

## The Emancipation of Evil Beings: The Story of the Salvation of King Ajātaśatru

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*To be without shame and self-reproach is not to be human;  
it is to be a beast.*

—Jīvaka

*Karmic evil is from the beginning without real form;  
It is the result of delusional thought and invertedness.*

—Shinran

### INTRODUCTION

Human history has witnessed the 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 good against another good. Hatred, antagonism, torture, murder, and war emerge from the self-centered darkness of the mind (*mumyō* 無明). How can we seek peace of mind in the midst of conflict between good and evil? Shinran uses the story of King Ajātaśatru to articulate the spiritual emancipation of evil persons. Shinran's Pure Land teachings have helped its followers understand the defilements of the world and the evilness within themselves by confronting their sorrows and leading them on the path to enlightenment.

#### *Shinran's Reflection on the Emancipation of Evil Being*

Shinran (1173–1262), the medieval Pure Land Buddhist cleric and the founder of the Jōdo Shinshū tradition, reasoned that spiritual release and realization is achieved through other-power (*tariki* 他力),<sup>1</sup> namely, Buddha's wisdom and compassion. Shinran particularly em-

phasizes the spiritual transformation of *bonbu* (凡夫, evil person) who is filled with *bonno* (煩惱, evil passions, Skt. *kleśa*), and who understands his/her limitations, recognizes the depth of his/her delusion, and entrusts his/her spiritual release to other-power, the Buddha's primal vow.<sup>2</sup> To explain the reality of spiritual transformation and release of the evil person, Shinran coined the expression *akunin shōki* (悪人正機). Describing the person who is the most favored for spiritual release, *akunin shōki* arose from the egalitarian posture that the mind that is free from ego-attachments and has transcended the dualism of good and evil.<sup>3</sup> Encouraged by Amida Buddha's vow that embraces and never abandons the karmic-filled person (*bonbu*), the notion of *akunin shōki* crystallizes the rationale and process for spiritual release. The karmically-filled evil person is assured spiritual release when he/she squarely faces his/her karmic limitations, realizes his/her delusion, tries to live sincerely, and wishes happiness for himself/herself and others.<sup>4</sup> However, Shinran never encourages people to commit evil deeds that would lead themselves and others to suffering.

Shinran outlines the rationale and process of spiritual transformation and release of the evil person through the working of Amida Buddha's primal vow by reference to the tragedy at Rājagrha. The original story is found in the *Nirvana Sutra*. Shinran quotes selective passages in the "Chapter on *Shinjin*" in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. Shinran identifies Prince Ajātaśatru, who assassinated his father, King Bimbisāra, and imprisoned his mother, Queen Vaidehī, as personifying all the three types of evil persons. Their respective illnesses are so severe, incurable, and fatal that even the Buddha is at a loss. The three are those who:

1. slander the *buddhadharma*, the Mahāyāna teaching, and speak ill of the Buddhist teachings;
2. commit the five grave offenses: killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an *arhat*, causing blood to flow from the body of the Buddha, and disrupting the harmony of the sangha; and
3. have severed the root of goodness (or mind of goodness) and are dispossessed to the seeds for buddhahood, i.e., the *icchantikas* (*issendai* 一闍提).<sup>5</sup>

The transformation and cure of these three types of persons requires able physicians, proper therapies, and effective medication. Accordingly, by listening to the teaching of the Buddha and bodhisattvas and following their guidance, these types of persons can awaken their *bo-*

*dhi*-mind even in the midst of their suffering. In the retelling of the tragedy of Rājagṛha, I explain and comment on the essentials of Shīran's teachings.

