

The Structure of Shinjin or True Entrusting

In Shinran's thought, those who realize shinjin and perform great practice—whose utterance of the Name arises out of the Buddha's mind that has been awakened in them as shinjin—enter into a complex relationship with Amida. On the one hand, they have become aware of themselves as beings whose ignorance, egocentricity, and delusional perceptions prevent them from performing any act that is genuinely good, that moves them in the direction of Buddhahood and not in the direction of further samsaric entanglement. Thus, the practitioner and the Buddha come to stand in total, mutual opposition. In traditional Mahayana terms, this is the opposition between samsara and nirvana, or blind passions and enlightenment.

On the other hand, Amida's mind has been given to them, so that the working of their minds and the Buddha's are one. This oneness is rooted in the nonduality that characterizes true reality in Mahayana thought, and does not obliterate the mutual opposition between sentient beings and Buddha. Shinran states:

When the rivers of blind passion have returned to and entered
The ocean waters of the great compassionate Vow
Of unhindered light filling the ten quarters,
They become one in taste with that sea of wisdom.

*Jinjippo mugeko no
Daihi daigan no kaisui ni
Bonno no shuryu kishinureba
Chie no ushio ni ichimi nari. (Koso wasan, 42)*

When we take refuge in the Vow, our delusional mental activity comes to be pervaded by great wisdom-compassion, just as the waters of rivers flowing into the sea take on the taste of salt. The blind passions we harbor—the entire working of our minds and bodies, including all our thoughts, feeling and perceptions—become one with the working of the Primal Vow. Since we still possess such passions, we are not yet enlightened; nevertheless, we have realized the “equal of enlightenment” (Passage 3) and been transformed into beings who are “equal to the Tathagatas” (Passage 13), and our eventual attainment of complete Buddhahood is settled.

In other forms of Mahayana Buddhism, beings perform practices in order to eliminate delusional thinking and passions, and in this way they liberate themselves from samsaric existence and realize nirvana. This nirvana is nondiscriminative wisdom that, on the one hand, transcends the dualism of samsara and nirvana, and on the other hand, perceives sentient beings undergoing pain in samsara and devises means to act within samsara to save them. Thus, samsara and nirvana, or blind passions and enlightenment, stand in opposition, so that bodhisattvas free themselves from the former to reach the

latter, and at the same time they are one, so that bodhisattvas perceive all beings as themselves.

The realization of shinjin shares a similar structure; it is the self-awareness of samsaric existence that is possible only through transcendent wisdom becoming one with it. In Shinran's thought, however, this realization is attained without passing through the complete negation of samsaric existence of deluded passions. Thus, emptiness—a cardinal element in the meditative practice of Mahayana bodhisattvas—is not a crucial term in Shinran's teaching. The transformation of self and of all things is experienced not as the eradication of dichotomous mental activity, and with it all objects in the world and the perceiving self, but rather as discovering oneself wholly devoid of any quality or capacity that can lead to enlightenment, and further being known and grasped by the enlightened activity of the transcendent. Other while carrying one's existence. Shinran states that, while continuing to live in this world, one enters the vast "ocean of wisdom" that is the Primal Vow, or that the "great treasure ocean of virtues"—the virtues of enlightenment or nirvana—becomes full within one. Thus, although the path of attainment is different, the structure of transformed existence, in which samsara and nirvana are brought to stand simultaneously in mutual opposition and in identity, is the same.

It may be said that Shinran delineates the nature of shinjin chiefly in terms of two broad, interrelated areas of religious concern: the awareness of evil or unenlightened existence, and the transcendence of such existence, including the delusional perceptions of the self caught within the temporality and finitude of samsaric life. In the remainder of this chapter, we will consider the first in relation to self-knowledge, and the second in relation to the significance of shinjin for the practitioner's emancipation and attainment of enlightenment.

