worldly benefits; nevertheless, over the centuries, Shin Buddhists have grown into one of the largest Buddhist movements in Japan and indeed in the world.

Second, at the same time that Shinran's Buddhist path embodies general Mahayana modes of thought and conceptions of wisdom, it also holds strong resemblances to elements and conceptual structures of Western religious traditions, thereby facilitating comparative perspectives.[2] The resemblances have their source in the form of Buddhist tradition that Shinran developed, the Pure Land tradition, and also in the particular character of Shinran's innovations. The Pure Land path focuses on the Mahayana ideal of the bodhisattva, the being of wisdom-compassion who aspires to ferry all living things, who are ensnared within painful existence by their ignorance, to the other shore of awakening.[3] At the heart of the path is the narrative of Bodhisattva Dharma-Treasury (Dharmākara, Hōzō), who established the Vow not to enter into nirvana unless he became capable, by attaining Buddhahood through aeons of practice, of bringing all sentient beings to liberation. This profound,

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2 Regarding issues of comparison, see my articles "On Recent Readings of Shinran," *Eastern Buddhist*, xxxiii:2 (Spring 2001), 38-55, and "Engaging Religious Language in the Pure Land Path: Repositioning Shin Buddhist Tradition in the Field of Buddhist Studies," in Shoun Hino and Toshihiro Wada, eds., *Three Mountains and Seven Rivers*, Motilal Banarsidass, 2004, 169-186.

3 For a discussion of the evolution of the Pure Land path on the basis of Mahayana thought, see Yoshifumi Ueda and Dennis Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989). Also see http://www.nembutsu.info/~indshin/readings.htm.

originary aspiration, the Primal Vow *(hongan)*, was formulated by Dharma-Treasury in forty-eight separate vows, the central one being the eighteenth (see the Glossary). As the result of his endeavor, the bodhisattva fulfilled his Vow and attained enlightenment as the Buddha Amida, the embodiment of wisdom-compassion, light and life. Through Amida's compassionate activity, beings who entrust themselves to his Vow, calling the Buddha's Name, "Namu-amida-butsu," in mindfulness, will be born in the "Pure Land" *(jōdo)*, the field of Amida Buddha's wisdom-compassion. There, they themselves attain awakening. We may note here that Pure Land Buddhists consider the entire formula, "Namu-amida-butsu," as the Name of Amida, although "namu" transliterates the Sanskrit *namas (namo-)*, literally meaning "I take refuge."

There are thus a small number of closely interrelated concepts by which the core of Pure Land Buddhist teachings is formulated: the wellsprings of the path in the bodhisattva's Vow to liberate all sentient beings from painful existence and bring them to the bliss of awakening; Amida, the Buddha of compassion who attained enlightenment by fulfilling the Vow through aeons of practice as a bodhisattva; the Pure Land, the field of activity of Amida Buddha; *shinjin*,[4] which is the awakened buddha-mind or wisdom that persons realize in the form of entrusting themselves to the Vow of Amida; and the Name of Amida Buddha, "Namu-amida-butsu," by which the Buddha's activity is manifested to and enacted by beings

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4 In general, I use the romanization of Shinran's term *shinjin* 信心instead of such translations as "faith" or "trust," which carry connotations concerning subject-object and temporal relationships that must be qualified by dimensions of nonduality when applied to Shinran's thought. In a few quotations, *shinjin* will render not only the original term, but also such related terms as *shin* 信and *shingyō* 信楽when they are used synonymously.

(both the Name itself and the saying of it are known as the "nembutsu"). Shinran developed Pure Land tradition by exploring the transformative event of "hearing the Name" (entrusting oneself to Amida's working) and the significance of entering the field of the Buddha's wisdom. These reflections resulted in conceptual motifs and structures in Shinran's path that have been seen as closely parallel with some historically later forms of Christian thought, even while they remain rooted in Mahayana Buddhist insights.

The Shin Buddhist heritage is centered on a path to realization of wisdom or awakening that is fully accessible to people in ordinary, nonmonastic environments, while they carry on everyday life. This means, in short, that Shinran was able to explore and expound a Buddhist path that, on the one hand, enabled persons to break the bonds of samsaric existence and manifest authentic wisdom-compassion, not merely improve their conditions in life or gradually progress toward some future attainment. On the other hand, however, it did not turn on the thorough eradication of delusional attachments through the regimes of meditative practices and disciplines at the core of other paths. The articulation of such a path and its underpinnings in a Buddhist understanding of reality or wisdom constitutes Shinran's contribution to the history of Buddhist tradition.

A Point of Divergence

The third reason for focusing on Shinran here is that while he articulated a form of Buddhist path at once anchored in Mahayana thought and yet with numerous conceptual parallels with Christian tradition, his outlook also highlights basic points of divergence between Buddhist analyses of the human condition and recent trends of Western thought. Perhaps the crucial difference lies in the conception of delusional egocentricity as evil in

the Buddhist sense, rooted in a pervasive and obsessive ignorance and ceaselessly giving rise to perceptions, thoughts, and actions that result in pain for oneself and others.

Western traditions of thought have tended to distinguish carefully between finitude and evil. This appears necessary to maintain conceptions of personal autonomy and responsibility or to uphold notions of a cosmos divinely created or ordered so as to accord with reason and human apprehension. Of course, a "hermeneutics of suspicion" as wielded by Nietzsche, Marx, or Freud has probed the overt presentations of religious, social, and personal life to disclose darker, inner motives. Nevertheless, in recent Western hermeneutical thought, the concern with finitude appears to focus on human existence as itself fundamentally hermeneutical. Human beings always interpret the world and the self, but for self-understanding, a direct approach of straightforward introspection such as found in the modernist model of the ego is recognized as impossible. While awareness of the human capacity for self-deception in persons' rationalizations and justifications of their actions is essential, just as in Buddhist thought, twentieth-century hermeneutical thinkers in the West have suggested that through the encounter and engagement with language, and above all through the interpretation of texts and narratives of one's cultural tradition, self-understanding, creativity, and hope become possible.

Buddhist thought also stands upon the relinquishment of any notion of an autonomous, substantial ego-self standing apart from the world, such as the so-called Cartesian self. Underlying Buddhist thinking, however, is a fundamental distinction, a radical dualism between opposing modes of existence: ignorance and wisdom, samsara and nirvana, karmic bondage and liberation. Ignorance or samsaric existence is

characterized above all by discriminative thought and perception, by which the subject falsely isolates, reifies, and inflates itself in opposition to all else in the world, which it objectifies and perceives instrumentally. Further, in Mahayana thought, including the Shin Buddhist tradition, one must break with one's ordinary mode of existence as mediated through delusional thought and language use, and reach a self-awakening that transcends the dualism of subject and object itself.

Despite this difference between understanding developed from within the locus of finite and situated human existence in hermeneutical thought and the attainment of nondiscriminative wisdom in Mahayana Buddhist traditions, conversations between them may indicate directions for the development and articulation of insights in ways that might address issues of our contemporary world. This is particularly true in the case of Shinran's thought, because of the central role played by language in his Buddhist path.

The Pure Land Buddhist Path and Language

From a contemporary perspective, the salient feature of the Pure Land Buddhist tradition as developed by Shinran surely lies in its integration of the realization of wisdom with use of language. Shinran's Buddhist teaching may be called the "path of accessible praxis" *(igyōdō)*, transformative for persons regardless of their particular intellectual or moral capacities, in contrast to the "path of arduous praxis" *(nangyōdō)* or the "Path traversed by Sages" *(shōdōmon)*, practicable only for a spiritually gifted elite, precisely because it provides a way to awakening – or contact with what is true and real – through and in the medium of language. In this respect, Shinran's path differs from Buddhist traditions in which delusional thought and conceptualization mediated by language are broken through by means of ascetic discipline and meditative praxis.

The standard formulations of the path in Buddhist tradition enumerate the "three learnings" (teaching, practice, and attainment, or precepts, concentration, and wisdom in the early tradition) or the "six paramitas" (selfless giving, upholding precepts, patient endurance in the face of adversity, vigor, concentration, and wisdom in Mahayana traditions) as essential factors, giving prominent place to the performance of contemplative exercises and the arising of liberative insight. This is not to say, of course, that language is normally regarded only in negative terms, or that the sage who practices nondiscriminative wisdom abandons human speech and remains silent. On the contrary, the sutras and the writings of accomplished masters are necessary means of communicating and transmitting dharma, and enlightened wisdom in fact enables the sage to guide the ignorant through language. Nevertheless, when Shinran, borrowing a phrase from the Chinese master T'an-luan (Jp. Donran, 476-542), states that in the Pure Land path, "nirvana is attained without severing blind passions,"[5] this may be understood to mean, in terms of awareness, that without reaching a point at which dichotomous thinking (language use, conceptualization) has been eradicated, one attains suchness (things-as-they-are) or truth and reality beyond words and concepts.[6]

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5 Quotations from Shinran's works are drawn from Dennis Hirota et al., *The Collected Works of Shinran* [hereafter, CWS], Translated with introductions, glossaries, and reading aids (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), two volumes. The phrase quoted here is from "Hymn of True *Shinjin* and the Nembutsu" *(Shōshin nembutsu ge),* in "Chapter on Practice," passage 102, of Shinran's major work, *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way* [abbreviated *Teaching, Practice and Realization*], CWS I: 70; original text in *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* [hereafter, SSZ] (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō), 2: 44. References to *Teaching, Practice and Realization* are given by chapter title and section number only.

6 While T'an-luan employs the expression in his *Commentary to [Vasubandhu's] Treatise on the Pure Land* to characterize the

The centrality of language in Shinran's thought may be grasped from his characterizations of the two fundamental elements in traversing the path, *shinjin* (Buddha's wisdom-compassion awakened in persons in the form of entrusting oneself to Amida's Vow) and practice (nembutsu, saying the Name of Amida Buddha, "Namu-amida-butsu"). He states, for example, that "the true cause of attaining nirvana is *shinjin* alone."[7] Further, practice, which indicates the nexus between our lives in the world and true reality, is "to say the Name of the Tathagata of unhindered light (i.e., Amida)."[8] The religious path, therefore, is to hear Amida Buddha's Vow and to say the Name. The pivotal role of language as the vehicle of awakening is apparent.

For our concerns here, it is significant that, even while they remain deeds of ordinary life, the linguistic acts

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inconceivable virtue of the purity of Amida's Land, Shinran uses it, in addition, to describe the condition of the Pure Land practicer in present existence. This does not mean, of course, that one realizes nirvana while remaining fettered within samsaric existence. Rather, one realizes the Buddha's mind (enlightened wisdom) in the form *shinjin* (authentic entrusting), so that complete awakening (nirvana) at death comes about spontaneously and necessarily. Shinran both emphasizes the fundamental continuity of present and future realization and preserves the temporal distinction; thus, he explains that when joy arises in the present, "one attains the realizing of the supreme nirvana" *(mujō dainehan o satoru o u)* (*Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls [Songō shinzō meimon]* CWS I: 519, adapted; SSZ 2: 601).

Viewed from the opposite perspective, the elimination of evil karma *(metsuzai)* was a central concern in the immediately preceding Pure Land tradition, including among such followers of Hōnen close to Shinran in thought as Shōkū, but Shinran uniquely develops instead a conception of transformation (*tenzu*) of evil that occurs without nullification or eradication of evil karma. For a discussion of Shōkū, see Dennis Hirota, *No Abode: The Record of Ippen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986, rev. ed., 1997), xlvi ff.

7 "Chapter on *Shinjin*," 19, CWS I: 93-94 (SSZ 2: 59).

8 "Chapter on Practice," 1, CWS I: 13 (SSZ 2:5).

Shinran speaks of as forming the core of the Buddhist path – hearing and saying the Name of Amida Buddha – also manifest a new, transformative dimension of a person's existence. It is easy to assume Shinran's emphasis on "hearing" Amida's Vow to mean that when one accepts or "believes in" the teaching of Amida Buddha, who vowed to bring those who say his Name into his Pure Land, one will be liberated. When, however, the *Larger Sutra* speaks of beings' "hearing the Name,"[9] this indicates the apprehension of the Name as it is praised by all the Buddhas throughout the cosmos, and according to Shinran, it implies the attainment of *shinjin*, the Buddha's mind or wisdom. Hence, to realize *shinjin* is not a means for advancing toward the goal, but attainment or liberation itself. The moment one hears and says Amida's Name – whatever else one may or may not do in one's life – a transformation has occurred, expressed by the notion that one's realization of enlightenment or Buddhahood has become completely settled.

Shinran's delineation of the path of liberation in linguistic terms raises a number of questions concerning the relationship between word and religious realization and the nature of the language that functions give rise to realization, both in its apprehension and in its verbal enactment. While these questions also arise in other Buddhist traditions, the rootedness in the sphere of language in Shinran's thought thrusts them beyond the solutions found in other forms of Buddhism. Briefly stated, the language of the Pure Land path must be accessible to people who perform no disciplines to nullify ordinary (in the Buddhist view, delusional) modes of thought, and at

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9 In the passage on the fulfillment of the Eighteenth Vow: "Sentient beings, as they hear the Name, realize even one thought-moment of shinjin and joy." Shinran explains: "Hear means to hear the Primal Vow and be free of doubt. Further, it indicates *shinjin*." *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling (Ichinen tanen mon'i)*, CWS I: 474 (SSZ 2: 604-605).

the same time it must possess the power to transform their existence by severing the bonds of delusional thought. That is, language, which normally functions as a medium of false discrimination between subject and object and among things as objects, also serves to lead people to break through the horizons and conceptual frameworks of the world and the self constructed through our cultural and social conditioning and our ordinary, egocentric modes of apprehension. How does our engagement with the Pure Land teaching (hearing and saying the Name) differ from our usual, delusional linguistic activity, so that it becomes the cause and the activity of enlightenment? In terms of the path, how are its two dimensions – its linguistic medium and its transcendence of language – integrated?

In this essay, I will first sketch the Mahayana Buddhist view of language reflected in Shinran's works and then go on to outline the nature of engagement with language in Shinran's Pure Land path, first from the perspective of the conceptual content of the teaching, then with regard to the awareness of the practicer.

PART ONE

A BUDDHIST VIEW OF LANGUAGE

Chapter First
Shinran's Buddhist Critique of Language

> The medicine of the Tathagata's Vow destroys
> the poisons of our wisdom and foolishness.
> —"Chapter on *Shinjin*," 51.

Reality as Unutterable

Shinran shares, not only with Mahayana tradition in general but with other religious traditions and much recent Western thought as well, a firm recognition of the limitations of language to describe or represent reality. In Buddhist thought, this basic critique of language involves the view that reality as such (indicated by such terms as suchness, thusness, dharma-nature, nirvana, etc.) lies outside the intellectual comprehension and conceptualization – and therefore the language – of unenlightened beings.[10] Shinran clearly states this position: "Dharma-body as dharma-nature [or suchness] has neither color nor form; thus, the mind cannot grasp it and words fall short [of representing it]."[11] Literally, this passage states that the mind cannot "reach" *(oyobu)* reality and words are "cut off" or "interrupted" *(tayuru)*. These phrases together express not only the interrelationship between thought and language and the coextension of their fields, but also their discursive and enframing quality, which cannot be applied to encompass reality.

Further, it is not simply that we lack the appropriate

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10 "Nirvana is called extinction of passions, the uncreated, peaceful happiness, eternal bliss, true reality, dharma-body, dharma-nature, suchness, oneness, and Buddha-nature." *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, CWS I: 461; SSZ 2: 630.

11 *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, CWS I: 461 (SSZ 2: 630).

terms; rather, ineffability and inconceivability with respect to human speech and thought are understood to be characteristic of what is real as it is. Thus, Shinran asserts formlessness or inconceivability to be an essential quality of supreme awakening or nirvana: "Supreme Buddha is formless . . . . When this Buddha is shown as being with form, it is not called the supreme nirvana."[12] For Shinran, as for the Mahayana tradition in general, reality – whether it is termed supreme Buddha or nirvana or suchness – is, with regard to human cognition, completely without feature; it cannot be represented linguistically or conceived in any way.

This assertion that supreme nirvana is formless derives in part from the idea that it cannot be identified as any transient and finite thing of the world and therefore cannot be defined or limited by mundane conceptions. As Shinran states, "All things in the world are limited; hence, they are said to be finite (literally, "subject to quantification"). Buddha-dharma is without any limit or bound; hence, it is said to be without measure."[13] Shinran's idea of measure or quantification *(ryō)* here is precise. Reality cannot be confined within the spatial and temporal frameworks that inform our usual understanding and perception of the world. In other words, there is a fundamental difference between the world of objects and qualities that we ordinarily speak of and perceive, and reality, which cannot genuinely be differentiated or circumscribed by terms and concepts. This is a distinction between that which can be delineated by the functioning of thought and speech and that which cannot. From these passages we see that for Shinran: (1) thought and language are intimately intertwined; (2) they are understood to delimit and define; and (3) what is real lies apart from the

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12 "On Jinen hōni," CWS I: 428.

13 Note *(sakun)* to *Hymns of the Pure Land (Jōdo wasan)*, hymn 4, CWS I: 325; *Teihon Shinran shōnin zenshū*, vol. 2 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1969), p. 8.

scope of such thought and speech, for it is distinct from such conceptual circumscription.

Invertedness

We must note that this view of language does not imply that reality transcends the world in which we carry on our lives or exists as a substratum underlying ephemeral and accidental features of things that we speak of and perceive. In general Mahayana thought, including that of Shinran, the critique of language turns not merely on the idea that language is inadequate, but on a view that reality is radically nondichotomous, not to be grasped by the dualities of subject and object and the objectifying discrimination of things. In this case, our ordinary, unenlightened use of language is in fact illusional, a play of false conceptions that informs and expresses the attachments of an imagined self and a world distorted by its anxieties and desires.

In Mahayana writings, the term "invertedness" *(tendō)* is used to characterize this false grasp of the world embodied in ordinary thought and speech. The unenlightened see things upside down, imagining what is impermanent to be everlasting, what actually brings pain to be worthy of pursuit, what is defiled by egocentricity to be pure, and what is egoless and nonsubstantial to possess a permanent identity. Shinran employs the term "invertedness" to characterize a fundamental falsity that pervades most human action:

> Evil karma is from the beginning without [real] form;
> It is the result of delusional thought and invertedness.
> Mind-nature is from the beginning pure,
> But as for this world, there is no person of truth (makoto).[14]

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14 *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, 107, CWS I: 423 (SSZ 2: 528):
zaigō motoyori katachi nashi / mōsō tendō no naseru nari / shinshō motoyori kiyokeredo / kono yo wa makoto no hito zo

From a Buddhist perspective, delusion and invertedness shape our usual thinking and perception – our use of language – so that what we conceive and feel is basically askew. This hymn, though atypical of Shinran in its emphasis on the unreality of evil karma,[15] expresses his view of human existence as characterized by thought and speech that falsely discriminate and reify subject and object ("there is no person of truth"), while reality is nondichotomous ("mind-nature is from the beginning pure").

The Linguisticality of Human Existence

While Shinran employs general Mahayana concepts concerning the critique of language, his own views are distinctive in the extremity to which he pushes this position, reflecting his understanding of the inescapable linguisticality of human existence. A prominent passage in *Tannishō*, a record of Shinran's spoken words made by a disciple, states:

> With a foolish being full of blind passions, with this fleeting world – this burning house – all matters without exception are lies *(soragoto)* and gibberish *(tawagoto)*, totally without truth and sincerity *(makoto)*.[16](See Appendix, pp. 137-152)

Shinran characterizes the self and the world as lies (or "hollow words," *soragoto*) and gibberish or delusions *(tawagoto)*, and states that the nembutsu alone is true and

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naki.

15 Perhaps the closest parallel to this idea in Shinran's works may be found in the passage from the *Nirvana Sutra* quoted in "Chapter on Shinjin," 116, in which Sakyamuni seeks to assuage the despair of King Ajatasatru, who has committed grave crimes.

16 *Tannishō*, "Postscript," in Dennis Hirota, trans., *Tannishō: A Primer*, (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1982) p. 44. Also in CWS I: 679 (SSZ 2: 792-793)

real *(makoto)*. We should note that in each of these Japanese expressions, the term *koto (-goto)* implies both "matter" or "affair" *(ji)* and "words" *(gon)*.[17] These terms suggest an early conception of the unity of the things of the world that are perceived and the words and concepts with which they are discerned and spoken of.

This passage may be viewed as a reformulation of the concepton of deep mind *(jinshin)* – the "mind of deep trust" – as expounded by the Chinese master Shan-tao (Jp. Zendō, 613-681). Shan-tao's explanation is the classic expression in Pure Land tradition of the twofold or double-sided awareness of the nembutsu practicer as simultaneously enmeshed in karmic evil and liberated by the Primal Vow:

> The second [of the three minds of the nembutsu practicer taught in the *Contemplation Sutra*] is deep mind, which is true and real *shinjin*. One truly knows oneself to be a foolish being full of blind passions, with scant roots of good, transmigrating in the three realms and unable to emerge from this burning house. And further, one truly knows now, without so much as a single thought of doubt, that Amida's universal Primal Vow decisively enables all to attain birth, including those who say the Name even down to ten times, or even but hear it.[18]

We see that Shinran has recast Shan-tao's insight in terms of false and true language in his words above recorded in *Tannishō*. This is neither fortuitous nor inconsequential, but indicates Shinran's view of the fundamental

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17 This is one standard etymological explanation of *koto* as it occurs in *kotoba* ("word," "language"); see *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten*, Shogakukan. It is clear from that Shinran's usage of the various terms incorporating *-koto* that it holds a broad meaning for him.

18 From Shan-tao's *Hymns of Birth in the Pure Land* that is translated here according to Shinran's interpretation. Quoted in both "Chapter on Practice," 76 (SSZ 2: 34), and "Chapter on *Shinjin*," 15 (SSZ 2: 58), indicating the importance of this passage for Shinran.

linguisticality of human existence. Further, it points to the core of his development of the Pure Land tradition, which turns on a distinction in modes of engagement with the language of the path.

Afflicting Passions and False Language

The conceptual world of the unenlightened may be thought of as a circle, the circumference of which represents the horizon of thought and conscious experience. For Shinran, this circle is coextensive with the world of false language, the medium of perception colored by afflicting passions and self-attachment. The meaning of the common Japanese word *soragoto* ("hollow words") in the context of Shinran's statement in the passage quoted above may be grasped by considering it together with *tawagoto*, which he uses as a synonym and which has a narrower range of reference. *Tawagoto* basically means nonsensical talk, spoken either out of jest, for amusement, or because one is not in a normal state of mind. It includes, therefore, jokes and prankish humor, and also delirious speech. As a negative term, it identifies speech as out of accord with reality, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Such speech is not to be taken "seriously," as reflecting the actual state of affairs or a reliable perception of things. *Tawagoto*, like *soragoto* and *makoto*, is used to characterize speech, its content or referent, and also acts or behavior. In Shinran's passage, then, "hollow" and "nonsensical" point to the delusional, distorted, and insincere world of ignorance and blind passions, the universe within the horizons of unenlightened thought and feeling.

