

Shinran in the Light of Heidegger

Rethinking the Concept of *shinjin*

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Although the notion of attaining *shinjin*¹ 信心 in Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263) constitutes the central, most distinctive element of his Pure Land path and offers significant resources for exploring a Japanese Buddhist view of human existence, it is often construed, both in the traditional Shin Buddhist (*Jōdo shinsbū* 浄土真宗) scholasticism in Japan and in the modern West, in terms of a commonsense notion of faith as belief or credal assent. This article is intended to suggest that a new, more apposite and fruitful paradigm for a contemporary understanding of what Shinran terms “the attaining of *shinjin*” may be brought to light by examining various aspects of his teaching in comparison with elements of the thought of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Such a revised understanding of *shinjin* would suggest not merely a different view of one among a number of Shinran’s key concepts, but a viable way of recasting the basic concerns of his thought and writings as a whole.

Despite the vast differences in their intellectual backgrounds, cultural contexts, and purposes, Heidegger is particularly appropriate for such a mediating role, not only because of his seminal influence on contempo-

1. “Attain” or “realize *shinjin*” (信心をう, 信心獲得). *Shinjin* is often translated “faith” or “trust,” but is romanized in *The Collected Works of Shinran* in order to enable Shinran’s contexts to define the term.

rary thought, including Japanese philosophy, over the past century, but because he may be said to share with Shinran a fundamental orientation of thought. Both Shinran and Heidegger take as their starting point profound limitations and distortions in human awareness. They consequently confront a similar problem: the inadequacy of what they both might describe as the “natural,” deeply ingrained notion that human knowledge and judgments about the world result from mental acts of an autonomous ego-subject grasping stable objects that exist around it. This leads them both to confront the question of how an authentic awareness may arise from within the context of bounded, conditioned experience.

Further, they arrive at structurally analogous notions of the enabling of human engagement with what is true. That is, their attempts to articulate the nature of self-aware human existence from a stance at the intersection of two shared lines of thought—the rejection of the doubly reifying subject-object dichotomy and a rigorous endeavor to think and write from within inevitably circumscribed, partial, and distortive horizons—bring the two thinkers into a convergence of concerns, seen in some of the focal issues that arise in their writings. In this essay, I will briefly take up the basic structural dynamic of the occurrence of truth in their thought, and then touch on several conceptual motifs shared by the two thinkers that articulate the nature of human existence implied by this structure.²

The comparison here is not an attempt to claim that Shinran adumbrates strains of recent Western thought or that he is validated by resemblances. Neither does it assume the possibility or usefulness to Shin tradition of merely adopting modern Western solutions to various intellectual quandaries now shared in Japan. Rather, exploring similarities between Shinran and recent Western thought may aid us in achieving a fresh understanding of Shinran by suggesting how his thinking might be extended beyond the predominantly soteriological framework of its traditional understanding and casting new light on often overlooked

2. I have taken up elsewhere several themes relevant to a comparison of Shinran and Heidegger. Regarding the concept of truth, referring to Heidegger’s essay “On the Essence of Truth,” see HIROTA 2008.

aspects of its implications for present existence. It may be possible, in this way, to explore its contemporary significance as a means of articulating a mode of awareness that, by being freed of both the absolutizing of the subject-agent and the reifying of its grasp of things, remains open to the emergence of truth in the arising of a world of meaning.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE OCCURRENCE OF TRUTH

Both Shinran and Heidegger seek to delineate the contours of human awareness—which inevitably implies a dichotomy of knower and known—without the substantialization of either the knowing subject or known object, which both thinkers regard as falsifying, resulting in a flawed mode of human existence in ignorance and attachment. This thinking leads in both figures to the development of two broad, inter-related themes that mirror each other from opposite sides of the dichotomy of awareness:

1. On the side of the knower, there is engagement with and apprehension of what is meaningful in the world wholly from *within* a prior horizon of directed behavior, that is, ignorance for Shinran and oblivion for Heidegger.
2. On the side of the known, there is truth as apprehensible, meaningful form emergent out of formlessness and inconceivability.

In their interaction, these two elements together point to the arising of an ineluctably doubled structure of awareness, in which truth is simultaneous with and inseparable from untruth. This is expressed by Shinran, “blind passions and enlightenment are not two in substance” (*Hymns on the Pure Land Masters*, 32, CWS 1: 369). In Heidegger’s terms, truth as unconcealedness, which is always partial and perspectival, is inseparable from withdrawal and concealedness.

This structural similarity reveals itself further in the actual occurrence or enactment of truth, which in both thinkers turns on a radical shift in mode of awareness and existence. Shinran’s distinction of the provisional (権仮) and the true (真実) forms a pervasive undercurrent in his thought: “That we abandon the accommodated and take up the real, set

aside the provisional and adopt the true is the Master's [Shinran's] fundamental intent" (*Tannishō*, CWS I: 679). We find an illuminating parallel in Heidegger's early lectures, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (1920–1921). There Heidegger takes up Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, the first of which is the earliest New Testament document, as manifesting the religious existence of what he calls "primal Christianity." Heidegger's concern in the written communication, like Shinran's in his own writings, is not an intellectual grasp of truth as doctrinal propositions, but the elucidation of a particular mode of existence. Because of this shared concern with a transformed awareness, Heidegger's central themes in his discussion of I Thessalonians—language as the call that occasions entrance into religious existence and the temporality of alreadiness ("already having become") in relation to the parousia or second coming of Christ—also have significant analogues in Shinran's distinctive concerns with linguisticity and temporality.³