Transformation

In a verse similar to the one above, Shinran delineates the transformation that is inherent in the realization of shinjin:

When the waters—the minds, good and evil, of foolish beings—
Have returned to and entered the vast ocean
Of Amida's Vow of wisdom, they are immediately
Transformed into the mind of great compassion.

*Mida chigan no kokai ni
Bombyu zen-aku no shinsui mo
Ki-nyu shinureba sunawachi ni
Daihishin to zo tenzu naru. (Shozomatsu wasan, 40)*

Shinran annotates this verse: "*Transformed* means that the evil mind becomes good." The use of "evil" here is precise. Human good is not elevated and made better; the transformation at the core of the Vow's activity involves only evil. In the context of the verse, we see that the "evil mind" refers to all our mental

activity and embraces what we judge as morally or ethically good as well as what we think of as evil; that is, both “good and evil” acts of the “foolish” or unenlightened mind (line 1) are evil that is transformed into good. This good is Amida’s wisdom (line 3) or great compassion (line 4).

This transformation is not one in which our mental activities cease to be blind and defiled, so that they wholly become the Buddha’s wisdom and compassion. Being transformed, they “become one in taste with the sea of wisdom,” but this means that they do not simply disappear. He explains elsewhere:

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. (Passage 8)

Our evil acts and the ignorance and passions from which they arise, while remaining just as they are, are transformed into the Buddha’s virtue. In order to understand this transformation, we must clearly grasp Shinran’s concept of evil.

In other Buddhist schools, it is taught that by performing practices one can thoroughly rid oneself of the egocentric attachments and aversions that defile one’s perceptions and thereby attain Buddhahood. Shinran, however, takes the position of one incapable of ridding oneself of these deep-rooted impulses of clinging and fear. They include even the cherishing of one’s own life, and thus form the core of one’s very existence as a human being; one has possessed them from the beginningless past and will continue to harbor them however long one lives. Shinran describes these passions, and the acts they motivate, as “evil,” meaning that they lead only to further samsaric existence and block the realization of enlightenment. Thus, while the term “evil” has moral and ethical implications in his thought, its chief significance is religious; it points to the inability to fulfill any religious practice because of the inveterate self-attachment that pervades all one’s acts. In other words, whatever moral or ethical “good” one may perform, and however pure and spiritually disciplined one may make oneself, every thought that one has, words that one utters, and deed that one does can result only in entangling one further in samsara.

Thus he states, “A foolish being is by nature possessed of blind passions, so you must recognize yourself as a being of karmic evil” (Passage 5). This view of human existence as evil is not, however, to be accepted intellectually as doctrine, and it cannot be the product of ordinary self-reflection. Evil, for Shinran, describes the nature of the self that one becomes aware of only at that level at which one can encounter Amida’s working, and only within the light of the Buddha’s wisdom. It is on the basis of this self-awareness that he speaks of the transformation of evil, while remaining evil, into good.

The Mind of Shinjin

The heart and mind in which blind passions and wisdom-compassion have become one has two aspects. First, it is the activity of the Buddha's enlightenment. Our delusional minds, on entering the ocean of the Vow, become the "mind of great compassion." Second, this mind of good or wisdom-compassion is not good alone, but at the same time embraces within itself our "evil minds," our self-centeredness and ignorance. Thus wisdom-compassion and blind passions, while they stand opposed as pure and defiled, form the single "good" mind—shinjin that is true, real, and sincere.

From the stance of shinjin, delusional thoughts and feelings are not something other than itself. Having been established through the oneness of Amida's wisdom and the unenlightened mind, it functions as the awakening to oneself as possessed of blind passions. Stated conversely, the mind that has been able to awaken to itself as blind passions is the same as Amida's wisdom-compassion.

The following two verses articulate the whole of what we have seen above: Buddha's mind and the mind of the practitioner becoming one, and the complex structure of the one mind—the mind of shinjin—thus realized:

Through the benefit bestowed by unhindered light,
One realizes the shinjin of vast transcendent virtues:
Unfailingly the ice of blind passions melts
And immediately becomes the water of enlightenment.