Although the word *tawagoto* – "word-play" or "delirious verbiage" – does not appear in Shinran's own writings, he does use the term *soragoto*, with the meaning of "lie," "deceit," "untrue statement," or "false report." An explanation of the concept "hollow" or "empty" *(sora-)* is found in Shinran's commentary on the following

passage from Shan-tao (translated here according to Shinran's interpretation, which departs from the literal sense):

> We should not make outward shows of wisdom, goodness, or diligence, for inwardly we embrace falsity (*koke*, what is "vacuous" and "fleeting").[19]

Shinran's explains:

> *Inwardly*: since within, the mind is possessed of afflicting passions, it is "vacuous" *(ko)* and "fleeting" *(ke). Vacuous* means "vain," "not real or sincere." *Fleeting* means "provisional," "not true." For this reason, in the Buddha's teaching, this world is called "the evil world of the last dharma-age."[20]

We see here that "vacuous" or "hollow," as a Buddhist term, is an antonym of "true reality" *(shinjitsu).* It describes the delusional agitation of afflicting passions, and further points to the fundamental falsity of the world as human construct, which the Buddha refers to as "the evil world of the last dharma-age." We should understand here that for Shinran, the prevalence of blind passions, and hence of falsity, transcends the merely private sphere. In his explanation, Shinran carefully distinguishes two forms of disparity or noncorrespondence implied by *koke*:

> Everyone, whether in secular or religious walks of life, is possessed of "Heart and tongue at odds," and "Words and thoughts both insincere." The former means that what is in the mind and what is said are at variance, and the latter means that what is spoken and what is thought are not real.[21]

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19 In the original context, Shan-tao's statement is an admonition to sincerity: Do not display signs of wisdom and goodness while being false within. *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra,* "Chapter on Non-meditative Good Acts," T37, 270c-271a.

20 *Notes on `Essentials of Faith Alone'*, CWS I: 466 (SSZ 2: 635).

21 Ibid.

With regard to the disparity between inner thoughts and projected speech, *koke* implies a moral dimension of falsity as deceit. Although Shan-tao's original admonishes practicers regarding the importance of sincerity in the performance of religious practices, Shinran, in his commentary, expresses his view of the impossibility of achieving such genuineness:

> Those who wish to be born in the Pure Land have only thoughts of deceiving and flattering. Even those who renounce this world have nothing but thoughts of fame and profit.[22]

Lack of sincerity is not, of course, confined to the realm of religious practice. Shinran also speaks more generally:

> All beings lack a true and sincere heart, mock teachers and elders, disrespect their parents, distrust their companions, and favor only evil.[23]

In addition to the disparity between thoughts and words, however, Shinran points to a disparity between what is spoken or thought, on the one hand, and reality, on the other: "People of this world have only thoughts that are not real." In the term *koke, ko* implies "hollow," "unfounded," or "insubstantial," and *ke* implies a similar sense of unreality in the temporal dimension, meaning "merely temporary," "evanescent," or "apparitional." Thus, when Shinran states that "what is spoken and what is thought are not real," he means that although we believe the world to be as we perceive and speak of it, in fact our conceptions of ourselves and of things around us are delusional and false, fabricated out of our own fears and attachments. Because our thoughts and words arise from passions and ignorance, the world of our ordinary existence must be said to be "empty and transitory." Thus, Shinran speaks of this world as a "burning house," and as "lies and gibberish."

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22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

We see, then, that *koke* or *soragoto* signifies falsity with a broad range of meaning, including an "ontological" aspect in which the world as experienced by unenlightened people is unreal and apparitional, an "epistemological" aspect in which the perceptions of the ignorant and their conceptions of the world are untrue constructs, and a "moral" aspect in which beings of blind passions speak and act with hypocrisy, flattery, and deception.

Shinran extends the Buddhist critique of language so that it comes to express the boundness of human existence to delusional thought and perception as embodied in the medium of language. Thus: "As for this world, there is no person of truth and sincerity *(makoto)*." In this recognition of the inescapable linguisticality of human existence and its inherent ego-attachment, his thought differs from Buddhist paths that expound the eradication of afflicting passions by stilling discriminative mental functioning through practice. In respect to linguisticality as boundness to language, Shinran may be seen to stand with Western thinkers who stress the inescapable "thrownness" of human existence and its inherently hermeneutical character.

Chapter Second
Reality as Language

Shinran's Understanding of Truth

Despite the negative assessment of language seen in Buddhist thought in general and also in Shinran, language is nevertheless upheld by Buddhists as the vehicle of dharma and the central means by which truth may be communicated. Thus, while reality that is beyond conceptualization is termed dharma, those who have awakened to it become able to guide others to awakening by using language, and their words are also termed dharma. In order to probe Shinran's view of the affirmative potential of language to manifest dharma, we must first summarize briefly the basic characteristics of his conception of truth.

To begin, in Shinran's writings, the basic term corresponding to "true" or "truth" *(shinjitsu, makoto)* must be taken fundamentally as synonymous with "real" or "reality" and its traditional Buddhist expressions, such as nirvana, suchness, thusness, nondual oneness, and so on. At a basic level, therefore, "truth" for Shinran is not primarily propositional. It does not most basically refer to assertions about the world or the actual state of things. "Truth" is reality itself. At the same time, truth for Shinran does stand in relation to awakened understanding and take the form of words. If we look at the method by which Shinran "proves" the elemental "truth and reality" of the teaching of the *Larger Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* in his major work, *The Collection of Passages on the True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way* (hereafter, *Teaching, Practice, and Realization*), we may get a sense of his notion of truth.

In the first chapter of his work, "Chapter on Teaching," Shinran asserts that the truth of the sutra is evident from the circumstances in which it was delivered by Sakyamuni Buddha. As revealed in the dialogue between Sakyamuni and his disciple Ananda that frames the exposition of the sutra proper, Sakyamuni has just emerged from profound samadhi, and his countenance and physical features hold a splendor and radiance that reflect the depth of his meditation. From the Buddha's extraordinary appearance, it is clear to his disciple that the sutra he is about to preach will be not merely one teaching among many, but the teaching that Sakyamuni has expressly appeared in our world in order to deliver. In answer to Ananda's inquiry, the Buddha praises his disciple's discernment and affirms his recognition that a momentous event is about to take place.

This is Shinran's proof of the truth of the sutra. The words that Sakyamuni delivers are known to be true not because they indeed teach correctly an intellectual grasp of the nature of the world or because what they state corresponds to the actual conditions of things, but because the words have emerged from the deepest samadhi, which is itself true reality – in the words of the sutra, the "dharma most rare and wondrous" or the "abode of all buddhas" – and therefore their delivery manifests reality beyond ordinary verbal expression and conceptualization. Truth in Shinran's thinking, therefore, is not primarily a matter of superficial correspondence or coherence.[24] It may seem to be foundationalist in that its veracity rests on the realization of the Buddha, but we must note that there is a critical rift between the reality realized by the Buddha, which transcends our words and concepts, and the verbal expression of the teaching, so

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24 Western students of Pure Land Buddhist tradition often assert, even in the face of the opposition of Buddhist adherents, that the teachings are to be understood as literal representations or as systems of exposition.

that logical, methodical construction of a doctrinal edifice upon an unshakable foundation of truth is impossible.

Further, it may be noted that this conception of truth does not rest simply on the authority of the Buddha. Thus, Shinran can assert:

> If Amida's Primal Vow is true, Sakyamuni's teaching cannot be false. If the Buddha's teaching is true, Shan-tao's commentaries cannot be false. If Shan-tao's commentaries are true, can Hōnen's words be lies? If Hōnen's words are true, then surely what I say cannot be empty.[25]

This is surely a line of reasoning that at bottom turns upside down our usual expectations of logical proof. According to this passage, the truth of Amida's Vow is not demonstrated on the basis of assertions found in the Buddha's teaching, but in fact precisely the reverse – the teaching as manifestation is true because it is the emergence in history of the Vow.

Shinran also states from the opposite perspective this same basic view of truth or reality as encountered at a level prior to the conceptual content of normally authoritative verbal expression:

> After true *shinjin* has become settled in us, even if Buddhas like Amida or like Sakyamuni should fill the skies and proclaim that Sakyamuni's teaching and Amida's Primal Vow are false, we will not have even one moment of doubt.[26]

Again, the truth of the Vow is not demonstrated by the authority of the teaching. Rather, it is truth itself as occurrence or event that provides the touchstone by which verbal expressions may be judged.

We may note here one further fundamental quality of

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25 *Tannishō* 2; see appendix.

26 *Letters of the Tradition*, 2, CWS I: 575.

truth in Shinran's thought. The character of truth stands diametrically opposed to the character of our ordinary modes of knowing and reflection. Thus he states:

> "True and real" *(shinjitsu)* refers to Amida's Vow being true and real; this is what the term *sincere mind* [in the Primal Vow] means. From the very beginning sentient beings, who are filled with blind passions, lack a mind true and real, a heart of purity, for they are possessed of defilements, evil, and wrong views.[27]

It is not simply that human thought and perceptions are limited so that truth does not naturally enter its compass. Rather, our vision and awareness are fundamentally askew, warped by delusional self-attachments, and thus at odds with truth. In spite of this, truth occurs as an event of communication, a synapse across the rift between two distinct modes of awareness. To probe Shinran's conception of truth further, therefore, we must consider how he conceives the possibility of human engagement with the truth, or its reception and understanding by fundamentally delusional beings. We will first, in the remainder of this chapter and in Chapter 3, take up the conceptual underpinnings that allow for the occurrence of true language and for human apprehension of truth through it, and then, in Part Two of this essay, sketch the process by which such apprehension emerges.

Language as Dharma

There are various concepts in the Mahayana tradition employed to account for the seemingly paradoxical possibility of enlightened speech and its capacity to guide the unenlightened toward awakening to reality. At their core lies the Mahayana understanding of wisdom as twofold always: it is one with reality that stands ungrasped

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27 *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, CWS I: 493.

though any dualism – subject and object, samsara and nirvana, blind passions and enlightenment – and further, it perceives things just as they are. We find in a gloss of the term "wisdom" *(chi-e)* by Shinran a concise statement of this simultaneity of the nonduality of subject and object together with their dichotomy in the functioning of awareness:

> Wisdom *(chi-e)*: *Chi* refers to thinking by reflection and judgment, discriminating this as this and that as that. *E* refers to no-activity attained through stilling such thought, so that there is no mental activity grasping this and that; it is samadhi of no-activity.[28]

By dividing the term *chi-e* (智慧) into its two component characters and explaining chi as discriminative and *chi* as nondiscriminative, Shinran indicates the character of wisdom as both nondichotomous reality and yet active in perceiving beings.

A corollary of this view is that attainment of nondichotomous wisdom necessarily unfolds in compassionate activity, for it gives rise both to the apprehension of beings as they are, trapped in painful existence by their delusional attachments, and to the experience of their pain immediately as one's own. Moreover, compassionate activity directed to guiding humans toward enlightenment would naturally include linguistic expression. In terms of language, it may be said that wisdom as "no-activity attained through stilling the mind" implies the cessation of conceptualization and language use, while wisdom as "reflection and judgment" implies the perception of the beings of the world that

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28 Note to *Hymns of the Pure Land*, hymn 4, CWS I: 325; *Teihon Shinran shōnin zenshū*, vol. 2, (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1969), p. 8. T'an-luan provides a similar analysis of the term: "To know advance and guard again regression is termed *chi*; to realize emptiness and no-self is termed *e*. Through *chi*, one does not seek one's own pleasure; through *e*, one becomes free of egocentric attachments to self" (CWS I: 169).

leads to the use of language and concepts in the compassionate guidance of others. Since, in the former aspect, the subject-object dichotomy has been eradicated, wisdom is not different from reality; regarding the stance of wisdom, there is no objectification, and regarding the stance of reality, there is no form. Thus, the two aspects of wisdom – stillness and activity – may be expressed in terms of formlessness (or emptiness) and form, wordlessness and words. A Chinese master writes:

> The dharma-body, being formless, takes on all forms. . . It being without words, profound writings spread more and more widely. Deep and subtle means, being without calculation, work to bring about the benefiting of beings.[29]

Here we see that reality, precisely in being without concepts, proliferates with creative energy, manifesting itself in all possible forms (words, concepts, things) to "bring about the benefiting of beings," that is, to awaken each being to itself.

Reality as Name

As in the case of false language, in which Shinran regards the speech of ordinary life as delusional, he also carries Mahayana thinking concerning wisdom to extreme. For him, true language does not merely arise as words employed by enlightened beings who, awakening to formless true reality, gain the power to see sentient beings in samsaric existence and show them the way through verbal teaching. It is not merely, or not primarily, the medium of language skillfully used to draw beings to enlightenment. Thus, he allows for a single exception to the falsity of ordinary human speech: "The nembutsu alone is

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29 *Chao-lun*, quoted by T'an-luan in a passage that is cited by Shinran in "Chapter on Realization," 17, CWS I: 164 (SSZ 2: 111).

true, real, and sincere *(makoto)*."

According to Shinran, the Name is not simply language that, as in invocation or prayer, provides a relation to Buddha, or that communicates propositional truth that enables one to move toward enlightenment. Rather, the Name itself is reality or wisdom. As he states:

> The great practice is to say the Name of the Tathagata of unhindered light. . . . It is the treasure ocean of virtues that is suchness or true reality.[30]

Further:

> The auspicious Name embodying the perfectly fulfilled supreme virtues is true wisdom that transforms our evil into virtue.[31]

As we have seen, Shinran carefully distinguishes two implications of falsity or *koke*. First, there is disparity between one's thoughts and one's words; this touches on moral problems of sincerity and deceit. Second, there is incongruity between one's thought or words and the way things actually are. Regarding the antonym of *koke*, truth *(makoto, shinjitsu)*, analogical criteria may be applied, for in the passages above Shinran asserts perfect concurrence – in the form of nonduality – of word (Name) and reality (suchness, wisdom). Moreover, Shinran also asserts that in nembutsu, there is accord between thought and speech:

> Know that "thinking" *(nen)* and "voicing [the Name]" *(shō)* have the same meaning; no voicing exists separate from thinking, and no thinking separate from voicing.[32]

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30 "Chapter on Practice," 1, CWS I: 13 (SSZ 2: 5).

31 *Teaching, Practice, and Realization*, "Preface," CWS I: 3 (SSZ 2: 1)

32 *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, CWS I: 468 (SSZ 2: 637). Behind this assertion lies a tension between contemplative and vocal nembutsu in the long history of interpretation of the Eighteenth Vow. A decisive development came when Shan-tao paraphrased the Vow, substituting "voicing" *(shō* 声*)* for *nen* 念.

It is not, then, that one cultivates an inner attitude and then expresses it in utterance of the Name. Rather, it may be said that true language in the form of utterance of the Name of Amida is characterized by the unity of thought, utterance, and reality.

What do these nondualities signify? In order to consider this question, we must take up next the structure of true language in Shinran's thought, and following that, the nature of religious existence as engagement with true language.

To reconcile the Vow and Shan-tao's paraphrase, Hōnen declared, "Thinking on *(nen)* and voicing are one *(nen-shō kore itsu)*" *(Senjakushū,* 3; SSZ 1: 946). This appears to mean that *nen* in the Vow simply indicates vocal nembutsu. But elsewhere he states, "To recite with the lips is the Name, and to think in the heart is the Name," suggesting the possibility of two elements of utterance and thought that are identical at their roots, even while stressing that the act indicated in the Vow is vocal nembutsu *(Jūni mondō, Hōnen shōnin zenshū).* It is in Shinran, who refines the notion of "being in accord with the Vow" that lies at the foundation of Hōnen's nembutsu with an exploration of *shinjin,* that the full significance of the Name underlying both thought and utterance is disclosed.

Chapter Third
The Dialogic Structure of True Language

The Structure of True Language

The most direct expression of Shinran's fundamental thinking about the relationship between language (in particular, the Name of Amida Buddha) and reality is found in two passages treating dharma-body *(hosshin)* or reality. (These two passages are, in fact, Shinran's only discussions of this concept, and they both date from the most mature period of Shinran's writings, when he was in his late seventies and eighties.) As we have seen above, in Mahayana Buddhist thought, dharma-body is said to transcend thought and speech, but at the same time it functions to awaken beings to itself by manifesting form. These two aspects of reality are expressed by the Chinese Pure Land master T'an-luan in terms of two dimensions of dharma-body – "dharma-body as dharma-nature [suchness or as-isness]" *(hosshō hosshin)* and "dharma-body as compassionate means" *(hōben hosshin)*. According to T'an-luan, "dharma-body as compassionate means arises from dharma-body as dharma-nature, and dharma-body as dharma-nature emerges [into human awareness] out of dharma-body as compassionate means."[33] Shinran expresses his interpretation of T'an-luan's concepts in two passages in his writings, the first (I.) from *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'* and the second (II.) from *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling.*

> I. Dharma-body as dharma-nature has neither color nor form; thus, the mind cannot grasp it nor words describe it. From this oneness, form was manifested. This form is called dharma-body as compassionate

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33 See "Chapter on Realization," CWS I: 165.

> means. Taking this form, the Buddha proclaimed a name, Bhiksu Dharma-Treasury, and established the forty-eight great vows that surpass conceptual understanding.[34]
>
> II. From this treasure ocean of oneness, form was manifested, taking the name of Bodhisattva Dharma-Treasury, who, through establishing the unhindered Vow as the cause, became Amida Buddha. . . . This Buddha . . . is the dharma-body as compassionate means. "Compassionate means" refers to manifesting form, revealing a name, and making oneself known to sentient beings. It refers to Amida Buddha.[35]

We find it stated in these passages that reality (suchness, dharma-body) is formless, completely ungrasped through conception and speech. Nevertheless, this reality acts to make itself known to ignorant beings. Shinran is here following T'an-luan, who asserts that formless reality and manifest form "differ but are not separable; they are one but cannot be regarded as identical."[36]

Shinran goes on, however, to recast traditional formulations into specifically linguistic terms, stating that formless reality moves into the awareness of beings by "manifesting form and *revealing a name.*" In other words, reality takes verbal form to disclose itself to ignorant human beings. Further, T'an-luan's characterizes the relationship between the two dimensions of dharma-body as one of "interpenetration."[37] When we apply this conception to the linguistic forms manifested by dharma-body as dharma-nature, we may say that reality and name, while differing as that characterized by formlessness (inconceivability) and that characterized by

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34 *Notes on `Essentials of Faith Alone'*, CWS I: 461 adapted (SSZ 2: 630-631).

35 *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling,* CWS I: 486 adapted (SSZ 2: 616).

36 Quoted in "Chapter on Realization," 17, CWS I: 165 (SSZ 2: 111).

37 *Sōnyū* 相入, CWS I: 165 (SSZ 2: 111).

form (word, concept), interpenetrate each other and are inseparable. This interfusion of formlessness and form, or nonduality of subject and object simultaneous with their duality, is the central feature of true language in Shinran's thought.

True Language as the Interpenetration of Dynamics

In order for language to be the medium through and in which unenlightened beings encounter and become one with that which is true and real, it must possess the two dimensions of formlessness and form simultaneously. From the perspective of beings, it must first of all be meaningful; that is, it must be accessible to our conceptual understanding.[38] Second, such language must manifest the two relationships of nonduality – with reality and with thought – mentioned above. This implies that it is also beyond the dichotomous functioning of conceptual understanding. It must also be inconceivable.

Thus, true language as the Name of Amida must be characterized by both conception and inconceivability, form and formlessness. It may be understood in terms of the concepts of Vow and Amida Buddha and, at the same time, it is not different from suchness or reality as things as they truly are. This does not mean that the Name may be comprehended as simply the form of that which is formless or as a word that refers to Buddha or reality. In such an understanding, the Name as word becomes an instrument appropriated within our ordinary modes of

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38 A clear indication that the Name possesses this aspect is seen in Shinran's use of equivalents and translations in addition to "Namu-amida-butsu." See, for example, *Lamp for the Latter Ages*, 14, CWS I: 543, where he dismisses criticism of utterance of *kimyō jinjippō mugekō nyorai* (I take refuge in Tathagata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters), stating that "Vasubandhu, exhausting all his resources, created this expression in order that we might know Amida's form with perfect certainty."

thought and speech. It is considered a means (invocation, prayer, practice) by which a relationship with the real may be established.

Shinran carefully avoids such a single-dimensional understanding by delineating a complex structure that informs the Name. The basic elements of this structure are dynamic processes that integrate the formless and form while resisting objectifying understanding. He employs two narrative motifs in which the qualities of duality (conception, subject and object) and nonduality (inconceivability) are conjoined by processes leading to disparate attainments. One results in the fulfilled Buddha-body adorned with the Buddha's virtues *(hōjin, sambhogakaya)*, which, as light or wisdom itself, is further said to be formless. The other results in dharma-body as compassionate means *(hōben hosshin)*, which is understood to be the emergence of form from formlessness. The first attainment may be envisioned as a process along a horizontal vector of temporal and causal progression; the second, emergence into form, as movement along a vertical vector from the timeless into the world of time and history.

In Shinran's view, the interfusion of these two vectors or moments comprises the basic structure of language that manifests what is true and real. Neither vector is in itself adequate, for alone it would tend to be frozen within the coordinates of our ego-centered calculative thought. Each undercuts the other, proceeding in opposite directions between the poles of form and formlessness or time and timelessness. At the same time, each serves as the source of the other's fulfillment, as we will see below. This structure allows for accessibility while denying an objectifying grasp; it accounts for transformative power while rejecting the imposition of ordinary frames of reference.

Let us turn once more to Shinran's discussions of dharma-body as compassionate means *(hōben hosshin)* and the fulfilled (or recompense) Buddha-body *(hōjin)*.

Shinran applies both of these concepts to Amida, and uses both terms in both passages. Nevertheless, each passage tends to be dominated by one term or the other, for while they are similar in content, both indicating that Amida is characterized by both form and formlessness, they have distinct implications.

Fulfilled Buddha-body: Temporal-Causal Attainment

Passage I is part of a commentary on the first line of the following hymn from Shan-tao:

> The land of bliss is the realm of nirvana, the uncreated;
>
> I fear it is hard to be born there by doing sundry good acts according to our diverse conditions.
>
> Hence, the Buddha selected the essential dharma,
>
> Instructing beings to say Amida's Name with singleness, again singleness.[39]

Shinran's chief concern in his commentary is to reveal the foundation for the rejection of self-power and the advocacy of the nembutsu expressed in the second half of Shan-tao's verse. He accomplishes this by setting forth, in his interpretation of the first line, the concrete, active aspect of reality in the Pure Land path.

As we have seen, Shinran first mentions the concept of the emergence of dharma-body as compassionate means early in his discussion, but he develops it with reference to Dharma-Treasury Bodhisattva as well as to Amida Buddha. By doing so, he emphasizes it as a general principle underlying the entire causal narrative of Dharma-Treasury Bodhisattva becoming Amida Buddha. Because his aim is to disclose the active significance of the potentially static concept of "the uncreated," he brings his discussion to focus on Amida as the

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39 *Hymns of the Nembutsu Liturgy* (*Hōjisan*) T47, 433b.

temporally attained and presently dynamic "fulfilled Buddha-body":

> I. Amida Buddha has fulfilled the Vows, which are the cause of his Buddhahood, and thus is called "Buddha of fulfilled body" . . . . "Fulfilled" means that the cause for enlightenment has been fulfilled.
>
> From the fulfilled body innumerable personified and accommodated bodies are manifested, radiating the unhindered light of wisdom throughout the countless worlds. . . . "Unhindered" means not obstructed by the karmic evil and blind passions of beings. Know, therefore, that Amida Buddha is light, and that light is the form taken by wisdom.[40]

In the concept of "fulfilled body," "fulfilled" means that "the cause for enlightenment has been fulfilled." The cause of enlightenment refers to Amida's Vows to bring all beings to birth into the Pure Land. The fulfilled body therefore is described in terms of activity to save beings, such as manifesting bodies that radiate light throughout the cosmos and dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

Dharma-body as Compassionate Means: Emergence from Timeless Reality

The reverse relationship between the concepts of "dharma-body as compassionate means" and "fulfilled Buddha-body" is seen in the exposition presented in passage II. In this context, Shinran's concern is to show that Amida's Primal Vow is indeed the authentic and supreme One Vehicle by which all beings attain enlightenment, and that it is precisely in order to teach this Vow that Buddhas appear in the world history. Thus, Shinran emphasizes here the relationship between the Vow and nondichotomous true reality:

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40 *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, CWS I: 461-462 (SSZ 2: 631).

