

from SHINRAN: AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS THOUGHT

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LETTERS AND COMMENTARIES

1 PRIMAL VOW

THE Primal Vow is the deep aspiration, arising from true wisdom or reality, to lead all beings to enlightenment. Thus it also refers to Amida Buddha's forty-eight Vows, in which this aspiration is manifested, and to the Eighteenth Vow in particular, which forms their core. The Eighteenth Vow is the foundation of the Pure Land path. The following passage is Shinran's only detailed commentary on it. Source: *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, pp. 33-35.

THE EIGHTEENTH VOW:

If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma.

FROM SHINRAN'S COMMENTARY:

1 *With sincere mind entrusting themselves*

Sincere means true and real. "True and real" refers to Amida's Vow being true and real; this is the meaning of *sincere mind*.

2 From the very beginning sentient beings, who are filled with blind passions, lack a mind true and real, a heart of purity, for they are possessed of defilements, evil, and wrong views.

3 *Entrusting* is to be free of doubt, believing deeply and without any double-mindedness that Amida Buddha's Primal Vow is true and real.

4 This *entrusting with sincere mind*, then, is that arising from the Vow in which Amida urges every being throughout the ten quarters, "Entrust yourself to my Vow, which is true and real"; it does not arise from the hearts and minds of foolish beings of self-power.

5 *Aspiring to be born in my land*

"Out of the entrusting with sincere mind that is Other Power, aspire to be born in the Pure Land of happiness!"

6 *Saying my Name perhaps even ten times*

In encouraging us to say the Name that embodies the Vow, the Tathāgata added *perhaps even* to the words *ten times* to show that there is no set number of times the Name must be said and to teach sentient beings that there is no determined hour or occasion for saying it.

7 Since we have been given this Vow by Amida Tathāgata, we can take any occasion in daily life for saying the Name and need not wait to recite it at the very end of life; we should simply give ourselves up totally to the entrusting with sincere mind of

8 Amida. When we realize this true and real shinjin, we enter completely into the compassionate light that grasps, never to abandon, and hence become established in the stage of the truly settled. Thus it is written.

9 *[If such beings] should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment*

"If the person who has realized entrusting with sincere mind is not born in my Pure Land, may I not become a Buddha."

10 This, the essential purport of the Primal Vow, can be found fully explained in *Essentials of Faith Alone*. "Faith alone" is the heart that aspires solely to this true and real entrusting.

12 *Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma*

Excluded means that those who commit the five grave offenses are rejected and reveals how grave the evil of slandering the dharma is. By showing the gravity of these two kinds of wrongdoing, these words make us realize that all the sentient beings throughout the ten quarters, without a single exception, will be born in the Pure Land.

NOTES

EIGHTEENTH VOW

The different versions of the *Larger Sutra* (Sanskrit, Tibetan, and five extant Chinese translations) give widely varying enumerations of Amida's Vows, ranging from twenty-four to forty-nine vows. The version of forty-eight in the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life*, the source for the Eighteenth Vow here, has been canonical for most of the Chinese and Japanese tradition.

ten quarters. The entire universe lying in the ten directions (eight points of the compass, zenith and nadir).

with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land. This phrase was traditionally understood to indicate three attitudes or states of mind—sincerity, trust, and aspiration—required of beings. These were termed the "three minds" or "threefold mind."

five grave offenses. Acts that condemn one to the deepest hell. The Mahāyāna tradition records them as: 1) destroying temples; 2) reviling the teaching; 3) harassing monks and nuns; 4) intentionally killing one's father, mother, or an arhat, physically injuring a Buddha, or disrupting the sangha; 5) refusing to recognize the law of causation and constantly committing the ten transgressions: destruction of life; theft;

adultery; lying; harsh words; speech leading to enmity; idle talk; greed; anger; wrong views (Shinjin, 123). Shinran interprets these offenses broadly: “People who look down on teachers and who speak ill of the masters commit slander of the dharma. Those who speak ill of their parents are guilty of the five grave offenses” (*Letters of Shinran*, pp. 58–59).