Perhaps the most arresting parallel may be seen in Heidegger's reading of Paul's response to queries from the Thessalonians regarding when the parousia will occur. Heidegger emphasizes Paul's response that there is no need to answer because the Thessalonians already "well know" out of their own religious life-experience. Further, Paul develops his assertion in concrete terms by distinguishing two groups of people by their relation to the parousia, those who seek peace and security, but who dwell in darkness and are destined for sudden destruction, and those who live in wakefulness and self-awareness. This is a distinction not merely of intellectual apprehension, but of two contrasting modes of existence, and although the content differs, it resembles Shinran's distinction of accommodated and true, or calculative self-power within the Other Power path and genuine Other Power. Thus, Shinran states, "There are two kinds of people who seek birth in the Pure Land: those of Other Power and those of self-power. This has been taught by the Indian masters and Pure Land teachers" (*Lamp for the Latter Ages*, letter 2, CWS I: 525).

Further, in rejecting commonsense notions of a transcendent subject, both Shinran and Heidegger focus on an event or emergence of truth,

3. On Shinran and language, see HIROTA 1993 and HIROTA 2006. On temporality, see UEDA and HIROTA 1989, pp. 168-182, and NISHITANI 1978.

rather than either a subjective state of consciousness or a fixed, objective reality. Their fundamental concern lies with that which allows or empowers truth to emerge for the always situated being. Shinran calls the event “the one thought-moment of [attaining] *shinjin* (true mind given by Amida Buddha)” and Heidegger uses the term “the open region” [ET 144] or “clearing” in which unconcealment or disclosure occurs. It might be argued that Shinran’s whole concern in his writings is with the realm of religious teachings, while Heidegger’s interests are phenomenological and studiously non-theological. Nevertheless, both thinkers investigate a transformative shift in mode of existence from an ordinary awareness of ego-self occupying a position in the world to the occurrence of truth. Further, both insist on the locus of this shift as everyday life.

Regarding this shift, I will focus on the drawing or summoning of finite beings to what is real and the necessary human posture of awaiting and being brought to hear, and the emerging of meaningful form from formlessness in terms of human being in the world.

The Call of Formlessness as the Other

Shinran speaks of the Name of Amida, *Namu-amida-butsu*, not as a person’s invocation of the Buddha, but as Amida’s call to or summons of beings (CWS I: 38), and of the hearing of the Name as the attaining of *shinjin*, the Buddha’s mind (CWS I: 474), so that neither utterance of the *nenbutsu* nor an attitude of entrusting oneself to Amida’s Vow have their origin in the practitioner’s deliberation. Underlying these radical reversals of agency in a person’s relation to Amida is Shinran’s understanding of the nature of reality itself in terms of the two dimensions of Buddha as formless dharma-nature (法性) and as conceivable form (dharma-body as compassionate means, 方便法身, Amida Buddha). He states:

From this treasure ocean of oneness [i.e., suchness, formless reality], form was manifested, taking the name Bodhisattva Dharmākara, who, through establishing the unhindered Vow as the cause, became Amida Buddha. (CWS I: 486)

Shinran develops his thinking based on the concept of the twofold dharma-body (二種法身) of the Chinese Pure Land master Tanluan 曇鸞

(c. 476–542), in which the two opposing dimensions of formlessness and form unfold into each other in the process of awakening beings. Tanluan states, in a passage quoted by Shinran:

All Buddhas and bodhisattvas have dharma-bodies of two dimensions: dharma-body as dharma-nature and dharma-body as compassionate means. Dharma-body as compassionate means arises from dharma-body as dharma-nature, and dharma-body as dharma-nature emerges [into our awareness] out of dharma-body as compassionate means. These two dimensions of dharma-body differ but are not separable; they are one but cannot be regarded as identical. (CWS I: 165, altered)

Shinran’s development of the notion of the ineffable and spontaneous (*jinen* 自然) unfolding of formless reality as wisdom-compassion may not be a concept either available or acceptable to Heidegger, but Heidegger develops a functionally analogous, though more inclusive, pair of terms in “On the Origin of the Work of Art” (1935–1936). To explore the work-being or functioning of the artwork as the happening of truth, Heidegger there sets forth a dichotomy of earth and world, which in broad outline may be brought into comparison with Shinran’s use of the twofold dharma-body.

In Heidegger’s conception, “World is not a mere collection of things... that are present at hand. Neither is world a merely imaginary framework added by our representation to the sum of things that are present” (OWA 23). A world is “always-nonobjectual” (OWA 23), yet is precisely that which enables our apprehension of things as meaningful parts of our surroundings. In functioning to make things available to our understanding, our “world worlds, and is more fully in being than all those tangible and perceptible things in the midst of which we take ourselves to be at home” (OWA 23). By contrast, “earth” may be understood to express the complementary counter-movement of concealment that is inherent in Heidegger’s exposition of truth. Thus, “earth shatters every attempt to penetrate it” (OWA 25) and “is apprehended and preserved as the essentially undisclosable, as that which withdraws from every disclosure, in other words, keeps itself constantly closed up” (OWA 25).

Several points may be noted with regard to our concerns here. First, the duality of earth and world, like the twofold dharma-body, is used to

delineate the dynamic circularity moving between formlessness or non-discrimination, on the one hand, and the field of discriminative apprehension or conceptual understanding, on the other. These two dimensions of reality or of the happening of truth, while standing in polar opposition, are for both thinkers interfused. Thus, Heidegger states: “World and earth are essentially different and yet never separated from one another” (OWA 26). Further he states: “World is grounded on earth, and earth rises up through world” (OWA 26). These statements have their close parallel in Shinran’s thought sketched above.