> II. Since the wondrous principle of true reality or suchness has reached its perfection [in the Primal Vow, this Vow] is likened to a great treasure ocean. . . . [T]he Buddha's nondiscriminating, unobstructed, and nonexclusive guidance of all sentient beings is likened to the all-embracing waters of the great ocean.[41]

Thus, just the reverse of passage I, Shinran first presents the narrative elements of Amida's Vow in temporal sequence, introducing the concept of fulfilled body, and then guides his discussion to an elaboration of Amida's nature employing the concept of dharma-body as compassionate means:

> II. This Tathagata is also known as "*Namu*-inconceivable light-buddha" *(Namu-fukashigikō-butsu)* and is "dharma-body as compassionate means." "Compassionate means" refers to manifesting form, revealing a name, and making oneself known to sentient beings. It refers to Amida Buddha.
>
> This Tathagata is light. Light is none other than the form of wisdom; wisdom is the form of light. Wisdom is, in addition, formless; hence this Tathagata is the Buddha of inconceivable light.

The concept of dharma-body as compassionate means points to the vertical, transtemporal relationship between reality that cannot be grasped conceptually and Buddha as form and name. "Compassionate means" here signifies both accessibility from the stance of beings and beings' encounter with reality, and as Shinran states earlier in this passage (passage II), "'To encounter' implies form." Thus, for Shinran, the light of wisdom is characterized by both form and formlessness, as is the Name, for Amida is above all Buddha as Name.

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41 *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling,* CWS I: 486 (SSZ 2: 615-616).

Dialectic of Temporal/Causal and Emergent Frameworks

We see, from the two passages on the origins and nature of Amida Buddha, that in Shinran's thought, the concepts of dharma-body as compassionate means and of fulfilled Buddha-body are held in an irresolvable tension. On the one hand, the concept of the two dimensions of dharma-body encompasses the concept of the fulfilled Buddha-body achieved through the completion of the Vow. This is a unique aspect of Shinran's teaching, for Hōnen and his predecessors accepted a historical framework for viewing the narrative of Dharma-Treasury Bodhisattva becoming Amida Buddha.[42] In Shinran, dharma-body as suchness emerging as dharma-body as compassionate means – "announcing the name Bhiksu Dharma-Treasury and establishing the forty-eight great vows that surpass conceptual understanding"[43] – stands as a prior movement of an emergence into history or time from beyond time. (This corresponds to the emphasis in passage II.)

At the same time, the concept of fulfilled Buddha-body embraces that of dharma-body as compassionate means in the sense that it shapes the emergence from formlessness. Without the causal, historical narrative of Dharma-Treasury becoming Amida or of the Vow and its fulfillment, the emergence into the awareness of beings cannot be accomplished. Thus, it is not Amida who appears directly from suchness and announces a name, but Dharma-Treasury.[44] In fact, it is the narrative of the

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42 Unlike Shinran, T'an-luan does not apply his concept of two dharma-bodies specifically to Bodhisattva Dharma-Treasury/Amida Buddha, but rather to all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, who have attained formless dharma-body by traversing the bodhisattva path.

43 *Notes on `Essentials of Faith Alone'*, CWS I: 461 (SSZ 2: 630-631).

44 In "Chapter on Realization," Shinran does state that Amida comes

fulfilled Buddha-body – the process of Dharma-Treasury becoming Amida – that is the emergence into form of that which is formless. (This corresponds to the passage I.)

Thus, the two conceptions of Amida are in essence embodiments of dynamic movements, and they maintain their dynamic quality by remaining in dialectical tension with each other. This is a tension between the vertical movement of the timeless into time and the horizontal movement of causal, temporal process and fulfillment. It is because the "forty-eight great vows that surpass conceptual understanding" – the "unhindered Vows" – have their source in true reality that the fulfilled body can radiate "the unhindered light of wisdom throughout the countless worlds." Further, it is because the causally fulfilled body has appeared in history "in the form of light called 'Tathagata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters'" that dharma-body as suchness has emerged into conceptual human awareness as dharma-body as compassionate means.

What is central for our concerns here is that Name and Vow share this character of the intersection of dynamics – of interfused movements between form and formlessness rooted in their nonduality – and it is precisely this character that enables them, as liberative language of the Buddhist path, to possess both accessibility and transformative power. That is, it is by entrance into these dynamics that genuine awareness of self and world from beyond the stance of objectifying self-attachment can arise.

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forth from suchness; this is, in fact, his interpretation of the term *tathāgata* ("thus come"), which is commonly used as a title for Buddha. This does not, however, preclude the implied inclusion of a "long route" to emergence through the aspect of temporal, causal process that we are considering here.

PART TWO

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PURE LAND TEACHING

Chapter Fourth

Modes of Engagement with the Teaching

> "Namu" [in Namu-amida-butsu] means to take refuge . . . . It is the command of the Primal Vow calling to and summoning beings.
> —"Chapter on Practice," 34.

From Words into No-Word

We must turn now to consider how the possibility of apprehending reality or wisdom through the verbal teaching has been viewed in Mahayana thought and by Shinran. We have seen that reality, which is manifested when the false discrimination of ordinary thought and speech has been broken through, works to disclose itself to beings through language. This emergence into words, therefore, must bring about the reverse movement, in which unenlightened beings awaken to and touch nonconceptual reality through the words of the teaching. To begin, we find an indication of such "entrance" into awakening through language at the conclusion to "Chapter on True Buddha and Land," which completes Shinran's treatment of the true and real teaching, practice, and realization. There, he cites a passage from The Awakening of Faith together with a commentary by Fei-hsi, both drawn from Fei-shi's Treatise on Nembutsu-Samadhi.

> *The Awakening of Faith* states:
>
> To realize that even though one expresses it in words, there is no one who can express it, and that [even in thinking] there is no one who can think it – this is called "being in accord [with reality]." Freedom from thought is called "attaining entrance."[45]

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45 Quoted from *Treatise on Nembutsu-Samadhi Treasure-King (Nembutsu-zammai hōō ron)* by Fei-hsi (Hishaku, fl. 8 c.) in "Chapter on True Buddha and Land," 38, CWS I: 202 (SSZ 2:

In the original context, this passage speaks of "all things" *(issai hō)*: even though "all things" are conceived of and expressed in words, it is realized, from the stance of nondiscriminative wisdom, that things we normally grasp conceptually are in actuality beyond such conception, formless and inexpressible; to realize this is to be "in accord with reality."[46] Thus, to be utterly free of all thought is to "attain entrance" into reality.

Fei-hsi, in his commentary on the expression "attaining entrance," states that the condition of no-thought, which includes awareness of the first arising of thought, "cannot be known even by bodhisattvas of the tenth stage," that is, of the highest level of attainment immediately preceding enlightenment. He concludes, therefore,

> Such people as ourselves . . . have not yet attained even the ten stages of understanding; hence, we must rely on Aśvaghosa Mahāsattva [and his teaching in the *Awakening of Faith*] and enter from words into no-word, from thought into no-thought.

Here, we find explicitly sketched the movement through the words of the teaching to reality that transcends all words.

Regarding Shinran's understanding of this passage, we must note that in Fei-hsi's text, the phrase "all things" is omitted from the quotation of *The Awakening of Faith.* Thus, when this passage is read in the context of *Teaching, Practice and Realization,* it is natural to take the object of thought and language as Buddha-nature, or reality as the potential for awakening pervading sentient beings, for preceding the passage, Shinran states:

> Delusional and defiled sentient beings cannot, here [in this world], see [Buddha-] nature, for it is covered over by

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46 T32, 376a.

> their blind passions. The *[Nirvana] Sutra* states, "I have taught that bodhisattvas of the tenth stage see a little of Buddha-nature."[47]

Shinran's point here is that beings will, through the working of the Primal Vow, attain genuine, supreme Buddhahood in the Pure Land. He quotes the *Nirvana Sutra:* "Sentient beings will, in the future, possess a body of purity adorned with virtues and be able to see Buddha-nature." Thus, through and in form (Amida, Vow, Pure Land), beings enter the formless (Buddha-nature).

The Four Reliances

Shinran also refers to the concept of the "four reliances" (*shi-e*), which sets forth the proper stance for reading the sutras. In "Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands," he stresses that "monks and lay people of the latter age should practice the dharma with clear awareness of the four reliances" after quoting the discussion of the four reliances in Nagarjuna's (Nāgārjuna, c. 2-3 c.) *Commentary on the Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra:*

> When Sakyamuni was about to enter nirvana, he said to the bhiksus, "From this day on, (1) rely on dharma, not on people who teach it. (2) Rely on the meaning, not on the words. (3) Rely on wisdom, not on the working of the mind. (4) Rely on the sutras that fully express the meaning, not on those that do not.[48]

From the perspective of our concerns here, the chief among these reliances are the second and third. Concerning the second, "rely on the meaning, not the words," Nagarjuna gives as Sakyamuni's explanation:

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47 "Chapter on True Buddha and Land," 37, CWS I: 202 (SSZ 2: 140).

48 "Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands," 71, CWS I: 241 (SSZ 2: 166).

> With regard to relying on the meaning, meaning itself is beyond debate of such matters as like against dislike, evil against virtue, falsity against truth. Hence, words may indeed have meaning, but the meaning is not the words. Consider, for example, a person instructing us by pointing to the moon with his finger. [To take words to be the meaning] is like looking at the finger and not at the moon. . . . Hence, do not rely upon words.

The well-known analogy of the finger pointing to the moon suggests an instrumental use of language, but in fact the central point is an admonishment against attachment to words of the teaching that one has locked into ordinary frameworks of understanding. To do so is to reduce the teaching to one's own delusional speech and to rob it of its power to point to reality. Since the intent of the words lies beyond our unenlightened, discriminative perceptions of "like against dislike, evil against virtue, falsity against truth," one must not grasp the words as ordinary language, but must see that "the meaning is not the words."

The attitude of genuine reliance, therefore, demands that we understand the language of the teaching to differ in nature from unenlightened speech. This is also expressed in the third reliance, "rely on wisdom, not on the working of the mind":

> As to relying on wisdom, wisdom is able to distinguish and measure good and evil. The working of mind always seeks pleasure and does not reach the essential. Hence it is said, 'Do not rely on mind.'

Since the words arise from wisdom, one must apprehend them through wisdom. To encounter them with our ordinary thinking, dominated by attachment to a delusional self, is to fail to grasp the actual meaning.

The importance of this passage on the four reliances for Shinran is revealed by its placement in *Teaching, Practice and Realization* following an exposition of his own shifts in engagement with the path, in which he first

"departed everlastingly from the temporary gate of the myriad practices and various good acts" – the attempt to attain birth in the Pure Land through performing practices – and "entered the 'true' gate of the root of good and the root of virtue," that is, the recitation of nembutsu as a means of gaining merit. He then "departed from the 'true' gate of provisional means and, [his self-power] overturned, . . . entered the ocean of the selected Vow," or Other Power.[49] As will be discussed below, Shinran's spoken words to followers who came to him with doubts and questions may be seen as an effort to bring them through the shift that he describes here. Thus, he adopts the concept of the four reliances partly to express the need to arrive at an engagement with the teaching that differs from our ordinary modes of understanding.

Engagement with Language in the Pure Land Path

In many forms of Buddhist tradition, engagement with the teaching is understood to deepen through endeavor in the praxis it expounds. As one gradually cultivates the insight that is identical with the wisdom from which the teaching has emerged, one comes genuinely to apprehend the meaning behind the words. Thus, understanding of the teaching and performance of praxis progress and deepen together and finally lead beyond the bounds of language.

As discussed above, the path Shinran sets forth is distinctive in that it turns not on the eradication of false, delusional thought as embodied in our ordinary language, but rather on engagement with language in which word is

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49 "Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands," 68, CWS I: 240 (SSZ 2: 166). This passage is referred to as the "turnings through the three Vows" *(sangan tennyū)*, a move from two Vows of self-power practices (the Twentieth and Nineteenth) to the Eighteenth Vow of Other Power. In Shinran's understanding, the provisional self-power teachings were intended from the outset to guide beings to the true.

one with reality and thought and spoken word are nondual. This may be said to be an engagement in which reality as liberative practice enters a person's existence as language. Rather than functioning as concepts and truth-claims to be assented to and appropriated within our ordinary frames of thought, the language of the Pure Land path, because of the dialogical structure seen above, demands and enables a corresponding mode of engagement.

Just as the Vow-narrative and Name embody temporal-causal and emergent vectors fused but interactive, so persons' hearing and voicing of the Name – its manifestation in them as *shinjin* – is an occurrence in which their karmic existence is touched and pervaded by reality. It is for this reason that the realization of *shinjin* is, for Shinran, a decisive and irreversible event, one that arises through a dynamic process of engagement with otherness embodied in words.

Two Modes of Engagement with Otherness

Shinran states that Amida's Vow "breaks through the darkness and ignorance of all foolish beings and gives rise in them to *shinjin*."[50] Unenlightened beings can only listen attentively and reflectively to the narratives of the teaching and await the working of the Vow, which not merely gathers them like streams into itself, but actively "causes beings to flow into the ocean of the Vow." The Vow is at once the source of aspiration and the inconceivable goal itself.

This dynamic circularity – perhaps inherent in any conception of reality as love or wisdom-compassion – is experienced by the person embarking upon the Shin Buddhist path as an interaction between basic elements of the teaching, one that we sense immediately when we

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50 "Chapter on Practice," 100, CWS I: 67 (SSZ 2: 42).

ask such rudimentary questions as why the path requires both "Amida Buddha" and "Pure Land" if they are, as Shinran teaches, identical in their wellsprings (reality) and essence (as light or wisdom), or why the Vow requires the Name also – from the practicer's perspective, why practice of saying the nembutsu is necessary as well as realization of *shinjin* or true entrusting. Thus, in the engagement with the Pure Land path, the general contours of two distinct phases of may be sketched:[51]

1. The person entering the Pure Land path may find that it harbors an interior dialectic. This dialectic is experienced as an interaction – a shifting of frames of reference – between two fundamental modes or models of apprehending reality. In order to view them in a broad context, we may label these modes the teleological and the interpersonal.

The teleological mode – based on the aspiration and will of beings to accord with the good and true that, exceeding their present state, can heal and fulfill their existence – develops in the teaching in terms of a dualism between this world and the Pure Land. The interpersonal mode – based on the revelation of reality to us in human images and qualities – develops in terms of a dualism of self and Buddha.

In the Pure Land teaching, both modes of apprehension are established, but inevitably come into a tension that deepens the two forms of dualism shaped by the Pure Land images, bringing the aspirant to self-reflection and at times a growing sense of distance or alienation from the teaching.

2. At some point along the path, however, this tension may be resolved and the dualisms implied (this

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51 Since I have discussed them in *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism*, here I summarize the major points.

world/Pure Land, self/Buddha) simultaneously overcome *in some sense*, though not eliminated. The overcoming of the dualities (manifestations of nonduality) occurs with the attainment of *shinjin* and leads both to a negation of the earlier conceptual structures of the teaching and further to their reemergence, this time transformed and integrated.

Since the attainment of *shinjin* typically occurs after a period of grappling with the teaching, two distinct phases or modalities of engagement with the Pure Land path – initial (or provisional) and fulfilled (or mature) – may be distinguished, with entrance into the mature phase marked by the attainment of *shinjin*, the emergence of awakening to reality in the person. The structure of the two basic modes of apprehension in the mature phase of engagement – integrated in a polarity in which their dualisms are both negated and affirmed – constitutes the precise articulation of religious existence that is Shinran's major contribution to Buddhist tradition and religious thought.

On the one hand, in teaching that birth in the Pure Land is completely settled with one's realization of *shinjin*, Shinran delineates an attainment of wisdom or reality in the present. Here, teleological will and the temporal dimension in which it works toward its goal are effectively dissolved. In this way, Shinran comes to stand beyond the absoluteness of the initial teleological duality of this world/Pure Land; he thus avoids an ultimately monistic understanding of reality and its attendant dichotomy of appearance (illusion)/reality or time/eternity. Further, in teaching that *shinjin* is itself the mind of Amida realized by beings, he also stands beyond the interpersonal duality of self/Buddha; he thus avoids a voluntaristic or theocentric view of reality, with such concomitant problems as predestination, the need for a theodicy, and a substantialist understanding of reality or of self.

In place of human will directed toward accord with a transcendent goal or theistic will, Shinran develops a perception of present life as the locus of ongoing transformation (presencing of reality in the midst of samsaric existence) that occurs "of itself" *(jinen)* and that eventually unfolds in full awakening to true reality (which is itself termed "*jinen*"). Shinran adopted the word *jinen* as a major term in his thought, using it to indicate formless reality in its dynamic modality, working to manifest itself as the awakening of beings to Amida's wisdom-compassion. Shinran defines *jinen* to mean "made to become so; not accomplished through a person's intentions and designs," and also speaks of *jinen* as indicating inconceivable Buddha or reality. It may be said that *jinen* is Shinran's characterization of reality as creative, in that it is itself the collapse of habitual understandings based on self-attachment, and as disclosive, in that it enables a broadened and renewed seeing of the self and the world.

Thus, on the other hand, by framing the narrative of Dharma-Treasury Bodhisattva becoming Amida Buddha with a conception of the story of the Vow as itself form emerging from formless reality in order to awaken each being, Shinran reaffirms the power and validity of Amida and the Pure Land – not as objects of will, but as manifestations of reality as wisdom-compassion perceiving beings and moving toward and within them. Here, genuine aspiration for the Pure Land emerges for the first time as itself an expression of the Buddha-mind.

In this way, Shinran forges a linguistically-mediated grasp of reality as compassion that, being based on an immediate apprehension of the transcendent that is nondual with existence, is consonant with reality or nondichotomous wisdom as it is understood in Mahayana tradition. The absolutizing of doctrinal concepts and reifying of images as objects of will is discouraged; at the same time, both personal and

teleological images are affirmed as expressive of the natural dynamic of the transcendent, and they direct the practicer to a new awareness of the self in the world, and to a full and positive involvement in everyday life.

Chapter Fifth
The Encounter with Truth

The Nature of Encounter with Truth

Our basic question concerns the role of language in the Pure Land Buddhist path in manifesting, imparting, and actualizing truth. It is possible to take up this topic both in relation to the concepts and narratives of the teachings and in relation to the awareness of the person engaging them. In Chapters 3 and 4, we sketched chiefly elements of the former aspect; in the remainder of this essay, we focus on the latter. What is it to encounter and to realize truth – in both senses of apprehension and actualization – in and through the Pure Land teachings?

As we have seen, in Shinran's path "nirvana is attained without severing blind passions." This means that one does not traverse the path by extricating oneself from the "lies and gibberish" of ordinary life. Rather, it is an essential characteristic of the path that its language be accessible to us just as we are, "possessed of blind passions" and bound to the linguistic universe of a particular locale in the history of a culture and society. At the same time, however, the true language of the teaching is not authentically apprehended if it is not distinct from the words of our ordinary life. If the words of the Buddha are grasped merely as confirming our delusional worldview or as teaching a means to enhance the existence of the egocentric self, we reduce them to language of ordinary life. It is here that we see the significance of Shinran's stark dichotomy of false and true language.

It may be said, therefore, that unlike other paths, which lead out of the world of false language into direct awakening to reality, Shinran's path leads from our

ordinary consciousness and thought into a world characterized by the simultaneous presence of false and true language. In our ordinary consciousness, we carry on our lives using speech that may, judged by our relative standards of accuracy or veracity or coherence, be true or false or of various gradings between these poles. According to Shinran, however, to enter genuine engagement with the path is a radical shift in which we become aware, at once, of the falsity of ordinary speech and the reality of true language.

Dialogical Engagement with Truth

To clarify further Shinran's understanding of the nature of truth, it may be helpful to consider a passage recording his spoken words drawn from *Tannishō*. I will focus in particular on the way in which he guides listeners from ordinary modes of thinking to realization of awakened awareness as *shinjin*. A striking example of such a transformative mode of expression may be found in *Tannishō* 2.[52]

From the words that open Shinran's speech at the beginning of this passage, the dramatic context in which they were uttered is clear. Disciples of Shinran have made the arduous journey to Kyoto from the Kantō area to see the master. Their sole aim is to seek "the path to birth in the land of bliss" – either through reassurance of the truth of the nembutsu teaching they have embraced previously or, failing that, through a new teaching Shinran may also know. They appear to have been shaken by various criticisms of the nembutsu teaching they were subjected to in the Kantō region. In addition, Shinran's own son Zenran, who was sent by Shinran to resolve the doubts of followers, ended up betraying his father's trust and thereby spawning further clashes and

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52 For the full passage, see the Appendix.

confusion. It appears that nembutsu practitioners were even being told they would fall into hell for following Hōnen's teaching. Shinran's disciples, then, have come seeking some sort of proof of the truth of the nembutsu teaching.

How does Shinran respond? What, from Shinran's perspective, constitutes a demonstration of truth? From the stance of our concerns with the notion of truth, we may note four phases of Shinran's answer that illuminate his attitude.

First, Shinran begins his response by forcefully declining to deal with the question within the framework that his disciples have presented it. He upsets their expectations by rejecting the presuppositions they have assumed in seeking an audience with him:

> If you imagine in me some special knowledge of a way to birth other than the nembutsu or a familiarity with writings that teach it, you are greatly mistaken. If that is the case, you would do better to visit the many eminent scholar-monks [of the great temple-compounds] in Nara or on Mount Hiei.

Shinran refuses to allow his disciples to rely on any authority, whether of scriptural text or his own charismatic person. He advises that if they seek such assurance, they should go to the eminent monks of the state-supported temple centers. Shinran is thoroughly familiar with the disputation conducted in those monastic halls, and he turns down the request to engage in such an exercise. Generalizing from this, we may conjecture that Shinran is rejecting here the processes of reasoning as they normally operate in ordinary life, occupied with grounds and methods for achieving a goal. He denies that in the path he is teaching – the path taught by Hōnen – such reasoning can serve as the basis for authentic engagement. The truth of the nembutsu path is neither demonstrated by usual means of reasoning nor genuinely engaged as a result.

Second, as an alternative to the mindset of his disciples, Shinran offers the view from his own personal perspective:

> I simply accept and entrust myself to what a good teacher told me, "Just say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida"; nothing else is involved.