1

Sincere means true and real. Shinran follows Shan-tao in interpreting “sincere mind” to mean “true and real”; however, he takes “true and real” not in their ordinary sense of complete sincerity, but in their Buddhist meaning, referring to truth or reality: “The true and real is Tathāgata; Tathāgata is the true and real. . . . The true and real is Buddha-nature; Buddha-nature is the true and real” (*Nirvana Sutra*, in Shinjin, 26). Sincere mind, then, is the mind that is whole, pure, free of delusional thought and self-attachment—the enlightened mind of the Buddha.

Amida. As an expression of reverence, Shinran frequently uses one of the titles for a Buddha, “Tathāgata” (J. *nyorai*) rather than “Amida.” In the selections for this volume, we have often substituted “Amida” for clarity. It should be noted, however, that “Tathāgata,” meaning “come from thusness” or “gone to thusness,” carries for Shinran the sense that “Amida Tathāgata comes forth from suchness” (Realization, 1).

Amida’s Vow being true and real. That Amida’s Vow is “true and real” means that it arose from the mind of Tathāgata or true reality and was fulfilled through Dharmākara’s activity, carried on completely free of blind passions (Shinjin, 22).

2

Shinran draws a direct contrast between Buddha and sentient beings. It is often assumed that a relationship between Amida and beings stands upon some element or condition of commonality in beings, but in Shinran’s thought, there is a fundamental and complete opposition. Beings seek to bring themselves toward Buddhahood, but through their efforts they can only become increasingly aware of failure. At the same time, it is precisely where Buddha and beings stand in opposition that Amida’s directing of virtue, which grasps and takes into itself what is the opposite of itself, can be fulfilled.

blind passions. All the thoughts and feelings arising from attachment to self and binding us to samsaric existence. The original Sanskrit term *kleśa* means “defilements” of body and mind; the Chinese translation carries the meaning of pain or affliction (Passage 7, 11).

3

free of doubt. Not to cling to one’s own calculation and designs; to be free of the fragmented thoughts and distractions of anxious self-concern.

Primal Vow (hongan). The term “primal vow” (sometimes rendered “original vow”) refers to the vows that a Buddha made as a bodhisattva—vows which define the qualities that are manifested upon fulfillment of Buddhahood. The vows are “original”—causal and formative—in that they concretely delineate the goal of a bodhisattva’s practice and the way the Buddha’s enlightenment will function upon fulfillment. Thus, in the Pure Land tradition “Primal Vow” refers to the forty-eight Vows Amida made as Dharmākara Bodhisattva, and in particular to the central Eighteenth Vow.

Primal Vow is true and real. Here, sincere mind (“Vow being true and real”) is the object of entrusting, not a characteristic of the practitioner’s attitude.

4

In conclusion to his comments on “sincere mind” and “entrusting,” Shinran points out that since “entrusting” means to be free of doubt, which is a form of blind self-attachment, it is the Buddha’s mind embodied in the Vow and not the minds of beings. That is, it implies the turnabout in which a person becomes free of self-power, the mind of blind passions having been transformed into good (become one with the Buddha’s mind).

Entrusting with sincere mind (shishin shingyō). In 3, Shinran gives a general definition of entrusting and identifies sincere mind as its object. In 4, he explains the special meaning of these terms in the context of the Vow. Here, entrusting is itself said to be the sincere mind. These two aspects of the mind of the Vow—entrusting to the sincere mind and entrusting that is the sincere mind—express the nature of shinjin, which is given to beings by the Buddha and realized or attained by beings as the awakening to the Vow. This “entrusting with sincere mind,” then, is that to which people who enter the Pure Land path aspire (7 and 11).

“*Entrust yourself. . .*” To stress the centrality of the Buddha’s activity, Shinran frequently interprets sutra phrases not as prescriptions for practice to be performed by beings, but as Amida’s call or summoning of beings, awakening them to the Vow (that is, bringing them to realize shinjin). Amida’s sincere mind in the Vow calls to beings to entrust themselves to it, and it is entrusted to by the sincere mind that Amida directs to beings (shinjin in which Amida’s mind and the being’s mind have become one).