*The Buddha's Salvation of the Evil Being: The Case of Prince Ajātaśatru*

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

1. Ajātaśatru's killing his father
2. advice of six ministers
3. Ajātaśatru's meeting with Jīvaka: significance of repentance
4. voice from heaven
5. the Buddha's meeting with Ajātaśatru
6. the Buddha's moon-radiant love *samādhi*
7. significance of the moon-radiant love *samādhi*
8. teaching of the Buddha: encountering a true teacher and mentor
9. Ajātaśatru's anxiety
10. the Buddha's teaching to Ajātaśatru
11. conversion of Ajātaśatru
12. true repentance
13. aspiration and repentance of Ajātaśatru
14. significance of reverse condition
15. significance of deep listening and hearing

(1) Ajātaśatru's Killing His Father

Prince Ajātaśatru lived in the palace of Rājagṛha in a country called Magadha in northwestern India. His nature was very violent and his mind filled with greed, anger, and ignorance.<sup>6</sup> The people usually called Prince Ajātaśatru "Prince Sudarśana," which means "good wisdom." One day, Devadatta enticed the prince, saying, "Your father King Bimbisāra once attempted to kill you."

Devadatta said, "Before you were born, all the soothsayers declared, 'This infant, once it has been born, will assuredly slay its father.' For this reason, the common people all call you 'Unborn Enemy.' Everyone close to you, in order to protect your feelings, calls you Sudarśana.

“Queen Vaidehī, having heard the words of the prediction, cast you from the top of a high tower when you were born. In that fall, your finger was broken. Because of this incident, the people call you ‘Broken Fingere.’ When I heard this, such sorrow and resentment sprang up in my heart that I could not face you and tell you of it.”

Devadatta related a variety of such matters, seeking to induce the prince to kill his father, and said, “If you kill your father, I too will kill the sramana Gautama.””

After hearing this, the prince spawned hatred for his father. He conspired against his father and was eventually successful in imprisoning him. Angry that his mother would try to save her husband, Ajātaśatru confined her to her quarters. He then enthroned himself as king of Magadha. Seven days after he stopped providing his imprisoned father clothing, bedding, food, drink, and medicine, the king passed away. Informed that his father had died, Ajātaśatru realized the graveness of his offence and began to regret and repent for what he had done. Shortly thereafter he became very ill; his body was covered with foul-smelling boils. Stricken by a sense of guilt and his body and mind in pain, Ajātaśatru feared falling into hell.

### (2) Advice of Six Ministers

Each of his six ministers visited King Ajātaśatru and consoled him, telling him he was blameless. Each also advised him to cast off his sorrow and affliction, because the more he felt sorrowful, the more pain he would suffer.<sup>8</sup> Respectively, the advice of the ministers reflected the six competing philosophies that rejected the truth of *pratītyasamutpāda* (*engi* 緣起), the principle of causation and interdependence.

### (3) Ajātaśatru’s Meeting with Jīvaka: Significance of Repentance

Subsequently, Ajātaśatru met with Jīvaka, an eminent physician, and explained the background of his illness. Although the six ministers advised King Ajātaśatru that he was blameless, Jīvaka’s counsel differed from the advice Ajātaśatru received from his six ministers. Jīvaka praised the King for his confessing his misdeeds and crime by saying, “Oh excellent, excellent! Though the king committed a crime, profound remorse has been stirred in his heart and he is filled shame and self-reproach. To be without shame and self-reproach is not to be human; it is to be a beast.”<sup>9</sup> By affirming Ajātaśatru’s admission of his

mistakes, Jīvaka in essence introduced the king to the Buddha’s teaching. Repenting self-centered crime is to be human. “Though the King has committed a crime, profound remorse has been stirred in his heart and he is filled with shame and self-reproach.” The significance of “shame and self-reproach” is critical in understanding Shinran’s notion of *akunin shōki*. The quickening of “shame” leads to a cessation of committing further evil deeds and to humility. The awakening of “self-reproach” results in not leading others to commit evil, expressing one’s abasement outwardly, and the feeling of humility before heaven.

Those who commit crimes are not able to reform if they fail to acknowledge the reality of their crimes or if they rationalize their innocence. Self-delusion only increases suffering and self-torment. The path toward spiritual transformation begins by facing the reality of their crimes, reflecting on their past conduct, and sincerely confessing their faults.