Here he appears, in his invocation of Hōnen, to appeal to a reliance on authority similar to what he has just rejected. We must note, however, that Shinran is not here seeking to present an argument by which to persuade his followers of the truth of the teaching, but rather establishing a stance distinct from the sphere of the disciples' inquiry. He thereby sets up an authentically dialogical situation in relation to his listeners, one reminiscent of the significance of Sakyamuni's luminious appearance in the narrative that frames the *Larger Sutra* considered in Chapter 2 above. This situation of encounter across qualitatively disparate stances is echoed in Shinran's reference here to Hōnen, and is characterized by the genuine Otherness that stands outside the horizon of the constructed self. In the case of Shinran and his interlocutors, the crucial difference is indicated by the phrase, "nothing else is involved." These words signify the absence of precisely the disciples' reckoning of foundations, methods, and goal-orientation that Shinran describes in his opening comments.

Next, Shinran then goes on to trace discursively the precise logic underlying his vision, a logic that runs counter to the reasoning of his disciples:

> I have no idea whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for my being born in the Pure Land or whether it is the karmic act for which I must fall into hell. Should I have been deceived by Master Hōnen and, saying the nembutsu, were to fall into hell, even then I would have no regrets. The reason is, if I could attain Buddhahood by endeavoring in other practices, but said the nembutsu and so fell into hell, then I would feel regret at having been deceived. But I am incapable of any

other practice, so hell is decidedly my abode whatever I do.

Shinran here rejects the weighing of methods for birth in the Pure Land and develops this rejection by transposing usual modes of thinking into a logic of regret. Regret is the natural consequence of a breakdown in the reasoning regarding foundations and practical methods – the endeavor to manage a matter that Shinran terms "contrivance" or "design" *(hakarai)*. But where expectation of such effort has been abandoned at the outset, there is no basis for such regret to arise.[53]

It is not, of course, that *hakarai* operates in regress, for example, by turning into an assessment that "nothing else is left to me" but to rely on the nembutsu. Rather, where the conclusion is inescapable – where no method can alter the direction of cause and effect – *hakarai* falls away, and at the same time, where such calculative thinking has fallen away, the condition of evil and ignorance stands exposed. However it may come about, "nothing else is involved," as the absence of self-attached designs, means that "hell is decidedly my abode whatever I do."

Finally, in the abrupt conclusion for which, once more, we are not prepared by any ordinary logic, Shinran stands the argument anticipated by his disciples on its head, beginning with what was to be proven and asserting essentially that the teachings of the tradition are true because they arise from the Primal Vow of Amida, rather than that the Vow is true based on scriptural or authoritative evidence. We have considered this passage above:

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53 For a modern treatment of this view of regret, see Nishida Kitarō, in Dennis Hirota, "Nishida's Gutoku Shinran," *Eastern Buddhist*, xxviii:2 (Autumn 1995), 231-244.

> *If* Amida's Primal Vow is true, Sakyamuni's teaching cannot be false. *If* the Buddha's teaching is true and real, Shan-tao's commentaries cannot be lies. *If* Shan-tao's commentaries are true and real, can what Hōnen said be a lie? *If* what Hōnen said is true and real, then surely my words cannot be empty.

In using the conditional *if*, Shinran indicates that his statement is not an assertion of objective fact or of the acceptance of scriptural authority, but a matter of personal engagement and retrieval. Here, Shinran comes full circle, giving in broadened context and generalized form his original, personal statement: "I simply accept and entrust myself to what a good teacher told me, 'Just say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida.'" In the truth of Hōnen's words, he was transfixed by the working of the Vow. Finally, therefore, Shinran states, "Whether you entrust yourself, taking up the nembutsu, or whether you abandon it, must be a matter of your own reckoning *(on-hakarai)*."

The sudden leap between the third and fourth phases of Shinran's response does not follow from discursive progression. That Shinran is bound for hell and that Amida's Primal Vow is true stand together in stark juxtaposition, as dark and light, where that which is illuminated shows the presence of light by its very lack of luminance.

The Character of Truth

What, then, is the conception of truth at work in the passage from *Tannishō* considered above? From our discussion, it is possible to enumerate several major characteristics. First, it is clear that Shinran's rejection of *hakarai* is not an abandonment of reasoning and truth. Shinran lays out his own argument in tight logical connectives. Truth, however, is not to be arrived at through the thinking with which we normally carry on our everyday lives, for such thinking is rooted in attachments to a

delusional self. Rather than truth as propositional statement or assertion about the world from the stance of a reified subject, for Shinran truth might be characterized as a fundamental shift in stance, a transformative event in which the self is dislodged from an absolute standpoint and made aware of its conditionedness. Thus, truth is the emergence of authentic self-awareness of one's existence as finite and delusional (evil in the Buddhist sense).

This sense of truth as a basic shift in mode of existence is expressed in a passage closely resembling parts of *Tannishō* 2 from *Shūjishō*, a record of Shinran's words by his great-grandson Kakunyo:

> For myself, I have no idea whether I am bound for the Pure Land or for hell. The late Master Hōnen said, "Just come wherever I may be." Having embraced these words, I shall go to the place where the late Master has gone, even if it be hell.
>
> If I had not encountered my good teacher in this life, foolish being that I am, I would surely have fallen into hell. But accepting the instruction of the Master, I have heard Amida's Primal Vow and received the truth *(kotowari)* of being grasped, never to be abandoned [by Amida's wisdom-compassion]. Thus, though it is difficult to part from samsaric existence, I have parted from it and will decidedly be born in the Pure Land.[54]

To accept Hōnen's instruction, to hear the Primal Vow, and to receive the truth of the teaching are not a matter of understanding within samsaric life, but may be expressed as going "to the place where the late Master has gone," as a shift in the stance of the conduct of one's life, so that one has parted from samsaric existence.

Here, we see the second major characteristic of Shinran's conception of truth. Shinran speaks of the importance of his encounter with Hōnen, who, from his own stance, beckons Shinran to cross the gap from

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54 SSZ III, 38.

ordinary existence. In precisely the same way, in the passage from *Tannishō* 2, Shinran beckons his disciples from their calculation of methods for achieving the Pure Land to his own stance, in which hell is decidedly his abode. Paradoxically, it is this stance of the exposed self that enables him to say: "If Hōnen's words are true, then surely what I say cannot be empty."

What is central here is the transformative force of what is true. The true words encountered in the person of Hōnen do not so much call one from the things of the world as they call one from the sameness of the world envisioned and embraced from the stance of the ego-self. The otherness of Other Power manifests itself precisely as the limits or boundary of the framework in which we measure and gauge the worth and resilience of our own extended existence. For Shinran, only in an existential encounter with otherness through dialogical engagement can the delusional attachments of our everyday life be broken. A reasoned adherence to the Pure Land teaching cannot bring us beyond the limits of our ego-centered judgment. It is for this reason that Shinran speaks of Other Power – which traditionally signifies the salvific activity of Amida Buddha – in the negative: "Other Power means to be free of any form of *hakarai.*"[55]

This brings us to a third major characteristic of Shinran's notion of truth: its dynamic multivalence. It becomes manifest in the process of understanding because it is a mode of apprehension and not a conceptual formulation. The quality of truth lies not in an intellectual grasp alone, but in an awareness that includes the recognition of its own finitude and its final partiality and untruth.[56] Truth for Shinran is not abstract

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55 *Lamp for the Latter Ages*, letter 10; CWS I: 537 (SSZ 2: 671).

56 For a detailed treatment in terms of the concepts and structures of the Pure Land teaching, see my article "Breaking the Darkness: Images of Reality in the Shin Buddhist Path," *Japanese Religions*, 16:3 (January 1991), 17-45, and in *Toward*

and transcendent, but always truth as performative, as Other Power that works to reveal the situatedness of human understanding. In this sense, truth for Shinran is neither objectified nor emanational; it does not stand apart from ignorance and falsity, for it functions as the self-awareness of karmically conditioned existence.

From the above, we see that in Shinran's thought, truth is above all enacted, a transformative event that manifests the functioning of self-awareness; dialogical in character as appropriate to the linguisticality of our existence; and pluralist and nonreifying in its force.

Chapter Sixth
The Context of Encounter

Personal Encounter with Truth

A movement of two aspects or shifts in perspective is at work in Shinran's responses to his followers: first, a negation, in which we find expressed a collapse of ordinary moral presuppositions; and second, an affirmation as the unfolding of truth or reality that is simultaneously oppositional to and nondifferent from falsity and ignorance. In Part Three, we will consider passages from *Tannishō* with an eye to the enactment of these shifts. Before taking up this dynamic directly, however, two preliminary points may be noted.

First, deeply interpersonal, rather than simply textual or abstracted, encounter with truth is an ingrained aspect of Pure Land tradition and of Shinran's own life and thought. Hōnen, following the stream of Chinese Pure Land tradition highlighted by Tao-ch'o and Shan-tao, built his interpretation of Amida's Primal Vow on the Contemplation Sutra narrative of the person immersed in evil throughout his life encountering a "good friend" who teaches him the nembutsu on his deathbed.[57] While Shinran regards this narrative as only a "provisional" teaching, with a similar emphasis on personal guidance, he gives the story of Prince Ajatasatru, who murdered his father and imprisioned his mother in order to seize the throne, as the prime example of the person beyond healing who is in fact the object of Amida's Vow. In long quotations in the central chapter of his major work, *Teaching, Practice, and Realization*, Shinran focuses on Ajatasatru's remorse and

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57 See Meiji Yamada, et. al., *The Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*, Kyoto: Ryūkoku University, 1984, 107-111.

his salvific encounter with Sakyamuni Buddha, guided by a faithful advisor.

In Shinran's own life, his teacher Hōnen played a crucial role, as we have seen from expressions of his reverence for his master above. Before taking refuge with Hōnen at age twenty-nine, Shinran is said to have visited him every day for one hundred days to face him and inquire directly about the teaching. In hymns written half a century later, nearly five decades after Hōnen's death, Shinran speaks of his teacher as a manifestation of Amida Buddha. We may note further that this view of Hōnen holds a general significance in Shinran's thought, for he emphasizes that persons born in the Pure Land immediately return to this world, taking on various modes of existence to work compassionately for the liberation of beings in samsara. It may be said, therefore, that if interpersonal encounters with the realm of awakening are usually necessary to bring about the realization of *shinjin*, the mechanism for such encounters is also narratively accounted for in the teachings. Such compassionate activity is one aspect of the working of *jinen*, or the truth and reality that is Amida's Vow. In other words, the concrete events of beings' engagement with truth may be conceived as occasioned, sustained, and fulfilled by the working of wisdom-compassion in a myriad forms in this world.

Falsity and Moral Agency

The encounter with truth, for Shinran, is not only interpersonal, but always also an engagement with personal falsity. This is the second point we must note in Shinran's responses to interlocutors. We have seen that Shinran speaks of the falsity that stands in opposition to truth as *koke* – what is vacuous and transitory. Further, he states that falsity is the absence of a mind true, real, and sincere. It is, in other words, our ordinary consciousness, which is absorbed with delusional attachments and

isolated from what is real. According to Shinran, this falsity displays itself prominently in the form of moral concerns. Although in many religious traditions, moral conduct is viewed as inextricably intertwined with religious life, for Shinran, moral consciousness – the confidence in one's ability to determine good and evil and accomplish genuine good – may be said to be the final barrier to authentic engagement with truth for the Pure Land Buddhist.

One recent discussion of classical Western accounts of moral agency from the perspective of religious ethics distinguishes three broad elements: moral disposition, moral capacity, and moral judgment.[58] Moral disposition is the intrinsic, primal desire for well-being in human beings that naturally leads one to seek to do right and reject wrong. Moral capacity includes all human powers relevant to fulfilling the intention toward what is good and wholesome. Moral judgment refers to the ability to determine and pursue conduct in accord with principles of human welfare.

In Shinran's thought, each of these elements of moral agency, when understood as inherent human qualities or abilities, is negatively assessed. According to him, human beings may seek their own (or others') happiness and well-being, but this does not constitute genuine pursuit of good because "from the very beginning sentient beings, who are filled with blind passions, lack a mind true and real, a heart of purity, for they are possessed of defilements, evil, and wrong views."[59] Perhaps it is precisely this absence of innate moral disposition that leads Shinran to emphasize the critical role of a "good teacher," which we have seen above. The genuine religious impulse can only be imparted through a jolt from without, not cultivated within. For

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58 Thomas W. Ogletree, "Agents and Moral Formation," in William Schweiker, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 36-44.

59 *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, CWS, I: 493.

Hōnen and Shinran, even the awakening of the aspiration for enlightenment *(hotsu bodaishin)* is praxis of which human beings today are incapable. The same understanding from the opposite perspective may be seen in Shinran's statement that he "lacks shame and self-reproach." Not only is an inner faculty of moral orientation like conscience denied, but so is the ability to respond ingenuously to the critical views of others.

At the heart of Shinran's Pure Land path lies his critique of confidence in one's capacities of genuine moral judgment in the concrete conduct of one's daily life. He rejects any reliance on innate moral agency because he perceives that such conviction is, at bottom, rooted in blind attachment to the ego-self as real and transcendent, able to exercise judgment from beyond one's conditioned and self-interested actuality. It manifests, in fact, the stubborn, intractable core of clinging to the worth and goodness of one's own existence, in the form of assurance that one can effect one's own liberation by making oneself good and worthy. Thus, the Pure Land path is precisely that form of Buddhist tradition that most sharply problematizes the human being as moral agent from the stance of the falsity of the self.

Falsity as the Doubled Self of Moral Judgment

Shinran develops the conception of falsity as discrimination of good and evil in his critique of self-power as "belief in the recompense of good and evil." Falsity is also expressed as doubt, which a failure genuinely to encounter truth and the endeavor to appropriate it instrumentally instead. Shinran quotes the *Larger Sutra*:

> The Buddha said to Maitreya, "Suppose there are sentient beings who, with minds full of doubts, aspire to be born in that land through the practice of various meritorious acts; unable to realize the Buddha-wisdom, the inconceivable wisdom . . . . they doubt these

> wisdoms and do not entrust themselves. And yet, believing in [the recompense of] evil and good, they aspire to be born in that land through cultivating the root of good."[60]

This passage speaks of clinging to the idea that one can attain birth in the Pure Land as recompense for performing good and avoiding evil, identifying it as doubt of Buddha-wisdom, which works outside the grasp of our designing.

A central aspect of our ordinary thought and speech is self-deception, encapsulated in the discrimination of good and evil. In our normal lives, the ego-self affirms itself as true and real by judging its own acts and determining some to be good and others to be wrong or evil. This activity strengthens the foundation for self-attachment. In Shinran's view, this *hakarai* or false language is the dominant element in the affirmation of and attachment to a delusional construction of self and world. Through it, one establishes an inner self that stands apart from and judges one's acts in the world. The activity of this false subject ("mind") of calculative thinking is the focus in Shinran's definition of self-power:

> Self-power is the effort to attain birth, whether by invoking the names of Buddhas other than Amida and practicing good acts other than the nembutsu, in accordance with your particular circumstances and opportunities; or by endeavoring to make yourself worthy through amending the confusion in your acts, words, and thoughts, confident of your own powers and guided by your own calculation.[61]

We see here that the core of self-power lies in the will and effort to affirm one's own goodness, "guided by one's own calculation" *(waga hakarai no kokoro o motte).*

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60 Quoted in "Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands," 7, CWS I: 209 (SSZ 2: 145).

61 *Lamp for the Latter Ages,* letter 2, CWS I: 525 (SSZ 2: 658).

"Calculation" signifies the judgment of the inner self that views and seeks to "amend one's acts, words, and thoughts." Here, the phrase, "in accordance with one's particular circumstances and opportunities," refers to our condition within the cultural and social contexts in which our images of self and our standards of judgment are formed. This is, in other words, to assume the absolute truth of one's own conceptions of the self and the world and to affirm the stance of the ego-self.

The self standing behind and observing one's own thoughts, words, and acts implies a doubled structure that is perhaps similar to notions of conscience or the Cartesian self in Western philosophy. Shinran uses the term "doublemindedness" *(futagokoro)* as a synonym for doubt or the mind of self-power, and as an antonym for *shinjin.* "Doublemindedness" expresses wavering and indecision, but at its core it indicates the hierarchical doubled self that is the subject of calculative thinking. It is precisely this self that would be the subject of the regret that Shinran speaks of in *Tannishō,* 2 – "the person who could have attained Buddhahood by endeavoring in other practices might regret that he had been deceived if he said the nembutsu and so fell into hell" – and that he denies in himself.

For Shinran, all the acts of unenlightened beings manifest blind passions arising from self-attachment. Since, in the Pure Land path, beings attain the Buddha's mind as the entrusting of themselves to the working of the Vow, not through eradicating those passions,

> you should not be anxious that the Tathagata will not receive you because you do wrong. A foolish being is by nature possessed of blind passions, so you must recognize yourself as a being of karmic evil.[62]

Thus, in the Pure Land path, delusional acts of body, speech, and mind are not obstacles to attainment of

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62 *Lamp for the Latter Ages,* letter 2, CWS I: 525 (SSZ 2: 659).

enlightenment: "nirvana is attained without severing blind passions." The obstacle is the introjected self within the self, which does not view itself "as a being of karmic evil" conditioned by the character of its existence in the world extending deep into the beginningless past, but instead, "confident of its own powers and guided by its own calculation," imagines that it stands apart from ignorance and passions and its context in the history of the world with other beings, and further that it possesses the capacity and judgment to rectify its own acts and make them accord with reality. It is this doubled, inner self that is "the mind of calculative thinking" or "the mind of self-power." Shinran therefore states:

> "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.[63]

The realization of *shinjin* is none other than the collapsing of this doubled self. It occurs as the shift from a self-attached engagement with the path to genuine engagement.

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63 Notes on `Essentials of Faith Alone', CWS I: 459 (SSZ 2: 628).

PART THREE

TRUTH AS TRANSFORMATIVE EVENT

Chapter Seventh
Shinran Face to Face

> One word of truth transforms evil karma into good.
> —Tsung-hsiao, quoted in "Chapter on Practice," 97.

Encounter in Dialogue

To explore further the nature of the shift from provisional encounter with the Pure Land teachings to fulfulled, transformative engagement and the role of language in this shift, let us turn to several additional passages from *Tannishō*, the record of Shinran's spoken words we have considered above. We will focus on the logical movement that informs the passages, referring to the general pattern of response we have seen in Chapter 5.

Shinran has also left a large body of his own writings. These present a specific problem in understanding because they are largely compilations from the scriptural tradition made from within the stance of the apprehension of those texts as dharma or true language, an apprehension that includes an awareness of ordinary speech as false and delusional.[64] In other words, dharma as true language must be accessible to us without the eradication of our false thinking and speech, but at the same time, no amount of exposition and reasoning carried on within the dimension of false

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64 A typology of true language in Shinran would include not only the Name, but also the praise of Buddhas throughout the cosmos, the teaching of Śākyamuni, who appeared in this world to disclose the Vow, and the words of masters and people of *shinjin*, including Shinran. He sets forth the fundamental element of true language when he says of the *Larger Sutra* as the true teaching that "the Name of the Buddha is its essence." "Chapter on Teaching," 2, CWS I: 7 (SSZ 2: 3).

language can lead to a grasp of the truth of true language. Shinran's works, therefore, may be said to present a version of the hermeneutic circle, in which we must already stand within the realm of true language in order to understand the texts. Once we stand within this circle, not only the various elements of the teaching, but the tradition as a whole comes to display a coherence and unity that cannot be grasped through the imposition of ordinary frames of reference.[65]

Although Shinran's writings adopt the stance of true language and do not seek to forge a bridge by which we can move intellectually from false thought to an apprehension of truth, he is perfectly aware of the problem. This awareness is manifested in particular in Shinran's words recorded in *Tannishō*, for there, instead of seeking to present the tradition of true language directly and without mediation, he responds to questions posed to him, questions that arise from attempts to engage the teaching while remaining – without self-awareness – in the realm of false language.

We find, therefore, that Shinran's spoken words provide a critical glimpse into the shift in mode of engagement with the teaching. In order to sketch the informing dynamic of Shinran's responses, let us consider the following passages, which are among the best known in the work.

> [*a*] I know nothing of what is good or evil. For if I could know thoroughly, as is known in the mind of Amida, that an act was good, then I would know the meaning of

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65 I have outlined fundamental aspects of Shinran's interpretive methods in his own writings, including *Teaching, Practice, and Realization*, in "Shinran's View of Language: A Buddhist Hermeneutics of Faith." These interpretive methods, while rooted in the scholarly traditions and synthetic attitudes of the Tendai school that studied during his twenty years as a monk on Mount Hiei, closely parallel the dialogic movements outlined in this book.

"good." If I could know thoroughly, as Amida knows, that an act was evil, then I would know "evil." But for a foolish being full of blind passions, with this fleeting world – this burning house – all matters without exception are lies and gibberish, totally without truth and sincerity. The nembutsu alone is true and real. (*Tannishō*, "Postscript")

[*b*] "Saved by the inconceivable working of Amida's Vow, I shall realize birth into the Pure Land": the moment you entrust yourself thus to the Vow, so that the mind set on saying the Name arises within you, you are brought to share in the benefit of being grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned.

Know that the Primal Vow of Amida makes no distinction between people young and old, good and evil; only the entrusting of yourself to it is essential. The reason is, it was made to save the person of karmic evil deep and immense, of blind passions that rage furiously. *(Tannishō* 1*)*

[c] *Even a good person can attain birth in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that an evil person will.* Though such is the truth, people commonly say, "Even an evil person attains birth, so naturally a good person will." This statement may seem well-founded at first, but it runs counter to the meaning of the Other Power established through the Primal Vow. The reason is, a person who relies on the good that he does through his self-power fails to entrust himself wholeheartedly to Other Power and therefore is not in accord with Amida's Primal Vow. But when he abandons his attachment to self-power and entrusts himself totally to Other Power, he will realize birth in the Pure Land.

It is impossible for us, filled as we are with 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 attainment of Buddhahood by the person who is evil. *(Tannishō* 3*)*

The Dynamic of Shinran's Response

Before proceeding to a reading of the passages, we should note two general points concerning them. First, we must recall that these records of Shinran's spoken words in fact represent only one-half of a dialogue or conversation – only the replies to statements or questions that the compiler did not record.[66] When viewed in the context of dialogue, the responses display the general contours of the collapse of calculative thought sketched before, which provides a model for the shift from ordinary thought into genuine awareness. While this shift occurs within the context of engagement with the teaching, it arises as a conversion from a world-picture characterized by our ordinary consciousness to another, in which these dichotomies coexist with the transcendence of them.

The second point to be noted concerning these passages is their uniform concern with issues of good and evil. Concerning passage [a], for example, Shin scholars suggest that the question posed concerned whether there was a need in the Pure Land path to perform good deeds and to avoid committing evil, in addition to saying the nembutsu.[67] It seems likely that this question, in one form or another, underlies all the statements I am taking up here. It is, for example, the context in which Yuien cites passage [a], which he prefaces: "In truth, both myself and others speak together only of 'good' and 'evil,' leaving Amida Buddha's benevolence out of the discussion." We must consider, then, why, in dialogic engagement with the teaching, it is this problem that arises so prominently.

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66 The dialogic element is clear in *Tannishō*, 2, where Shinran himself restates the question, and in *Tannishō*, 9, where the compiler records a conversation of which he was a part.