6

no set number. Shinran’s teacher Hōnen recited the nembutsu tens of thousands of times a day, as did Pure Land masters before him. Shinran stresses, however, that the number of times one says the nembutsu is not relevant to “being given the Vow” or realizing shinjin.

no determined hour or occasion. For example, at appointed hours of the day such as dawn or sunset, or at the time of death.

In this sentence, Shinran rejects two assumptions widely accepted in his day: that the more one said the nembutsu the better, and that the nembutsu uttered at the point of death held particular power in determining one’s future as the final act of one’s lifetime. It was thought that through the nembutsu uttered at the end of life, one could nullify all one’s karmic evil and ensure Amida’s aid in attaining birth. Shinran stresses that there is no need to await the moment of death for the settlement of birth, because one attains non-retrogression at the time one realizes shinjin; one should say the nembutsu and enter the ocean of the Vow in the present.

7

Shinran states that those who wish to enter the working of the Vow should “take any occasion” in daily life for saying the Name, and “give themselves up totally” (*fukaku tanomu*) to Amida’s “entrusting with sincere mind” (the mind of the Vow). Two central points should be noted here.

First, in clarifying the passage of the Vow teaching the saying of the Name, Shinran moves easily from nembutsu to shinjin; to say the nembutsu, we should aspire to realize shinjin, and when we have realized shinjin, the saying of the Name (great practice) is also realized. This is because genuine nembutsu—the nembutsu set forth in the Vow—arises spontaneously when beings have realized the true and real mind of the Vow as shinjin or true entrusting. “True entrusting” means that one

has become free of all designs and all attachment to one’s own will and actions; hence, the nembutsu is no longer an expression of one’s own effort. It has the same fundamental nature as the mind of the Vow; hence, “It is the treasure ocean of virtues that is suchness or true reality” (Practice, 1). Since it is the activity born from the mind in which the Buddha’s mind and our own mind have become one, our usual measures of the quality of practice—length of performance, manner, or occasion—are irrelevant.

Second, we are urged to “give ourselves up totally” to “entrusting with sincere mind.” Since such entrusting is free of doubt and double-mindedness (blind passions), it can arise only as the true and real mind of Amida given to beings and not from sentient beings themselves. Hence, beings must aspire for its realization; they cannot entrust themselves to the Vow through their own will or intellectual assent. By listening to the teaching and perhaps saying the nembutsu, and by seeking to live in accord with what is true and real in their daily lives, beings become increasingly aware of their own actual powerlessness to achieve enlightenment. In this way, they may reach a point at which the power of the Vow grasps them, so that their minds and Amida’s mind become one. This is the point of the realization of “entrusting with sincere mind,” or shinjin.

8

grasps, never to abandon (sesshu fusha). Phrase derived from the *Contemplation Sutra*, which states that “each ray of Amida’s light shines everywhere on the worlds of the ten quarters, grasping and never abandoning sentient beings of the nembutsu.” Shinran frequently adopts this phrase to express the Vow’s activity, for it connotes the complex relationship of simultaneous mutual opposition and identity between Amida Buddha and the person of evil who has realized shinjin. It also expresses the significance of realizing shinjin as attainment of non-retrogression.

truly settled (shōjōju). Those whose attainment of enlightenment is completely settled. In general Mahāyāna writings, this term refers to bodhisattvas who have attained the stage of non-retrogression. The Eleventh Vow states that beings in the Pure Land will “dwell among the settled and necessarily attain nirvana.” Prior to Shinran, this was interpreted to mean that they will reach the stage of the truly settled in the Pure Land after death, but Shinran states that this stage is attained at the point of realizing shinjin.

9

Although the Vows take the form “If, when I attain Buddhahood. . .,” for Shinran they express not tentativeness, but rather the intricate and necessary bond between the Buddha’s enlightenment and the liberation of beings.

10

Essentials of Faith Alone (Yuishinshō). Tract by Seikaku (1167–1235), Shinran’s contemporary and fellow disciple of Hōnen. Translated in *Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone,’* pp. 55–76.