#### (4) Voice from Heaven

When Ajātaśatru heard his father, King Bimbisāra, speaking from heaven, he fainted and his physical condition worsened considerably.

“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.<sup>10</sup>

It is noteworthy that Ajātaśatru’s sores suddenly increased twofold. The first time was when Ajātaśatru’s mother, Vaidehī, was caring for

Ajātaśatru. Ajātaśatru realized the significance of having caused his father's death in jail. Because he killed his father, a fever of remorse arose in his heart. Because of this fever of remorse in his heart, sores began to cover his entire body. As soon as Ajātaśatru's mother, Queen Vaidehī, was liberated from prison, she applied a variety of medicines.<sup>11</sup> She took care of Ajātaśatru without judgment. Then, his sores only spread, showed more clearly, and increased in stench. The second time was when Ajātaśatru heard his father's voice from heaven; Ajātaśatru's sores and stench again increased dramatically.<sup>12</sup>

Why did Ajātaśatru's sores suddenly increase twofold? Ajātaśatru's fever, sores, and stench represent his remorse and his repentance of his evil deeds toward his father and mother. Ajātaśatru clung to his belief that his father and mother hated him. However, after badly mistreating his parents, he came to appreciate their kindness and compassion. His sores and stench grew worse in proportion to his deeply realizing his offences.

#### (5) The Buddha's Meeting with Ajātaśatru

Encouraged by the physician Jīvaka, Ajātaśatru met with the Buddha, who, seeing his suffering, said, "Good son! I say, For the sake of Ajātaśatru, I will not enter Nirvana.... 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."<sup>13</sup> The utterance "For the sake of Ajātaśatru, I will not enter Nirvana" is especially significant for Shinran, who believes that Buddha's compassion pours out to the people who are afflicted with very deep anguish. Concerned for those persons who have committed the most hideous deeds, the Buddha says, "I will be with you until you are saved." Ajātaśatru came to truly realize his own evilness through his encounter with the compassionate mind of the Buddha. Most human beings cannot avoid committing evil deeds, but the Buddha guides all suffering beings toward enlightenment. It is noteworthy that the Buddha refers to Ajātaśatru as "good son"; it is another indication of the Buddha's great concern for suffering beings.

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

Completing his interview with Ajātaśatru the Buddha entered the moon-radiant love *samādhi* and radiated a brilliant light that instantly healed the stricken Ajātaśatru. Ajātaśatru asked Jīvaka,

“Does the Tathagata, the World-honored one, think to cast his eye on me?”

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.”<sup>14</sup>

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

(7) Meaning of the *Samādhi* of Moon-Radiant Love

The *samādhi* of moon-radiant love brings joy to all:

Jīvaka answered, “The light of the moon brings joy to the hearts of all travelers on the road. Such is the *samādhi* of moon-radiant love, which brings joy to the hearts of those in practice on the path of nirvana. This is why it is called ‘the *samādhi* 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.”<sup>15</sup>

The radiance of the Buddha's moon-radiant love *samādhi* is not a supernatural cure. The Buddha's *samādhi* of moon radiant love conveys two meanings. First, just as the light of the moon shines gently without overwhelming the darkness, the Buddha's non-judgmental and unconditional compassion can embrace the evil person. For an evil-filled suffering person, it is very reassuring to have someone be with them silently. Buddha's *samādhi* of moon-radiant love demonstrates the power of compassionate presence. Those who experience unspeakable suffering need a good listener who can enable self-reflection. Second, the Buddha's *samādhi* of moon-radiant love signifies the necessity of quiet reflection free from secular distractions. A suffering person seeks without the need for explanation, because one cannot express one's deep sorrow in words. Zen meditation and reciting the *nenbutsu* are methods through which one can realize one's true self. In other

words, embraced by Amida Buddha's infinite light of compassion, one comes to know one's foolishness.

