

**The Emancipation of Evil Beings:
Shinran's Reflections on Human Nature**

Naoki Nabeshima

Center for Contemporary
Shin Buddhist Studies
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Number Four

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Professor
Ryukoku University, Japan

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Editor's Preface

The Institute of Buddhist Studies had the privilege of hosting the 2003 Ryūkoku Lectures, presented by Professor Naoki Nabeshima. Professor Nabeshima presented a three-part lecture on the topic of "The Emancipation of Evil Beings: Shinran's Reflections on Human Nature" on March 6, 13 and 15, 2003 at the IBS Reading Room in Berkeley, California. His lectures, which were given in both English and Japanese, were attended by students and faculty of the IBS and Graduate Theological Union, as well as many other interested persons from the Bay Area and elsewhere.

Professor Naoki Nabeshima is a professor of Shin Buddhist Studies at Ryūkoku University, in Kyoto, Japan. The areas of his specialized study include Shin Buddhist thought, Buddhist perspectives of death, Shin Buddhist terminal care and bioethics. He is also a founding member of Ryūkoku's Open Research Center for Humanities, Science and Religion, in which he heads Applied Research Unit 2, Buddhism and Bioethics, which focuses on issues pertaining to "transcending life and death: spiritual ease and care."

In this study, Professor Nabeshima offers a wide-ranging and yet nuanced examination of the important issue of religious evil. He begins with a discussion of general religious and Buddhist views of good and evil, and then considers Shinran's world view and unique perspective on good and evil, with particular emphasis on the Shin Buddhist approach to the concept of *akunin shōki* (evil persons are the right persons for salvation by Amida Buddha). In the second section, he illustrates the dynamics involved in Amida's salvation of the evil person with the story of King Ajātsatru. Professor Nabeshima's treatment of this story as a kind of case study allows him to explore both the theological and therapeutic implications of salvation. The final portion of this study looks at the importance of Shinran's self-reflection and awareness of his own evil self. Professor Nabeshima concludes by suggesting that Shin Buddhism offers a system of ethics beyond ethics—a world beyond good and evil—that can allow beings to realize emancipation in a life of true interconnectedness.

The Institute of Buddhist Studies is deeply grateful to Professor Nabeshima for sharing his time and thoughts with us during his very busy schedule, and for allowing his lectures to be included in the Center for Contemporary Shin Buddhist Studies On-line Publication Series. IBS is also indebted to our own Dr. Eisho Nasu, Tamai Chair Professor of Shin Buddhist Studies, for his inspired translations of Professor Nabeshima's presentations into English and for coordinating this publication series.

David Matsumoto
Director, Center for Contemporary
Shin Buddhist Studies

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Translator's Note

The on-line edition of "The Emancipation of Evil Beings: Shinran's Reflections on Human Nature" is based on the lecture notes prepared for the participants of the Ryukoku Lecture Series 2003 delivered by Prof. Naoki Nabeshima at the Institute of Buddhist Studies in March of 2003. The original text of the lecture notes provided by Prof. Nabeshima was primarily written in Japanese and first translated into English and edited by Eisho Nasu. The translation has been further edited and revised for on-line publication by incorporating the transcripts of Prof. Nabeshima's lectures as well as the discussion and comments of the students who attended the Ryukoku Lectures. An English translation of *The Dragon's Tears* (publication pending) is provided by courtesy of Prof. Nabeshima who kindly gave us permission to include the text as an appendix of this publication. I would like to thank particularly Ms. Haru Matsumune, a student of the Institute of Buddhist Studies and a participant of the lectures, for her kind help in revising and editing the text, without which it would not have been possible to complete this project.

Eisho Nasu
(Institute of Buddhist Studies)

The Emancipation of Evil Beings: Shinran's Reflections on Human Nature

by

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INTRODUCTION

The life of every human being depends on other living beings. In everyday life, we often encounter situations where we need to make decisions about who is right and who is wrong. At the same time, we also notice that both good thoughts and evil thoughts arise within our own minds. We are living between two minds which constantly confuse us.

In all periods of human history, we have seen conflict between good and evil. Human beings have been fighting each other with swords and shields of justice. In a sense, these are battles of one goodness against another goodness. We see hatred, antagonism, torture, murder, and war. All are created out of the ignorance and hatred which originate in the self-centered darkness of the mind (*mumyō*). What is "evil," then? How can we seek

peace of mind in the midst of the dualistic conflict of good and evil?

In this lecture first I will introduce the Buddhist concepts of good and evil and the significance of the realization of enlightenment, which is beyond good and evil. Then, I would like to discuss the Pure Land teaching of the emancipation of evil persons, especially that of Shinran (1173–1262). The Pure Land teaching helps its followers understand the defilement of the world and the evilness within themselves. The goal of the teaching is to lead all living beings to the path to enlightenment, by crossing the ocean of suffering and attaining birth in the Pure Land, through the working of Amida Buddha's compassion. Shinran particularly emphasizes the path for the emancipation of evil persons. But why can evil persons be saved?

Shinran's concept of *akunin shōki* (evil persons are the right beings for salvation by Amida Buddha) clearly arose from the egalitarian teaching of Buddhism. The Buddhist concept of equality is that the mind, free from ego-attachments, has surpassed the dualistic perspective of good and evil. In this sense, Shinran's concept of *akunin shōki* is compassion toward evil persons. However, Shinran never encourages people to commit evil deeds which would lead themselves and others to suffering. *Akunin shōki* is the thought of compassion of the Buddha who embraces and never abandons those who become aware of their own evil and suffer from it.

1. CONCEPTIONS OF GOOD AND EVIL

a. Buddhist Views on Good and Evil

In Buddhism good and evil are apprehended in relationship with the result of specific actions (karmic retributions, *gōhō*). As is often said, "Good causes bring joy, but evil causes end in

suffering” (*zenin rakka, akuin kuka*). Good and evil are defined by whether actions bring joy or suffering. Good actions are demonstrated by the following four standards.

- (1) Good is an action that brings peaceful happiness to oneself and others.
- (2) Good is an action in which both the motivation is good and the result of the action is beneficial to the person.
- (3) Good is an action that is a blessing to the people in both this world and subsequent times.
- (4) Good is an action that is in accordance with the ultimate truth (the truth of no-self which is beyond worldly truth).

What is evil? Evil is the opposite of these definitions. In consideration of the first through third definitions of good above, evil means to destroy the harmonious order of human society. If an action not only has a motivation to harm self and others but also actually does harm self and others, that is evil. Evil not only creates suffering in this world but also brings suffering in future generations. The fourth definition of good is not based on the human relationship of self and others. In respect to this fourth definition, evil means going against the ultimate truth, or going against the Buddha dharma. An action based on ego-attachments is considered to be evil. Therefore, the definitions of good and evil are not based on subjective value judgments. They must be based on the universal truth which goes beyond geographical and historical boundaries.

In Buddhism, in addition to good and evil, there is a third category called “unmarked” or “undetermined” (*muki*). “Unmarked” or “undetermined” means the action is neither good nor evil and does not bring any rewards or retributions. In a sense, “unmarked” refers to neutral actions which are neither good nor evil, both in terms of morality and in terms of results.

Then how do Buddhists respond to good and evil? In Buddhism, there are two fundamental ways to approach good and evil. One approach is to eliminate evil and cultivate good (*haiaku shuzen*) (stop doing evil and practice good [*shiaku shuzen*]). The other approach is to transcend good and evil (*zenaku chōetsu*).

(1) Eliminating Evil and Cultivating Good

The Buddha explains the approach of eliminating evil and cultivating good as follows.

Do not do any evil deeds, practice good deeds, and make one’s mind pure. That is the teaching of all buddhas.
(*Dhammapada* 183)

Concretely, evil acts have been explained as ‘the ten evil acts’ from original Buddhism. They are: (1) killing living beings; (2) stealing; (3) committing adultery; (4) telling lies; (5) uttering harsh words; (6) uttering words which cause enmity between two or more persons; (7) engaging in idle talk; (8) greed; (9) anger; and (10) ignorance. In Pure Land Buddhism, in addition to the ten evil acts, ‘the five grave offenses’ and ‘abuse of the Dharma’ are the most serious and heavy offenses. Those who commit these offenses are difficult to be saved even by the Buddha. ‘The five grave offenses’ are (1) killing one’s father; (2) killing one’s mother; (3) killing an *arhat*; (4) causing the Buddha’s body to bleed; and (5) causing disunity in the Buddhist order.

(2) Transcending Good and Evil

Next, the Buddha explains the approach to transcending good and evil as follows.

For those who have awakened and transcended good and evil, there is nothing to fear. (*Dhammapada* 39)

A holy man is a man who has calmed himself, is a man who has abandoned merit and demerit. Knowing this world and the other, he is dustless and has overcome birth and death. (*The Sutta-Nipata*, Translated by H. Saddhatissa, p. 60, Curzon Press)

What does it mean to demand that we cast away not only evil but also good? Many people believe that we should seek to make others happy by doing good deeds, which will in turn bring us merits and benefits. We tend to expect that we should receive rewards in exchange for our own good deeds. In this sense, transcending good and evil means to get rid of the selfish mind that seeks rewards in exchange for good deeds. Enlightenment, which transcends both good and evil, is becoming liberated from worldly judgments and self-centered calculations.

b. Worldly Views on Good and Evil

In order to highlight the uniqueness of Buddhist approaches to good and evil discussed above, next I would like to introduce worldly views on good and evil, namely the secular legal system and moral principles.

First, the secular legal system, which is based on the assumption of the relativity of good and evil, can be seen as the

most general guideline on good and evil in the modern societies in which we live.

- (1) Legal System: rules for governing people enacted to protect individual dignity and human rights and to uphold the order of human society.

However, there are limits to any legal system. Laws are different from country to country and change in accordance with the introduction of new values throughout history. The most problematic case regarding the national and historical limits in a legal system is, perhaps, the case of wars between nations. The irony of war is if you kill one person in your society, you are a murderer. But if you kill one thousand enemies in a war, you are a hero.

In order to amend the problems of secular legal systems, our society usually also adopts moral principles which provide ethical guidance to apply rules of the law in human manners.

- (2) Moral Principles: That which demonstrates the right path human beings should follow. Moral principles are based on internal principles of conscience and are models for normative behavior in society. Whereas laws are external rules typically defined in negative terms: "one shall not do such and such things," moral principles are internal rules typically phrased positively: "one should do such and such things." Ethics provide principles to be shared by a group of people or social community.