Further, both thinkers propose that the relationship of interaction between formless reality and forms also signifies, regarding the aspect of the subject, that human awareness is brought into contact with the dimension of the formless *through and as* apprehension of things in the world of form. Such a dynamic is, in fact, required for the apprehension of beings in their truth and reality, for ordinary human understanding, absorbed in the field of things, cannot attain such a grasp through its own discriminative operations. In relation to the functioning of the artwork, then, on the one hand, the work makes manifest both a world and earth:

Rising-up-within-itself the work opens up a *world* and keeps it abidingly in force. To be a work means: to set up a world. (OWA 22, emphasis in original)

The work moves the earth into the open of a world and holds it there. *The work lets the earth be an earth.* (OWA 24; emphasis in original)

The setting up of a world and the setting forth of earth are two essential traits belonging to the work-being of the work. Within the unity of that work-being, however, they belong together. (OWA 26)

While on the one hand, “earth rises up through world” to become manifest as “essentially self-secluding” (OWA 25), on the other hand, there is a reciprocal, opposite movement: “This setting forth of the earth is what the work achieves by setting itself back into the earth” (OWA 25).

The “setting itself back into the earth” expresses a movement perhaps analogous to Shinran’s notion that “in order to make it known that supreme Buddha is formless, the name Amida Buddha is expressly used,” so that “Amida Buddha fulfills the purpose of making us know the signif-

icance of *jinen*.” In interpreting a passage from the *Larger Sutra of [the Buddha] Immeasurable Life* (*Muryōjukyō* 無量壽經), Shinran states:

[The sutra states:] *Never at variance with the [Pure] Land, one is drawn there by its spontaneous working (jinen)...* The person who has realized true and real *shinjin* naturally [by *jinen*] is in accord with the cause of birth in the Pure Land and is drawn by the Buddha’s karmic power; hence, going [to the Pure Land] is easy, and ascending to and attaining the supreme great nirvana is without limit.... *Jinen* means that there is no calculating on the part of the practitioner. (*Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, cws 1: 496–8)

We see here that *jinen* in fact holds a multiple significance more complex than any single term in Heidegger. It is formless, inconceivable reality itself, and it is a dynamic of the emerging of form that further brings beings to awareness and to attainment of formlessness. In other words, it enables encounter (implying form: Amida, Vow, Name, etc.) and further “calls” or “draws” beings unendingly to formless reality.

At the same time, in his dichotomy of earth and world, Heidegger moves toward a structure of thought similar to Shinran’s:

The earth is openly illuminated as itself only where it is apprehended and preserved as the essentially undisclosable, as that which withdraws from every disclosure, in other words, keeps itself constantly closed up. (OWA 25)

That earth as “essentially undisclosable” and formless may be “openly illuminated as itself” so that it is “apprehended” in the artwork means:

The self-seclusion of the earth is, however, no uniform, inflexible staying-in-the-dark [*Verhangenbleiben*], but unfolds, rather, into an inexhaustible richness of simple modes and shapes. (OWA 25)

A similar dynamic of incessant self-disclosure across the horizon of formlessness and form is express in Shinran in words of Sengzhao (僧肇 374 or 384–414) quoted by Tanluan and reproduced in Shinran:

The dharma-body, being formless, takes on all forms.... It being without words, profound writings spread more and more widely” (cws 1: 164)

Taking a hint from Heidegger's broad application of an essential dynamic of self-disclosure and self-concealment to works of art, it may be useful to expand the understanding of the potential range of emerging forms in Shinran, for in actuality one cannot limit what may bring a person to hear in the dissolution of calculative thought and perception.

Jinen and Ordinary Life

It may be objected that, despite the structural parallels in their thought, Shinran's conception of *jinen* is specifically soteriological, while Heidegger explicitly avoids an overtly theological orientation in seeking to illuminate human existence in the world. Thus, while *jinen* indicates the working of reality moving beings toward awakening, Heidegger's term *phusis*, for example, bespeaks the general "worlding" of the world. For this reason, while Shinran interprets the motive force moving in his concept of *jinen* in anthropomorphic terms such as wisdom-compassion, Heidegger employs neutral, impersonal concepts of sway and *poemos*.

Two points may be briefly noted here regarding this objection. First, Heidegger, tracing perhaps a reverse path from Shinran's, is led from reflection on the locus of truth as event toward anthropomorphic expressions of the holy in setting forth the principal significance of earth for human existence:

φύσις lights up that on which man bases his dwelling. We call this the *earth*. What this word means here is far removed from the idea of a mass of matter and from the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that in which the arising of everything that arises is brought back—as, indeed, the very thing that it is—and sheltered. In the things that arise the *earth presences as the protecting one*. (OWA 21; emphasis added)

As we have seen, earth shares the dual character of truth, or the non-duality of discrimination or differentiation and nondiscrimination that we have been considering: "Earth is the coming-forth-concealing [*Hervorkommend-Bergende*]" (OWA 24). On the one hand, "All things of the earth, the earth itself in its entirety, flow together in reciprocal harmony" (OWA 25), and on the other hand, "this confluence is no blurring of outlines" (OWA 25). In addition, like *jinen*, "Earth is that which cannot be

forced, that which is effortless and untiring” (OWA 24), unyielding to calculative grasp or contrivance (“earth shatters every attempt to penetrate it” [OWA 25]) and yet emerging to the patient, heedful mind, so that earth presences “in the things that arise” in the world.