#### (8) Teaching of the Buddha:

##### Encountering with a True Teacher and Mentor

After emerging from the of moon-radiant love *samādhi*, 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 Avīci hell. Hence, with the day [of the death] approaching, there is nothing more important than a true teacher."<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to accept responsibility for one's evil deeds; one is prone to rationalize one's actions. As the narrative reveals, it becomes possible for one to accept one's evilness when one encounters a being who can wholly accept a person who is aware of one's own evil. The narrative of Ajātaśatru describes an encounter between an evil person and a true teacher and mentor that brought spiritual relief. Ajātaśatru's intimate encounter with Jīvaka and the Buddha gave him the opportunity for self-reflection. The encounter that helped Ajātaśatru develop a mutual relationship is also true for others.

#### (9) Ajātaśatru's Anxiety

Ajātaśatru anxiously begged Jīvaka with the following request: "Come with me, O Jīvaka! I want to ride on the same elephant with you. Even though I should with certainty plunge into Avīci 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..."<sup>17</sup> Though the Buddha's moon-radiant love *samādhi* healed Ajātaśatru's mental and physical afflictions, Ajātaśatru was still burdened with the grave offences he committed; he was still afraid of falling into hell. Depressed by terrible guilt, he was fearful of the retribution for the offences that he committed.

#### (10) The Buddha's Teaching to Ajātaśatru

*Causes and conditions of an evil deed.* The Buddha's instruction 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 thor-



oughly unpacked. But one thing is clear. Śākyamuni Buddha reveals a path for resolving the problem of evil from the perspective of enlightenment. The Buddha explains to Ajātaśatru the causes and conditions of his evil deeds that can be understood, not only from Ajātaśatru's perspective, but also from many differing 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?”<sup>18</sup>

The Buddha's statement, “if you have committed evil, all Buddhas, world-honored ones, must have done so also,” are words of compassion toward Ajātaśatru. Here, the Buddha announces that his offense is not his 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 method 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 and sympathizes with others. No matter how grave a person's offense may be, when the person feels a loving mind that tries to get beyond the transgression, a pure good mind can arise even from the mind that willed the grave offense. It is important that someone be present with the person who commits an offense and share their suffering until the end. The Buddha is not a co-conspirator with the murderer. However, a murder is not resolved by simply putting all the 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 understands that Ajātaśatru fully realizes the seriousness of his crime of murder and that he is gripped by the fear of falling into hell alone. Therefore, the Buddha teaches that his crime occurred when various causes and conditions came together. He sees that, because of the crime, Ajātaśatru feels extremely shameful and cannot see

his future at all. The Buddha understands that an evil person cannot bear to live with the burden of the crime they have committed by simply reproaching them and tormenting them by foretelling their retributions. The Buddha instead thinks together with Ajātaśatru about how he can go on with his life.

*Giving widened perspectives of dependent co-arising.* The important issue is that the Buddha does not see evil as permanently fixed. All events are after all subject to change and are empty of permanent reality. The Buddha's perception that the karmic retribution created by a crime is not permanently fixed provides Ajātaśatru with a totally new perspective on his future.

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 a 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. Shinran interpreted the essence of evil as "unformed evil."

Karmic evil is from the beginning without real form;  
It is the result of delusional thought and invertedness.  
Mind-nature is from the beginning pure,  
But as for this world, there is no person of truth.<sup>19</sup>

Shinran states that, by its nature, evil does not have a firm substantial form. It arises when one makes a judgment through eccentric and delusional views and adheres to a completely inverted interpretation of truth. Thus, he says that there is no "person of truth," even though one is pure by nature. Shinran's interpretation of evil, that it has no form in itself, but arises from delusion and distortion, has much in common with the contents of the Buddha's sermon described in the *Nirvana Sutra*.

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 remorse for the crime.

Reflecting on ourselves, we need to remember that our own self-righteousness and authoritarianism are often created out of our own attitude that we are good. On the other hand, if we dwell too much on the evil aspects of our nature, we tend to deprecate ourselves 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 our evil minds.