However, there are limits in such moral principles. Moral principles change over time. They also differ among ethnic groups and places. Faith in human conscience, such as moral

principles, breeds trust in all human beings. However, since the conscience is determined by one's own judgment, it tends to take one's own judgments as correct and reject those of others as wrong, creating disagreements. One's conscience tends to affirm itself, and it lacks the self-reflection necessary to reveal the mistaken notions and self-centeredness contained within itself.

2. SHINRAN'S THOUGHT ON GOOD AND EVIL

a. Shinran's Awareness of Good and Evil: *Tannishō* Chapter 3

Shinran, a medieval Japanese Pure Land Buddhist master and the founder of the Jōdo Shinshū tradition, developed a unique Buddhist understanding of good and evil by introducing the concept of *akunin shōki* (evil persons are the right beings for salvation by Amida Buddha). The concept of *akunin shōki* appears in the *Tannishō* (*A Record in Lament of Divergences*), a collection of Shinran's saying recorded by his disciple Yuien.

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

Though it is so, people commonly say, "Even an evil person attains birth, so it goes without saying that a good person will." This statement may seem well-founded at first, but it runs counter to the intent of the Primal Vow, which is Other Power. This is because people who rely on doing good through their self-power fail to entrust themselves wholeheartedly to Other Power and therefore are not in accord with Amida's Primal Vow, but when they overturn the mind of self-power and entrust

themselves to Other Power, they will attain birth in the true and real fulfilled land.

It is impossible for us, who are possessed of blind passions, to free ourselves from birth-and-death through any practice whatever. Sorrowing at this, Amida made the Vow, the essential intent of which is the evil person's attainment of Buddhahood. Hence, evil persons who entrust themselves to Other Power are precisely the ones who possess the true cause of birth.

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

(*Tannishō*, Chapter 3, in *The Collected Works of Shinran* [hereafter *CWS*], vol.1 [Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997], p. 663)

In this section, first, I would like to focus on the meaning of good and evil as discussed in *Tannishō*, Chapter 3 cited above, because it contains a more profound meaning of good and evil than that customarily used by the general public.

Shinran's definitions of good and evil given in Chapter 3 of the *Tannishō* can be summarized as follows:

(1) Good: Persons who do good deeds with self-power

Self-power: Relying on one's own power and doubting Amida Buddha's Primal Vow. Self-working of the practitioner. One who adorns oneself with one's own good deeds.

Do good deeds: the ability to accumulate good roots through practice, or the ability to donate wealth.

(2) Evil: Persons who entrust in the Other Power

Shinran realizes that “it is impossible for us, who are possessed of blind passions, to free ourselves from birth-and-death through any practice whatever.” His analysis of “evil person” and “Other Power” discussed in the passages of Chapter 3 can be summarized as follows:

Evil Person: A person who does not become overconfident of his or her own power, recognizes the depth of his or her delusions, and entrusts in the Buddha’s Primal Vow.

Other Power: Amida Buddha’s power of the Primal Vow. The working of Amida Buddha’s aspiration to guide all living beings out of suffering and into blissfulness.

In Chapter 3 of the *Tannishō*, therefore, “evil persons” means the “evil persons who entrust themselves to Other Power.” They are ordinary beings who entrust in the power of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow without doubt.

b. Good and Evil: Worldly View and Shinran’s View

Shinran, however, also discusses his view on good and evil from the perspective of good and evil conceived in general society. Usually, people call someone an evil person because that person is breaking the law, creating a public nuisance, defaming other persons, or cheating others by lying. Shinran’s view of good and evil has some commonalities and some differences with the secular view of good and evil. In this section, I will compare the idea of good and evil as conceived of in general society (Section 1.b: Worldly Views on Good and Evil) and Shinran’s view of good and evil by introducing relevant passages by Shinran in

which he concludes that Buddha's compassion transcends conventional ethics of good and evil.

(1) Passages in which Shinran encourages people to do good deeds as ethically right conduct:

Even that person who has been inclined to steal will naturally undergo a change of heart if he comes to say the nembutsu aspiring for the land of bliss. . . . One must seek to cast off the evil of this world and to cease doing wretched deeds; this is what it means to reject the world and to live the nembutsu. (*Mattōshō*, 16, *CWS*, p. 547)

But the person who purposely thinks and does what he or she should not, saying that it is permissible because of the Buddha's wondrous Vow to save the foolish being, does not truly desire to reject the world, nor does such a one consciously feel himself a being of karmic evil. (*Mattōshō*, 19, *CWS*, p. 550)

Formerly you were drunk with the wine of ignorance and had a liking only for the three poisons of greed, anger, and folly, but since you have begun to hear the Buddha's Vow you have gradually awakened from the drunkenness of ignorance, gradually rejected the three poisons, and come to prefer at all times the medicine of Amida Buddha. . . . That people seek to stop doing wrong as the heart moves them, although earlier they gave thought to such things and committed them as their minds dictated, is surely a sign of having rejected this world. Moreover, since shinjin that aspires for attainment of birth arises through the encouragement of Śākyamuni and Amida, once the true and real

mind is made to arise in us, how can we remain as we were, possessed of blind passions? (*Mattōshō*, 20, *CWS*, pp. 553-554)

According to these passages, the person who entrusts in Amida Buddha's Primal Vow is reflected in the pure mind of the Buddha. This person is able to reflect upon the problems inherent in self-centered living and gradually comes to abhor the three poisonous delusions of greed, anger, and ignorance. Those who hear the Buddha's teaching become awakened to the mind of entrusting and recite the nembutsu, begin to turn around and reflect upon the evil within themselves from the past, stop their foolish behavior, and detest the evilness of this world. In this respect, it is clear that Shinran values upholding human moral principles.

Shinran, however, understands that all human beings are at the same time originally and profoundly possessed of evil nature. Fundamentally, human beings are self-centered and harm other living beings. Shinran explains that one becomes truly human only when one becomes aware of one's own evil nature.

(2) Passages in which Shinran reveals that all human beings are originally and profoundly possessed of evil nature:

...I find that all beings, an ocean of multitudes, have since the beginningless past down to this day, this very moment, been evil and defiled, completely lacking the mind of purity. (*Kyōgyōshinshō*, *CWS*, p. 95)

Extremely difficult is it to put an end to our evil nature;
The mind is like a venomous snake or scorpion.
Our performance of good acts is also poisoned;

Hence, it is called false and empty practice. (*Hymns of the Dharma-Ages* [Gutoku's Hymns of Lament and Reflection], 96, *CWS*, p. 421).

I am incapable of any other practice, so hell is decidedly my abode whatever I do. (*Tannishō*, Chapter 2, *CWS*, p. 662)

Shinran was well aware of his own evil nature. When he realized that he was bathed in the light of the Buddha's truth, he understood his true self which could not but hurt himself and harm others. Before the ultimate goodness of the Buddha, his own roots of goodness were nothing but false goodness mired in poison.

Shinran's deep reflections on evil in his writings have continued to influence the Shin followers from medieval through modern periods. For example, Rennyō (1415–1499), the eighth abbot of Hongwanji, says, "Good deeds can end in bad results, and bad deeds can end in good results" (*Rennyō shōnin goichidai kikigaki*).

Kujō Takeko (1887–1928) was a sister of Kyōnyō, the twenty-second abbot of Hongwanji. A renowned Shin Buddhist poet and a leading figure in social welfare movements, she writes about her self-reflections on evil following Shinran's understanding of evil:

It is human nature to love good and hate evil. However, if we simply hate evil and never reflect upon it, evil cannot be saved eternally. We should encourage people to do good. However, no one should be conceited of one's own goodness. Rather, if we are not able to lament over our own evil by [understanding] the evil of others, our inner mind can never become aware that it is burning in the fire of evil. Those who are not able to reflect upon their own evil tend to become too proud of their own small

good. However, from the perspective of equal fellow practitioners (of the nembutsu path), good persons and evil persons are equally good friends who seek the Path. We cannot help but reflect upon our own inner mind quietly but deeply, not by affirming goodness itself but affirming the very presence of evilness.

(“Akuno naisei” (Self-Reflection on Evil), in the *Kujō Takeko: Kashū to Asoka* [Tokyo: Nobara Sha, 1968], p. 170)

Miki Kiyoshi (1897–1945), a Kyoto School philosopher, discusses the Buddha’s Primal Vow as follows:

The Primal Vow is a loving aspiration for the salvation of sentient beings that is always apprehending historical reality (of living beings)....

He practices good deeds to the limit of his own power to try to accumulate virtues. His efforts are extremely sincere. However, the more sincere he becomes and the more he makes efforts, all the more he realizes the hollowness and falseness within himself. Outwardly, his life does not appear to have even a speck of error. However, he is aware that falseness is hiding inside when he reflects upon himself. Behind the mind of those who feel pity at the misfortunes of others and give things to them, does there not exist a feeling of their own superiority or even enjoyment at the misfortune of others? Is there no one who has not in his mind stolen a thing, or committed adultery? Do we not uphold moral principles just for the sake of maintaining our own reputations? No matter how much you practice good outwardly, the evil mind always creeps in from behind.

(*Miki Kiyoshi shū* [Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1975], p. 435)

c. Concept of *Akunin shōki*

Then what does the concept of *akunin shōki* in *Tannishō* mean? What was the true intention of Shinran to introduce such an idea as recorded in Chapter 3 of the *Tannishō*? Kakunyo (1270-1351), the third abbot of Hongwanji, says in the *Kudensho*, Chapter 19:

“The primal Vow of Tathagata is for ordinary people, not for sages” explains the concept of *akunin shōki* according to Shan-tao’s *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra in Four Volumes*, which says that the Pure Land teaching is “definitely for ordinary beings, not for sages.”

Also, Shinran’s master Honen, in his *Senchaku hongan nembutsu shu* (Passages on the Nembutsu Selected in the Primal Vow), the Chapter on the Two Gateways (Nimon sho), quotes a passage of the *Yusim allakto* (A Joyful Stroll to the Land of Peace and Bliss; Jpn. *Yushin anrakudō*), ascribed to a Korean Pure Land Master, Won-hyo (617–686, Jpn. Gangyō), saying, “the Pure Land teaching is, primarily, for ordinary beings, but also available for the sages, too.” In this sense, Shinran’s idea of *akunin shōki* follows the teaching of Shan-tao and Honen: it is not sages but ordinary beings who, entrusting in Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow, are the right beings for birth in the Pure Land. It is not the case that evil persons can attain birth in the Pure Land without entrusting in the Primal Vow.