67 For example, Uryuzu Takao, *Tannishō kōwa*, (Kyoto: Hyakkaen, 1959), p. 12.

Let us explore Shinran's vision by considering two general elements of the pattern of response seen above: first, the rejection of the presusppositions of the question in their dissonance with an alternative vision proposed from Shinran's own stance; then, an exposition of the logic underlying Shinran's perceptions, leading to a generalized expression of the teaching.

Breaking with the Stance of the Question

In the passages from *Tannishō*, Shinran does not take up the questions presented on their own terms, but seeks rather to break down the assumptions that gave rise to them by speaking from beyond their frames of reference. The questions arise from the working of our ordinary thought, but Shinran's response is given from within his realization of wisdom-compassion as *shinjin*. Thus, to the question, "Is it not important still to perform good and to avoid evil?" he answers:

> [a] I know nothing at all of the two, good and evil.
>
> [b] Know that the Primal Vow of Amida makes no distinction between people young and old, good and evil.
>
> [c] Even a good person can attain birth in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that an evil person will.

These statements must have stunned their hearers and seemed a total rejection of their questions. (Shinran's blunt contrast in passage [c] between his own statement, which completely inverts ordinary thinking regarding the judgments of good and evil, and what "people in society" normally say shows that he is perfectly aware of the impact he is making on his listeners, and his choice in the order of the statements indicates his deliberateness in colliding with their questions rather than resolving them.) Such a response was necessary, for no reasoning undertaken within the realm of self-attachment and

calculative discrimination can lead beyond the horizon of the constructed self, and it is the unfolding within the self of a dimension of transcendence that is the crux of the problem of authentic engagement and self-realization.

Interior Logic

At the same time, after responding with statements that upset our usual thought, Shinran proceeds to expand on them, presenting an exposition in the form of logical argument. Thus, in the first two sections, the statement above is followed by the phrase, "the reason is" (or "that is to say," *sono yue wa*), and the third section, although a separate argument intervenes, also employs logical conjunctions of close reasoning:

> [*a*] The reason is, if I could know thoroughly, as is known in the mind of Amida, that an act was good, then I would know the meaning of "good."
>
> [*b*] The reason is, it was made to save the person in whom karmic evil is deep-rooted and whose blind passions abound.
>
> [*c*] It is impossible for us, filled as we are with 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 attainment of Buddhahood by the person who is evil. Hence the evil person who entrusts himself to Other Power is precisely the one who possesses the true cause for birth.

The rhetorical power moving through the text of *Tannishō* has tended to obscure the peculiarity of the logic at work in the passages we are considering. Passage [a] states both that (1) Shinran does not know (cannot rightly distinguish between) good and evil, and that (2) for the being of blind passions, all matters of this world are lies and gibberish, that is, all is false and delusional. Passage [b] states both that (1) the Vow does not discriminate and select among

good and evil people, and that (2) it was made with the intent of saving the evil (people filled with blind passions). Passage [c] states that (1) even the good can go to the Pure Land, so of course the evil can, and (2) we are incapable of accomplishing any genuine good.

Although the exposition in each of these sections differ, in general the second statement is prominently given as the reason for the first, but rather than providing logical explanation, it seems to contradict the initial assertion. Put simply, how can an awareness of oneself and the world as "lies and gibberish, totally without truth and sincerity," be the logical reason for the statement that one does not have any idea of what is good and what is evil? Rather, does not such awareness imply a judgment of oneself as evil? Concerning passage [b], if the Vow does not choose among good and evil people, how can it have been made specifically for the evil? If it has been made to save the evil, how can it be said that *for this very reason* it does not discriminate between the good and the evil? In passage [c], if beings are incapable of performing any truly good act, how can this be the explanation for the statement that even a good person can attain birth in the Pure Land?

But to raise these questions is no more than to say that, if received as an explanation within the framework of the original question, the answer cannot be understood. The logic involved is the logic at work in the awakening termed *shinjin* and demands a relinquishment of the absolutized subject. Each section might close with Shinran's comment at the end of *Tannishō*, 2, "Such, in essence, is the *shinjin* of the foolish person that I am."

In these passages, a fundamental rift runs between the question and the mind-set from which it arises, on the one hand, and Shinran's response, on the other. In other words, Shinran's reply is not an attempt to lead the listener discursively into the realm of *shinjin*, but rather an expression that manifests the difference between our ordinary thinking and the thinking that occurs as and

through *shinjin*. Thus, the response begins with a presentation of an utterly transformed vision of the issue raised and then proceeds to disclose the stance from which this perspective flows.

Chapter Eighth
Hearing the Vow: Two Moments

Awaiting and encountering the moment
When *shinjin*, firm and diamondlike, becomes settled:
In that instant Amida's compassionate light grasps and protects us,
So that we part forever from birth – and - death.
—*Hymns of the Pure Land Masters*, 77.

The Irreversibility of Authentic Engagement

For Shinran, false, vacuous, and insincere language has its roots in delusional thought and emotion stemming from clinging to an illusory self. Nevertheless, in the Shin Buddhist path, liberation is attained without abolishing falsity in thought and speech. As we have seen, Shinran uses the term *soragoto* (empty, delusional speech) to indicate such intractable falsity. We find in his works, however, another use of the term *soragoto*, and a comparison of these two usages will help us grasp the nature of the gap across which Shinran seeks to bring his interlocutors through his exchange.

In addition to the conception of *soragoto* as the delusional linguisticality that is an inherent element of unenlightened human existence, Shinran uses the term in the following way:

> While persons who do not know even the characters for "good" and "evil"
> All possess a mind true, real, and sincere *(makoto no kokoro)*,
> I make a display of knowing the words "good" and "evil";
> This is the manifestation of great falsity *(soragoto)*.[68]

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68 *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, 115, CWS I: 429 (SSZ 2: 531): *yoshi-ashi no monji o mo shiranu hito wa mina / makoto no kokoro narikeru o / zen-aku no ji shirigao wa / ō-soragoto no katachi nari.*

In passage [a] (*Tannishō*, "Postscript") discussed in Chapter 7, Shinran confesses to ignorance of "the two, good and evil," but in this hymn, while employing the same distinction between knowledge and ignorance of good and evil, he places himself in the opposite stance, confessing to a "display of knowing the words 'good' and 'evil.'"

In passage [a], "false language" *(soragoto)* expresses the self-awareness of one who has awakened to the incapacity to determine good and evil truly, in accord with reality, while in the hymn, it characterizes the consciousness of the person who presupposes his ability to judge self and others appropriately, though inevitably doing so from the perspective of the ego-self and its convenience. In the hymn, we see Shinran as one possessed of "great falsity," while in passage [a], he must be said to be, from the perspective of the hymn, a self-aware person of truth *(makoto no kokoro)*. We see in these two aspects of the identical person of samsaric existence that while falsity in the sense of warped and fragmentary apperception cannot be eliminated from human life, blind falsehood as an absolutist and ultimately self-serving judgment of good and evil can, for there are people who, out of self-awareness of incapacity, know their own ignorance of genuine "good" and "evil," and such people are described as people of "truth, reality, and sincerity" *(makoto)*.

For Shinran, the realization of *shinjin* – what we have spoken of as entrance into authentic engagement – is a radically transformative event, occurring irreversibly in a single thought-moment *(ichinen)*. The quality of realization of *shinjin*, therefore, is regarded quite differently from, for example, the character of faith in Luther, who speaks of the importance of daily reaffirmation. For Shinran, an engagement with the teaching that can be shaken by doubts has simply not been genuine attainment of

shinjin.[69]

This once-and-for-all character of realization of *shinjin* may be seen as related to the radical nature of the transformation implied. Once the capacities surrounding moral agency, particularly the capacity of moral judgment, come to be thoroughly permeated by the actual incapacity of the ego-self, reinstatement becomes impossible. The exposure of delusional thinking and feeling cannot be canceled out or undone.

Entrance into Authentic Engagement

We may distinguish two dimensions of genuine engagement with the Pure Land Buddhist path. One is the transformative point of entrance into engagement, which Shinran identifies as the "one thought-moment of the realization of *shinjin*," and the second is the continuing engagement carried on throughout one's life (these are sketched diagrammatically in the appendix). Here, we will consider the first moment of transformation, and in Chapter 9, we will turn to the deepening transformation that works in one's ongoing existence.

In the words recorded in *Tannishō* that we have considered above, Shinran speaks across the breach of the realization of *shinjin* to followers whose engagement with the path is still in a provisional mode. They have come to Shinran with doubts regarding the efficacy of the nembutsu and concern over the necessity of accomplishing good in order to attain birth in the Pure Land. It may be said that they have engaged the teaching by drawing it into the ordinary frames of reference of their daily lives. They have grasped the Vow as an object or instrument within the universe of their own conceptions of cause and result and of good and evil, and seek to utilize it to affirm the self. In other words, it has become an element of the calculative

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69 "that shinjin was not genuine has become manifest" (CWS I: 569).

thinking rooted in their self-attachment.

For Shinran, however, to come to "hear the Name" or be "summoned" by the Vow is for the horizons of our ordinary understanding and judgment to have been fractured. Here, the Vow stands free of egocentric appropriation.

Collapse of the Doubled Self

Shinran confronts his disciples' questions about the need to accomplish meritorious acts and the fear of having committed evil by exposing and undermining their assumptions, stating that he "knows nothing at all of the two, good and evil." In this way, he manifests his own lack of a doubled, self-reflective self or of calculative thinking, which has collapsed within him. This breakdown of an inner, judgmental self is the crucial overturning or discarding of self-power, for here the confidence has vanished that one can, through effort to amend the self, decisively rectify one's own thoughts and acts. Hence, the false language *(soragoto)* of good and evil – the language of the doubled self or the "mind of calculative thinking" – has fallen away. When Shinran states that he "has no idea whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for being born in the Pure Land or whether it is the karmic act for which [he] must fall into hell," he is expressing this absence of the determination of good and evil. Here, on the one hand, the Name and the Vow stand extricated from the bounds of ordinary thought and cease to be means operating within the parameters of the delusional self. On the other hand, a person's acts come in themselves to be pervaded by an awareness of their roots in a distorted vision of self and world. It is for this reason that others' acts may be perceived as selfless and compassionate, but one's own never give rise to such an assessment. It is precisely for this reason that Shinran states repeatedly that conscious compassionate action that is genuinely selfless and effective can only occur upon return from the Pure Land.

By the same working of wisdom-compassion that brings one to enlightenment in the Pure Land, one is enabled to return to the field of samsara to work for the benefit of all beings.

Emergence of Opposition

This falling away of calculation or collapse of the stance of the doubled self is inextricably tied to Shinran's other use of false language as the action of afflicting passions, of craving for what enhances the self and abhorrence for what is felt menacing. On the one hand, it is only through the dissolution of falsity as egocentric contrivance, so that one "knows nothing at all of the two, good and evil," that falsity as blind passions emerges as an actuality into a person's self-awareness. Here, hell is one's only abode. On the other hand, it is the persistent emergence of this "self possessed of afflicting passions" that undermines the construction of the absolutized or doubled self of calculative thinking.

The first aspect, the collapse of inner reflectivity, involves the dissolution of the motive force driving attachment to an autonomous self and its judgments of good and evil. It is not that ordinary modes of thinking are eradicated, however. Instead of being eliminated, the categories of good and evil are forced to their limits, so that they transcend the bounds of self-interest. This is a second aspect of the breakdown of the doubled self. Here, good and evil are brought into a mold of complete dichotomy in which all false judgment is seen itself to be evil in the Buddhist sense of binding one to further samsaric existence.

Thus, rather than governing the means by which movement from unenlightened being to Buddhahood is seen to be possible, the dichotomy of good and evil is expanded so that it comes into correspondence with that of the conditions of Buddha and being, and both

dichotomies are frozen into opposing pairs. True language, when speaking of "truth," is self-reflexive ("true and real refers to the Vow"), and from this perspective, false language characterizes the existence of beings. Here, all means for self-initiated movement along the Buddhist path become inoperative.

In Shinran's words in *Tannishō*, this shift in perspective is expressed by a rejection of the questioners' assumptions of the need and the ability to judge and perform good, and by a view of human existence as inherently characterized by afflicting self-attachment:

> [a] With a foolish being full of blind passions, with this fleeting world – this burning house – all matters without exception are lies and gibberish, totally without truth and sincerity.
>
> [b] [The Vow] was made to save the person of karmic evil deep and immense, of blind passions that rage furiously.
>
> [c] Amida made the Vow, the essential intent of which is the attainment of Buddhahood by the person who is evil.

With the rejection of any capability on the part of persons to determine and perform acts that might move them toward attainment of Buddhahood, the questions posed lose all significance. In the face of the correlated dichotomies of being/Buddha and evil/good, all relative discrimination is encompassed under the category of evil. From this point, however, there emerges a transformed subjectivity.

The Unfolding of Awareness

In the shift described above, the nexus one had assumed between oneself and personal fulfillment – our means of access to what is real framed by a conception of efficacious praxis guided by our judgments of good and evil – evaporates. It is precisely at this point that there

emerges an apprehension of one's own existence and of reality in polar opposition. At the same time, because of the nondichotomous ("unhindered") nature of reality, this opposition is also overcome. One's existence is pervaded by the true and real without their mutual exclusiveness falling away. In Shinran's terms, the collapse of the doubled self is also, in itself, Amida's giving his awakened mind to beings as the Name, which surfaces in their existence as the living utterance of the nembutsu. Hearing the Vow – indicated, in the examples we have considered of Shinran's spoken words, by his abrupt and disjunctive opening responses – involves a new awareness, and the development of this awareness constitutes a disclosure of the dimension of nonduality in the language of the path.

Shinran's words expressing this unfolding awareness in the *Tannishō* passages are equally as abrupt as those expressing its initial arising:

> [a] All matters without exception are lies and vanities, totally without truth and sincerity; the nembutsu alone is true and real.
>
> [b] [The Vow] was made to save the person of karmic evil . . . . Thus, for those who entrust themselves to the Primal Vow, no performance of good is required, for no act can hold greater virtue than the nembutsu.
>
> [c] Hell is to be my abode whatever I do. If Amida's Primal Vow is true and real, . . . then my words cannot be empty.

Again, as with the opening words of Shinran's responses, we are unprepared to absorb them. Here, there is a leap from Shinran's reflection on the limitations – in knowledge of and in capacity for good – that hem his own existence, to the dimension of the true and real. As before, our very dependence on and attachment to discursive logic and intellection are called into question. In fact, however, the awareness of that which is true and real – and the hearing and speaking of true language – is

but the opposite face of the radical self-awareness of incapacity, and it arises spontaneously.[70]

The relative intellection that functions at the core of the conception of the self becomes aware of itself as delusional blind passions and ignorance. This self-awareness of the limitations of one's ability to know and judge emerges because such judgment finds itself within a larger context of awakened wisdom. In other words, the self of relative intellection (good and evil) becomes absolutely evil, and this in itself is to become aware of itself from beyond its own horizons. It is also to become aware of – and give vital breath to – that which, from beyond oneself, makes oneself aware of one's own existence.

This is not a breaking through the horizons of ignorance from within; nevertheless, it is an unfolding of a new awareness. Apprehension of the horizons of one's own knowledge and conceptual thought arises only through awareness of the presence of a knowing (Buddha-wisdom) functioning beyond relative discrimination. For the limits of ordinary thought to rise to awareness means that the mind has come to stand beyond those limits and been able, from that new perspective, to reflect on those limits. For all that can be conceived to come to be seen as circumscribed and in fact untruly construed means that there is at once an absolute dichotomy between ignorant thought and wisdom and, further, that there is both an interaction and nonduality. Thus, the relative categories of good and evil within our world-picture are absolutized, so that all within the bounds of our ordinary judgment comes to be seen within the realm of the false and samsaric. For Shinran, this breakthrough is an approach or inward movement of the real that is nondiscriminative. It cannot

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70 Shinran's term is *jinen*: by the working of Amida's Vow, without any contrivance by the person.

originate from within the circle of delusional thought. Further, this approach of reality ("being grasped by Amida" or by light that is wisdom) is first apprehended as the hearing of the Name, and reality emerges in one's existence enacted as utterance, which possesses both nondualistic and dualistic dimensions.

PART FOUR

LANGUAGE AND RELIGIOUS AWARENESS

Chapter Ninth
Language and the Realization of *Shinjin*

> We are quickly brought to realize that blind passions and enlightenment are not two in substance.
> —*Hymns of the Pure Land Masters*, 32.

Two Dimensions of Authentic Engagement

The nature of linguistic activity in the Pure Land path may be approached through the distinction of two aspects of authentic engagement sketched in Chapter 8: the point of entrance into such engagement and its subsequent unfolding in the practicer's life. These two dimensions roughly correspond, in Shinran's terms, to realization of *shinjin* ("hearing the Name" or "hearing the Vow" as the summons of the Other) and praxis as the enactment of the Buddha's wisdom-compassion ("saying the Name of the Tathagata of Unhindered Light"). With both aspects, we find the opposition of ignorance and awakening simultaneous with their interpenetration and interaction.

According to the teaching of Shinran's master Hōnen, if one genuinely accepted and entrusted oneself to Amida's Vow to bring all beings of the nembutsu into the Pure Land, one would say the nembutsu as a matter of course. The inseparability of trust in the Vow and utterance of the Name was assumed to be both obvious and indispensable, for otherwise religious life was in danger of fragmentation.[71] An intellectualized overemphasis on trust as in itself decisive led to antinomian denials of restraint and to self-indulgent

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71 See Dennis Hirota, *Plain Words on the Pure Land Way: Sayings of the Wandering Monks of Medieval Japan*, a translation of *Ichigon Hōdan*, Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1989.

presumption on the Buddha's compassion. At the same time, an anxious insistence on the significance of praxis tended toward a moralistic, self-congratulatory devotion to utterance of the nembutsu as one's personal accomplishment of good.

Shinran deals with this problem by asserting the essential unity of the phases of engagement that he terms realization of *shinjin* and practice of nembutsu. Through his radical conception of *shinjin* as itself the enlightened mind of Buddha, which was realized in the event of hearing the Name and which became the core of authentic practice, he sought to clarify why a person's saying the nembutsu was the Buddha's own activity, that is, an act of genuine wisdom-compassion with the power of resulting in awakening. This question had remained obscure in Hōnen's thought.[72]

Unity is not mere identity, however, for Shinran also states that realization of *shinjin* and utterance of the nembutsu, though conjoined, are distinct. Let us now consider these two phases of engagement, beginning, in this chapter, with the initial transformative moment.

The Role of Language in Attainment of Shinjin

We have seen that Shinran's Pure Land path is distinguished from meditative regimens by a fundamental linguisticality and a rootedness in everyday life. Authentic engagement with it is not, however, simply an intellectual grasp or affective embracing of the verbal teaching, but involves a fundamental shift in awareness. We are moved from assent as an appropriation of the

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72 Thus he states: "Saying the Name is the right act, supreme, true, and excellent. The right act is the nembutsu. The nembutsu is Namu-amida-butsu. Namu-amida-butsu is right-mindedness" ("Chapter on Practice," 12, CWS I: 17-18; SSZ 2: 8). Here, the equivalency of utterance, reality, word, and thought *(shinjin)* is asserted.

teaching into our conventionally perceived universe to a realization of all our language use as false or true in Shinran's senses. On the one hand, ordinary conceptions of self and world are seen to be shaped by the attachments and judgments of the egocentric self and become biased constructs and fabrications ("empty talk and gibberish"). On the other hand, "the nembutsu alone is true and real." It is accessible to our conceptual understanding, yet it functions as the presence of that which stands apart from conception, for it is characterized by the nondualities of word and reality and of act and word.

To hear the Buddha's Vow as true language is to "attain *shinjin*," to realize the Buddha's mind. Thus, the teaching has a therapeutic function, illuminating the falsity of the thought and speech ordinarily generated by human beings and, at the same time, as true word, entering their thought and speech and transforming them into manifestations of awakening. In Shinran's words in *Tannishō*, we have found materials for sketching the entrance into genuine engagement with the teaching as the collapse of the doubled self (calculative thinking that stands apart from and judges self and world) concomitant with the emergence of reality (Buddha-wisdom) in complete polarity with the self (samsaric existence). We are now in a position to consider this shift in terms of linguistic activity, including the hearing and saying of the nembutsu.

Hearing the Name as the Horizon of Self

Shinran interprets the phrase "hear the Name" from the *Larger Sutra* to indicate realization of *shinjin* (Buddha-mind). It signifies entry into an unfamiliar realm of language, which implies a new mode of awareness. This awareness is not attainment of nondiscriminative wisdom in which the subject-object dichotomy that characterizes delusional thought and perception has been eradicated; nevertheless, a transformative paradigm of apprehension of

self, world, and reality emerges in which the subject-object dichotomy has lost its domination.

The new paradigm is characterized precisely by the decentering of the self as subject-agent that discerns and relates itself to the elements of the Buddhist path (Amida, Name, Pure Land) as objects. In place of the autonomous subject, there emerges a dual presence: the self as false, samsaric existence and the Vow or Name as that which is true and real (see Diagram I, pp. 141-142). Self and Vow, inseparable and in polar opposition, emerge together in this way at the very point that a divide between them forms.

Here, the impetus of the self to appropriate the elements of the path is arrested. At the same time, the person who realizes *shinjin* gains a new apprehension through the arising of the boundary between samsaric self and true and real Name. This occurs in two ways. On the one hand, the boundary emerges as the horizon of the world of the self, delimiting and defining one's entire existence and the dimensions of its possibilities. On the other hand, with the breakdown and cessation of effort directed toward rectifying the self by assimilating what is true and good and expelling what is evil, this horizon takes form as an opposing movement – the approach to the self of reality unconceptualized yet embodied as the Name.

To delineate the arising of this new mode of awareness, we must cut across the subject-object cleavage of practicer and Vow and consider the process of entrance in terms of negative and positive aspects that occur simultaneously.

The Dissolution of Vow and Name

Upon first encountering the Pure Land Buddhist path, persons may exercise what Shinran terms "doubt," objectifying the self and assessing its moral quality. Doubt is described in Shinran's writings as "belief in the

recompense of good and evil and reliance on [one's own cultivation of] the root of good (nembutsu)."[73] Here, two elements are implied: (1) the frameworks of ordinary thought – including causality and the discrimination of good and evil – within which persons as subject grasp the teaching instrumentally and evaluate their involvement with it; and (2) the effort to integrate what is good into the self and eliminate from the self and its environment that which it considers detrimental. Shinran speaks of this as relying on the nembutsu as "one's own good act."

When the inner self that manifests itself as the imposition of these frameworks emerges not as the arbiter of true good and evil but rather as the reified activity of the fundamental passions of desire (incorporation of good) and aversion (eradication of evil) rooted in self-attachment, the means of judging the existence of the self and determining the path disintegrate. The stance of such an absolutized self has itself been engulfed in the evil it sought to isolate and distance itself from; thus, the drive to establish one's existence through moral rectification is uprooted. With regard to the practicer, this aspect is the "overturning of the mind of self-power."

With the dissolution of the stance of the subject that endeavors, through devotion and praxis, to disengage itself from its own past and from the flux of existence in the world together with other beings, one's conception of oneself – as the objectified self acting to amend itself – loses its clear outlines. One's existence becomes coextensive with time stretching back into the "beginningless past," and one's present bears the influence of acts of other lifetimes, as other selves, in

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73 See *Hymns of the Dharma Ages (Shōzōmatsu wasan)*, 60: "As a mark of not realizing the Buddha-wisdom,/ People doubt the Tathagata's various kinds of wisdom,/ Believe in the recompense of good and evil, rely on their practice/ Of the root of good, and hence remain in the borderland."

other circumstances of existence.