Further, “Earth is that in which the arising of everything that arises is brought back... and sheltered.... [E]arth presences as the protecting one.” Here we find expressed a function of earth that is perhaps analogous to Shinran’s perception of Amida Buddha as fulfilling “the purpose of making us know the significance of *jinen*” (CWS I: 428) and of the dharma-ocean within which his “thoughts and feelings flow” as he carries on his present life in the world. Heidegger goes on to state, “On and in the earth, historical man founds his dwelling in the world.” This sense of “dwelling”—simultaneously in the field of discrimination and attachments and in the dimension of the inconceivable—is crucial for both Shinran and Heidegger.

Second, concerning Shinran, although the metaphor of emergence into the field of human apprehension is applied particularly to the salvific working of reality (formless supreme Buddha, suchness, dharma-nature, etc.), this does not necessarily mean that his concept of *jinen* is restricted to overt manifestations of Buddhist transmission such as Amida’s Vow and Name, Śākyamuni’s teaching, or Hōnen’s preaching. *Jinen* as “becoming so of itself, not through the practicer’s calculation,” also characterizes the modality of the practicer’s present existence and the existence of the things of the world in which the person carries on her life. This is because, as we have seen, the world of the practicer is one in which “Tathagata (true reality, suchness, etc.) pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood” (CWS I: 461). Formless reality is said to fill the mind of the practicer and all the things of the world. The practicer comes to apprehend this reality through its realization as *shinjin*, and that out of such awareness it is. Shinran states:

How joyous I am, realizing as I humbly reflect that my heart and mind stand rooted in the Buddha-ground of the universal Vow, and that my thoughts and feelings flow within the dharma-ocean, which is beyond comprehension. (*Passages on the Pure Land Way*, CWS I: 303)

The “Buddha-ground” or “dharma-ocean, which is beyond comprehension” may be said to indicate the dimension of formless reality that “pervades the countless worlds” and the locus in which both the practitioner and all things have their existence. Perhaps the parallel concept in Heidegger is the “open region” in which beings “can properly take their stand and become capable of being said” (ET 141) or Being as “clearing.”

According to Shinran, *jinen* may be said to be a synonym for truth as “dharmicness” (法則), meaning “the way that things have become settled to be” (ことのさだまりたるありさま, *sakun* annotation, CWS I: 481), that is, as they are in themselves in the world and in human involvement, not as objects of calculative thinking empirically observed by the ego-self. Thus: “*Dharmicness* expresses the natural working (*jinen*) in the life of the person who realizes *shinjin* and says the Name once” (CWS 481). It is particularly in considering such ideas as the manifestation of *dharmicness* in the ordinary life of the person of *shinjin*, a topic perhaps inadequately explored in traditional scholastics, that such notions of Heidegger’s as “letting-be” and releasement (*Gelassenheit*) (ET, 144, 152) may shed light on concepts in Shinran that are little noted but potentially significant for a contemporary understanding.

MAJOR THEMES SHARED BY SHINRAN AND HEIDEGGER

Drawing on Heidegger’s delineation of that which enables apprehension of truth, it may be said that Shinran’s conception of attaining *shinjin*, rather than being grasped on the model of belief in doctrinal assertions, is more appropriately understood as the emergence of a new world of meaning, unfolding with the hearing of the call of the formless that is authentically other. As Shinran insists, no amount of deliberation or contrivance within the field of the ego-self can bring about such an encounter. It arises by the working of *jinen*, spontaneously, and signifies the very falling away of our usual mindset of calculative thinking (*hakarai*). Both Shinran and Heidegger speak of a posture of awaiting.

I turn briefly here to the conceptions of givenness, temporality, and

dwelling, which are distinctive, key themes in Shinran that he develops employing radically innovative interpretations of scriptural texts, and all of which are open to comparative consideration with Heidegger. This comparative potential arises analogically from the deeper structural similarities in their thinking that we have seen.

Givenness and Alreadiness

Although it is impossible to discuss Shinran's historical context here, the configuration of his thought outlined in this article should be seen as a direct response to the fundamental, unresolved issue Hōnen's teaching posed for practitioners: identifying the decisive locus of a person's relationship to the liberative power prepared for beings by Amida Buddha. Even while Hōnen was alive, intense debate arose among his disciples stemming from a failure to move beyond the objectification of the *nenbutsu* practice and the Primal Vow in relation to the practitioner as autonomous subject-agent. Shinran developed a constellation of concepts and highly innovative interpretations (*shinjin*, *jinen*, *ekō* 廻向, *ichinen* 一念, etc.) precisely to articulate the mode of existence that he regarded to be the true core of Hōnen's teaching (*jōdo shinshū*).