To summarize these points, we can clarify Shinran’s definition of each word in the concept of *akunin shōki* as follows:

Evil persons (*akunin*): Ordinary beings possessed of blind passions.

Right (*shō*): Heading, straight toward (the foolish beings).

Beings (*ki*): Human beings. The objects of the Buddha's salvation.

Therefore, *akunin shōki* means that Amida Buddha directly reaches out to evil beings who are possessed of blind passions as the primary object of salvation.

A modern scholar of Jodo Shinshu Studies, Sokusui Murakami, discusses the fundamental meaning of *akunin shōki* as follows:

Good persons are those who do good deeds by self power. Evil persons are none other than those who are possessed of blind passions. Entrusting in Other Power, or entrusting in and following Amida Buddha's power of the Primal Vow, is the true cause for birth in the Pure Land. If someone simply says that the evil person is the true cause for birth, Amida Buddha's commitment made in the Primal Vow is negated and one falls into a wrong view that ignores faith itself. (Murakami Sokusui, *Shinran tokuhon* [Kyoto: Hyakkaen, 1968], p. 69).

Dragon's Tears: Metaphor for Akunin shōki

Now I would like to introduce a story that metaphorically expresses the thought of *akunin shōki*. This is a children's story titled *Dragon's Tears* written by a Japanese writer of children's stories, Hamada Hirosuke (the full text of the story in English is available in Appendix A). According to recent studies on Hamada's works, he wrote the story inspired by Shinran's Pure Land teaching and I believe it very clearly conveys the feeling of the significance of the salvation of evil persons.

The main characters in the story are a young boy and a dragon. The boy, who possesses a clear and gentle heart, lives in

a village; the dragon who is hated and feared by the people of the village, lives alone in the nearby mountains, away from human habitation. The young boy is to go to celebrate his birthday soon and decides to invite the dragon. Against his mother's wishes, he ventures toward the mountains to meet the dragon. The dragon had become an evil being feared by people. But when the dragon's heart is touched by the true gentleness of the boy, all of the suffering frozen in the heart of the dragon melts away and turns into beautiful teardrops.

Tears of ignorance
themselves naturally turn
into emancipation.

Orokasa no namida ga
Sono mama
Sukui kana

Naoki Nabeshima

In the story, the dragon can be equated with the evil person, and the boy with the Buddha. True gentleness is to meet others with a non-discriminatory pure mind, to give them courage and open their minds.

True Intention of Shinran's Introduction of the concept of *Akunin shōki*

The Buddha lived in the world filled with defilement but sought goodness and aspired for the happiness of all living beings. Shinran also aspired for peace, stating that he "wishes for peace in society." His ideal of *akunin shōki* neither negates the seeking of goodness nor encourages evil deeds. It is a teaching of facing one's own evil nature without deceiving one's mind.

First, Shinran realized that there was a pitfall in his search for goodness. It is an honorable thing to make efforts to become a good person; however, by adorning himself with his own good

deeds, he noticed that he demanded others also to do good deeds without reflecting upon his own falsity. He was convinced that he was a good person and felt contempt for the ignorance of others. Becoming arrogant of his small goodness, he failed to recognize the ignorance within himself. He realized that those who are proud of their own goodness become convinced of their righteousness, are judgmental toward others' evil, and demand good deeds from others. This is the so-called legalism of fundamentalism, and it is this pitfall of arrogance that people fall into while seeking goodness.

On the other hand, by seeking goodness one can come to realize one's true nature. The greater our efforts to live sincerely, the more we realize our limitations and ignorance. We often realize that we can do nothing but wrong. However, if we feel that our life is difficult, that is also proof that we are seriously seeking after truth. When Shinran ran up against the wall of self-power, he gave up any attempt at disguised goodness. He realized his real being in the light of the Buddha's compassion. Knowing the Buddha wished him to be just as he was, possessed of evil offenses, he achieved a great peace of heart. Encouraged by the Buddha's vow which would embrace and never abandon him, he came face to face with his own evil offenses and realized his ignorance. He then all the more sincerely made efforts to live honestly, wishing happiness for himself and others. *Shinjin* (faith), which arises in the awakening of ignorance, is love to all.

The doctrine of *akunin shōki* developed out of the non-discriminating egalitarian thought fundamental to the Buddhist teaching. It is a teaching of profound self-reflection on human evil and loving compassion. Bathed in the light of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion, we become aware of our real selves and realize that even within our own good mind, an evil mind is hiding. We realize the falseness hidden inside of good appearances. When we human beings transcend attachments to good

and evil, we become aware that all human beings are interconnected to each other.

3. THE BUDDHA'S SALVATION OF THE EVIL PERSON: THE CASE OF KING AJĀTAŚATRU

a. Three Kinds of Severe Illness

In this section I would like to introduce Shinran's understanding of the Pure Land teaching of the emancipation of evil persons. The goal of the teaching is to lead all living beings to the path to enlightenment through the working of Amida Buddha's compassion. In the *Kyogyoshinsho*, Shinran explains the process of the emancipation of evil persons by citing the case of the salvation of King Ajātaśatru in the Chapter on Shinjin. In the text, Shinran particularly focuses on the three types of human beings who are extremely difficult to save even by the Buddha. The illnesses of these three kinds of persons are, in this world, the most severe, incurable, and fatal. These three are as follows:

(1) Slanderers the Buddha dharma: slanderers of the Mahayana teaching and those who speak ill of the Buddhist teachings.

(2) Those who commit the five grave offenses: 1. killing one's father; 2. killing one's mother; 3. killing an arhat; 4. causing blood to flow from the body of the Buddha; and 5. disrupting the harmony of the sangha.

(3) *Ichchantikas* (those who lack the seed of Buddhahood): Those who have severed the root of goodness or mind of goodness.

In order to cure these three types of illness, there needs to be proper treatments, great doctors, and good medication. If those who have these severe illnesses follow the guidance of the buddhas and bodhisattvas and listen to the noble teachings of Buddhism which provide healing, they will be able to awaken the ultimate bodhi-mind even in the midst of their suffering.

Now we will turn to the story of King Ajātaśatru's offenses, to which Shinran paid special attention, and discuss the issue of the salvation of those who have committed grave offenses.

b. Transgressions, Grief, and Suffering of King Ajātaśatru

The following events summarize the story of the salvation of King Ajātaśatru:

1. Ajātaśatru's Killing of his Father
2. Advice of Six Ministers
3. Ajātaśatru's Meeting with Jīvaka
4. Voice from Heaven
5. The Buddha's Meeting with Ajātaśatru
6. The Buddha's Samadhi of Moon-Radiant Love
7. Ajātaśatru's Question
8. Meaning of Samadhi of Moon-Radiant Love
9. Teaching of the Buddha
10. Ajātaśatru's Anxiety
11. The Buddha's Teaching to Ajātaśatru
12. Conversion of Ajātaśatru and his New Aspiration

This story is found in the *Nirvāṇa Sutra* and the relevant passages (as quoted by Shinran in *Kyogyoshinsho*) appear in "Appendix C: The Story of the Buddha's Salvation of King Ajātaśatru." Here, for discussion purposes, passages will be summarized as appropriate. [Editor's note: During the lecture,

the story of Ajātaśatru was originally presented as a play, with students reading various roles.]

It is suggested that the reader first read Appendix C to get a feel for the story as a whole, then continue reading this section, which discusses the story event by event.

(1) Ajātaśatru's Killing of his Father

Incited by Devadatta, Ajātaśatru imprisoned his father and deprived him of nourishment. After his father died, Ajātaśatru was severely tormented by mental anguish and physical illness.

(2) Advice of Six Ministers

All six ministers advised him to cast off his sorrow and affliction, because the more he felt sorrowful, the more pain he would suffer. The words of advice of the six ministers reflect on the philosophies of the six teachers outside of the Buddhist path, who rejected the principles of causation and dependent co-origination.

(3) Ajātaśatru's Meeting with Jīvaka

Ajātaśatru met with Jīvaka, an eminent physician, and explained the background of his illness. Jīvaka, understanding the cause of Ajātaśatru's suffering, introduced the king to the Buddha.

Interpretation of Passages

The most important message in the words of Jīvaka is found in his saying, "Though the King has committed a

crime, profound remorse has been stirred in his heart and he is filled with shame and self-reproach.” Here, I would like to clarify the meaning of “shame and self-reproach” discussed in the passages quoted above.

- Shame: not committing further evil oneself; being abased within oneself; the feeling of humility before others.
- Self-reproach: not leading others to commit evil; expressing one’s abasement outwardly; the feeling of humility before heaven.

People who commit crimes are not able to solve their problems by neglecting the reality of the crimes they committed or by trying to defend themselves as innocent. By lying to themselves, they only increase their suffering and become self-tormented. Instead, by facing the reality of the crimes they committed, reflecting on their past conduct, and confessing their faults from the bottom of their hearts, the path toward their salvation begins.

(4) Voice from Heaven

Ajātaśatru’s father, King Bimbisāra, spoke from heaven. Ajātaśatru fainted and his physical condition worsened considerably.

(5) The Buddha’s Meeting with Ajātaśatru

At Jīvaka’s urging, Ajātaśatru met with the Buddha.

Interpretation of the Passage

The meaning of the Buddha’s words, “For the sake of Ajātaśatru, I will not enter Nirvāṇa,” is that the Buddha’s

compassion pours out to the people who are afflicted with very deep anguish. The Buddha says, “I will be with you until you are saved.” The Buddha is concerned for people who have fallen into hell in both body and mind. Ajātaśatru truly came to realize his own evil action as evil through his encounter with the compassionate mind of the Buddha.

“For the sake of Ajātaśatru” also means that the Buddha will not enter Nirvāṇa for the sake of all living beings filled with evil passions. In a sense, human beings cannot live without committing evil deeds. Therefore, “For the sake of Ajātaśatru, I will not enter Nirvāṇa” also means that people are originally evil beings and the Buddha guides all suffering beings universally toward enlightenment. It is very noteworthy that the Buddha calls King Ajātaśatru a “good son,” which reflects the Buddha’s great concern for suffering beings.