#### (11) Conversion of Ajātaśatru

The Buddha's compassionate words enabled *shinjin* (信心) to arise within Ajātaśatru, who responded with deep gratitude. 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.”<sup>20</sup>

“Eranda” signifies self-awareness of Ajātaśatru's crime. “Candana” signifies *shinjin* filled with Buddha's infinite compassion. 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.

*True repentance.* Quickening awareness of shame and self-reproach equals to a process of understanding oneself and to live one's life seriously. One has to be aware of evil as evil. In other words, having awareness of shame and self-reproach is neither a rite of passage for salvation nor an expiation of evil. It remains throughout one's life and will be gradually deepened. It is clear in the following confession that *shinjin* with no root arose in Ajātaśatru's heart. He said, “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.”<sup>21</sup> *Shinjin* with no root arisen in Ajātaśatru's heart led him to humbly repent before the Buddha. Consequently,

Ajātaśatru's awareness of shame and self-reproach began immediately after the death of his father and he is entirely filled with Buddha's primal vow. Even after *shinjin* with no root arose in Ajātaśatru's heart, the awareness consistently continued and gradually deepened. Regarding shame and self-reproach Shinran explained that,

Although I am without shame and self-reproach  
And lack a mind of truth and sincerity,  
Because the Name is directed by Amida,  
Its virtues fill the ten quarters.<sup>22</sup>

Shinran confessed that what he should have shame and self-reproach for was nothing but himself, as he could not have even the awareness of shame and self-reproach.<sup>23</sup> However, at the same time, he described that even though he was not capable of having the awareness, he was entirely filled with the virtue of Amida's primal vow. True shame and self-reproach are not those that one can be aware of by will or efforts. They can be eventually conceived by one, once the deceitful self is enlightened by Amida's primal vow to save all sentient beings by the other-power.<sup>24</sup>

#### ASPIRATION AND REPENTANCE OF AJĀTAŚATRU

Now, let us consider the most important statement by Ajātaśatru, which articulates his psychological change when *shinjin* with no root arose in his heart. His *shinjin* was expressed as an aspiration: "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."<sup>25</sup> Although Ajātaśatru deeply repented his evil acts and greatly feared going to hell, he declared his aspiration to assist evil sentient beings' who were suffering, even if he would eventually go to hell. His holding on to evil and fear of hell were transformed into love towards others, for which he did not hesitate to go to hell. His aspiration arose by going through deep sorrow and remained with a deep repentance, which was expressed in his poem dedicated to the Buddha.

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 Buddha  
 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.<sup>26</sup>

Ajātaśatru's straightforward repentance and aspiration arose from the bottom of his heart. He swore not to commit any more evil deeds and aspired to free all sentient beings from the sufferings of their evil passions. Ajātaśatru, who committed a grave offense, encounters the Buddha's embracing compassion. At that moment, a deep gratitude arose and he discovers a new direction for his life, a life of faith (*shinjin*). Ajātaśatru's old self dies and a new self is born. He breaks out of his solitary shell of ego-attachment and is born as a son of the Tathāgata. This is *shinjin*.

In the *Nirvana Sutra*, the Buddha's concern for Ajātaśatru does not simply arise from a sense of duty or responsibility, but from joy and hope. Śākyamuni Buddha believes that there is a future even for a person who commits the gravest offenses. If the entirety of our lives were predetermined, we would have no control over our actions, both good and evil. Happiness and unhappiness would be determined, a matter of fate. If the future is determined by the past, there would be no point to hope, no need to make efforts to repent transgressions or to be kind for the sake of others. Philosophies that negate *pratīyasamutpāda* (dependent co-origination), such as determinism, do not provide any motivation for hope in the future.