Thus, the central doctrinal issue confronted in Shinran's theology is the obdurate tendency toward the bifurcation of trust (*shin* 信) and practice (*gyō* 行) in enactment of the Pure Land path, based on unacknowledged presuppositions of the practitioner's effective agency. Hōnen had struggled to resolve disputes among his followers over this problem, but eventually bequeathed it to his disciples, who took a variety of stances. Hōnen had taught that the practice of *nenbutsu* as simple utterance of the Name has been prepared for beings by Amida, enabling them to be born into his buddha-field. The problem for followers was how the practice of *nenbutsu* fulfilled by the Buddha rather than endeavored in by the practitioner should be accessed by beings and made their own. Shinran's unique answer was that it is not primarily a person's own saying the *nenbutsu* out of trust that is the praxis specified by Amida and in accord with his Vow; rather, the practitioner's *nenbutsu* is itself Amida's own fulfilled act of practice, for its enacting is the self-manifestation of the Buddha's wisdom-compassion that has become the practitioner's

own as *shinjin*.⁴ That is, Amida directs to (*ekō*) or realizes in beings the buddha-mind of wisdom-compassion as the attainment of *shinjin*. Thus, from the stance of the practitioner, attaining *shinjin* is a matter of already “having-become,” in Heidegger’s phrase, in which a meaningful world has already arisen pervaded by formless reality.

Further, what Shinran terms Amida’s “giving” of buddha-mind unfolds in awareness as the opposite, affirmative face of the dissolution of a world of calculative perception (*bakarai*). Thus Shinran states, “No [self-] working is the working [of buddha-wisdom]” (CWS I: 525), and further, “The term ‘Other Power’ means being free of any form of calculation” (CWS I: 537). From the perspective of our concerns here, two meanings are indicated by these expressions. First, it is only an encounter with what becomes manifest as genuinely Other-than-self—Otherness that works to dissolve the foundations of the self’s efforts to calculate and manage existence according to its own advantage—that can precipitate an awareness not fixed in egocentric self-reification. When, in his words recorded in *Tannishō*, Shinran refers to Hōnen (“entrusting myself to the saying of a good person,” “even if I have been deceived by Master Hōnen”), he is speaking of such a transformative encounter.⁵ It is for this reason, and not a superstitious hagiology, that elsewhere he also speaks of Hōnen as a manifestation of Amida (CWS I: 390).

4. For a consideration of the approaches of Hōnen and Shinran and the characteristics and relationship of their writings, see CWS II: 13–27 and HIROTA 2010, 28–34.

5. From *Tannishō* 2: ‘For myself, beyond receiving and entrusting myself to the words spoken by a good person, “Just say the *nenbutsu* and be saved by Amida,” nothing whatsoever is involved. Whether the *nenbutsu* is truly the seed for being born in the Pure Land, or whether it is karma that *causes* one to fall into hell, I know not at all. Even in the instance that I have been deceived by Master Hōnen and, by doing the *nenbutsu*, end up plunging into hell, I will have no regrets whatsoever. The reason is this. It is the person who could have attained Buddhahood by endeavoring in other practices who would surely regret having been deceived if he fell into hell because of saying the *nenbutsu*. But my existence is such that [fulfilling] any practice is beyond reach, so it is clear that hell is my settled dwelling whatever I might do. If Amida’s Vow is true and real, Śākyamuni’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.’ See HIROTA 1982 and CWS I: 662.

Second, because of its inherent character of giving *itself*, the Other functions not as objectively present to a self-determining subject but as a kind of enveloping backlight against which the self and the things of the world emerge jointly, in interrelationship. It is not that one freely apprehends the world from a transcendent standpoint, but rather that the apprehension of self and world arises from experience illumined by a pervasive light of otherness. When Shinran speaks of the absence of regret even if deceived, or of hell as decidedly his dwelling, he is speaking not from the domain of doctrine or of common sense, but from within an immediacy and directness of experience in which the notion of autonomously determining the parameters of his existence has been replaced by an awareness of having been brought to an encounter with those parameters through what is genuinely other.

An analogical notion of givenness is seen in Heidegger's *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, in the explanation that the early Christians' "having-become is linked to [Paul's] entrance into their life," and further that it effects a connection with God. Heidegger focuses, for example, on Paul's sentence in I Thessalonians I: 6: "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit," explaining:

The ["acceptance of the word (proclamation)"] brought the despair with it, which also continues, yet at the same time a "joy" which comes from the Holy Spirit is alive—a joy which is a gift, thus not motivated from out of one's own experience. This all belongs to the character of the *genesthai* (having-become). The "word of God" (*logos theon*) is at the same time a subjective and objective genitive. The having-become is understood such that with the acceptance, the one who accepts treads upon an effective connection with God. (PRL 66).

In relation to our concerns here, we may note that the word of God enters the Christians' lives through Paul and effects a "transformation of life" (PRL, 66). All this is given in that it comes from without and is alien to what the person has known. Moreover, it is not that ordinary life is abandoned, but rather that it comes to be characterized by a doubleness: "The acceptance consists in entering oneself into the anguish of life. A joy is bound up therewith, one which comes from the Holy Spirit and

is incomprehensible to life” (PRL 66). This quality of doubleness is not unrelated to the character of religious awareness as at once both dichotomous and nondiscriminative, so that “the ‘word of God’ is at the same time a subjective and objective genitive.” The motifs surrounding givenness here, including even the “word” of proclamation, parallel closely Shinran’s expression of entrusting himself to what Hōnen told him and may be seen to emerge as aspects of a similarly holistic apprehension of the world of experience.