(6) The Buddha’s Samadhi of Moon-Radiant Love

The Buddha entered the samadhi of moon-radiant love, radiating a brilliant light that instantly healed Ajātaśatru.

The samādhi of moon radiant love does not mean that the Buddha cured Ajātaśatru through supernatural powers. The Buddha’s samādhi of moon radiant love conveys two meanings. First, it signifies unconditional acceptance without judgment, like the moon’s radiance shining on people gently. To be there in silence is very helpful for a suffering person. “Not doing but being,” is the deep meaning of the samādhi of moon radiant love. Whenever we endure unspeakable suffering, we need a good listener to reflect on ourselves. Second, the Buddha’s

samādhi of moon radiant love signifies the importance of meditation without secular words. Compassion without explanation is needed for a suffering person, because one cannot express one's deep sorrow in words. Through meditation, unlike Zen or Nembutsu, one can come to realize the true self as it is. In other words, embraced by Amida's infinite light of compassion, one comes to know one's foolishness.

(7) Ajātaśatru's Question

Ajātaśatru asked Jīvaka why the Buddha sent forth his radiance.

Interpretation of the Passage

As shown in the words of the Buddha, he exists wholly to save ordinary beings in the depths of karmic evil.

(8) Meaning of Samadhi of Moon-Radiant Love

The samadhi of moon-radiant love brings joy to all.

(9) Teaching of the Buddha

The Buddha expounded the importance of a true teacher.

(10) Ajātaśatru's Anxiety

Ajātaśatru anxiously begged Jīvaka to let him "ride on the same elephant" and be saved.

(11) The Buddha's Teaching to Ajātaśatru

(a) Causes and conditions of an evil deed

The Buddha's teaching to Ajātaśatru is long and ambiguous. This section of the sutra is also very difficult to interpret and its doctrinal significance has yet to be discussed thoroughly. But one thing that is clear is that Shakyamuni Buddha indicates the path for solving the problem of evil from the perspective of enlightenment.

Interpretation of Passages

The Buddha's statement, "if you have committed evil, all Buddhas, world-honored ones, must have done so also," are words of compassion toward the person who has committed a crime. Here, the Buddha announces that Ajātaśatru's criminal offense is not committed by him alone.

The Buddha's compassionate mind identifies with the mind of a person who has committed a crime as if the Buddha had committed it himself. Compassion is the Buddha's way to remove suffering and give peace to others. Such compassion is expressed in the words "your suffering is my suffering." This attitude of non-duality of self and others transcends the self to sympathize with others. No matter how grave a person's offense, when the person feels a loving mind that together tries to get beyond the transgression, a pure good mind can arise even from the mind of the grave offense. The important thing is that someone needs to be with people who commit offenses to share their suffering with them until the end. The Buddha is not an ally of the murderer. However, a murder is not solved by simply putting all

blame on a single person. The Buddha knows the significance of understanding the sadness of a person who commits a murder as one's own sadness.

The Buddha knows that Ajātaśatru fully realizes the seriousness of the crime of murdering his father and is gripped by the fear of falling into hell alone and unaided. Therefore, the Buddha teaches that a crime occurs when various causes and conditions arise together. He sees that, because of the crime, Ajātaśatru feels extremely shameful and cannot see his future at all. The Buddha cannot help evil persons to live their lives with the crime they have committed simply by reproaching and tormenting them by foretelling their retributions. The Buddha instead thinks together with Ajātaśatru about how he can go on with his life.

Then the Buddha discloses to Ajātaśatru that King Bimbisāra was once possessed of evil thoughts. He also tells him that Bimbisāra received both good and evil recompense by becoming a king and being murdered. What is noteworthy is that the Buddha explains that the life of a human being has many different aspects and it is impossible to determine whether it is good or bad (indeterminate).

(b) State of the confused mind

Interpretation of Passages

The important issue discussed in the last paragraph is that the Buddha does not see evil as a permanently fixed entity due to the concept of "emptiness." The Buddha's perception that the karmic retribution created by a crime

is not permanently fixed provides Ajātaśatru with a totally new perspective on what he has done.

First, Ajātaśatru is given a broader perspective on reality with the concepts of “emptiness” and “dependent co-origination.” Ajātaśatru’s murder of his father is a reality and the very grave offense of taking away a human life. However, from the Buddhist perspective based on the concepts of “emptiness” and “dependent co-origination,” an evil deed occurs as a result of various causes and conditions. Ajātaśatru is not the only person who is to be blamed for the crime. The Buddha provides Ajātaśatru a new and broader perspective on evil deeds.

Second, the Buddha teaches that one should not simply be constricted by a crime one committed but should also be given hope for the future. Ajātaśatru cannot erase the grave offense of murdering his father. However, at the same time, he should not perceive karmic retributions of the crime as fixed. His future is not determined only by the crime committed in the past. Of course, the more deeply one laments, the more one becomes bound to the terror of the crime committed and must live with the heavy burden of the crime. It is important not to forget the crime. However, realizing the graveness of the crime, it is even more important to seek to live a true life beyond remorsefulness of the crime.

Reflecting on ourselves, we need to remember that self-righteousness and authoritarianism are often created out of our own attitude that we are good people. On the other hand, if we dwell too much on the evil aspects of our nature, we tend to deprecate ourselves too extremely and shut ourselves into a world of darkness. If we put too much emphasis on karmic retribution, we may fall into the fallacy of determinism. Therefore, the Buddha teaches that we

must take responsibility for the crimes we commit, but without being bound by the past we need to explore the future to be liberated from the evil mind.

(12) Conversion of Ajātaśatru and his New Aspiration

The Buddha's compassionate words enabled *shinjin* to arise within Ajātaśatru, who responded with deep gratitude.

Interpretation of Passages

In this process, Ajātaśatru in his shame and self-reproach comes to realize the graveness of his crime and his evil mind is transformed into pure faith (*shinjin*) through the compassion of the Buddha. Further, he vows to defeat the evil mind of all people. Ajātaśatru, who has committed a grave offense, encounters the Buddha's embracing compassion. At that moment, a deep gratitude arises within Ajātaśatru and he discovers a new direction for his life as a life of faith (*shinjin*). Ajātaśatru's old self dies and a new self is born. He breaks his solitary shell filled with ego-attachments to be born as a son of the Tathagata. This is faith (*shinjin*).

In the *Nirvāṇa Sutra*, the Buddha's concern for Ajātaśatru is not from a mere sense of duty or responsibility. He joyfully devotes himself to Ajātaśatru, because Shakyamuni believes that there is a future even for a person who commits the gravest offenses. If everything were predetermined by fate in the past, both good and evil deeds in this world would also be predetermined by fate. Happiness and unhappiness would be based on fate. There would be nothing but fateful existences. If the future were predetermined by the past, there would be no point to hope

or to make efforts to repent transgressions or to be kind for the sake of others. Philosophies that negate dependent co-origination, such as determinism, do not provide us with any motivation to keep living.

The theory of dependent co-origination which the Buddha teaches Ajātaśatru tells him that everything arises due to various causes and conditions, depending on each other and continuously changing. To live in accordance with the teaching of dependent co-origination is to respect the freedom of each human being. Conviction in the theory of dependent co-origination provides us with an understanding that everything is interconnected. In short, one knows, "I am not alone; I live in the love and vows of others." When we experience such compassion, we can transform our suffering into the energy to live in the future. We should not destroy the future of any human being with karmic evils. No matter how grave one's karmic evil is, when one realizes the depths of misery, one can turn evil into truly nurturing pure compassion. In any kind of circumstance, faith and hope can provide people with the power to live. All human beings are interconnected. Therefore, we can see each other's evil and transcend the evil together to build a future which brings peace of mind.

Kujō Takeko, in her essay entitled "Lamenting Evil" (*Tsumi no nageki*), says:

Among people who seek the path [of enlightenment], I occasionally see those who negate human life as deeply sinful. We also cannot help but wonder and become frightened by facing the fact that we cannot negate reality. But the light of salvation shines for those who suffer. The light shines directly on very grave karmic evils. Where there is suffering, there is always the light. The light is always with us suffering beings. Those who would experience the joy of being in the light also lament their karmic evil. Those who

realize the undeniable karmic evil within themselves are truly able to accept the joy of salvation.

(*Kujō Takeko: Kashū to Asoka*, p. 199)

The Buddha approaches Ajātaśatru with complete confidence in his future. In the Buddha's attitude, there originates the power for us to mature with compassion toward other beings. By realizing that we live through the Buddha's vow and through faith (*shinjin*), our world expands beyond our ego-centric self. By encountering the Buddha's compassion, or the Buddha's Other Power, we become free from the bondage of ego-attachments, face our own real self, and are provided with the power to keep living into our own future.

(13) The Significance of Adverse Conditions

One can learn many things from adverse conditions. Adversity can be the catalyst for spiritual growth. Sometimes tragedy provides the opportunity for unbounded compassion and generosity. The flower that blooms in adversity is rare and beautiful. Just like this flower, a person who has experienced extreme sorrow is embraced by the Buddha's compassion, pure as the moonlight, and flowers with deep kindness.

c. Salvation of Evil Persons and Shinran's View of Human Nature

Shinran teaches the salvation of evil beings. The teaching of evil beings' salvation is based on the Buddhist understanding of the compassion of the buddhas who embrace and never abandon people suffering from their own evil deeds. What does Shinran mean by "evil beings" in consideration of the socio-cultural context of medieval Japan? How does Shinran want to help them

by propagating the teaching of the salvation of evil beings? Shinran's teaching of the salvation of evil persons can be discussed from the following three aspects:

(1) Socio-Cultural Context: In medieval Japan, those who were considered lower class in society, such as hunters, fishermen, and merchants, etc., were generally defined as evil beings (*akunin*). Discrimination was based on people's occupations and social status. Since they had to work constantly to make a living, they did not have time to devote themselves to Buddhist practice to accumulate good roots and were too poor to make offerings. Shinran preached to these people that all humans are equal beings and that, regardless of occupation or poverty, all can become the person of pure gold color through reciting nembutsu anytime and anywhere and entrusting in the teaching of the Buddha, even though we do not have time to devote our life to Buddhist practice. This teaching that all will be the color of pure gold (*shikkai konjiki*) perhaps empowered all who heard it to live equally together.