The self becomes fluid, a tissue of acts permeating the temporal boundaries of this life, and is fused with the past through unknowable deeds that remain as traces in the present. Moreover, not only temporally, but "spatially" as well, the fixed boundaries of the objectified self and its separateness from the "outside" world melt, and there emerges an awareness of oneself as floundering in an ocean of existence with other beings.

Here, the dissolution of Vow and Name as they had been apprehended also occurs. The frameworks in which they had been grasped instrumentally cease to define them. When the thinking that had guided one's efforts to establish a relationship between oneself and Buddha as person or Pure Land as goal loses its capacity even to determine what is good and effective for achieving its ends, the conceptions of Amida and Pure Land themselves are invalidated (in fact they correspond to no more than what Shinran calls provisional "transformed buddha-bodies and lands").

The Name ceases to function as a means for invoking the Buddha or gaining merit for progress to the Pure Land, and Amida's Vow can no longer be located in a linear, temporal past of this world – as a principle set in motion that one can bring one's life into accord with. Further, the Pure Land can no longer be located as an extension of the spatial coordinates of this existence. Buddha and Pure Land fulfilled through the Vow cease to be meaningfully conceived through calculative thinking. Shinran's confessions, in *Tannishō*, of ignorance about the nembutsu or his own birth in the Pure Land express this stance.

Coincidence in the Name of Samsaric Existence and True Reality

The role of language in the realization of *shinjin* may also be discussed affirmatively, in terms of the apprehension of

the illusory self and true reality arising together. While, on the one hand, practicers are bereft of the power of defining themselves in relation to what is good and real, having been forced to relinquish the absoluteness of their perspectives and frames of reference, on the other hand, they have overcome the fragmentation of the self – the incessant bifurcation into transcendent subject and amenable object, together with the division of self from other beings and the world – and thereby have become able to apprehend their existence whole.

For the self whose center, as the judge of the worth and destiny of the self itself, has dissolved, to be apprehended whole is for the delimiting horizon of one's own existence to arise. That is, the self at once loses its own definition as autonomous and enduring and comes to apprehend itself as samsaric existence in entirety. These two aspects – dissolution and holistic apprehension – are inseparable and can arise only together.

Here, the existence of the self, conditioned by its history and past acts and circumstances, moves in repetitive circularity. It rises to self-awareness as inevitably samsaric only where it is circumscribed temporally at every possible point. Though one had sought or assumed within that circle a stable, undistorted point of reference for determining one's existence, apprehension of its totality must include the relinquishment of the very possibility of any such stance. When the self is apprehended thus, all possibility of establishing a basis for one's own liberation from painful existence and for immersion in the real must be abandoned. This is the meaning of overcoming the fragmentation of the self in its temporal aspect through the collapse of the doubled self.

There is also a "spatial" aspect of fragmentation, for it is precisely the arising of the horizon of the self and the collapse of the doubled, inner self that leads to the falling

away of the distinction the self had sought to construct and enforce between its own existence and the world of existence together with other beings. This aspect is vividly expressed in Shinran's words in *Tannishō*, 5: "All sentient beings, without exception, have been my parents and brothers and sisters in the course of countless lives in many states of existence."

Shinran makes this statement to explain why he does not engage in the common practice of uttering the nembutsu for the repose of his departed parents. The basic reason is his incapacity, through his own deliberation and powers, to fulfill any good act whose merit he might indeed turn over to others. This is an expression of his awareness of the horizon of his existence as wholly samsaric. He goes on, however, to indicate the narrowness of blandly assuming that one can direct merit toward the enlightenment of one's ancestors – a powerful element of native Japanese religiosity – by pointing out the closely bound interrelationships between oneself and all other beings, so that to save one's parents would in fact mean saving countless multitudes of living things. We see here the intimate link between the self-awareness of one's own existence as bounded and samsaric and the awareness of that existence – precisely in being samsaric – as intimately intertwined, throughout the expanses of time and space, with the existence of all beings. All living things thus come to manifest the possibilities and limits of one's own existence.

This is the perception underlying the expression, "this self possessed of blind passions, this world that is a burning house." It calls to mind the vision of Bodhisattva Dharma-Treasury, who is enabled by his teacher, the Buddha World-Sovereign (Lokeśvārarāja), to survey the multiverse of worlds and beings before establishing the Primal Vow. In fact, it points to the opposite side of the newly-formed boundary of the self: the active face of

reality.

Reality Manifest in Hearing the Name

Entrance into authentic engagement is the perforation and transformative relocation of the defining boundary of the self. This new boundary not only circumscribes the self, but also manifests the presence of that which stands beyond the existence of self and its conceptual universe. The presence on the far side of the boundary of the self is apprehended linguistically as the Name; that is, the arising of the horizon of the practicer's existence is itself also the hearing of the Name. This hearing is not one's perceiving and arrogating the path that stands apart from oneself. Such a subject-object relationship is precisely what marks provisional engagement rooted in self-attachment. Rather, the horizon simultaneously divides and conjoins the polar opposites of false existence and reality, so that both sides concomitantly become loci of new apprehension.

In the narrative of Bodhisattva Dharma-Treasury becoming Amida Buddha, Shinran emphasizes faultless perfection and selflessness of the bodhisattva's praxis in every one of its moments.[74] It stands in utter contrast with the defiled efforts of beings at self-fulfillment. Shinran thus radicalizes the narrative so that it provides, in mythic expression, a paradigm of the bipolar opposition that emerges together with the collapse of the doubled self. The acts of persons and the acts manifesting awakened wisdom are represented as

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74 Shinran elaborates on the practicer's floundering in the ocean of samsara and the purity of Bodhisattva Dharma-Treasury's practice in his exposition of the three minds, discussed in "Shinran's View of Language: A Buddhist Hermeneutics of Faith." Shinran employs ocean imagery to suggest inconceivability, universality, and transformative power, core characteristics of the double-sided horizon.

antithetical, characterized by samsaric vacuousness and true reality. The fulfillment of the Vow does not stand simply at the conclusion of aeons of endeavor, but is brought into every moment of practice, so that the Vow-narrative contracts into a mode of temporality removed from our usual conceptual frameworks. Here, the opposition between being and Buddha becomes one between samsaric existence and that which transcends it at every point, or the life of the self within the world and that which grasps and pervades the life of the world as one.

This compression of the Vow's establishment and fulfillment into each moment of bodhisattva practice has its parallel in the field of language. The Vow-narrative moves toward its own condensation into the Name of Amida, in the same way removing itself from our usual frameworks of comprehension. It is not simply that the Name lies at the end of a long process leading to its establishment. Rather, it is of the very nature of the Vow that the Name embody all the elements of the entire narrative – aspiration for Buddhahood, aeons of practice, attainment of wisdom-compassion, liberation of all beings – which are together rooted in reality (formless dharma-body). It is for this reason that Shinran explains "hearing the Name" as hearing "how the Buddha's Vow arose – its origin and fulfillment,"[75] and also as occurring as "one thought-moment."

These movements toward condensation, temporal and linguistic, fuse in the event of the thought-moment of realization of *shinjin*. This hearing the Name and its instantaneity signify the total compression of the Vow, which is also the complete extrication of the path from a discursive grasp and any calculated process of attainment. The saying of the nembutsu ceases to be one's own good act, being disentangled from causal frameworks that center

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75 "Chapter on *Shinjin*," 65, CWS I: 112 (SSZ 2: 72).

on the autonomous volition of the self, and comes to be apprehended rather as a dynamic permeation of one's existence.

Shinran's emphasizes that the Name uttered is not a person's invocation of Amida – though the original meaning of Namu-amida-butsu is, "I take refuge in Amida Buddha." Rather, it is reality making itself known to beings. He also focuses attention on the *Larger Sutra*'s statements that the Buddhas throughout all time and the entire cosmos say and praise the Name, so that it resounds through the universe (Amida's Seventeenth Vow). In these mythic motifs, we find an image for the movement into one's awareness of what is true. It is precisely at the point where the horizontal, linear frames of reference condense that this Name emerges as the presence of reality beyond the self's conceptual grasp.

The Crystallization of Reality in the Name

Where what is real moves toward one, touching one's awareness and entering one's existence (condensing into the pervasive Name), the horizon of the self becomes manifest and, at the same time, the hearing of the Name occurs. To hear the Name in this way means that it is apprehended as the crystallization of the Vow-narrative, a gestalt in which wisdom-compassion is compressed.

It is this apprehension that underlies Shinran's creation of altar scrolls late in his life. In these scrolls, the traditional sculpted or painted images of Amida Buddha are replaced by the written characters of the Name. In those scrolls that Shinran himself inscribed, the Name, in one of several possible versions, stands in a vertical line upon a lotus pedestal painted at the bottom; the written characters body forth the nondiscriminative wisdom of Buddha. Here, the Name has the quality of form that is at the same time formless reality, or of spoken language that is pervaded by the silence of

astonishment or inconceivability. (One is reminded that the early sculptural depictions of Buddha were not of bodily form, but employed such symbols as the dharma-wheel and the bodhi tree.) On the one hand, it is reality (wisdom-compassion, unhindered light) that has coalesced within the existence of the self; on the other hand, it is itself the horizon of the self of karmic existence, a demarcation of limits that has arisen through the falling away of calculative thought. Shinran states in a hymn:

> The light shines everywhere ceaselessly;
> Thus Amida is called "Buddha of Uninterrupted Light."
> Because beings hear this power of light,
> Their mindfulness is enduring and they attain birth.[76]

To hear the Name is to hear or apprehend the power of light, a nonobjectified apprehension that becomes enduring mindfulness in the hearer.

The Name can embody these movements – contraction and emergence – because of its dual character as true language or as word that is also silence. The movement of condensation occurs along the horizontal vector, when the entire span of the Vow-narrative, extricated from temporal, conceptual frameworks, fuses into and becomes present as one thought-moment. The movement of emergence occurs along the vertical vector at that very point of condensation, when the Name becomes the opposite face of the horizon of the self as samsaric existence.

Shinran's altar scrolls include another innovation in addition to the representation of Amida Buddha as Name: the inscription of scriptural texts above and below the central image. It may be said that text and Name stand not only in the circular relationship between teaching and realization mentioned above, but also in the dialectical one

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76 *Hymns of the Pure Land*, 12, CWS I: 327 (SSZ 2: 487).

between horizontal and vertical that we have been delineating. The texts free themselves from conceptual grasp and condense into the Name, which is encountered as another face of the horizon of the self. At the same time, however, Shinran speaks of the "ultimate brevity *and expansion* of the length of time in which one attains the mind and practice that result in birth in the Pure Land."[77] Thus, the one thought-moment of hearing the Name unfolds in acts of language, which now newly articulate the nature of self and world in fulfilled enactment of the path. We will consider this "expansion" next.

77 *Passages on the Pure Land Way*, 298 (SSZ 2: 445).

Chapter Tenth
Living from the Name of Buddha

Saying the Name as Transformation

Shinran speaks of hearing the Vow or Name as transformative. When persons "encounter" the Vow – entrust themselves to its dynamic – "all roots of good and all virtues" become "perfectly full in their hearts."[78] Further: "Because persons entrust themselves to the power of Amida's Vow – this is itself the absence of calculation on the part of the practicer – they cut off and abandon the five evil courses [of samsaric existence] and becomes free of the four modes of birth naturally *(jinen)*."[79] When one hears the Name, one is "filled" with the Buddha's virtues (activity of wisdom-compassion), so that bondage to samsaric existence is broken.

From the perspective of the nature of the Name, the aspect of nonduality dominates its relation to beings: "The Name embodying the perfectly fulfilled supreme virtues is true wisdom that transforms our evil into virtue," or into itself. From the perspective of the practicer's condition also, Shinran states:

> The directing of virtue for our going forth is such
> That when Amida's active means toward us reaches fulfillment,
> We realize the *shinjin* and practice of the compassionate Vow;
> Then birth-and-death is itself nirvana.[80]

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78 *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling,* 487 (SSZ 2: 616).

79 *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls,* 496 (SSZ 2: 580).

80 *Hymns of the Pure Land Masters,* 35 (on T'an-luan), CWS I: 370 (SSZ 2: 505).

This event of encounter occurs because hearing the Name (Amida's directing activity of awakening to beings) is simultaneously the collapse of the reified inner self of calculative thinking that bifurcates the self and objectifies the elements of the Pure Land path. Engagement with the teaching is liberated from ordinary discursiveness and self-objectification, and the Name becomes a transparency (light), pervaded by a silence in which instrumentality is replaced by the emergence of the real that stands beyond ordinary conception.

The result is the dual presence of practicer (samsaric existence) and true reality concomitant with the transformation in which birth-and-death is itself nirvana.[81] There are several points to be noted concerning this transformation. First, it occurs "naturally" *(jinen)*, without the conscious effort or even the awareness of the practicer:

> In entrusting ourselves to Amida's Primal Vow and saying the Name once, necessarily, without seeking it, we are made to receive the supreme virtues, and without knowing it, we acquire the great and vast benefit.[82]

This attainment of supreme virtues is not brought about through the practicer's will or endeavor; rather, it occurs precisely where calculative thinking falls away and the elements of the path are removed from usual frames of reference. Thus, it takes place instantaneously, apart from

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81 To express this, Shinran uses the metaphors of a person's being filled by the ocean of Amida's virtues or a person's existence as blind passions flowing into and become one with the ocean of the Vow (activity of wisdom-compassion).

82 *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, 481 (SSZ 2: 611). Also: "Though people of the diamond-like mind neither know nor seek it, the vast treasure of virtues completely fills them" (*Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, 487, SSZ 2: 617); "Since, without his seeking it, the person who entrusts himself to the Buddha's Vow is made to attain all virtues and all good, it is said `made to become so'" (*Notes on `Essentials of Faith Alone'*, CWS I: 453-454; SSZ 2: 641).

causal processes a person might initiate; with utter decisiveness; and at a level deeper than ordinary awareness. For this reason, Shinran adopts the term *jinen* to characterize the dynamic of this transformation, explaining simply that, free of designing and self-assertion, "one is brought to become so."

At the same time, however, the transformation does not remain confined to the one thought-moment of realization of *shinjin* or to an instant apart from the flow of temporal existence:

> "To be made to become so" *(ji)* means that without the practicer's calculating in any way whatsoever, all his past, present, and future evil karma is transformed into good. "To be transformed" means that evil karma, without being nullified or eradicated, is made into good, just as all waters, upon entering the great ocean, immediately become ocean water.[83]

While transformation occurs with realization of *shinjin*, it encompasses, without negating, the practicer's entire temporal existence, including all the acts that make up ongoing life.

Thus, we see once again that two moments may be distinguished with regard to this transformation: (1) the realization of *shinjin*, when it fundamentally and irreversibly takes place ("virtues quickly and rapidly become perfectly full in the heart"[84]), and (2) each moment of ongoing life, when evil acts of self-attachment are transformed into good as they continue to arise. While the first moment pervades one's existence in its unconscious depths, the second, though not brought about by conscious endeavor, further emerges into one's conscious life (see Diagram II, pp. 143-145).

It is the arising of the horizon of the self's existence,

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83 *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, 453 (SSZ 2: 623).

84 *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, CWS I: 487 (SSZ 2: 617).

with the attendant collapse of calculative thinking, that allows for the apprehension of reality to emerge. "We are full of ignorance and blind passions. Our desires are countless . . . to the very last moment of life they do not cease."[85] Nevertheless, the Name "breaks through all the ignorance of sentient beings and fulfills all their aspirations,"[86] and "the compassionate light of the Buddha of unhindered light always illumines and protects the person who has realized *shinjin*; hence the darkness of ignorance has already cleared."[87] In these quotations, Shinran asserts that ignorance both remains and is dispersed.

This condition reflects the complex nature of the Name. It is real (beyond delusional conception) and transforms practicers' awareness by both circumscribing and pervading their existence. It is therefore said to be formless and to function apart from their conscious volition, "without their knowing or seeking it." It is also, however, characterized by form, and is therefore accessible to conscious apprehension. Thus, Shinran states that practicers "should truly receive the Name of the Primal Vow / And never forget it, whether waking or sleeping."[88]

Because the first transformative moment in which reality enters one's existence continues to unfold in one's life, one "never forgets [the Name], whether waking or sleeping." It pervades the whole of one's life precisely by virtue of the linguistic dimension of human existence. It is *as* and *through* word (Name) that reality continuously transforms the person's life, which is carried on with thought and perception informed by language. The Name possesses this power because it functions not simply as

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85 *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, 488 (SSZ 2: 618).

86 "Chapter on Practice," 12, CWS I: 17 (SSZ 2: 8).

87 *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, 519 (SSZ 2: 601-602).

88 *Hymns of the Pure Land Masters*, 96, CWS I: 386 (SSZ 2: 512).

another word of conceptual thought, but more basically as a double-faceted model of language that comes to underlie linguistic activity and awareness.[89]

The Name as a New Paradigm of Language

The collapse of the doubled self means that hearing the Name ceases to be a merely conceptual grasp of the Vow and saying the Name ceases to be viewed as the outward expression of thoughts and aspirations harbored within the mind. Calculative thinking is, in fact, rooted in clinging to the existence and the salvific significance of what we take to be pure and isolate "inner" thoughts of the self. Instead of the Name functioning as an instrument within the subject-object dichotomy, with the collapse of calculative thinking, an awareness emerges within persons in which the reality that is the Name and the reality that pervades their existence are one. In this sense, it may be said that the nembutsu, whether voiced or voiceless, and whether one is awake or asleep, functions as sacrament – the tracing of the contours of the real – in the life of the practicer.[90]

Let us consider this second dimension of continuous and spontaneous transformation. The Pure Land path condenses into the Name in the one thought-moment in which it penetrates a person's existence. It does this not, however, by casting off its linguistic character, but by becoming language pervaded both by an ingrained sense of partiality and distortion and by openness for

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89 The thought of Ippen (1239-1289) affords an example of focus on the point of the arising of the Name (one "discards one's self-being and becomes solitary and single with Namu-amida-butsu," so that "the nembutsu says the nembutsu"), without the counterbalancing movement of the second moment of transformation.

90 Cf. Karl Barth's statement, "Revelation means the giving of signs. We can say quite simply that revelation means sacrament," *Church Dogmatics* II, 1:52.

emergence of the real. In Chapter 3 we discussed the Name's structure as a dialectic of temporal-causal and emergent dynamics. Because this character remains intact, the movement toward hearing (compression of the temporal-causal vector) also undergoes a reversal. Without parting from its nature as reality free of conceptual grasp, the Name takes form and evinces its linguistic character as the reassertion of the horizontal dimension of causality, time, and space (fulfillment of immeasurable life and light).

This is also the renewed occurrence of the arising of the horizon of the self, informing each new moment of the practicer's life. The field of the Name surfaces from the passivity of the instant of realizing *shinjin*, in which one attains virtues while neither seeking nor knowing it, to fuse with the flow of karmic existence made up of one's actions – physical, verbal, and mental – issuing from the blind passions and attachments of the delusional self. This shift into the dimension of human action underlies the continuity between hearing and utterance that Shinran expresses as the inseparability of *shinjin* and practice.

Saying the Name – whether voiced or voiceless – becomes practice that continuously transforms one's ongoing existence. As the reenactment of the arising of the horizon of the self, it is an act in which the agent is not at issue, for it is not independently accomplished by either being or Buddha. Thus, in "Chapter on Practice," Shinran adopts as an expression of practice the saying and praise of the Name by all the Buddhas, and further states that great practice is the person's saying the Name. Practice is the Name uttered by Buddhas throughout the cosmos and all past, present, and future, and it is one's own utterance. Where the nembutsu that pervades the self and all existence becomes an ever-present ground bass, such a distinction holds no significance.

In addition, the Name emerges into conscious thought.

This implies conceptual understanding and the subject-object dichotomy. Thus, Shinran also states: "Knowing truly *(shinchi)* that the Primal Vow . . . grasps those who commit grave offenses and transgressions, we are quickly brought to realize that blind passions and enlightenment are not two in substance."[91] Here, Shinran asserts the being's new self-awareness, which develops conceptually in structures of thought informed by both polarity and nonduality.

The Name in the Practicer's Acts of Speech

The Name becomes present in conscious speech in two modalities. On the one hand, it becomes deeply harbored in the words of ordinary life, so that it exposes the ambiguity and falseness of one's own speech. On the other hand, it unfolds as true words manifesting the reality that permeates one's acts and illuminates their nature. Thus, authentic engagement with the path results in the arising of false (ordinary) language and true language (nembutsu, words that manifest awakening), and these two are not necessarily distinct.

Persons of *shinjin* do not cease from "empty talk and gibberish"; neither do they give themselves freely to false speech and acts with a sense of license. Instead, the words of ordinary speech come to be invested in their depths with the awareness of self that arises as the hearing of the Name. This inner face of ordinary words is recovered to conscious awareness together with the perception of their falsity. The process by which this occurs is described by Shinran's disciple Yuien in *Tannishō* 16, which argues against the belief that sincere acceptance of the teaching

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91 *Hymns of the Pure Land Masters*, 32 (on T'an-luan), CWS I: 369 (SSZ 2: 505). Also see "Hymn of True *Shinjin* and the Nembutsu": "When foolish beings of delusion and defilement awaken *shinjin*,/ They realize that birth-and-death is itself nirvana" ("Chapter on Practice," 102, CWS I: 72; SSZ 2: 45).

requires constant repentance (*eshin*, "change of heart") for each new evil act. In the Shin Buddhist path, "change of heart" properly refers to the transformative entrance into authentic engagement that occurs as a decisive event. Rather than repeated conversions as resolute acts of temporal existence, therefore,

> even when our thoughts and deeds are evil, if we thereby turn all the more deeply to the power of the Vow, gentleheartedness and forbearance will surely arise in us naturally. Whatever may occur, as far as birth is concerned, one should just recall constantly and unselfconsciously the depths of Amida's benevolence and one's gratitude for it, without any contriving.

When one finds oneself committing evil ("becoming angry, doing misdeeds, disputing with fellow practicers"), one should not seek to repent, for that is precisely to take the stance of the doubled self that judges and amends the self. Rather, the act of evil becomes an occasion for reflecting on the Vow, for in the depths of all one's acts lies the emergence of the horizon – the polarity and interfusion – of self and true reality. Out of those depths, where it has reverberated as a ground bass, the Name rises to the lips spontaneously as the reenactment of that emergence.

Acts of self-attachment come to be seen in the broad context of one's samsaric existence, that is, as evil transcending ego-centered criteria of good and bad. Further, not only those acts considered wrong by normal standards serve as occasions for reflection; our every act, in its depths, opens out to the horizon of the self. The words that define our world and shape our interactions with others all harbor in their depths the distortions of self-attachment. To plumb each word, then, is to recover in its depths the Name as the arising to awareness of the horizon of the self.

This does not lead one to abandon oneself to evil or to

despair, for it is this awareness running in the depths of all one's words that works to overcome the judgments and divisions that one had sought to impose, from the stance of the self, on the things of the world. At the other side of the horizon of the self, all beings come to be seen as grasped together by the light of wisdom. It is with this meaning that Shinran states: "Tathagata pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood." Further reflecting the nature of the Name as a modality of awareness, Shinran states that the person of *shinjin* enjoys the benefit of "constantly practicing great compassion" – constantly saying the Name. This also may be understood as the manifestation of the holistic apprehension of karmic self and reality harbored in the depths of all one's linguistic acts.