The Arising of a New Temporality

Temporality is a major theme of Shinran’s thought, one that, in its prominence as well as the interpretation given it, again distinguishes him from his master Hōnen and from the preceding Pure Land tradition. In *Tannishō* 2 (fn. 5 above), two critical aspects of time find expression. First, Shinran speaks of his entrusting himself to Amida’s Vow through receiving Hōnen’s teaching. As mentioned before, he understands such an encounter to be taught in the *Larger Sutra* when Śākyamuni Buddha speaks of beings’ “hearing” Amida’s Name.⁶ The sutra passage employs the term *ichinen*, which Hōnen had interpreted to mean “saying the *nen-butsu*” but which Shinran breaks with tradition to interpret as expressing the temporal quality of “hearing”: “*Ichinen* (one thought-moment) is time at its ultimate limit, where the realization of *shinjin* takes place” (*Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*, CWS I: 474). “Time at its ultimate limit” indicates both the shortest instant of time and the interruption of ordinary temporality. Since there is no process a person can initiate in time to bring about entry into life in *shinjin*, its arising may be said to emerge abruptly, in the briefest “one thought-moment.”

Further, in explicating the sutra’s term “one thought-moment” (*ichinen*), Shinran speaks not only of the “ultimate brevity of the instant in which the true cause of one’s birth in the fulfilled land becomes definitely settled through one’s hearing the power of the Vow” (“Chapter on Practice,” 34) or the “ultimate brevity of the instant of the realization

6. For a discussion of this central passage in Shinran, see UEDA and HIROTA 1989, 195–202.

of *shinjin* (here the synonym *shingyō* 信樂 is used)” (“Chapter on Shinjin,” 60), but also of

the ultimate brevity *and expansion* of the length of time in which one attains the mind and practice [i.e., *shinjin* and *nenbutsu*] that result in birth in the Pure Land” (*Passages on the Pure Land Way*, emphasis added)

The time of realizing *shinjin* is not merely momentary, an instant removed from the ordinary passage of time, but involves the generation of a new temporality that emerges inseparably from that moment.⁷ This temporalization of expansion also finds expression in the *Tannishō* passage we have been considering.

In explaining his own stance to his disciples, Shinran discusses his religious existence in terms of absence of regret: “Even in the instance that I have been deceived by Master Hōnen and, by doing the *nenbutsu*, end up plunging into hell, I will have no regrets at all.” Regret in itself involves a temporal awareness. It may be viewed as a kind of affective hypothetical projection in which one finds that one’s present state is less than what one had had the power in the past to achieve or become. It is a clinging to an assumed potential that lies wholly in one’s past, the neglect of which now informs one’s present. For the person in regret, it is adhering to that supposed past potential that most decisively colors one’s perceptions of one’s present life, so that one’s full existence is temporally displaced. Similarly, to say that one will have no regrets in the future normally means that one is exerting all one’s powers in the present in expectation of some fulfillment to come.

When Shinran, however, states that he will have no regrets in the future, he is rooting himself in the present and expressing his relinquishment of attachment to any capacity as agent, whether it lie in the past, present, or future. Regardless of what his future may be, he can have no regrets. There is nothing in the past existence of the ego-self to which he can cling in the present, and thus nothing of his present capacities on which to base hopes for a different future. Shinran’s awareness is such

7. Shinran’s view of time may be compared with Augustine’s notions of *intentio* and *distentio*. See HIROTA 2008, 128–32.

that he perceives the self's existence in its finitude, bound about by false, discriminative awareness and incapacity. Here, Shinran's existence condenses into a single moment bereft of differentiation. Calculative thinking falls away and the sameness of karmic bondage comes to light.

In that moment, however, Shinran also discovers himself within the temporal flow of the action of Other Power from the past, so that "if Amida's Vow is true and real... my words cannot be empty." On the one hand, "desires are countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves" (*Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*, CWS I: 488). One lives out the karmic acts of the past that inform one's present (and future) existence. On the other hand, the person of *shinjin* "dwells in the stage of the truly settled," so that birth in the Pure Land at the time of death is completely settled, and "constantly practices great compassion" ("Chapter on Shinjin," 65). The realization and acceptance of finitude, which can occur only by standing fully within it in the present, leads to an altered, doubled temporality in which the future (hell/functioning of enlightened wisdom-compassion) pervades and transforms the past and the present. Amida Buddha and his vow may in fact be said to signify precisely this dynamic, transformative temporality. For the practitioner, time ceases to be an abstract, fleeting instant in the flow of time and becomes the lived time of conditioned awareness.

Temporality is thus an inherent aspect of the apprehension of the bound, finite perspective seen in Shinran and Heidegger, for human finitude is characterized by discriminative awareness. It also forms a major theme of both 1 Thessalonians and Heidegger's commentary on it. We may see the continuity in Heidegger's thinking with the character of a holistic perspective discussed above in his comments on the following passage from Paul's letter, responding to the question of precisely when Christians should expect Christ's return: "But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (5: 1-2). Heidegger remarks:

When will the Parousia take place?... Paul does not answer the question in worldly reasoning. He maintains a total distance from a cogni-

tive treatment, but does not also, in that, claim that it is unknowable. Paul enacts the answer in juxtaposing two ways of life.... What is decisive is how I comport myself to it in actual life. (PRL 69–70)

We find in Heidegger’s summary of Paul’s method of exposition both the rejection of ordinary reasoning and the focus on concrete modes of life that we have considered above. Here, a temporalizing dimension is added in Heidegger’s contention that, for Paul, the Christians already “know well”:

[Paul] says: “You know exactly....” This knowledge must be of one’s own, for Paul refers the Thessalonians back to themselves and to the knowledge that they have as those who have become. (PRL 72).