(2) Doctrinal Foundation: According to the *Nirvāṇa Sutra*, there are three kinds of people who are "hard to cure" (*nanke no sanki*) and who are therefore called evil beings. They are 1. those who commit the five grave offenses (1. killing one's father; 2. killing one's mother; 3. killing an arhat; 4. causing blood to flow from the body of the Buddha; and 5. disrupting the harmony of the sangha); 2. those who slander the true Dharma; and 3. icchantikas (those who lack the seed of Buddhahood). Shinran, however, explains that there is salvation even for these people if they feel shame for the offenses they have committed, if they confess the offenses to other people and to the

Buddha, and if they turn about at heart (*eshin*). If they try to hide their wrongdoings or make excuses, they only become filled with more lies. By encountering the Buddha's compassion which never abandons evil beings, however, we become ashamed of our ignorance and we are able to repent. Embraced by the compassion of the Buddha, pure faith (*shinjin*) arises within the evildoer's mind even while he or she still clings to the evil offenses.

(3) Personal Self-Reflection: For Shinran, evil beings are those who deeply realize their own evil nature. In this third case, the definition of evil beings extends to all human beings or ordinary beings, including those in the first two definitions. Shinran questions the ways we normally live by overestimating our own power and pretending to live like good persons. Shinran, rather, teaches that it is evil people who recognize their own ignorance and live in deep self-reflection on their own evil offenses who are the truly sincere persons. Therefore, *akunin shōki* teaches that the Buddha's compassion primarily pours out to those who realize that their own ignorance means that they cannot live without hurting others.

[Editor's note: The mini-drama in Appendix B cleverly illustrates Shinran's understanding of the teaching of Buddha's salvation of evil persons. To reinforce learning, students assumed the roles of the people in the mini-drama during the lecture.]

Shinran teaches a path that transforms suffering into blissfulness for all regardless of good or evil. Shinran does not take himself as any kind of measure in order to judge the evilness of others while presupposing that he himself is good. Reflecting on

human good and evil, we find evil within good and vice versa. Shinran, reflecting upon himself, faced the self-centered passions and the darkness in his own heart. Shinran demonstrates that if we recognize that evil within all of us, we can truly connect with each other.

However, there were some who misunderstood Shinran's teaching of *akunin shōki*. If the Buddha is here to save evil beings, they maintained, there would be no problem in committing any evil offense. Now we turn to Shinran's teaching discussed in chapter 13 of the *Tannishō* in which he admonished those who uncritically affirmed evil.

4. SHINRAN'S SELF-REFLECTION ON EVIL

a. Ethical Nature of *Shinjin*

Shinran teaches us in *Tannishō* Chapter 13 that even though the Buddha has pledged to save us no matter how evil we are, we should not take the Buddha's compassionate love for granted.

There was, in those days, a person who had fallen into wrong views. He asserted that since the Vow was made to save the person who had committed evil, one should purposely do evil as an act for attaining birth. As rumors of misdeeds gradually spread, Shinran wrote in a letter, "Do not take a liking to poison just because there is an antidote." This was in order to put an end to that wrong understanding. (*Tannishō*, Chapter 13, *CWS*, p. 671)

In this passage, Shinran criticizes people who abuse the antidote (medicine) which is Amida's Primal Vow by doing evil deeds themselves and encouraging people to do evil things to

others. His sayings in *Tannishō* 13 reflect very serious ethical problems that arose among Shinran's followers during the Kamakura period (1185-1333). Shinran's writings indicate that there are two misinterpretations, both of which were not in accordance with Shinran's thought, spread among Shinran's followers: one is called *kenzen shōjin* (entrusting in wisdom, goodness, and diligence) and the other is *zōaku muge* (licensed evil).

(1) Entrusting in Wisdom, Goodness, and Diligence (*kenzen shōjin*): outwardly expressing (self-power) cultivation of wisdom, goodness, and diligence—legalistic understanding.

People who aspire for the Pure Land must not behave outwardly as though wise or good,.... (*Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,' CWS*. p. 466)

Shinran's true intention in this passage is to stop pretending to be a man of wisdom or a good person. However, there arises another misuse of his Pure Land teaching.

(2) Licensed evil (*zōaku muge*): believing that evil deeds are not going to hinder one's salvation—licentious understanding.

It is like offering more wine before the person has become sober or urging him to take even more poison before the poison has abated. "Here's some medicine, so drink all the poison you like"—words like these should never be said. (*Mattōshō* 20, *CWS*, p. 553. [This letter was written when Shinran was 80 years old.])

In this letter, Shinran teaches that one should not do evil deeds or encourage people to do evil things to harm others.

Shinran negates both *kenzen shōjin* and *zōaku muge*, which are two extreme interpretations of his teaching. His negation of these extreme views is clearly expressed in the thirteenth chapter of the *Tannishō* compiled by Yuien. However, at the end of the chapter, Yuien notes that those who abuse the meaning of the Primal Vow (*hongan bokori*) will not be excluded from salvation, which seems to be a different position from Shinran's strong stance against evil deeds. Shinran teaches that one should "not take a liking to poison just because there is an antidote." He teaches that people should not commit offenses just because they think they will be pardoned.

In the following, I would like to introduce passages written by a Jodo Shinshu poet, Kujō Takeko, discussing the ethical nature of *shinjin* (faith). Kujō Takeko, in her essay "Before the Compassionate Eyes" (*Jigen no mae ni*), admonishes people not to take the Buddha's compassion for granted and intentionally taint their minds with evil deeds.

It is lamentable to realize that we are repeatedly committing evil offenses by hiding behind the grace of salvation. We should not become too accustomed to the Buddha's compassion nor become playful with the Buddha. Reflecting upon our weakness and meagerness, let us appreciate the salvation granted by the Buddha. Weak beings all want to become strong.

How lamentable!

We cannot know the evil deeds we committed life after life.

Before the compassionate eyes, what can we possibly assume?

Aware are no
Aku wo shirazu
Jigen no maeni
Nani wo amayuru

(*Kujō Takeko: Kashū to Asoka*, p. 186)

b. Self-Awareness of Residual Karma (*shukugō*)

Another important concept introduced in Chapter 13 of the *Tannishō* is residual karma (*shukugō*), or more simply past karma:

Good thoughts arise in us through the prompting of good karma from the past, and evil comes to be thought and performed through the working of evil karma. The late Master said, “Know that every evil act done—even as slight as a particle on the tip of a strand of rabbit’s fur or sheep’s wool—has its cause in past karma [residual karma].” (*Tannishō*, Chapter 13, *CWS*, p. 670)

According to this passage of *Tannishō* 13, “residual karma” means actions in previous lives and their retributions (past karma). The concept suggests that Shinran understands that the present existence of a human being is connected to the distant past. Strictly speaking, however, Shinran does not use the term “residual karma” (*shukugō*) in his own writings. The term appears only in the *Tannishō*, which contains the sayings of Shinran as recorded by Yuien.

What exactly is residual karma? Murakami Sokusui, a contemporary scholar in Jodo Shinshu Studies, explains the concept of residual karma as follows:

Although we know evil as evil and we should not commit evil, we cannot live but by committing evil deeds. I

believe that is what is meant by words such as residual karma (*shukugō*) or karmic evil (*zaigō*) in Shinran's thought. Salvation though the Primal Vow is the salvation of those who are completely incapable of helping themselves.

(Murakami Sokusui, *Shinran kyōgi no gokai to rikai* [Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1984], p. 66)

By adopting the concept of residual karma (*shukugō*), Yuien expresses the real figure of ordinary beings possessed with karmic evil in order to counter those who wrongly maintain that people cannot be saved unless they refrain from evil deeds to become good persons (wrong view of entrusting in wisdom, goodness, and diligence [*kenzen shōjin*]). Human beings cannot simply become as good as they think they should be. Influenced by the conditions of our lives, we cannot even predict our own behavior. I believe Yuien uses the term residual karma to express the depth of our karmic evil which cannot be controlled by our own will. This is made clear by a conversation between Shinran and Yuien in which Shinran confesses that it is not that he does not kill because his heart is good.

The Master once asked, "Yuien-bō, do you accept all that I say?"

"Yes, I do," I answered.

"Then will you not deviate from whatever I tell you?" he repeated.

I humbly affirmed this. Thereupon he said, "Now, I want you to kill a thousand people. If you do, you will definitely attain birth."

I responded, "Though you instruct me thus, I'm afraid it is not in my power to kill even one person."

“Then why did you say that you would follow whatever I told you?”

He continued, “By this you should realize that if we could always act as we wished, then when I told you to kill a thousand people in order to attain birth, you should have immediately done so. But since you lack the karmic cause inducing you to kill even a single person, you do not kill. It is not that you do not kill because your heart is good. In the same way, a person may wish not to harm anyone and yet end up killing a hundred or a thousand people.” (*Tannishō*, Chapter 13, *CWS*, pp. 670–671)

As Shinran points out, human beings have within themselves a terribleness that can hurt others unknowingly. Yoshikawa Eiji (1892-1962), a Japanese novelist, writes, “A person changes into a bodhisattva and a demon hundreds of times a day.” In the same chapter of the *Tannishō*, Shinran reiterates the issue by saying that if the karmic cause so prompts us, we will commit any kind of act.

The Master further stated:

For those who make their living drawing nets or fishing in the seas and rivers, and those who sustain their lives hunting beasts or taking fowl in the fields and mountains, and those who pass their lives conducting trade or cultivating fields and paddies, it is all same. If the karmic cause so prompts us, we will commit any kind of act. (*Tannishō*, Chapter 13, *CWS*, p. 671)

This passage clearly demonstrates Shinran’s egalitarian view on human beings. At the same time, however, he recognizes that all human beings share the same problem that human minds some-

times cannot control themselves, no matter how good a person you are.

Shinran explains that when people are influenced by conditions that drive them to their limits, they may respond with very fearful actions beyond their imagination. He teaches that we all should become aware of the darkness within the human mind.

As discussed in the *Tannishō*, Yuien is unable to comply with the request to kill a thousand individuals, Shinran remarks, not because he had purged his mind of the will to kill or that he is “good.” Rather, Shinran states that the karmic cause or causes enabling him to kill are not present. Although Yuien may entertain the desire to kill, the conditions for him to kill are not present at the time. Shinran rightly asserts that we cannot “always act as we wish.” We human beings are all the same. If the karmic cause so prompts us, we will commit any kind of act.