The Name as Words Made New

It is also possible for words to manifest and shape conscious awareness of the polar and interfused self of falsity and true reality. The fundamental expression is, of course, the utterance of the Name, which may spring from astonishment at self and world in the grasp of Amida's light, joy and gratitude for the Buddha's compassion, or aspiration for birth in the Pure Land. It may arise almost unconsciously, as a reaffirmation of the simultaneous presence of false and true, samsaric existence and true reality that has emerged as the hearing of the Name and that draws reality into apprehension without objectification. On the one hand, the Name is the action of the real, being the intimation as form of what is formless, and on the other hand, it holds conceptual meanings rooted in polarity and interpenetration, being the condensation of the Vow. While with regard to the first of these characteristics, it is instantaneous in arising and glyphic or emblematic, so that it is nondual with its apprehension, with regard to

the second, it is open to discursive understanding and becomes the object of thought.

Because the Name holds both of these characteristics, it unfolds as the teaching of Amida's Vow in the *Larger Sutra* and as the words of the Pure Land masters down through history. There are two aspects here. First, with regard to the words of the teaching, Shinran states that "to teach Amida Buddha's Primal Vow is the true intent of the sutra; the Name of the Buddha is its essence."[92] That is, the Name – with its dual characteristics as reality and as conception – lies at the core of the words of the teaching and makes them true language, with powers to transform and to make the path comprehensible.

Second, with regard to the speaker or writer, the words of the teaching issue from reality (Buddha's mind, wisdom, *shinjin*). The central model for such arising is Sakyamuni's entrance into the samadhi of great tranquility as the wellspring of the *Larger Sutra*, which is delivered while he "abides in the place of all Buddhas." When Shinran states that Hōnen was a manifestation of the bodhisattva Seishi (Mahāsthāmaprāpta), he is not merely drawing on popular belief, but also applying the model of the Name as transmitted and spread by words arising from the Buddha's mind; this is clear also in his statements that the teachings of Seikaku and Ryūkan are to be embraced because these practicers have already attained birth in the Pure Land.

A fundamental implication of this view of the teaching as the Name unfolding in history is that the basic mode of apprehension of the Name must be applied for genuine understanding of the teaching. It is from the stance of hearing the Name or entrance into fulfilled engagement with the path that the teaching is authentically interpreted.[93] Through such a hermeneutic,

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92 "Chapter on Teaching," 2 (CWS I: 7; SSZ 2: 3).

93 See "Shinran's View of Language: A Buddhist Hermeneutics of

the words of the teaching are recovered from ordinary, relativizing conceptualization and come to express the double-sided horizon of self as samsaric and reality as compassion.

The Creative Work of the Nembutsu Practicer

At immediate issue for practicers in the Pure Land path is less the acceptance of certain metaphysical assertions than the nature of conceptual constructions of the world, and how apprehension of reality is possible that is not ultimately shaped and motivated by the attachments of the egocentric self and the historical and cultural circumstances in which its desires and aversions have been nurtured. I have sought to show, through formulations of the teaching in disparate but sequential modes of engagement, that this is not a mere regression, in which one accepts as dogma that the self is delusional and the world impermanent. The problem is to come to a coherent and intelligible understanding of oneself and the world that ignores neither the historical and emotional

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Faith," particularly pp. 115-130, "Shinran's Interpretive Methods." The hermeneutic circle implicit in Shinran's view of scriptural texts is expressed in the following passage: "Although in their general import the three sutras have explicit *(ken)* meanings and an implicit, hidden, inner *(shō on mitsu)* meaning, they each reveal *shinjin* to be the basis for entry [into dharma]. Hence, each sutra opens with the words, 'Thus [have I heard]. . . .' 'Thus' signifies the aspect of genuine entrusting" ("Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands," 37, CWS I: 227; SSZ 2: 157). In other words, the sutras "all teach the true, diamondlike mind to be what is most essential," and at the same time, *shinjin* is the "basis for entry" that allows for genuine understanding of the texts. Shinran develops his highly focused position drawing on earlier hints: "Each sutra opens with the words, 'Thus [have I heard] . . . . 'This reveals entrusting to be the basis for entry." T'an-luan, *Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land*, quoted in "Chapter on *Shinjin*," 38, CWS I: 103 (SSZ 2: 65). For a general discussion of the problem of Shinran's handling of scriptural passages, also see CWS II: 23-27.

boundness of the self nor the variety and worth of experience. The Pure Land path functions to guide practicers to such awareness.

A thoroughgoing penetration of ordinary conceptual life by an apprehension of its own limitations and distortions is not possible simply through the adoption of one further conception, but only as a new mode of conceptuality. Truth here is not proposition or conceptual construct, nor an emptiness in which all conceptions are rendered uniformly meaningless or conceptual thought itself transcended. It may be said to be a mode of perception and action in which the self is self-aware from the stance of wisdom, or that wisdom is self-aware from the locus of the practicer's life.

Self-awareness, since it emerges as an element of human life in the world, implies conceptuality and language. But where the content is the practicer's life together with others, this awareness involves the permeability of such conceptuality by its own inevitable inadequacy and distortion, and where the content is the true and real, it is pervaded by a dimension of inconceivability in which awareness is the real itself. In both cases, conceptuality fused with the transcendence of its horizons and dualisms allows for the growth of awareness, which ceases to be repetition of prior attachments and becomes genuinely creative activity in the world.

The practice of the Pure Land path is not to determine good and evil, accomplish good, and eradicate evil, for the permeability of conceptuality implies the collapse of any stance for an absolutized subject to view, judge, and impose its will on itself and the world. This does not mean, however, that the world is perceived as a morally homogeneous flatland or that the practicer is merely passive. The terrain is newly marked, not by determinations of gain and loss or right and wrong that shore up the righteousness of the self, but by a

heightened and acute sense of both pain and gratitude – the pain visited on other living beings and the expenditure of life-energy borne by the closely interwoven world that is the cost for one's own existence, and the joy in and gratitude for one's own life as the locus of the activity of wisdom-compassion that arises in one's acts from beyond the delusional horizons of the self. Out of such awareness emerges the vocation of the Pure Land practicer, which is the call to see the self and the world anew with ever greater breadth and clarity.

In terms of the teaching, this is to live by Amida's Name and light. The practicer's job of work is to hear and say the nembutsu. This is for the self and world to become manifest to the self; it is for one to come to speak what is true within ordinary words and to enact what is real within acts of daily life. The obligation of the Shin path is above all to know the self and world by the exercise of such awareness, for such knowing allows for the arising of a world of action in which the reified self is no longer absolute center.

Postscript

Shinran and Hermeneutical Thought

Obstructions of karmic evil turn into virtues [of wisdom];
It is like the relation of ice and water:
The more ice, the more water;
The more obstructions, the more virtues.
—*Hymns of the Pure Land Masters*, 40.

Linguisticality and Situatedness

Unlike Buddhist traditions that revolve around meditative practices by which delusional thought and speech are sundered, Shinran's Buddhist path is to be enacted in nonmonastic environments. It aims to open up a new dimension of awareness in the course of everyday life, without the elimination of ordinary thought and emotion. At the same time, this path is distinguished by the profundity and acuteness of its reflection on the attachments to self that obstruct authentic engagement with truth. These two aspects of Shin Buddhist thinking in particular lend themselves to conversation with modern Western hermeneutical thought, which has sought to explore the linguisticality and the situatedness of the human subject. There are, of course, fundamental differences between these disparate traditions as well. While in hermeneutical thought, human finitude has tended to be delineated in terms of historicity and linguisticality, for Shinran, the concept parallel to historicity is surely karmically conditioned existence, and the critical implication of linguisticality is ignorance. As we have seen that, for Shinran, these hallmarks of human life signify not only finitude, but evil, for in themselves they lead inexorably to further samsaric existence.

Nevertheless, one might suggest various topics of modern hermeneutical thought as loci for conversation with Shinran's Buddhist path, for example, the

explorations of understanding in Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics, his rejection of a conception of truth as grounded in proof and intellectual certainty, and his turn from understanding as an act of the subject to a notion of understanding as an event that one can only await; or Gadamer's concept of prejudice or prejudgment, which forms the frame of reference for understanding, the importance he gives to a dialogical or conversational dynamic in understanding, his notion of "play" (Spiel), indicating the loosening of one's moorings in previous conceptualizations, and even, despite the gap we would expect in the ontological underpinnings of understanding, the emanational model he invokes in his discussions of art. A pursuit of such comparisons, though impossible here, would both clarify Shinran's thinking and also contribute to a Buddhist model of hermeneutical thought.

Language, Narrative, and Time

Among the topics that suggest themselves for comparative reflection, I will briefly sketch one as an example: the opening section of Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative,* which includes a treatment of temporality based on the thought of Augustine. Ricoeur's discussion might be considered together with Shinran's understanding of the nature and functioning of language, the significance of narrative in his Buddhist path, and the centrality of the conception of time in his thought.

Ricoeur treats narrative together with metaphor under the rubric of creative language. In delineating a mechanism for the meaningfulness of nonliteral language, his orientation may be seen as broadly analogous to Shinran's. According to Ricoeur's exposition, metaphor entails a clash of literal meaning, for one thing is asserted to be something else. Thus, the metaphoric statement involves both affirmation and negation at the same time, since the statement cannot be accepted literally. Nevertheless, from this clash or tension

there arises an imaginative new meaning that cannot be reduced to a literal statement. In other words, the metaphorical statement does not simply substitute a decorative or nonliteral word for an intended meaning, but actually expresses a metaphorical meaning that shows things in a new light and that cannot be expressed identically in another way.

Ricoeur's assessment of the meaningfulness of the interactive tension in metaphorical expression provides for a rejection, such as seen in Shinran, of notions of religious texts as asserting truth-claims to be accepted as representative of reality. Moreover, metaphoric meaning is a conspicuous example of the general character of human cognition as "seeing-as" – as experiencing the world not as assorted surfaces and shapes but as the everyday domain of clearly defined and familiar things. In a similar way, according to Ricoeur, human beings form their sense of identity and their understanding of acts in the world as a "being-as" – through the creation and grasp of narratives.

Further, in his analysis of the interpretation of narrative, Ricoeur applies Gadamer's notion of the process of understanding as the fusion of horizons. Through engagement with narrative, one encounters new possibilities for understanding one's own life and actions. Such a model is particularly suggestive for Pure Land Buddhist tradition, which is grounded in the Primal Vow of Amida, its underlying narrative of Dharma-Treasury's aspiration, practice, and attainment of Buddhahood, and the narrative of practicers and their attainment of birth in the Pure Land. In Chapters 4-6, I have given an account of the practicer's engagement with the narrative of the Vow.

Ricoeur's view of the dialectical relationship between temporality and narrative may serve to highlight the concerns we have seen in Shinran's thought with the narrative of the Vow, with the process of engagement with

the teaching, and with time. At the beginning of his *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur outlines elements of the correlation between the actual human experience of time and the creation of narrative. As a preliminary statement of his conclusion, he writes: "Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."[94] This mutual informing of the experience of time and narrative may be seen to form a version of the hermeneutic circle in Ricoeur's thought.

As mentioned above, Ricoeur focuses his discussion of the human experience of time on the meditative exploration of time in Book 11 of Augustine's *Confessions*. Ricoeur's chief concern is with tensions in the understanding of lived, human time. He notes that, according to Augustine, when we seek to delve into the nature of time, which is part of all our experience, we find it elusive. The past is not happening now, for it has already passed away; the future does not yet exist; and the present, whenever we seek to grasp it, has already slipped into the past. It appears therefore that "time has no being since the future is not yet, the past is no longer, and the present does not remain."[95] Despite our experience, time seems only a series of present instants of no duration. Augustine's solution to this dilemma lies in a threefold present of past, present, and future, in which the past exists through memory, the future through expectation, and the present is characterized by attention that relegates the future to the past. That is, the pointlike present without extension comes to hold past, present, and future through the distension *(distentio)* of the mind, which is stretched by the separate intentions *(intentio)* of expectation, attention, and memory.

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94 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, (University of Chicago Press, 1984), Vol. 1, p. 52.

95 *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 7.

What is of particular interest to Ricoeur here is the dialectic between distension and intention when intention comes "to be identified with the fusion of the inner man" with God, that is, with eternity. Eternity, according to Augustine, stands in contrast with time just as stillness stands in contrast with the movement of the human mind. The mind of God does not move, and therefore is not characterized by time. The dialectic arises because one may, forgetting what lies in the past and undistracted by other aims and expectations, look "to an eternal goal." The intention of eternity may inform one's acts, but this is a paradoxical movement toward stillness and is not free from the constraints of time.

For Ricoeur, it is out of such a dialectic that time comes to be grasped as distension and comes to enable narrative. Narration is "grounded in time's approximation of eternity."[96] Narrative, in other words, is a configuring operation in which diverse and multiple phenomena are unified by being formed into actions of agents with goals, motives, and interpersonal relationships in a "conceptual network."

Shin Buddhist Narrative

Ricoeur's discussion resonates with various aspects of the treatment of time in Shinran. To begin, we find in Shinran a number of motifs and concepts similar to those highlighted by Ricoeur. In a note on the term wisdom *(chi-e)* that we have considered before, Shinran states: "*Chi* refers to thinking by reflection and judgment, discriminating this as this and that as that. *E* refers to no-activity attained through stilling such thought, so that there is no mental activity grasping this and that; it is samadhi of no-activity."[97] We see here a contrast between

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96 *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 29.

97 *Hymns of the Pure Land*, 4, CWS I: 325. Nabata Oshun, ed., *Shinran Wasan-shū*, Iwanami bunko, 15-16.

the movement and stillness of the mind that may be understood to include the contrast of discrimination and nondiscrimination or time and eternity. In addition, we find what might be termed a Mahayana Buddhist resolution of the dialectic delineated in Ricoeur's discussion between distension and intention. That is, while Ricoeur's discussion reflects the strict dichotomy in Western thought between time and eternity, the structure of wisdom set forth by Shinran is one of simultaneous dichotomy and nonduality.

Of course, wisdom is the functioning of an enlightened one who has attained suchness and not the ordinary human mind. Nevertheless, regarding the realization of *shinjin* by the unenlightened person, Shinran states that it occurs in one thought-moment, "time at its ultimate limit *(toki no kiwamari),*" which may be said to be a moment of no duration that stands outside the flow of time. Further, he speaks, regarding this thought-moment, of "the ultimate brevity of the instant *(jikoku no gokusoku)* of the realization of *shinjin,*"[98] and further, of "the ultimate brevity and expansion *(jisetsu no en-soku)* of the length of time in which one attains the mind and practice that result in birth in the Pure Land."[99] While various interpretations of this last passage may be possible, I would like to note in particular the expression "brevity and expansion" *(en-soku),* which may be understood to hold together interfused the temporal distension of mental activity and the moment of the realization of Buddha's wisdom.

Shinran's concern in his description is, of course, of the person who has realized *shinjin* and not ordinary consciousness. How, then, is *shinjin* realized? As we have seen, Shinran states that to hear the Vow is to realize *shinjin.* We may say that it occurs as the hearing of the narrative of the Vow, when the entrusting of oneself to the

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98 "Chapter on *Shinjin,*" 60, CWS I: 110-111 (SSZ 2: 71).

99 *Passages on the Pure Land Way,* CWS I: 298 (SSZ 2: 445).

Vow and the falling away of calculative thinking occur together. Aspects of the notion of the distension of the mind through mental activity directed to the past as memory and the future as expectation appear to correspond to what Shinran terms *hakarai* or contrivance, particularly as operative in the context of the Pure Land path. To be absorbed in assessing what one has done in the past in terms of good and evil, in hoping for salvation in the future, and in overcoming the past or ensuring the future through acts in the present, is what Shinran terms "self-power." He views it as delusional self-attachment. The Primal Vow, which is conceived of as action through countless aeons fulfilled and encapsulated in narrative, refigures our past and future and thereby transforms the present.

To paraphrase Ricoeur's statement of the dialectic of time and narrative, time becomes authentically human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode informed by the Vow, and the narrative of the Vow attains its full and genuine meaning when it becomes a condition of our temporal existence. That is, while Ricoeur describes the temporal awareness of human existence and the role of narrative in shaping our conceptions of actions and events, Shinran's concern is with the transformation of such awareness through fusion with the dimension of the Vow.

The narrative of the Vow attains its full meaning when it is heard in the way expressed in Shinran's words: "When I consider deeply the Vow of Amida, which arose from five kalpas of profound thought, I realize that it was entirely for the sake of myself alone."[100] This is precisely an understanding of the teaching not as a universal,

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100 The discussion of this passage from *Tannishō* by Nishitani Keiji in "The Problem of Time in Shinran," trans. Dennis Hirota, *Eastern Buddhist* 11:1 (1978), 13-26, is the most influential discussion of issues of temporality in Shinran's thought.

objective principle or truth-claim, but as lived truth incorporated into personal existence as one "heavily burdened with karma." The Vow is fulfilled act that encompasses its own aeons of aspiration and practice, but when it comes to inform one's own past, its meaning is to impart to the time of one's own human existence the temporality of karmic working. It functions as a kind of "seeing-as," where past actions emerge in narrative gestalt configured as though for the first time.

In a lecture given towards the end of his life, the novelist Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) speaks, probably with Shinran in mind, of the significance of being able to describe one's own acts of wrongdoing. Suppose, he states, that there is a person who has committed a murder or a heinous crime, recognized by all in society as an act that is wrong and that must be punished. But suppose, he continues, that the person is able describe with precision his thoughts and motives – the workings of his mind – just as they occurred, hiding nothing and omitting nothing. And suppose that in this way the person were able to communicate vividly to another exactly what had taken place. Then, says Sōseki, by the virtue of his description, the person would be able to "attain Buddhahood" *(jōbutsu suru)*. His crime would be absolved, transformed though not eradicated. Of course, for having violated the law, he would still face punishment or execution, but he would have been "purified" *(kiyomerareru)*.

> Consider a person who has committed theft and been sentenced to imprisonment, or one who has murdered and faces execution. From a legal standpoint, persons such as this are guilty of crimes. Because they have transgressed from the perspective of public morality, they must be punished by society. Nevertheless, I believe that if the human being who has perpetrated the offense is able to set forth the processes of his or her own mind just as they were, and if he or she is able to impress on others just what took place, then the crime in its entirety is nullified. It is not ascertained as a

> crime. What most strongly compels one to think thus is a novel that relates events just as they are, a well composed novel. Even though a person may have committed an act that from every possible viewpoint can only be called evil, if he has been able to write what took place just as it happened – if he has been able to describe what occurred precisely as it was, concealing nothing, omitting nothing – then through the virtue of having depicted it, he will be able to attain Buddhahood. Legally, he must be punished for his wrongdoing. But I believe that, with what he has described, his crime will have been purified. I firmly believe this.[101]

I wonder if what Sōseki describes might not be considered a Shin Buddhist sense of narrative. To depict the processes of one's thoughts and deeds just as they are *(ari no mama)* is to be aware of the working of delusional attachments and the effects of afflicting passions. Such awareness, however, is already the functioning of wisdom. As Shinran states, explaining the narrative of a traditional parable in which the aspiration for the Pure Land is likened to a narrow path between the banks of a raging river:

> 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 exhause themselves. When we, who are so shameful, go a step or two, little by little, along the White Path of the power of the Vow, we are taken in and held by the compassionate heart of the Buddha of unhindered light.[102]

To continue the paraphrase of Ricoeur, in the Shin path, time becomes authentically human to the extent that it is

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101 Natsume Sōseki, "Mohō to dokuritsu" (1913), in Miyoshi Yukio, ed., *Sōseki bunmei ronshū*, (Iwanami Bunko, 1986), pp. 165-166.

102 *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, CWS I: 488 (SSZ 2: 618).

articulated through a narrative mode informed by the Vow. It is not just that the cosmic time that is a regular progression of uniform movements becomes instead the lived time of the subject, for such lived time is ordinarily samsaric, characterized by clinging to the imagined self and by the attempt to forge our identity against the flow of time. Such time is merely anxious repetition. Rather, in the realization of *shinjin*, the time of one's existence ceases to be samsaric by being continuously pervaded or transfixed by the nirvanic moment of the Vow. This structure of a dialogical interaction or intersection of axes represents a major element of Pure Land Buddhist understanding of the self and the world, one that manifests itself in diverse areas of Japanese cultural life,[103] and that also provides materials for comparative considerations with contemporary Western thought.

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103 See my *Wind in the Pines: Classic Writings of the Way of Tea as a Buddhist Path* (Fremont: Asian Humanities Press, 1995).

APPENDIX

Passages from *Tannishō* Discussed in the Essay

[See Dennis Hirota, trans., *Tannisho: A Primer*, Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1982; the two translations given in this book were also adapted and included in CWS I: 661-681.]

1. "Saved by the inconceivable working of Amida's Vow, I shall realize birth into the Pure Land": the moment you entrust yourself thus, so that the mind set upon saying the Name arises within you, you are brought to share in the benefit of being grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned.

Know that the Primal Vow of Amida makes no distinction between people young and old, good and evil; only realization of *shinjin* is essential. For it was made to save the person in whom karmic evil is deep-rooted and who blind passions abound.

Thus, entrusting yourself to the Primal Vow requires no performance of good, for no act can hold greater virtue than saying the Name. Nor is there need to despair of the evil you commit, for no act is so evil that it obstructs the working of Amida's Primal Vow.

Thus were [Shinran's] words.

2. Each of you has crossed the borders of more than ten provinces to come to see me, undeterred by concern for your bodily safety, solely to inquire about the way to birth in the land of bliss. But if you imagine in me some special knowledge of a way to birth other than the nembutsu or a familiarity with writings that teach it, you are greatly mistaken. If that is the case, you would do better to visit the many eminent scholars in Nara or on Mount Hiei and inquire fully of them about the essentials

for birth. I simply accept and entrust myself to what a good teacher told me, "Just say the Name and be saved by Amida"; nothing else is involved.

I have no idea whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for my being born in the Pure Land whether it is the karmic act for which I must fall into hell. Should I have been deceived by Hōnen Shōnin and, saying the Name, plunge utterly into hell, even then I would have no regrets. The person who could have attained Buddhahood by endeavoring in other practices might regret that he had been deceived if he said the nembutsu and so fell into hell. But I am one for whom any practice is difficult to accomplish, so hell is to be my home whatever I do.

If Amida's Vow is true and real, Sakyamuni's teaching cannot be lies. If the Buddha's teaching is true and real, Shan-tao's commentaries cannot be lies. If Shan-tao's commentaries are true and real, can what Hōnen said be a lie? If what Hōnen said is true and real, then surely my words cannot be empty.

Such, in essence, is the *shinjin* of the foolish person that I am. Beyond this, whether you entrust yourself, taking up the nembutsu, or whether you abandon it, must be a matter of your own reckoning.

Thus were his words.

3. Even a good person can attain birth in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that an evil person will.

Though such is the truth, people commonly say, "Even an evil person attains birth, so naturally a good person will." This statement may seem well-founded at first, but it runs counter to the meaning of the Other Power established through the Primal Vow. For a person who relies on the good that he does through is self-power fails to entrust himself wholeheartedly to Other Power and therefore is not in accord with Amida's Primal Vow.