The Buddha's teaching of *pratīyasamutpāda* informs Ajātaśatru that everything and all events arise due to various causes and conditions, are dependent on each other, and are continuously changing. To live in accordance with the teaching of *pratīyasamutpāda* is to respect the freedom of each human being. To understand that everything is interconnected means that "I am not alone; I live in the love and vows of others." When we experience such compassion, we can transform our suffering into energy and hope for the future. The possibility of spiritual transformation negates the determinism of karmic deeds. No matter how grave one's karmic evil may be, when one realizes the depths of his or her misery, one can transform this misery into a truly nurturing and pure compassion. Faith and hope can provide people

with the power to live. On the relationship between evil and enlightenment Shinran writes,

Through the benefit of the unhindered light,  
We realize shinjin of vast, majestic virtues,  
And the ice of our blind passions necessarily melts,  
Immediately becoming water of enlightenment.

Obstructions of karmic evil turn into virtues;  
It is like the relation of ice and water:  
The more the ice, the more the water;  
The more the obstructions, the more the virtues.<sup>27</sup>

This passage explains Shinran's understanding of the relationship between good and evil, and the warmth of Amida's vow. Although the appearance of ice and water are different, their nature is identical. "Evil passions are themselves enlightenment." Evil passions are attachments that harden the human mind. However, like ice that can melt into water, wrong thoughts can be transformed into the water of enlightenment through the warmth of Amida's light and vows. Amida Buddha's primal vow becomes one with one's lost self and converts evil into the goodness of enlightenment. By recognizing each other's evil we can together transcend the evil and build a peaceful future.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF ADVERSE CONDITIONS

Adverse conditions can be catalyst for enlightenment and appreciation of Amida Buddha's benevolence. Ajātaśatru, Bimbisāra, Vaidehī, and Jīvaka, the principal personalities involved in the tragedy at Rājagṛha, are "the incarnations of benevolence"; they are the incarnations of bodhisattvas who appeared respectively as a prince, king, queen, and doctor.<sup>28</sup> For Shinran, the tragedy at Rājagṛha is a narrative to make one aware of infinite benevolence and tolerance of Amida Buddha. Just as flowers blooming at the edge of a garbage dump seem especially beautiful, suffering and sorrow offer an opportunity to find true tenderness and benevolence.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF DEEP LISTENING AND HEARING

"Deep listening and hearing" has something in common with the *samādhi* of moon-radiant love practiced by the Buddha and the feeling of compassion arising from an awareness of dependent origination. "Listening," interpreted by Shinran as "guided to listen," means that

one with evil passions is wholly accepted, embraced, and guided by Amida to listen to the voice of truth. On the other hand, “hearing” is “awakening” to Amida’s primal vow as the highest expression of compassion in relation to the deep crisis of one’s existential plight.<sup>29</sup> “Hearing” is the experience of *shinjin*. In other words, “hearing” refers to the internal experience of feeling that Amida has reached out to one while one is in calm contemplation, when one is most aware of a sense of longing for help, in the midst of agony. It is through this “deep listening and hearing” that in agony one comes to recognize one’s bare self and realize dependent origination with all beings, in the light of the Buddha’s teachings. Ultimately, one’s lost self is converted into a more flexible personality, set free from various attachments.

In psychotherapy as well, “deep listening and hearing” is the basic attitude for the therapist (one who listens) to take toward the client (one who is heard). The therapist, sitting by the client, hears without a word the client’s talk of his/her sufferings in order to offer an unbiased analysis/finding. Through a continuous human relationship, mutual understanding is established between the therapist’s self and the self of the client. “Hearing” has the significant potential of bringing an unexpected, creative change to the self of the client.

“Deep listening and hearing” is a manifestation of affection done by someone who stays close but does not judge. It aims to ease the situation in which one is shackled by some kind of concept of one’s own, and to encourage one to lead a more flexible life in the midst of sufferings of day-to-day life.