The issue on the darkness of human nature discussed in the conversation between Shinran and Yuien took place during the Kamakura period, and still remains to be a very serious questions among us even today. Sakuta Keiichi, a sociologist and a retired professor of Kyoto University, recalls his experience during World War II in his essay titled “War Criminals Within Us” (*Warera no uchi naru sensō hanzaisha*). As the conclusion of his essay, Sakuta Keiichi confesses that:

The fact that I had not committed a crime today, just as I did not commit war crimes then, is simply because I have yet to encounter an opportunity to do so. (In Sakuta Keiichi, *Haji no bunka saikō*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1967)

Shinran urges us to open our eyes to the terribleness hiding at the bottom of all human minds. No matter how good we are everyday, depending on circumstances we might have to commit

horrendous acts. Human nature is weak. Nembutsu practitioners, however, understand the offenses and ignorance of others as their own by thoroughly reflecting on the evil nature inherent in their own minds. Based on this understanding, nembutsu followers aspire to live together by not hurting each other.

If we simply consider war and other tragic events which make us avert our eyes as cruel atrocities, there will be no solutions to these tragedies. As Shinran explains, everyone who lives in this world is equally ignorant. Everyone most certainly possesses the potential to commit fearful mistakes depending on the circumstance. By reflecting on the truth that we all can commit errors because of our ignorance, we may be able to move together toward the elimination of tragic murders and wars. We should not think that war and other tragic events are other people's affairs. When we encounter such cruel incidents, we must not feel animosity, but we must see that such things are our own affairs too, since, after all, we are all interconnected.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

Shinran confesses that "I am such that I do not know right from wrong" (*Shōzōmatsu Wasan*, 116). Shinran, who is aware of his own ignorance, cannot pass judgment on others. As the Buddha says, "One can become a true person of the path by casting away both good and evil," so Shinran entrusts in the Buddha's Primal Vow transcending good and evil. What sort of perspective emerges in the realm transcending good and evil? To conclude my lectures, I would like to introduce three passages from Shinran and one from Prince Shōtoku, whom Shinran respected, which I believe will be helpful for discussions and studies on the issue of Shinran's teaching of the emancipation of evil beings.

1.

Among Master Shinran's words were:

I know nothing at all of good or evil. For if I could know thoroughly, as Amida Tathagata knows, that an act was good, then I would know good. If I could know thoroughly, as the Tathagata knows, that an act was evil, then I would know evil. But with a foolish being full of blind passions, in this fleeting world—this burning house—all matters without exception are empty and false, totally without truth and sincerity. The nembutsu alone is true and real. (*Tannishō*, Postscript, CWS, p. 679)

2.

While persons ignorant of even the characters for "good" and "evil"

All possess a sincere mind,

I make a display of knowing the words "good" and "evil";

This is an expression of complete falsity.

(*Hymns of the Dharma-Ages*, 115, CWS, p. 429)

3.

"To abandon the mind of self-power" admonishes the various and diverse kinds of people—masters of Hinayana or Mahayana, ignorant beings good or evil—to abandon the conviction that one is good, to cease relying on the self; to stop reflecting knowingly on one's evil heart, and further to abandon the judging of people as good and bad. When such shackled foolish beings—the lowly who are hunters and peddlers—thus wholly entrust themselves to the Name embodying great wisdom, the inconceivable Vow of the Buddha of unhindered light, then while burdened as they are with blind passion, they attain the supreme Nirvāṇa.

(*Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, CWS, p.459)

Article Ten in the *Seventeen-Article Constitution*
by Prince Shotoku

Article Ten

Refrain from hatred and angry looks. Do not be irate when people disagree with you. All people have hearts, each with their own deep attachments. If you are right, then I am wrong; if I am right, then you are wrong. I am not necessarily a sage and you are not necessarily a fool. We are both only ordinary people. Who can decide for certain what is right and what is wrong? Both of us are alternately wise and foolish, like an endless circle. For this reason, although other people become angry, I, on the contrary, fear my own errors. Even if I alone fully comprehend, I will follow the others and act like them. (Translated by William Deal, in *Religions of Japanese in Practice*, edited by George Tanabe, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 326.)

To transcend good and evil means to reconsider the rules we use to measure right and wrong. We usually judge others by applying our own standards to determine right and wrong. However, because all existences in this world are conditioned, fundamentally there are no differences. The opposition of good and evil is created by people's discriminatory views. However, I am certainly not superior to others, and others are certainly not ignorant.

Therefore, transcending good and evil is understanding that all human beings are ordinary beings. From the perspective beyond right and wrong, every person is equally an ignorant ordinary being possessed of ego-attachments. Just as a gold ring does not have an end, all human beings are interconnected. Human beings realize their own ignorance when they are in the

light of the Buddha's compassion. One can truly become aware of the deep interconnectedness of self and others by becoming aware of one's own evil.

Shinran reiterates this hope within all living beings by referring to the passage, "I can make bits of rubble change into gold" (Fa-Chao's *Nembutsu Chant in Five Stages* [Tang dynasty]), as follows:

"I can make bits of rubble change into gold." This is a metaphor. When we entrust ourselves to the Tathagata's Primal Vow, we, who are like bits of tile and pebbles, are turned into gold. Peddlers and hunters, who like stones and tiles and pebbles, are grasped and never abandoned by the Tathagata's light. Know that this comes about solely through true shinjin. We speak of the light that grasps because we are taken into the heart of the Buddha of unhindered light; thus, shinjin is said to be diamondlike. (*Notes on "Essentials of Faith Alone," CWS, pp. 459-460*)

We are akin to small pebbles or fragments of rock. Yet, even supposedly insignificant pebbles can become the equivalent of gold in the eyes of the Buddha. Just as stars fill the night sky, our entire world can glitter after we have been released from stifling prejudice and obsession.

Like the raw ore of a wondrous jewel,
All life has a potential to radiate with incomparable
splendor.
The mutual illumination of life awakens awareness of self
And deepens the intensity of radiance.

Naoki Nabeshima

Appendix A
THE DRAGON'S TEARS

In a land far away to the south
people have long told of
a great dragon hiding
somewhere in the mountains.

The eyes of the dragon pierce with blazing light.
Its mouth spreads from ear to ear, and from this mouth
a tongue flashes out, as red as fire.
It is a frightening dragon.
A terrifying beast.

"The dragon will come. He looks for naughty children
and children who will not do as they are told!"
Many fathers have used such words
to frighten misbehaving children.

Is the dragon real? Will he truly come and eat us?
He is real, and he will swallow you whole!
And so, children everywhere learned to fear the dragon.

By and by, people began to hear talk
of an unusual child in a town somewhere.
The child was not at all frightened
by tales of the dragon.
As a matter of fact,
he *wanted* to hear about the dragon.

"What a very strange child!"
"Perhaps his mother has not taken care
to let him hear how terrible the dragon is."

It all began one night.
This strange child sat on his bed and began to weep.
“Whatever is the matter? Does your tummy hurt?” his mother asked.

The child quickly shook his head from side-to-side.
“What is it then? Tell me.”
“The dragon, the dragon . . .”

His mother had not expected to hear those words.
She was very surprised and said anxiously,
“It’s all right. You don’t have to be afraid.
The dragon doesn’t take children who are good.”
But the child replied, “No. It isn’t that. I’m not afraid.”

“Then why are you crying?”
“The poor dragon,” said the child.
The mother echoed, “Yes, the poor thing.”
She could not imagine
what her child was thinking.

The child continued,
“Mother, why does nobody like the dragon?”

“What are you saying? What a strange thing to say.”
“No it isn’t. I really do feel sorry for the dragon,”
he said clearly while wiping away his tears.

The mother just could not understand
why her child should suddenly say something like that.
Perhaps he did not understand what he was saying, she thought.

It so happened that the strange child’s birthday was drawing near.
His mother went to him and said kindly,

“It will be your birthday soon.
Why don’t we invite some of your friends
to visit on your birthday?”
The child answered with delight,
“The dragon of the mountains. Call the dragon.”

His mother became angry and frowned as she said,
“It’s time you ended this joke.
I don’t like mischievous children.”

His birthday was only three days and two nights away.
Counting the days, the strange child arose early in the morning
and left the house.
He climbed to the top of a hill, just outside the town.
Below, the fields spread far and wide.
Mountains rose beyond the fields.
It was a hot summer’s day and white clouds,
the tall white clouds of summer, hung silently about the
mountains.

The dragon of the mountains, the great dragon,
must surely be hidden, asleep, somewhere in those mountains.
“I will find him.”
Having made up his mind, the child began to walk.

After walking all day, when evening came the child was very tired.
He lay down to rest beneath a tree and slept.
A new day dawned,
and the singing of small birds in the forest awakened the child.
Red raspberries and peaches grew wild in the mountains.
He picked the fruits and ate as he walked,
deeper and deeper into the mountains.

Mist lay in the mountain valleys
and the roar of rushing water came to his ears.
A bush warbler chirped as it flew over a thicket,
while a crow cawed from the top of a high cedar tree.
Dew fell with a pitter-patter from the leaves above,
onto the shoulders of the boy as he passed below.

But how quiet the mountain was!
Were one to call in a loud voice,
it would surely be heard
in the furthest passes and the deepest valleys.

Let's shout and see.
If I shout, surely something — no, the dragon — will come.
So thought the child.

He was not even a little bit afraid of the dragon coming out.
Turning towards a deep valley, the strange child called out
at the top of his voice.
“Dragon of the mountains, Dragon of the mountains.”
The mountains echoed with his shout.
His voice passed through the valley and disappeared.

Deep inside a cave, the dragon was asleep and alone.
But when the strange child's voice reached his ears,
his eyes opened wide.
The dragon was surprised — a human voice.
“Who can that be? Who calls my name?”

He could not imagine who might be calling him.
Whoever it was, the dragon felt no fear.
For he was a mighty dragon.

From his cave, the dragon gave a reply that sounded like a growl.
“What is it? What do you want?”

“Come on out.”

Certainly it was the voice of a child.

The dragon thought this was very odd indeed.

“Very well, I will go out and see,” he thought.

Shifting his long body, the dragon crept out of the darkness in the depths of the cave — his trunk slowly twisting and turning, the belly, the flashing eyes, the mouth spreading from ear to ear.

The dragon came to the child, lifted his head and spoke.

“You called me, did you?”

“That’s right. I came to call you.”

The child looked at the dragon with great curiosity and said,

“I don’t think anybody has ever called you before.”

“It is true.”

“That’s why I came. Tomorrow is my birthday.

There will be many wonderful things to eat.”