Obstructing evils have become the substance of virtues;
It is like the relation of ice and water:
The more ice, the more water;
The more hindrances, the more virtues.

*Mugeko no riyaku yori
Itoku kodai no shin o ete
Kanmarazu bonno no kori toku
Sunawachi bodai no mizu to naru.*

*Zaisho kudoku no tai to naru
Kori to mizu no gotoku nite
Kori oki ni mizu oshi
Sawari oki ni toku oshi. (Kosho wasan, 39-40)*

Through the working of the vow, we realize shinjin and our blind passions become the Buddha's great wisdom and great compassion (first verse). According to this hymn, blind passions disappear, becoming the waters of enlightenment. In the second verse, however, we find that in this mind, blind passions and Amida's mind make up one, interfusing whole ("obstructing evils have become the substance of virtues"). While delusions and attachments turn into virtues, they remain as they are, standing in opposition to good; hence, not

only are virtues abundant, but so are the hindrances to enlightenment: “The more ice, the more water;/ The more hindrances, the more virtues.”

Our passions, while remaining just as they are, have become one with great wisdom, and in addition, through the working of that wisdom, they are gradually transformed like ice melting to become water. As they melt to become the same as the Buddha’s wisdom, the evil pervading the very existence of the self, which had been hidden because of ignorance, is brought to light; hence, one’s evils are said to increase. Moreover, as obstructing evils increase and one’s awareness broadens and deepens, one naturally repents, and at the same time is filled with gratitude for Amida’s compassion. In this way, acts arising from ignorance continue to be transformed into virtue. Thus, all our acts—the roots of our existence itself—come to be seen as characterized by evil, so that all possibility of living as a person free of delusional self-centeredness vanishes, and at the same time, this evil is transformed into good.

Shinran characterizes evil as “karmic” (in such terms as *akugo* and *zaigo*, literally “evil karma”). Karma signifies the law of cause and effect at work in human existence. In general Buddhist thought, past acts, whether good or evil, become causes manifesting their effects in the present, and likewise, present acts become causes of results that will appear in the future. Good acts necessarily result in circumstances favorable toward more good, and evil in unfavorable ones. For Shinran, all our acts, whether good or evil by moral or ethical standards, are evil in a religious sense, being defiled by ignorance and passions. Moreover, this evil is karmic, meaning that it stretches back infinitely into the past. Since the beginningless past, all our acts have worked only to bind us to samsaric life. Because of aeons of repetition and habit, we harbor unknowable evil in the depths of our existence. Hence, to become aware of the roots of our existence is to know the basic nature of the self as pervaded by passions and ignorant clinging. This attachment traps us completely, and we cannot let go.

Amida Buddha, as the embodiment of wisdom-compassion, becomes one with the karmic evil and blind passions of beings in order that they awaken to authentic self-knowledge, that is, be brought to realization of no-self and to enlightenment. This oneness of Buddha and sentient being, of the virtues of wisdom and karmic evil, is the fundamental nature of Amida himself as Buddha, manifested as “grasping, never to abandon” the evil person. Since Amida’s virtue is not simple goodness as opposed to evil but embraces evil and ignorance within itself, not only does a person’s karmic evil not disappear, but it is illuminated by wisdom and compassion, and thus it comes to fulfill the activity of Amida’s virtue. Hence, when a person takes refuge in Amida’s Vow, “without his calculating in any way, all his past, present, and future evil karma is transformed into good.” This is not to say that it is deprived of its own inherent action. One’s evil, though it may have been committed in the distant past, is personal, and Amida does not redeem it. It works its effect in one’s life according to the law of karma. One is grasped by great compassion just as one is, possessed of evil, so that one’s evil at once follows the law of karma and is transformed by the power of the Vow. In this way, the person of shinjin, the essence of whose existence is

karmic evil, is nevertheless filled with the Buddha's virtues, for his karmic evil is the very substance of the activity of wisdom-compassion.