But when he abandons his attachment to self-power and entrusts himself totally to Other Power, he will realize birth in the Pure Land.

It is impossible for us, filled as we are with 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 attainment of Buddhahood by the person who is evil. Hence the evil person who entrusts himself to Other Power is precisely the one who possesses the true cause for birth.

Accordingly he said, "Even the virtuous man is born in the Pure Land, so without question is the man who is evil."

5. I have never said the Name even once for the repose of my departed father and mother. For all living things have been my parents and brothers and sisters in the course of countless lives in many states of existence. Upon attaining Buddhahood in the next life, I must save every one of them.

Were saying the Name indeed a good act in which a person strove through his own powers, then he might direct the merit thus gained toward saving his father and mother. But this is not the case. If, however, he simply abandons such self-power and quickly attains enlightenment in the Pure Land, he will be able to save all beings with transcendent powers and compassionate means, whatever karmic suffering they may be sinking into in the six realms and the four modes of birth, beginning with those with whom he life is deeply bound.

Thus were his words.

Shinran's words from the "Postscript":

When I consider deeply the Vow of Amida, which

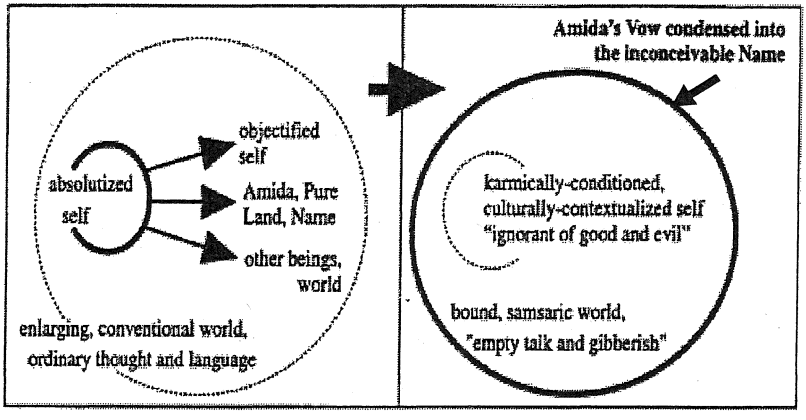
arose from five kalpas of profound thought, I realize that it was entirely for the sake of myself alone! Then how I am filled with gratitude for the Primal Vow, in which Amida settled on saving me, though I am burdened thus greatly with karma.

I know nothing of what is good or evil. For if I could know thoroughly, as in known in the mind of Amida, that an act was good, then I would know the meaning of "good." If I could know thoroughly, as Amida knows, that an act was evil, then I would know "evil." But for a foolish being full of blind passions, in this fleeting world—this burning house—all matters without exception are lies and gibberish, totally without truth and sincerity. The nembutsu alone is true and real.

Diagram I

Emergence of Fulfilled Engagement

The shift from initial encounter with the Pure Land Buddhist teaching into engagement with true reality, focusing on language and awareness (as Shinran does in *Tannishō*).



A) Provisional engagement: doubled self of calculative thinking that assesses its own acts and its condition in the world: "judging people as good and bad"; "reflecting knowingly on one's evil"; "endeavoring to make oneself worthy"; "making the nembutsu one's own good act."

B) Point of entry into authentic engagement: the collapse of contrivance simultaneous with the arising of the dual horizon circumscribing the self and its world and manifesting the Vow. The boundness of one's existence arises interfused with the hearing of the Name (emergence of reality).

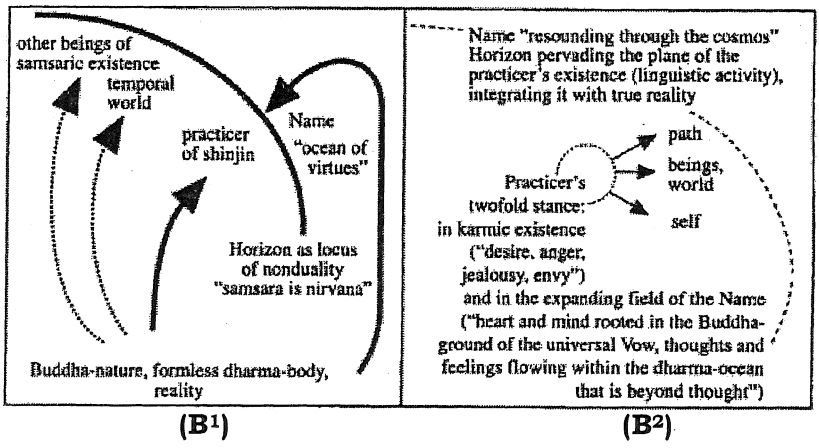
Realization of *shinjin* as the movement from (a) to (b) includes: (1) dissolution of any stance for an inner, autonomous subject to determine and incorporate genuine good and shun evil; (2) freeing of the elements of the path ("Buddha," "Pure Land," "nembutsu") from objectification within the coordinates of conventional thought and from appropriation and utilization; (3) apprehension of one's existence as thoroughly conditioned by past karma and intertwined with that of all other beings; (4) emergence of self and all beings pervaded by the working of reality, conceived as life or light and apprehended in the hearing of the Name.

The delimiting horizon (or joint presence of Name as compassionate reality and self and world as samsaric existence) depicted as instantaneously emerging in (b) represents not an abstract, doctrinally imposed dualism of beings and Buddha but rather an altered mode of existence and awareness. To depict the dynamics that evolve in the practicer's life, it must further be recast as in Diagram II.

Where calculative thinking collapses and the path condenses into the Name, all causal relations between one's acts and religious realization are severed. There is no basis in ordinary discriminative thought for genuine awareness of the path. This disjunctive horizon itself, however, in its linguistic dimension as the Name, enters the practicer's awareness and holds together two transformative moments: the arising of polar opposition between delusional being and what is real, and the simultaneous dissolution of opposition. This allows for the person's interfusion [Diagram II (b^1)] and renewed interaction [Diagram II (b^2)] with Vow and world. This is the basic model of *shinjin* as both salvific (attainment of reality) and interrelational (providing for a coherent apprehension of self, path, and world) in Shinran's writings.

Diagram II

Two Moments of Transformation



(b1) The primary moment of transformation: the horizon of the self arises to awareness as the nonduality of delusional existence and true reality. Word and reality are one ("From this oneness form [name] was manifested...") and act of hearing and reality are one ("*shinjin* is none other than Buddha-nature"). The horizon as both oppositional and nondiscrim- inative signifies that "Buddha pervades the countless worlds. . . . Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood."

(b2) Continuous transformation: the horizon (self as afflicting passions / reality as activity of the Vow) arises anew as the saying of the Name—voiceless and voiced, unconscious and conscious—within the linguistically-shaped and karmically-bound acts that make up one's ongoing temporal existence. Thus, "the minds, good and evil, of foolish beings are immediately transformed into

the mind of great compassion," and further, "the more ice of passions, the more water of enlightenment."

The Name as true language (conception permeated by inconceivability, or genuine self-realization of finitude) harbors the nonduality of samsaric existence (being) and true reality (Buddha, awakening), and at the same time manifests their polarity. Reality cannot be grasped in a subject-object relationship, but neither can it be encountered in awareness without engagement with the path (cannot be realized through simple reflection). The horizon arising as the Name (b), without allowing objectification of reality, is itself the functioning of dharma-body that "fills" oneself and all beings (b^1).

The teaching opening forth from the Name comprises a bridgework of dialectical concepts that discloses to apprehension the ungraspable reality in its depths. Through it, Amida "gives" awakening to ignorant beings or "grasps" them with the light of wisdom. The "boundlessness . . . of Amida's virtues is like the unobstructed fullness of the ...ocean," and those virtues flood persons' hearts. Conversely, their "rivers of blind passions, on entering the ocean of the Vow, ...become one in taste with that sea of wisdom." "Blind passions and enlightenment become one body and are not two."

This nonduality does not signify eradication of delusional thought. Shinran states, with regard to Buddha, that Amida's light is "unhindered" by beings' passions and ignorance, and with regard to beings, that they attain the Buddha's virtues of wisdom without knowing or seeking it. Their evil is "transformed into good without being nullified" as evil or eradicated. In other words, the oneness of Buddha and being underlies the horizon, but thought and perception remain linguistic and conceptual. Because of the dimension of nonduality, Shinran speaks of the "wisdom of *shinjin*" ("since Amida's Vow is wisdom, the emergence of the mind of entrusting

oneself to it is the arising of wisdom") and "nembutsu that is wisdom." Thus, through the Name as linguistic act, one's ongoing existence is integrated with true reality. Passions still arise, but with the dissolution of calculation that absolutizes the "inner" self, they are divested of the driving force of the intellect, which functions instead to mediate and alleviate them. The Name pervades the practicer's words, which are transformed thereby into false language (delusional thought and feeling that harbors the Name's dynamic as the illumination of their own distorted perceptions) and into true language (words with power to disclose the horizon's dimensions of polarity and nonduality to oneself and others) (b^2).

Glossary

A more detailed treatment of Pure Land Buddhist concepts, the evolution of Pure Land Buddhist tradition out of fundamental Mahayana Buddhist thought, and the nature of Shinran's development of the tradition may be found in Yoshifumi Ueda and Dennis Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989). The basic text of this book is also available at:
http://www.nembutsu.info/~indshin/readings.htm.

Amida Buddha (Amida-butsu)

The Buddha named Immeasurable Light and Life (Amitābha, Amitāyus), who embodies the ideals of wisdom and compassion in Mahayana Buddhist tradition. Amida is reality conceived narratively as working to bring all beings to awakening to the nature of self and the things of the world, and to the bliss and peace of enlightenment. It is said that the bodhisattva Dharma-Treasury aspired to liberate all living things from painful, delusional existence and vowed not to attain Buddhahood himself unless he established the means by which all could likewise attain enlightenment. Having fulfilled this vow, he became Amida Buddha.

Blind Passions, Afflicting Passions (Bonnō)

Unwholsome mental functioning that pollutes mind and body and brings distress. Distorted modes of perception and feeling arising from desperate clinging to a self falsely conceived as enduring, autonomous, and substantial. Typified as greed (desire for self-gratification and self-magnification), hatred (malice, abhorrence of what is threatening or diminishing), and ignorance (disregard of things as they actually are), they dominate our ordinary

conceptual life and bring about conflict, pain, profound anxiety, and inevitable frustration. Blind passions obstruct and stand in opposition to the awakening of wisdom, and yet in self-realization can come to be pervaded by wisdom.

Bodhisattva

In Mahayana Buddhist traditions, bodhisattvas ("enlightenment-beings" or beings who have awakened the momentous aspiration for Buddhahood) are often conceived as idealized Buddhist practicers who embody the qualities of wisdom and compassion and who share the virtues of their matchless endeavor with all beings. In Shinran's thought, such bodhisattvas gain their powers through the working of Amida's Primal Vow and in fact fulfill the functioning of the Vow in acting compassionately to lead other beings to enlightenment. Shinran speaks, for example, of Prince Shōtoku (574?-622), who was pivotal in the introduction of Buddhist tradition into Japan, and of Hōnen as manifestations of bodhisattvas carrying on the bodhisattva-work in this world. Further, Shinran teaches that when persons of *shinjin* are born in the Pure Land, then "with great love and great compassion immediately reaching their fullness in them, they return to the ocean of birth-and-death to save all sentient beings" (*Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*). They are, therefore, comparable with bodhisattvas of the highest level.

Dharma-body (Hosshin)

Reality, or each thing just as it is, which is also awareness as nonobjectifying and nonreifying. Dharma-body is reality conceived in terms of two inseparable dimensions: that beyond all conceptualization or form; and that as Amida Buddha, the activity of wisdom-compassion. It is said that Amida Buddha emerges out of formless reality without parting from it, and that reality free of all false

construction emerges into beings' awareness as the activity of Amida Buddha.

Dharma-Treasury Bodhisattva (Dharmākara, Hōzō)

The aspirant for enlightenment in the measureless past who vowed to create the means to liberate all living things from painful existence, and who became Amida Buddha on fulfilling the vow. The narrative of Dharma-Treasury's awakening of aspiration for Buddhahood in the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life Buddha* is based on legends about Sakyamuni.

Hakarai (Contrivance, Calculation, Design)

Thought, feeling, and effort driven by impulses to enhance and protect the self. This is perhaps the only central term in Shinran's writings not drawn from Buddhist texts in Chinese or inherited from the preceding tradition. Shinran uses this term to identify the mode in which delusional self-attachment tends to utilize religious practices and teachings to embellish the self or allay its anxieties is the final obstruction to genuinely transformative engagement.

Jinen

Literally, "naturally," "spontaneously," occurring "of itself" and not brought about through one's contrivance. Shinran identified the word *jinen* as a term expressive of reality in its dynamic modality, working to manifest itself as the awakening of beings to Amida's wisdom-compassion. Shinran defines *jinen* to mean, "made to become so, not accomplished through a person's intentions and designs," and also speaks of *jinen* as indicating formless supreme Buddha or reality. The spontaneous activity of compassion (Amida Buddha's Vow) in a person's existence, leading the person beyond calculative thinking to the realization of *shinjin* and attainment of wisdom.

Name (Myōgō)

The Name of Amida Buddha, "Namu-amida-butsu" in Japanese pronunciation. The entire phrase is considered the Name, although *"namu"* also is glossed, "I take refuge in . . . ." Shinran understands the Name as the form Amida Buddha's enlightenment takes in order to call beings to self-realization. As such, it is praised by all awakened beings and thus reverberates throughout the cosmos.

Nembutsu

To say the Name of Amida Buddha, "Namu-amida-butsu." A person's utterance is the manifestation of genuine religious practice, that is, an act that embodies awakened wisdom-compassion, not one's own will or aspirations. It is the activity of Amida Buddha in one's existence emerging as language and thus informing one's life, even as one's continues to live as a being of blind passions.

Primal Vow (Hongan)

The *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life Buddha (Sukhāvatīvyūha sūtra, Daimuryōjukyō)* relates the narrative of Dharma-Treasury's vows to attain Buddhahood as Amida Buddha. The central vow in the East Asian Pure Land Buddhist tradition is the eighteenth, which states: "If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment."

Pure Land (Jōdo)

The Buddha-field or sphere of compassionate activity of Amida Buddha. All beings who say the Name entrusting themselves to Amida's wisdom-compassion enter the field of Amida's activity. On severing the karmic bonds at work

in their present lives, they are born in the Pure Land and return immediately to samsaric existence as enlightened beings, in order to work for the liberation of all who remain in the pain of blind passions.

Samsaric existence (Shōji, "birth-and-death")

This term indicates anxious, painful existence of obsessive repetition, driven by blind passions and resulting in renewed frustration, conflict, and suffering.

Shinjin

The transformative permeation of one's existence by true wisdom-compassion, manifesting itself primarily as the entrusting of oneself to the Primal Vow of Amida and gratitude for its working; as realization that one's present attainment will unfold as perfect enlightenment and the power of genuine compassion in this world; as awareness of one's life now as karmic, bound by blind attachments; and as utterance of the Name pervading one's thoughts and words. Realization of *shinjin* in the immediate present is the fundamental goal of Shinran's path.

Shinran (1173-1263)

Buddhist teacher of medieval Japan. Of aristocratic birth in Kyoto; entered the priesthood at age nine and spent twenty years in study and practice as a Tendai Buddhist monk on Mount Hiei. Abandoned monastic practice as futile and became a disciple of the Pure Land teacher Hōnen. Exiled by the imperial court at the behest of the established temples; more than twenty years spent preaching in the countryside, where he built a large following. Return to an inconspicuous life in Kyoto at about age sixty, devoting the final three decades of his long life to writing. Left behind a large body of writings on Pure Land Buddhism (see *Teaching, Practice, and Realization*). Radically reformed Buddhist tradition by articulating a Buddhist path practicable in daily life in society. The

Buddhist school stemming from his teachings is one of the largest in Japan and the world.

Tannishō

A record of spoken words of Shinran made after Shinran's death by the disciple Yuien. Although its reliability has been debated, it is indispensable for the picture it provides of Shinran as teacher and person.

Teaching, Practice, and Realization

Shinran's major work, in Chinese, ninety percent of which consists of passages drawn from sutras and commentaries in the Chinese canon and arranged to illuminate central themes of Shinran's thought. In six chapters. The full title is: *Passages on the True and Real Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Path (Ken jōdo shinjitsu kyō gyō shō monrui,* popularly known as *Kyōgyōshinshō*). The subjects of the six chapters making up this work are: Teaching, Practice, *Shinjin*, Realization, True Buddha and Buddha-land, and Provisional Buddha-bodies and lands.

A complete translation of Shinran's works may be found in Dennis Hirota et al., trans., *The Collected Works of Shinran* (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997; available at: http://www.shinranworks.com.). Volume 2 includes introductions and an extensive glossary by the translators.

On *Asura's Harp*: An Afterword

Two Reflections from a Western Perspective Only

Peter McCormick

1. Many reflective persons, from Plato to Wittgenstein to mention but two outstanding examples from the Western philosophical tradition only, have focussed their thoughts sharply on the elusive nature of language. Moreover, in the particular case of philosophy's perennial struggles with religion, language continues to be at the centre of critical attention today. For without sustained and careful attention to the vagaries of language, taking the critical measure of the sense and significance of the dynamic relations between religious experience and reflective articulation cannot be satisfactory.

Among the many merits of Dennis Hirota's own sustained and careful attention to language in his *Asura's Harp: Engagement with Language as Buddhist Path*, first presented several years ago in the Fürst Franz-Josef and Fürstin Gina Memorial Philosophy Lecture Series at the Internationale Akademie für Philosophie in Liechtenstein and now published here in revised and extended form, is his original contribution to the elucidation of the nature of language in some forms of religious experience. Although his emphasis throughout is on the extraordinary work of one only of the several medieval Japanese religious geniuses whose reflection remain largely unknown to Western philosophers, the thoroughness and depth of his account of Shinran (1173-1263) provide several quite important suggestions for further work in contemporary philosophy of religion, whether in Japan or elsewhere.

In this brief Afterword, which Professor Hirota has very kindly asked me to contribute despite my working outside his own field of East Asian Religious Studies, I would like to indicate, in a quite provisional way, just two of the many suggestions some philosophers working in other traditions

might find of special interest. Perhaps some may find in at least these two points partial indications only towards areas where more knowledgeable critical reflection on the part of several East Asian as well as Western philosophers may prove fruitful for making more substantial contributions on the bases of such work as Dennis Hirota's here?

2. The first point has to do with the remarkably strong critiques of language on hand in the works of Shinran and in those of other thinkers in the Pure Land tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, especially in Jodo Shinshu.

The general idea in this first point is the already familiar one to Western philosophers of the unreliability of language for properly articulating what some who have first-hand experience of religious matters claim is most at stake in religious experience. What is probably unfamiliar to such philosophers, however, is the extent of that unreliability specifically as Shinran has expounded it in his religious masterpiece, *A Collection of Passages Revealing the True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way.*

For Western philosophers learned long ago, whether through the reflections of Aristotle, or of Augustine, or of Ockham, or of Locke, or of Kant, or of Nietzsche, or of Kierkegaard, or of such moderns as Frege, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Carnap, Ryle, Austin, Strawson, Quine, Davidson, and so many others, that some uses of language not only can elucidate what is real; inevitably, our uses of language also distort the real, sometimes systematically and sometimes randomly. Exactly why this is the case, however, especially in the attempts to articulate religious and spiritual experiences, remains controversial.

Many philosophers today hold that language's inevitable distortions are especially the case in our attempts to know that something or other is the case. And, like Kant's famous example of our intellectual cognitive capacities being very much like unremovable rose-coloured glasses for viewing the world, so too our intimately related linguistic capacities for articulating the world are similarly both

deforming and irremediable. As much contemporary philosophical work continues to show, philosophers today cannot help but continue to struggle with not just the Kantian problematic of the limits of mind, but also with the Wittgensteinian problematic of the limits of language.

Yet, however fundamental the claims about the unreliability of our various uses of language remain, and however rationally unassailable both the arguments in support of such unreliability as well as the evidence behind such arguments are, Dennis Hirota has shown how Shinran's own still largely overlooked claims about the unreliability of language are still more basic. For most of our ordinarily satisfactory yet unreflective uses of language not only distort what it is we wish to articulate; our uses of language whether ordinary or as reflective as we can make them, the basic claim here goes, necessarily distort how things truly are. That is, cogent arguments seem to be on hand that elucidate why even suitably reflective persons can neither satisfactorily apprehend in language alone, *in* saying, nor satisfactorily articulate by language alone, *by* saying, just how things truly are.

Thus, if Shinran is right, it is not just the case, as for example Augustine held, that the mind is inexorably dark and that the will is irremediably weak; it is also the case that our uses of language are irreparably damaged. That is, we just are not able of ourselves to get things truly right with words alone.

Thus, if we come to follow Shinran's indications, just what is and how things are, the way we were and where we are going, how to make one's way and how not, what is to be feared and what is to be hoped for — all of this and so much more can not be properly grasped and formulated *in* language alone.

3. However — and this is the second point I would like to suggest for further critical reflection here — all of this and so much, much more may, if Shinran is right, be granted and received *through* language.

But — and this is the crucial condition — without first getting into language in a certain way, without "engaging with language as Buddhist path," in the words of Dennis Hirota's evocative sub-title, one cannot go through language. That is, one must engage with our myriad uses of language, and engage with our uses of language specifically as a Buddhist path, if one is to move *through* language along such a path beyond what can only be apprehended and articulated inadequately *in* language.

The very general idea here, if I am not mistaken — and I need to stress quite explicitly that what, as a deeply respectful but agnostic outsider, I believe is at issue here may not be expressible without the kinds of inner witness and wordless testimony that are available presumably to some Shin Buddhist practicers only — is that certain specific linguistic practices may become occasionally the privileged sites where an empowering intuitive awareness of things as they truly are and of the true order of things as they truly are may be granted.

Comparisons and contrasts between the specific kind of linguistic practice that makes up the saying of the "nembutsu" and practicing other kinds of religious discourse are of course called for. One complicated example of such further work might involve looking freshly from a comparative philosophical view today at the different kinds of linguistic acts that would seem to make up the saying of the "nembutsu" with the saying of the words of consecration in the Roman Catholic Mass, "This is my body." Another might consider more closely the saying of the words of Baptism in the Lutheran Church, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." For now, however, I hope to have said enough at least to indicate briefly two aspects only of the many genuinely important and original contributions that make up Dennis Hirota's *Asura's Harp*.

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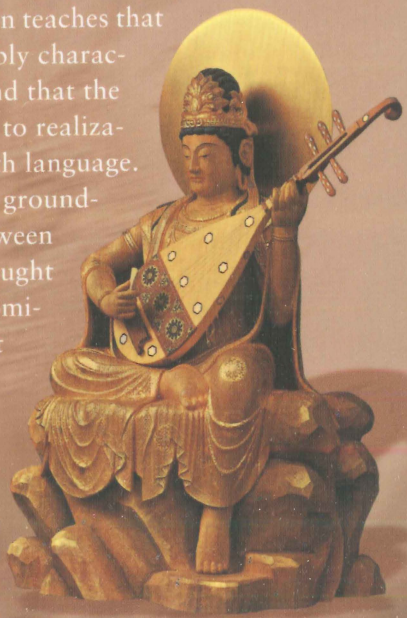

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