11

Shinran explains the central term in Seikaku’s title. Although we have employed the translation “faith” to distinguish Seikaku’s usage from Shinran’s concept of shinjin, the original term (*shin*) is the same, and Shinran interprets it as “true and real entrusting,” the mind that is true and real. “Alone” implies “aspiring solely” to this entrusting; thus, as in 7, the true mind of shinjin is the object of aspiration. Elsewhere, Shinran gives a similar explanation of Seikaku’s term: “*Faith alone* means that nothing is placed equal with this shinjin of Other Power” (*Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone,’* p. 29).

12

Among the forty-eight Vows, only the Eighteenth includes a clause excluding certain beings from its working—in this case, those who commit the five grave offenses or who slander the dharma. That the Vow that provides a way for “the sentient beings of the ten quarters” to attain Buddhahood should have such a clause has seemed self-contradictory to some Pure Land masters, but the fact that the exclusion is reiterated in the passage on the fulfillment of the Vow indicates its importance. Concerning Shinran’s understanding, see Comment.

COMMENT

Shinran’s interpretation of the Eighteenth Vow differs from that of the preceding tradition. This may be seen by comparing it with a paraphrase by Shan-tao:

Bhikṣu Dharmākara, before Lokēśvararāja Buddha, established forty-eight vows, stating in each one: If, when I attain Bud-

dhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters say my Name aspiring to be born in my land, even but ten times, and do not attain birth, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. (from *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*, quoted in True Buddha and Land, 30).

Two crucial points of similarity may be seen here. First, the Eighteenth Vow is recognized as the core of the entire set of forty-eight vows. Second, the term *nen*—which may be interpreted to mean “mindfulness” or “thinking on” the Buddha—is interpreted to mean utterance.

Shan-tao’s interpretation, however—while focusing on saying the nembutsu—differs in omitting two phrases, “with sincere mind entrusting themselves” and the final sentence on the exclusion of people who commit the grave offenses and slander the dharma. For Shan-tao, the crucial center of Amida’s Vow is his promise to save those who say his Name. Faith in the Vow is of course necessary, but awakening sincere belief and avoiding the grave offenses are the practitioner’s problems; they do not involve the Buddha’s activity.

For Shinran, however, these two phrases are the defining passages of the Vow.

Concerning the first: Shinran takes up the “three minds” presented in the Vow in order; they are not treated simply as a list, however. Sincere mind forms their essence, with entrusting arising from it (4), and aspiration arises from “entrusting with sincere mind” (5). By unfolding the three minds in this way, and by defining sincere mind as the Buddha’s mind, Shinran indicates that they are not generated from the ignorant minds of beings.

At the same time, if shinjin (the threefold mind) is not an attitude that beings assume, neither is it a vague sense that we are already saved as we are. We must aspire to realize shinjin—“aspire solely to this true and real entrusting” (11)—and when we entrust ourselves to the Vow that is true and real (Amida’s sincere mind), that trust is further “entrusting *with* sincere mind.” As the mind of beings that has become one with the mind of the Buddha, it has the subjective content of entrusting to the Vow and realizing one’s own nature as blind passions.

In the same way that Shinran divests the threefold mind of attitudes assumed by the practitioner and shows it to be the activity of the Buddha’s mind, he also strips the saying of the Name of all sense of practice performed in order to attain birth through the Vow. He takes note of the expression “perhaps even” ten times, which he explains as meaning that there is no set number of times the Name must be said and no

special or particularly appropriate time for saying it. For Shinran, since the nembutsu is great practice directed to beings by Amida through Other Power, whether one says it many times or only a few, its essential nature remains unchanged. However much merit a person may seek to accumulate, such effort is all empty and temporary, and cannot function as a cause of birth.

Thus, instead of seeking to say the Name as a means of gaining merit, “we should simply give ourselves up totally to the entrusting with sincere mind of Amida” (11), for it is shinjin—the mind of the Buddha realized in beings—that is the source of genuine utterance. Thus, nembutsu and shinjin are not conditions to be fulfilled, but natural manifestations of having realized the Buddha’s mind, or of having been given the Vow.