The Parousia that is the future is already known in the present as part of the knowledge that belongs to the experience in having-become from the past. Regarding Paul directly, Heidegger states:

Paul lives in a peculiar distress, one that is, as apostle, his own, in expectation of the second coming of the Lord. This distress articulates the authentic situation of Paul. It determines each moment of his life. He is constantly beset by a suffering, despite his joy as apostle. (PRL 68–9)

Later, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger will analyze the role of death (future) in informing the present existence of the person who, in recognition of her mortality, breaks the oblivion of daily distractions to live authentically. For our concerns here, we may simply note that the holistic quality of finite human existence as delineated by both Heidegger and Shinran implies, for both thinkers, an acute sense of the temporality of present existence as encompassing past, present, and future.

Human Existence as Dwelling

Both Shinran and Heidegger employ the metaphor of “dwelling” as a central metaphor for ongoing human existence in genuine engagement with truth or reality. For both thinkers, it may be said that “to dwell” expresses the mode of existence in which persons abide in the highest fulfillment of their existence as human beings. Heidegger states that “man

is insofar as he *dwells*” (BDT 147). For Heidegger, the genuine sense of dwelling (as *bauen*, building) tends to fall into oblivion as attention is focused on various *means* of livelihood, and thus modern man in particular is beset by a sense of alienation and “homelessness.” For Shinran, the verb “to dwell” (住す) is a central expression for the mode of existence of the person who has realized *shinjin*: persons of *shinjin* dwell (or abide) in the stage of nonretrogression; dwell among the truly settled; dwell in the same stage as Maitreya;⁸ dwell in Amida’s Vow;⁹ “the heart of the person of *shinjin* already and always resides in the Pure Land” (CSW 1: 528), even as that person lives out her karmic existence in this world.

Why should both Shinran and Heidegger employ the metaphor of “dwelling” to refer to genuine, fulfilled human existence in the world? For both thinkers, it characterizes existence in unwavering contact and interchange with that which exceeds conceivability and yet enables apprehension of what is true and real. I will note here three intertwined aspects of the experience of “dwelling” that both thinkers may be said to share, though with different emphases: settledness, givenness, and compassion or “preserving” and caring for.

It will not be possible to draw parallels or comparisons in detail here, but to suggest the general direction of thought, I will briefly consider a single passage from Heidegger, from “Building Dwelling Thinking,” then take up a complex of similar elements in Shinran. Heidegger states:

[T]he Gothic *wunian* [cognate of *bauen*, to remain, to stay in a place] says more distinctly how this remaining is experienced. *Wunian* means: to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. The word for peace, *Friede*, means to free, *das Frye*, and *fry* means: preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded. To free really means to spare. The sparing itself consists not only in the fact that we do not harm the one whom we spare. Real

8. “Because persons of *shinjin* dwell in the same stage as Maitreya, who will attain Buddhahood after one lifetime, it is certain that they are grasped, never to be abandoned” (*A Collection of Letters* [Zenshō text] 7, CWS 1: 574).

9. “To respond to your question concerning the cause of birth, at the moment we realize true and real *shinjin*, we receive [the benefit of] Amida’s grasping, never to abandon us; hence, we unfaillingly come to dwell in the Tathagata’s Vow” (*A Collection of Letters* [Zenshō text] 7, CWS 1: 573).

sparing is something *positive* and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own nature.... The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving. It pervades dwelling in its whole range. (BDT 149)

Various characteristics of the experience of dwelling may be seen expressed here in succession. Regarding settledness, to dwell implies being at ease, knowing oneself secure whatever may occur. This results from apprehending the sources of one's existence in the concealed and inconceivable. Thus, it is "to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace." This peace or security is not gained through exertion of self-will, but is given as a freedom from absorption in one-dimensional calculative thinking. Further, this givenness is expressed in terms of a passivity: dwelling as being "preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded." At the same time, however, such preserving manifests itself in an active sense: "Real sparing is something *positive*." For Heidegger, to dwell is *bauen* in a twofold sense of cultivating and building, and "this word *bauen* however also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine."

To consider the aspects of dwelling briefly as they appear in Shinran's thought, "to dwell" expresses a settledness (定) possessing several dimensions; the most important may be seen in the following quotation:

Practicers who have realized true *shinjin*... abide in the stage of "the truly settled" (正定聚, those whose attainment of birth in the Pure Land and perfect enlightenment at the time of death is inalterably established), for they have already been grasped [by the light of Amida's wisdom-compassion], never to be abandoned. There is no need to wait in anticipation for the moment of death, no need to rely on Amida's coming [to receive one at death]. At the time *shinjin* becomes settled, birth too becomes settled; there is no need for the deathbed rites that prepare one for Amida's coming. (*Lamp for the Latter Ages*, letter I, CWS I: 523)

Because *shinjin* has become settled in one (Shinran also expresses this, as we have seen, in terms of Amida's "giving"), one's birth in the Pure Land and attainment of enlightenment at death becomes settled (invi-

table, decided, coming about of itself): “Because of the realization of this *shinjin*, a person necessarily attains the supreme nirvana.” “Settled” has this meaning of the firmness of the outcome resulting from present attainment (realization of *shinjin*) or certainty of the eventual result (birth, enlightenment) because, at bottom, it indicates for Shinran a person’s awakening to and enduring contact with the dimension of formless reality. According to Shinran, once this occurs, it is subject to no regress, though the person remains immersed in the happenings of ordinary life.

In addition to the meaning of the stability of a radically transformed mode of existence, “settled” also expresses a sense of equanimity and assurance: “There is no need to wait in anticipation for the moment of death.” Having been “grasped” by the dimension of the inconceivable, death has also ceased to be a source of anxiety and uncertainty.