Listening, the dragon looked at the boy blankly.

He was embarrassed as he said, “May I go? Me?”

“Yes. I don’t hate you. I won’t tease you.

If someone attacks you, I will protect you.”

What was this?

These words, this gentle heart.

The dragon forgot himself for a moment and stared at the child.

Within the piercing eyes of the dragon, a soft light flickered.

It was a mysterious light, a light that had burned dark and forgotten for hundreds of years.

“Oh, thank you, thank you.”

The dragon bowed his head as he spoke to the boy.

“Until now, I have never heard a kind word from a human being. I have always been disliked and hated.”

Tears began to pour from the eyes of the dragon.

“Because of that, I had always felt bitter towards people.

It has made me twisted.

Whenever I saw people, I would flash these eyes, show my teeth, and growl. But no more. From today, I will do that no more.”

The dragon’s tears had become a torrent and would not stop.

The child, standing nearby, quickly grabbed onto a tree and said,

“Please, your tears are like a river. I’m going to be washed away.”

To which the dragon replied, “Do not worry. Here, climb onto my back.”

“You’ll let me get on your back? That’s all right then.”

The child soon let go of the tree and jumped quickly and lightly onto the dragon’s back.

Truly, the dragon’s tears did become a river,

reflecting the mountains and the blue sky.

The dragon floated like a boat on the surface of the river.

Pushing up great waves as he kicked with his feet,

the dragon moved forward.

“I am so happy. I have never been so happy.

I will become a boat.

I will become a boat and carry many kind-hearted children.

In that way, I will make this world a new and good world.”

So said the dragon to the child on his back.

The child’s town could now be seen on the other side of the river.

Then, the great body of the dragon began to change.

Starting at the end, it began changing from a dragon into a black shape. Soon, it had taken the shape of a boat. As the boat glided quickly forward, the breath coming out of the dragon's nostrils turned into steam. The dragon's growl became the cheerful hoot of a steam whistle.

People of the town and all around were surprised to see the boat. With eyes wide open, they stared in wonder as the wonderful black boat gradually drew closer.

When they saw just one child standing in the boat, their surprise turned to amazement and they shouted to each other.

"Look at that!"

"It is that child, the strange child."

"He looks very pleased."

"Yes, he does. How happily he's waving to us."

This translation of the story of *The Dragon's Tears* is provided by courtesy of Prof. Naoki Nabeshima (original Japanese published by Hamada Hirosuke, *Ryū no me no namida*, Tokyo: Kaiseisha, 1965).

Appendix B

THE BUDDHA AND EVIL PERSONS: MINI-DRAMA

Shinran frequently went out and met people in the town to discuss the teaching. One day, townspeople gathered around as Shinran was teaching about the salvation of evil persons.

Woman: I'm a fish merchant and I kill a lot of fishes. Can I still go to the Pure Land when I die?

Shinran: A fish merchant is in a noble business providing people with the food they need to live. Because of you, I can eat fish to live tomorrow. Regardless of your job or upbringing, all are able to go to the Pure Land.

Woman: I'm very relieved to hear that. Does that mean that killing is not counted as an evil offense?

Shinran: Yes it is. Killing is an evil offense. Neither cows nor fish are born to be eaten by humans. Both fish and humans are the same family. It is wrong to kill living beings simply according to our whims or to satisfy our greed.

Woman: Yes, indeed. Animals too feel love and care for their children.

Shinran: I can only receive their lives by putting my palms together with gratitude that I am supported by all living beings. Deeply reflecting on our lives, we cannot help but live by committing evil offenses. But no matter how serious these offenses, Amida Buddha will save us as we are.

Woman: I understand. In gratitude, I will try live for the fish, too.

Man: When I was young I got in a lot of fights. Sometimes I hurt people and stole from them. Can I still go to the Pure Land?

Shinran: Certainly you can! Of course the crimes you have committed are not to be forgiven. But Amida first saves people like you who realize your wrongdoings and deeply repent. The person who knows his own ignorance is a true human being.

Man: How wonderful! By knowing the kindness of the Buddha, now I truly regret my past wrongdoings.

Merchant: It cannot be true! You say evil persons are to be saved first, but that does not make sense!

Shinran: OK. I have a question for you. If you were a doctor and there were many sick people, who would you treat first?

Merchant: If I were a doctor, I would treat the sickest person first.

Shinran: That's right. Amida Buddha also saves the person who commits evil offenses and is truly suffering. The Buddha embraces and never abandons those who feel that they are not needed by anyone.

Merchant: I see. He never abandons suffering people. Thank you. I'll be kind to others too.

Appendix C
THE STORY OF THE BUDDHA'S SALVATION OF
KING AJĀTAŚATRU

(1) Ajātaśatru's Killing of his Father

Prince Ajātaśatru lived in the palace of Rajagriha in a country called Magadha in northwestern India. His nature was very violent and filled with the mind of greed, anger, and ignorance. One day, Devadatta enticed the prince, saying, "Your father King Bimbisāra once attempted to kill you." Because of this, the prince began to hate his father. Eventually, Ajātaśatru arrested his father and confined him in jail. He also placed his mother under house arrest because she had tried to save her husband. Then he enthroned himself as the king of Magadha. He stopped providing his father in jail any clothing, bedding, food, drink, or medicine, and the king passed away after seven days. When he was informed that his father had died in jail, Ajātaśatru realized the graveness of the offense he had committed and began to regret and repent what he had done to his father. He then became very ill and his body was covered with boils which gave off a foul smell. King Ajātaśatru, stricken by a sense of guilt, was in pain both in his body and mind and was afraid of falling into hell.

(2) Advice of Six Ministers

Six ministers of Magadha visited King Ajātaśatru one by one to console him. All of them maintained that the King was blameless.

The minister Candrayaśas told him, "There is no good or bad karma. Therefore, there are no retributions, either."

The minister Prāptagarbha said, "The law of state recognizes the case of a person killing his father and taking over the kingdom, which is not a crime at all."

The minister Tattvalabdha said, “The late king’s past karma is the cause of his death. Therefore, King Ajātaśatru has committed no offense.”

The minister Sarvārthajña told him, “No one has ever seen hell and there is no causation in this world.”

The minister Maṅgala said, “There is no hell and there is no such thing as murder. If there is an eternal indestructible self, it cannot be killed. And if all things are impermanent, they perish with each instant anyway. The sword that kills a man has committed no crime; so how can the person be blamed?”

And the minister Abhaya also told Ajātaśatru that he was blameless.

(3) Ajātaśatru’s Meeting with Jivaka

Then, King Ajātaśatru met a doctor named Jivaka who was a follower of the teaching of the Buddha.

At that time there was an eminent physician named Jivaka. He approached the King and said, “Great King, are you able to sleep well?”

The King answered in a verse...

Then he said, “Jivaka, my sickness now lies heavy upon me. Against the King, who followed the right dharma, I have committed a grave and evil offense. No excellent physician, no miraculous medicine, no charms, no good and skillful nursing can heal me. Why? Because my father, King who adhered to the dharma, ruled the land according to the dharma, and was indeed blameless. Viciously I murdered him. I am like a fish upon the dry ground.... Long ago I heard a wise man say, ‘If a person’s acts in body, speech, and mind are not pure, know that he is certain to fall into hell.’ I am like this. How should I be able to sleep peacefully? And now there is no supreme great physician. If such

a person were to impart to me the medicine of the dharma, surely it would relieve the pain of my sickness.”

Jivaka replied, “Oh, excellent, excellent! Though the King has committed a crime, profound remorse has been stirred in his heart and he is filled with shame and self-reproach. Great King, all Buddhas, the world-honored ones, always preach these words: There are two good means by which sentient beings can be saved: one is shame and the other is self-reproach. Shame means not committing further evil oneself; self-reproach means not leading others to commit evil. Shame is to be abased within oneself, self-reproach is to express this outwardly, toward others. Shame means to feel humility before others, self-reproach means to feel humility before heaven. This is shame and self-reproach. To be without shame and self-reproach is not to be human; it is to be a beast. Because one feels shame and self-reproach, one reveres father, mother, teachers, and elders. Because one feels shame and self-reproach, it is taught that there is accord among father, mother, elder and younger brothers, and elder and younger sisters. (The *Nirvāṇa Sutra* cited in *CWS*, p. 130–131)

Jivaka, then, introduced a good master to King Ajātaśatru.

Know, Great King, of the son of King Śuddhodana from the city of Kapilavastu. His family name is Gautama, and he is called Siddhārtha. Without a teacher, he has naturally attained awakening and realized supreme, perfect enlightenment....He is Buddha, the World-honored one. He possesses diamondlike wisdom and can break through all the karmic evil of sentient beings....Great King, the Tathagata has a cousin named Devadatta who disrupted the harmony of the sangha, inflicted a bleeding wound on the Buddha’s body, and killed the nun Lotus. He committed these three grave offenses. By teaching him the different essentials of the dharma, the Tathagata reduced that heavy burden of karmic evil to minuteness. Thus the Tathagata is the

pre-eminent physician, beyond compare with the six masters.
(*CWS*, pp. 131–132)

(4) Voice from Heaven

Then there was a voice from heaven:

“Great King, the person who commits one grave offense suffers fully the corresponding retribution for it. If he commits two grave offenses, the retribution is double. If he commits five, the retribution is fivefold. Great King, we know with certainty now that you cannot escape your evil acts. Pray, Great King, go quickly to the Buddha! Apart from seeing the Buddha, the World-honored one, there is no help. It is out of deep pity that I urge you to do so.”

As the Great King heard these words, terror gripped his heart and a shudder ran through his body. He trembled in his five parts like a plantain tree. Gazing upward, he replied, “Who is it? There is no form, only the voice.”

Then it replied, “Great King! It is your father, Bimbisāra. Let Jīvaka’s advice be heeded. Do not follow the words of the six ministers; their views are wrong.”