#### CONCLUSION

In closing, I would like to reflect on the true intention of Shinran’s understanding of the meaning of the emancipation of King Ajātaśatru. How did Ajātaśatru come to realize his own evil? What kind of ethical attitudes did Ajātaśatru cultivate through becoming aware of his evilness? The process of the salvation of King Ajātaśatru has three spiritual bonds filled with compassion that made Ajātaśatru come to realize how foolish he had been.

First, after the death of his father, Ajātaśatru became aware that his father and mother loved him deeply. As a result, Ajātaśatru keenly felt how terrible his behavior had been. Second, Jīvaka counseled Ajātaśatru, instructing him that living while feeling one’s evilness is living as a human being. Thanks to this, Ajātaśatru was able to face



honestly the offenses he had committed. Third, the Buddha trusted Ajātaśatru with complete confidence for his future, which in turn gave Ajātaśatru the motivation to transform himself into a being who could respond to the suffering of others and treat all living beings compassionately. The Buddha's moon-radiant love *samādhi* made Ajātaśatru realize that he was in the darkness of ignorance. Thus Shinran reasoned that by realizing that human beings live in *shinjin*, as vowed by the Buddha, our world expands beyond our ego-centric self. Encountering the Buddha's compassion or the Buddha's other-power frees us from the bondage of ego-attachments and enables us to accept our own real self, to continue living into our own future.

Ajātaśatru, knowing that he was embraced by the Buddha's vow just as he was, possessed of the evil deeds he had already committed, realized a great peace of mind. Encouraged by the Buddha's vow that would never abandon him, he came face to face with his own evil offenses and realized his ignorance. Because he realized his own ignorance, he became all the more sincere to make efforts to live his life honestly, wishing for the happiness of himself and others. *Shinjin* is one's love for all beings, which arises in the awakening of one's own ignorance. Ajātaśatru, who received the love and kindness of his father and mother, Jīvaka, and the Buddha, in turn extended his love and kindness to all beings. Although it took a long time, the Buddha's compassionate vow gradually penetrated Ajātaśatru's evil mind. Finally, his defiled mind was transformed into the mind of sincere repentance with aspiration for the happiness of all beings.

Shinran's teaching of the emancipation of evil beings (*akunin shōki*) developed out of the non-discriminating egalitarian thought fundamental to Buddhist teaching. *Akunin shōki* is the crystallization of profound self-reflection on human evil and loving compassion. Illuminated by 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 our attachment to the mind of calculation on good and evil, we become aware that all human beings are interconnected with each other.

Spiritual maturity in Buddhism can be measured by the capacity to acknowledge one's dependency on others. By accepting the loving kindness of others, a feeling of gratitude arises in our hearts. And that



feeling of gratitude is then transformed into our compassionate mind directed to all living beings.

All beings are interdependent. Violence arises from a sense of vanity. When one is conscious of being dependent upon others and Amida Buddha, one can reflect on oneself and go forward. Salvation is not a miracle that suddenly happens. Salvation from deep repentance of evil takes a long while. Enlightened by the benevolence of Amida, who stays with one in silence, and awakened by Amida's primal vow, one can be aware of one's evil and will be able to take the path to remaking one's life.

## NOTES

1. In Shinran's words, "Where the mind of self-power is made to disappear... the realization of true entrusting that is Other Power (*tariki no shinjin*) comes out." Shinran further states, "Other Power means to be free from any form of calculation or attachment." The realization of other-power is awakening to the reality of interrelationship to all beings and identifying the self with others. Shinran, *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 2 vols. (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), 2:198.
2. *Tannishō*, chap. 3, in *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:663. *Kyōgyōshinshō*, in *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:95. "Hymns of the Dharma-Ages," in *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:421.
3. 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) and "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" (*Sutta-nipāta*, trans. Hammalava Saddhatissa [London: Curzon Press, 1985], 60). Enlightenment, which transcends both good and evil, is becoming liberated from worldly judgments and self-centered calculations.
4. *Mattōshō* 20, in *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:553–554.
5. "The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization," in *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:125.
6. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:125.
7. *Ibid.*, 1:142.
8. *Ibid.*, 1:126–130.
9. *Ibid.*, 1:131.
10. *Ibid.*, 1:132.
11. "Then the queen-mother Vaidehī applied a variety of medicines, but the sore only spread and showed no sign of alleviation. The King said to his mother, 'These sores have been produced by the heart.'" *Ibid.*, 1:126.
12. *Ibid.*, 1:132.
13. *Ibid.*, 1:132.
14. *Ibid.*, 1:133.
15. *Ibid.*, 1:134.
16. *Ibid.*, 1:134.
17. *Ibid.*, 1:134.