A second shared characteristic indicated by the metaphor of dwelling is givenness. As discussed above, this is stated by Shinran in his concept of Amida’s directing or giving (廻向) of all aspects of the path—teaching, practice, realization—to sentient beings. The vehicle for this giving is *shinjin* as the mind of Buddha, which is itself “directed to” or “given to” beings by Amida. With regard to the notion of dwelling in particular, this mind of *shinjin* is formless dharma-body pervading the minds of all sentient beings. Thus, the “call” (Shinran’s metaphor) of the teaching and the response or practice (*nenbutsu*) are both the unfolding of what is real as the life of the being. At another level, for Shinran, the fragility and contingency of one’s own existence is supported and “protected” by powers one cannot know.

Finally, Shinran states that the gift of bringing to the kind of dwelling described above manifests itself in gratitude and compassionate concern for beings, so that persons who have realized *shinjin* “constantly practice great compassion.” Thus,

Those who feel that their own birth is completely settled should, mindful of the Buddha’s benevolence, hold the *nenbutsu* in their hearts and say it to respond in gratitude to that benevolence, with the wish, “May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha’s teaching spread!” (*A Collection of Letters*, 2, CWS I: 560)

The Locus of Dwelling and Engagement with Things

For both Shinran and Heidegger, “to dwell” is also delimiting. It is to recognize one’s existence as fused with one’s own particular historical, geographical, and cultural locale. Both thinkers share a strong sense of their concrete point within the flow of epochal changes over broad extents of time, and of their secluded place in the global landscape. “To dwell” expresses this self-awareness of fundamental situatedness that belongs to genuine human existence. It means to sense the bounds of time and place that form the horizon of the very possibilities of one’s own awareness.

To delineate the locus of dwelling, both Shinran and Heidegger again devise structurally similar conceptual motifs. In Heidegger, this is “the fourfold,” which is developed particularly in his later essays, “Building Dwelling Thinking” and “The Thing.” In Shinran, it is a fundamental framework that informs his thinking regarding a number of central issues, such as the nature of Amida Buddha, the cause of birth in the Pure Land, and the nature of *shinjin*.

There are two basic elements for both Shinran and Heidegger: (1) two polarities that form axes along which there is constant tension and movement; and (2) the point of intersection of the two axes, which forms the locus of dwelling or of genuine human existence. This structure accounts for the necessity of the fourfold in Heidegger, as well as the complexity of Shinran’s exposition of a number of key concepts, as well as a density in his use of imagery that distinguishes it from, for example, from that of Tanluan. The necessity of the structure itself would seem to lie in the paradoxical nature of the basic problem both thinkers face of accounting for the apprehension of the inconceivable as inconceivable from within a situation of ignorance and finitude.

In Heidegger, the two axes are earth and sky, and divinities and mortals. Perhaps these two dynamics or axes may be seen as reflecting the two aspects of *bauen* as cultivating and building. For the sake of brevity in the case of Shinran, we will focus on the two axes as seen in the following passage:

Thus, when one has boarded the ship of the Vow of great compassion and sailed out on the vast ocean of light, the winds of perfect

virtue blow softly and the waves of evil are transformed. The darkness of ignorance is immediately broken through, and quickly reaching the land of immeasurable light, one realizes great nirvana and acts in accord with the virtue of Samantabhadra. Let this be known. (“Chapter on Practice, 78, CWS I: 56)

Drawing on Shinran’s imagery in this passage, we may say that the axes are the winds of virtue (working of the Vow) and the waves of evil (personal karmic existence), and the darkness of ignorance and the land (and ocean) of light.

For both Heidegger and Shinran, the intersection of axes involves a fusion of spatial and temporal elements, though with different emphases. For Heidegger, the nexus is the thing that gathers the flux and continuities of ordinary life, such as the jug whose “thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds” (TT 169). For Shinran, it is perhaps the one thought-moment at which buddha-nature or suchness fills the heart and mind of beings, so that all their “past, present, and future evil karma is transformed into the highest good” (CWS I: 453). Moreover, it is thus for both it is a point of transformation. Nevertheless, it is at this point of intersection that we find perhaps the deepest fundamental difference between the views of the two thinkers. For Heidegger, the intersection is the locus where one has become a mortal capable of death, and dies “continually, as long as he remains on earth” (BDT 150). For Shinran, however, the intersection is the unfolding of the transformative moment in which one becomes a foolish being (凡夫) incessantly animated by false attachments, so that “anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves” (CWS I: 488). Thus, the character of the finitude of human existence that emerges as self-aware and self-reconciled is fundamentally different in the two thinkers. For Heidegger, it is death that inhabits the present, and for Shinran, it is afflicting passions. Nevertheless, despite this basic difference regarding the nature of human existence, the structural parallels in methodology and focus of thought that we have charted here suggest that new, nonreductive approaches for interpreting and developing Shinran’s Pure Land path in our contemporary situation may emerge from comparative considerations with the thought of Heidegger.

In particular, viewing Shinran comparatively with Heidegger reminds us that the Pure Land Buddhist tradition, from its origins, has been fundamentally concerned, not with attaining some afterlife, but with overcoming a separation from what is genuine in human existence, evident in the mounting distance from the time when Śākyamuni Buddha taught in the world and the remoteness from his enlightened presence and empowering guidance. It further reminds us that Shinran's abiding concern throughout his writings has its focal point in both apprehending and overcoming such distance in present existence, and may aid us in articulating that concern anew.

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