Exclusion clause

Both T’an-luan and Shan-tao discuss the clause, partly to resolve inconsistencies with a similar provision stated in the *Contemplation Sutra* (Shinjin, 120, 121). Shan-tao also states, however, that its purpose is not to exclude certain beings. Rather:

The Tathāgata, fearing that we would commit these two kinds of faults, seeks to stop us through compassionate means by declaring that we will then not be able to attain birth. This does not mean that we will not be grasped. (Shinjin, 121)

Shinran follows Shan-tao in finding that the clause is intended to make us realize the gravity of the offenses. He goes further, however, in stating that it is through this clause that we realize that no beings are excluded. This is because, for Shinran, it is precisely the person who commits grave offenses and slanders the dharma—who lacks any capacity for good—who is the object of the Vow. Precisely through becoming aware of the nature of one’s own existence as characterized by the grave offenses and releasing one’s attachments to one’s own powers to do good, one comes to be grasped by the Vow. Thus, the Buddha, out of compassion, seeks to awaken beings to their own existence with the exclusion clause. This does not mean, of course, that beings are encouraged to continue in their evil acts; to the contrary, their self-reflection naturally leads to an abhorrence of their own misdeeds (see Passage 14). But with this interpretation of the exclusion clause as in fact all-embracing, Shinran presents a consistent understanding of the entire Vow as the Buddha’s call to beings.

2 REALIZATION OF SHINJIN

THE *Larger Sutra* relates how the bodhisattva Dharmākara made his Vows and ultimately fulfilled them to become Amida Buddha. Then, in passages that correspond closely in content to some of the major Vows, the sutra describes the conditions resulting from their fulfillment. Shinran bases his understanding of the Eighteenth Vow on the passage teaching its fulfillment, discovering in it such crucial concepts as Amida’s directing of virtue (*ekō*) and the “immediate attainment of birth.” Source: *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*, pp. 32–33.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE VOW:

All sentient beings, as they hear the Name, realize even one thought-moment of shinjin and joy, which is directed to them from Amida’s sincere mind, and aspiring to be born in that land, they then attain birth and dwell in the stage of non-retrogression.

SHINRAN’S COMMENTARY:

1 *All sentient beings*

All the sentient beings throughout the ten quarters.

2 *As they hear the Name*

3 To hear the Name that embodies the Primal Vow. *Hear*
4 means to hear the Primal Vow and be free of doubt. Further, it indicates shinjin.

5 *Realize even one thought-moment of shinjin and joy*

Shinjin is hearing Amida’s Vow and being free of doubt.

- 6 *Joy (kangi)* means to be gladdened in body (*kan*) and gladdened in heart (*gi*). It means to rejoice beforehand at being assured of attaining what one shall attain.
- 7 *Even* includes all possibilities, both many and few, a long time and a short time, first and later.
- 8 *One thought-moment* is time at its ultimate limit, where the realization of shinjin takes place.
- 9 *Which is directed to them from Amida's sincere mind*
Sincere mind: that which is true, real, and sincere, the heart of Amida Tathāgata.
- 10 *Directed to them*: Amida's giving the Name that embodies his Primal Vow to sentient beings throughout the ten quarters.
- 11 *And aspiring to be born in that land*
Aspiring to be born means that every sentient being should desire to be born in the land fulfilled through the Primal Vow.
- 12 *That land* is the land of happiness.
- 13 *They then attain birth*
Then (soku) means immediately, without any time elapsing, without a day passing.
- 14 *Soku* also means to ascend to and become established in a certain rank.
- 15 *Attain* means to have attained what one shall attain.
- 16 When one realizes true and real shinjin, one is immediately grasped and held within the heart of the Buddha of unhindered
- 17 light, never to be abandoned. "To grasp" (*sesshu*) means to
- 18 take in (*setsu*) and to receive and hold (*shu*). When we are grasped by Amida, immediately—without a moment or a day elapsing—we ascend to and become established in the stage of the truly settled; this is the meaning of *attain birth*.