18. Ibid., 1:135.
19. “Hymns of the Dharma-Ages,” no. 107, in *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:423.
20. “The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization,” in *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:137–138.
21. Ibid., 1:139–140.
22. “Hymns of the Dharma-Ages,” no. 97, in *Collected Works of Shinran*, 2:421.
23. Sokusui Murakami writes, “Shinran’s words about evil and foolish beings are based on his real, deep repentance. When Shinran found himself aspiring for salvation by the benevolence of Amida, he at the same time found with regret that he was so far from it. The saint could not claim himself to be a good person, because, in his belief, he was rather nothing but a ‘being with deep evil and numerous defilements.’ This finding was indeed a matter for real shame and self-reproach. To be precise, however, Shinran found himself as a being who could not have even a sense of shame and self-reproach. He, therefore, called himself ‘A shameless being without a sense of self-reproach.’” Sokusui Murakami, *Shinran kyōgi no gokai to rikai* (Misinterpretation and Understanding of Shinran’s Doctrine) (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1984), 58.
24. Chang Wai 張偉 writes, “Ajātaśatru’s tears of shame, self-reproach, joy, and sorrow” is mundane in comparison to the true shame and self-reproach in Buddhism.

The shame and self-reproach from the perspective of Buddhism differ from those in mundane meaning. Shame and self-reproach in the mundane meaning are intentional work exposed to other’s eyes. One cannot be free from mingling of the elements of deceit, deceptions, or utilitarian schemes [in] how one tries to work with sincerity. Although shame and self-reproach in the mundane meaning could occasionally become the catalyst for [a] shift to a higher level of shame and self-reproach, if one stays with it one would not be able to reach the level of salvation by Buddhism. Shame and self-reproach of the level of Ajātaśatru could not be realized by intention. Now I understand afresh Shinran’s feeling expressed in his words “Unrepentant and unashamed.” Conceivably, the words “Unrepentant and unashamed” have the implication that shame and self-reproach would not be realized in the true sense of the word as long as one has such an awareness as “I will do, won’t do, can do, or can’t do” and as long as one does not abandon one’s own willful attempt. Ajātaśatru’s feeling of shame and self-reproach was triggered by his awareness of evil, and it is the power of Tathāgata that turns the awareness into an opportunity for salvation. The awareness of real shame and self-

reproach so realized is not the product of human will, but it would be brought about by the benevolence arisen of Amida's primal vow.

Chang Wai 張偉, "Ajase no zangi to hiki no namida (Ajātaśatru's Tears of Shame, Self-Reproach, Joy, and Sorrow)," *Jisho Dojin* 19 (November–December 2003): 12.

25. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:138.

26. *Ibid.*, 1:139–140.

27. "Hymns of the Pure Land Masters," nos. 39–40, in *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:371.

28. Shinran regarded the persons in the lore surrounding Ajātaśatru as bodhisattvas who lead foolish beings to spiritual ease. "When conditions were mature for the teaching of birth in the Pure Land, Devadatta provoked Ajātaśatru to commit grave crimes, and out of pity for beings of this defiled world, Śākyamuni led Vaidehī to select the land of peace. As we turn this over in our minds and quietly reflect, we realize that Devadatta and Ajātaśatru bestowed their generous care on us, and that Amida and Śākyamuni thus manifested their profound intention to save all beings." *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:302.

29. *Ibid.*, 2:189.