Upon hearing this, the King fainted and collapsed to the ground. The sores on his body spread with vehemence, and the stench and filth grew worse. Cooling salves were applied to treat the sores, but they still burned and the poisonous fever only worsened, with no sign of alleviation. (*CWS*, p. 132)

(5) The Buddha’s Meeting with Ajātaśatru

Encouraged by the physician Jīvaka, Ajātaśatru visited the Buddha. The Buddha, seeing the suffering of Ajātaśatru, said to him: Good sons! I say, *For the sake of Ajātaśatru, I will not enter Nirvāṇa...* Why? Because *for the sake of* means for all foolish

beings, and *Ajātaśatru* includes universally all those who commit the five grave offenses....*Ajātaśatru* refers to all those who have yet to awaken the mind aspiring for supreme, perfect enlightenment. (CWS, p. 132)

(6) The Buddha's Samadhi of Moon-Radiant Love

Then the World-honored one, the Guide of great compassion, entered the samadhi of moon-radiant love for the sake of *Ajātaśatru*. Having entered this samadhi, he cast a brilliant light. That light, cool and refreshing, shone upon the body of the King, and the sores healed instantly. (CWS, p. 133)

(7) *Ajātaśatru's* Question

The King said to *Jīvaka*, "He is a deva among devas. What causes him to send forth this radiance?"

Jīvaka replied, "Suppose there are parents with seven children. When there is sickness among the seven children, although the father and mother are concerned equally with all of them, nevertheless their hearts lean wholly toward the sick child. Great King, it is like this with the Tathagata. It is not that there is no equality among all sentient beings, but his heart leans wholly toward the person who has committed evil. (CWS, p. 133)

(8) Meaning of Samadhi of Moon-Radiant Love

The King then asked, "What is the samadhi of moon-radiant love?"

Jīvaka answered, "The light of the moon causes all the blue lotuses to unfold in brilliant luminosity. Such is the samadhi of moon-radiant love, which causes sentient beings to open forth the good mind. This is why it is called 'the samadhi of moon-radiant love.'

“Great King, the light of the moon brings joy to the hearts of all travelers on the road. Such is the samadhi of moon-radiant love, which brings joy to the hearts of those in practice on the path to Nirvāṇa. This is why it is called ‘the samadhi of moon-radiant love’....It is the king of all good, it is sweet nectar. It is what all sentient beings love and aspire for. Therefore, it is called ‘the samadhi of moon-radiant love’.” (CWS, p. 134)

(9) Teaching of the Buddha

Then the Buddha said to all those in the great assembly, “Among the immediate causes of all sentient beings’ attainment of supreme, perfect enlightenment, the foremost is a true teacher. Why? If King Ajātaśatru did not follow the advice of Jīvaka, he would decidedly die on the seventh day of next month and plunge into Avici hell. Hence, with the day [of death] approaching, there is nothing more important than a true teacher.” (CWS, p. 134)

(10) Ajātaśatru’s Anxiety

Ajātaśatru said to Jīvaka, “Though I have just heard these two kinds of stories, I still feel anxious. Come with me, O Jīvaka! I want to ride on the same elephant with you. Even though I should with certainty plunge into Avici hell, my wish is that you grasp me and keep me from falling. For I have heard in the past that the person who has attained the way does not fall into hell.” (CWS, p. 134)

(11) The Buddha’s Teaching to Ajātaśatru

(a) Causes and conditions of an evil deed

First, when the Buddha hears Ajātaśatru’s anxiety, the Buddha asks him, “Why do you say that you will certainly fall into hell?”

(*CWS*, p. 134). The Buddha tells him not to become consumed by his own anxiety and not to give up his future.

Then the Buddha continues to explain the causes and conditions of an evil deed to Ajātaśatru. The Buddha explains that the causes of Ajātaśatru's evil deeds can be understood not only from Ajātaśatru's perspective but also from many other different viewpoints. The following words of the Buddha are particularly noteworthy:

King, if you have committed evil, all Buddhas, world-honored ones, must have done so also. Why? Because your father, the former king Bimbisāra, always planted roots of good by paying homage to the Buddhas. For this reason, he was able to occupy the throne in this life. If the Buddhas had not accepted that homage, he would not have been able to become king. If he had not become king, you would not have been able to kill him in order to seize the kingdom. If you have committed evil in killing your father, we Buddhas too must have also. If the Buddhas, the world-honored ones, have not committed evil, how can you alone have done so? (*CWS*, p. 135)

(b) State of the confused mind

Next, the Buddha explains the state of the confused mind (insanity) of sentient beings.

Great King, the insanity of sentient beings is of four types: 1) insanity induced by greed, 2) insanity induced by drugs, 3) insanity induced by spells, and 4) insanity induced by one's past karmic conditions. Great King, these four types of insanity are found among my disciples. But though such disciples may commit numerous evil acts, I have never pronounced them violators of the precepts. Their acts do not lead them to the three evil courses. When they regain their senses again, I do not say they have violated [their precepts]. King, originally out of greed to

rule over the land, you murdered your father the king. You did this because you were possessed of greed-insanity. Why should you receive the recompense for this act? Great King, it is like a person who, in a drunken fit, slays his own mother, but when he has become sober again, is overcome by remorse. Know that this act will not bring recompense. King, you were drunk with greed; your act was not committed out of your normal mind. If it was not done out of your normal mind, how could you receive recompense for it? (*CWS*, pp. 135-136)

As discussed by the Buddha above, a human being may commit murder by losing his or her mind because of greed, drugs, spells, or past deeds. We need to focus on a person's psychological condition when someone commits a murder. If a person is pushed to his or her psychological limits and thereby commits a murder, the Buddha says that it should not necessarily be considered a crime.

Then the Buddha continues to talk to Ajātaśatru.

Great King, it is like a person who intends you ill coming to you with false pretensions of goodwill. The ignorant think such a person truly kindhearted, but the wise, understanding thoroughly, know it is but empty pretense. Killing is like this. Foolish beings think it real, but the Buddhas, the world-honored ones, know it is not. (*CWS*, p. 136)

Truth in the worldly perspective of general society may not always be the same as the super-mundane truth that transcends our delusory minds. There can be two conflicting perspectives on the same thing. The Buddha may see alternative meanings within the reality of the crime of killing a person. When a person is realizing the reality of the crime he or she has committed, the words of the Buddha encourage us to see the incident not only from the worldly perspective but also from the perspective of the Buddha's wisdom.

Further, the Buddha tells Ajātaśatru:

For the person who sees emptiness, it is nonexistent; for the person who sees existence, it is not nonexistent; for the person who sees existence as existent, it is existent. Why? Because the person who sees existence as existent receives the karmic recompense....In this sense, then, it is neither existent nor nonexistent, and yet it is existent. Great King, sentient beings are termed so for their exhaling and inhaling of breath. The cutting off of exhaling and inhaling breath is 'killing.' The Buddhas, in accord with worldly usage, also teach this to be 'killing.' (CWS, p. 137)

"Seeing emptiness" means to understand all things exist temporarily through the co-arising of causes and conditions. "Emptiness" means all existences are interrelated and interdependent through various causes and conditions beyond the continuum of time and space, and there is no such thing as an eternally fixed substance.

(12) Conversion of Ajātaśatru and his New Aspiration

At last, the Buddha's compassionate words penetrated Ajātaśatru's heart. In the midst of Ajātaśatru's self-awareness of his crime, pure faith (*shinjin*) arose. Ajātaśatru confessed and opened his mind with wholehearted gratitude to the Buddha. Ajātaśatru said,

"O World-honored one, observing the world, I see that from the seed of the eranda grows the eranda tree. I do not see a candana tree growing from an eranda seed. But now for the first time I see a candana tree growing from the seed of an eranda. The eranda seed is myself; the candana tree is shinjin that has no root in my heart. 'No root' means that at the beginning I did not know to revere the Tathagata, and did not entrust myself to the dharma and sangha. World-honored one, if I had not encountered the Tathagata, the World-honored one, I would have undergone

immeasurable suffering for countless, incalculable kalpas in the great hell. Now I meet the Buddha. With the virtue I have acquired from this meeting, I will destroy the blind passions and evil mind of sentient beings!”

The Buddha said, “Excellent, excellent, Great King! Now I know that you will without fail be able to destroy the evil mind of sentient beings.”

Ajātaśatru said, “World-honored one, if I can clearly destroy sentient beings’ mind of evil, even if I were to dwell in Avīci hell constantly for innumerable kalpas, undergoing pain and suffering for the sake of sentient beings, it would not be painful.”

At that time, all the countless people of Magadha awakened the mind aspiring for supreme, perfect enlightenment. Because these innumerable people awakened the great mind, King Ajātaśatru’s heavy burden of karmic evil was reduced to minuteness. The King, the Queen, the consorts, and the court maids all in the same way awakened the mind aspiring for supreme, perfect enlightenment. (CWS, pp. 137-138)

At that time, King Ajātaśatru said to Jīvaka, “O Jīvaka, I have now, even before dying, already attained the heavenly body. Casting off short life, I have gained unending life; abandoning the impermanent body, I have gained the eternal body. I bring sentient beings to the awakening of the mind aspiring for supreme, perfect enlightenment.” (CWS, p. 138)

Ajātaśatru continues as follows:

The true words are extraordinarily subtle and excellent.
They are skillful in expression and content;
They are a store of profound secrets.
For the sake of the multitudes,
He explains extensively with many words;
For the sake of the multitudes, he teaches in summary.
Possessing such words,

He perfectly heals sentient beings.
 If there are sentient beings
 Who are able to hear these words,
 Whether they entrust themselves or not,
 They know with certainty that these are the Buddha's teaching.
 The Buddhas always possess gentle words,
 But for the multitudes they teach in rough words.
 Rough words or gentle,
 All have their basis in the highest truth.
 ...
 The Tathagata, for the sake of every being,
 Always acts as one's loving father and mother.
 Know that all sentient beings
 Are the Tathagata's children.

At the end Ajātaśatru concludes his verse as follows:

Having met with evil friends,
 I committed evils whose recompense spanned past, present
 and future.
 Now, before the Buddha, I repent;
 May I henceforth never perform evil again.
 May all sentient beings alike
 Awaken the mind aspiring for enlightenment,
 And with a whole heart think constantly
 On the Buddhas throughout the ten quarters.
 And may all sentient beings
 Break free forever from blind passions,
 And in seeing Buddha-nature clearly,
 Be the equal of Mañjuśrī.

Then the World-honored one praised King Ajātaśatru, "Excellent, excellent! Know that if a person awakens the mind

aspiring for enlightenment, he adorns the Buddhas and their great assemblies....Great King, know that the mind aspiring for enlightenment brings such incalculable recompense. Great King, from this moment on, be ever earnest in practicing the mind of aspiration for enlightenment. Why? Because through this cause, you will be able to eradicate immeasurable karmic evil." (CWS, pp. 138-140)