NOTES

SUTRA PASSAGE

The translation follows Shinran's distinctive interpretation as indicated in his commentaries and by the notations he adds for reading the Chinese original in Japanese. The passage as understood in the preceding tradition reads:

When sentient beings hear the Name, say it even once in trust and joy, sincerely turn over their merits [towards attainment of birth], and aspire to be born in that land, then they shall attain birth and dwell in the stage of non-retrogression.

There are three chief points of difference: saying the nembutsu once versus realizing shinjin in Shinran's understanding (8) (this includes the aspect of the nature or significance of the nembutsu versus the moment of realizing shinjin); directing one's own merits versus Amida directing his virtues to beings (9–10); and attaining birth at the end of life versus attaining birth immediately (13).

1

In his interpretation, Shinran echoes the text of the Eighteenth Vow ("sentient beings of the ten quarters"). In notes to a hymn based on this passage, he also interprets *shou* ("all") to refer to the twenty-five forms of existence, that is, all forms of samsaric life (*Teihon Shinran Shōnin zenshū*, Kyoto, 1969, volume II, p.19).

2

the Name that embodies the Primal Vow. In the *Larger Sutra*, the immediately preceding passage states:

All the Buddha-tathāgatas throughout the ten quarters, countless as the sands of the Ganges, are one in praising as surpassing conceivability the majestic power and the virtue of the Buddha of immeasurable life.

This is the passage teaching the fulfillment of the Seventeenth Vow that all Buddhas say Amida's Name in praise. For sentient beings to hear the Name—or the praise of the Buddhas and others who have come to know the significance of the Primal Vow, which resounds throughout

the universe—is for them to awaken to Amida’s working to grasp all beings. In the Seventeenth Vow, Amida sets forth the means by which we are made aware of his compassion.

3–4

Hear the Primal Vow. To hear Amida’s calling of beings and to become aware of the working of great compassion. *Teaching, Practice and Realization* states:

The word *hear* in the passage from the [*Larger*] *Sutra* means that sentient beings, having heard how the Buddha’s Vow arose—its origin and fulfillment—are altogether free of doubt. (Shinjin, 65)

For Shinran, “hear” suggests the receptivity and the unfolding of awareness that the practitioner experiences; hence, it indicates realization of shinjin (4). Though one must make efforts in listening to and understanding the teaching, and in bringing it into one’s life, finally to hear implies an awakening that arises from beyond one’s efforts, when those efforts have fallen away. It means that designs arising from self-attachment have reached an impasse, and doubts have finally been eradicated through gaining the Buddha’s wisdom.

Thus, Shinran also uses the term “encounter” (*au* or *mōau*) with the same sense (“hear of the Vow and encounter Namu-amida-butsu,” *Letters of Shinran*, p. 56). “Encounter” implies a meeting that has not been planned or intended, yet neither is it purely accidental. Encountering the teaching and realizing shinjin is not the result of our efforts, nor is it brought about wholly by the Buddha’s activity. Shinran states:

Hard to encounter, even in many lifetimes, is . . . Amida’s universal Vow! . . . If you should come to realize this practice and shinjin, rejoice at the conditions from the distant past that have brought it about. (Preface)

Both to hear and to encounter imply an experience, but one that does not come about through the calculation and efforts of beings.

The sutra passage implies that by hearing the Name, beings come to give rise to trust and aspiration, but Shinran states that to hear itself is the realization of shinjin or true entrusting. There is no stage of reflection or reasoning between hearing and shinjin, for shinjin is the Buddha’s mind, and not a result of a person’s decision or resolution. By giving the Name (or the Vow)—calling to beings and bringing them to hear—Amida gives his mind of wisdom-compassion to them.

6

Joy (kangi). Shinran splits the compound term into two elements, a method of explanation he frequently employs.

being assured of attaining what one shall attain. Through a precise use of auxiliary verbs, Shinran expresses the complex status of the person of shinjin. Birth into the Pure Land lies in the future (“one shall attain” it), yet it is completely settled in the present (one is “assured of attaining” it) because one’s mind and the Buddha’s mind have become one. Below, in a variation on this sentence, he also states that “attain” means “to *have attained* what one shall attain” (15), expressing with even greater force the condition of the person who is at once a “foolish being of blind passions” and also “the equal of the Tathāgatas.” This is explained below as “immediately attaining birth” (13–18).

7

Even. As in Passages 1 (sentence 6) and 10 (5), Shinran interprets this expression to mean that there is neither a required number nor a limit to utterances of the Name. Although in this passage alone Shinran interprets the term *nen* to mean “thought-moment” rather than “saying the Name,” his interpretation of “even” still refers to utterance, for this is the manifestation of shinjin.

The nature of the saying of the Name arising from shinjin may vary widely—in numbers of utterances, in periods of life over which they are said, and whether it is the first utterance with the realization of shinjin or occurs later—but all such possibilities are manifestations of the Vow.

8

One thought-moment (ichinen). Shinran’s teacher Hōnen and earlier masters understood the term *nen* here to mean nembutsu or utterance of the Name, as it does in Passages 1 and 10. Thus, they interpreted this phrase, “say the Name even once with trust and joy.” Shinran, however, understands this passage to express the realization of shinjin, which lies at the heart of the Eighteenth Vow. In his writings, there are two interpretations of *ichinen* in this passage; one is temporal (given here), and the other is qualitative.

Concerning the first, *time at its ultimate limit* may be interpreted in two ways: as one’s samsaric life of ignorance reaching its limit or end; and as the briefest instant of time, a moment so brief that it cannot be further divided. In either case, the expression implies that the realiza-

tion of shinjin, as the mind of the Buddha becoming one with a person's mind, is the entrance of that which is timeless into time. Shinran states:

Even one thought-moment refers to the ultimate brevity and expansion of the length of time in which one attains the mind and practice [shinjin and nembutsu] that result in birth in the Pure Land (*Passages on the Pure Land Way*, p. 34).

The realization of shinjin occurs in the shortest possible moment (ultimate brevity; also see Practice, 34), a point in and yet beyond the flow of time, and in its transcendence of samsaric time, it is also transtemporal, so that it pervades each successive moment of a person's life (this is the meaning of "expansion"). Thus Shinran states, "People of true shinjin constantly recall the Primal Vow without interruption" (*Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,'* p. 37).

The second interpretation of *ichinen*—related to the temporal sense but not directly expressed here—is singleness and purity of mind: "Because shinjin is free of double-mindedness, *one thought-moment* is used" (Shinjin, 65); "*One thought-moment* in the passage teaching the fulfillment of the Vow is wholehearted thought" (Shinjin, 66).

9

sincere mind (shishin). This is the same term that occurs in the Vow (Passage 1, 1), and Shinran gives a similar interpretation here, departing from his predecessors in understanding it to be Amida's mind, not that of beings.

10

Directed to them (ekō). In his understanding of this term, Shinran again differs from the entire Pure Land tradition, which took it to mean that sentient beings "sincerely direct their merit" toward birth in the Pure Land and toward other beings. Through his Japanese reading annotations (indicating an honorific sense), Shinran makes clear his understanding that the agent of the activity of "directing" is Amida. Instead of beings directing their merit in aspiration, they receive both the mind and practice that result in birth from Amida.

13

Then (soku). Prior to Shinran, this word in the present passage was viewed as a conjunction of negligible meaning: if beings said the Name in trust and joy, *then* they would attain birth at the end of life in this

world and reach the stage of non-retrogression in the Pure Land. *Soku*, however, also has the sense of "immediately" or "then and there," and Shinran takes it in this meaning: the person of shinjin *immediately* attains birth while carrying on life in the present existence. "Attain birth" in this sense means to reach the stage of non-retrogression (18). For Shinran, therefore, "birth" means both to attain non-retrogression in the present and to enter the Pure Land and realize enlightenment at death (cf. 12, 6), for both result from realization of shinjin.

14

ascend. Another meaning of *soku*; for a fuller explanation, see Passage 9, 5-6.

15

to have attained what one shall attain. One "has attained" birth (non-retrogression), assuring that one "shall attain" birth (reach the Pure Land and realize enlightenment).

16

Buddha of unhindered light (mugekō butsu). One of twelve epithets for Amida describing the nature of his light, given in the *Larger Sutra*. "Unhindered" is of particular significance for Shinran, for it means that Amida's light (wisdom), being unobstructed by the ignorance and karmic evil of beings because it holds the power to become one with it, acts to save all beings.

COMMENT

The chief figures in the Pure Land tradition from the sixth century on—Tao-ch'o, Shan-tao, Genshin and Hōnen—all interpreted the Eighteenth Vow on the basis of the *Contemplation Sutra*, particularly the passage describing the lowest grade of practitioner, who attains birth in the Pure Land after a life of evil by uttering the nembutsu ten times at death. Prior to Shinran, then, utterance of the Name tended to be viewed as the minimal act of practice a person needed to perform in order to conform with the Vow. It therefore remained the person's practice, and thus could not resolve uncertainty concerning its effectiveness.

Shinran developed a radically new interpretation of the Eighteenth Vow by rejecting the *Contemplation Sutra* as a provisional teaching

and basing his understanding on the present passage from the *Larger Sutra*. He discovered in this single sentence the explanation of how sentient beings are saved by the Vow (by realization of shinjin, which is directed to them through the Name) and the significance of genuine saying of the nembutsu as entrance into new life (immediately attain birth).

3 THE PURE LAND PATH

OUT of gratitude for the Pure Land path and for all the figures involved in communicating and transmitting it, Shinran composed a hymn in which he summarizes the teaching and the contributions of the foremost masters. He included the entire hymn of 120 lines in *Teaching, Practice and Realization*, but also selected the following passage, a concise statement of his thought, for inscription on his portrait. Since the hymn is in Chinese, he wrote a commentary in Japanese. Source: *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, pp. 69-73.

FROM SHINRAN'S HYMN OF TRUE SHINJIN:

The Name embodying the Primal Vow is the act of true settlement,
 The Vow of entrusting with sincere mind is the cause of birth;
 We realize the equal of enlightenment and supreme nirvana
 Through fulfillment of the Vow of necessarily attaining
 nirvana.

- 5 The Tathāgatas appear in this world
 Solely to teach the ocean-like Primal Vow of Amida;
 We, an ocean of beings in an evil age of five defilements,
 Should entrust ourselves to Śākyamuni's words of truth.

- 10 When the one thought-moment of joy arises,
 Nirvana is attained without severing blind passions;
 When ignorant and wise, even grave offenders and slanderers of
 the dharma, all alike turn and enter shinjin,
 They are like waters that, on entering the ocean, become one in
 taste with it.

The light of compassion that grasps us illumines and protects us
always,
The darkness of our ignorance is already broken through;
15 Still the clouds and mists of greed and desire, anger and hatred,
Cover as always the sky of true and real shinjin.

But though the light of the sun is veiled by clouds and mists,
Beneath the clouds and mists there is brightness, not dark.
When one realizes shinjin, seeing and revering and attaining
great joy,
20 One immediately transcends crosswise, cutting off the five evil
courses.

FROM SHINRAN'S COMMENTARY:

The Name embodying the Primal Vow is the act of true settlement

21 The practice that embodies the selected Primal Vow.

The Vow of entrusting with sincere mind is the cause of birth

22 [This] refers to true and real shinjin, which is given by Amida
Tathāgata. This shinjin is the very cause for attainment of
supreme enlightenment.

We realize the equal of enlightenment and supreme nirvana

23 *The equal of enlightenment* is the stage of the truly settled.
24 Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna speaks of this stage as “immediately
entering the stage of the definitely settled” and Master T’an-
luan as “entering the group of the truly settled.” It is equal to
the stage of Maitreya.

25 *And supreme nirvana:* Know that through the fulfillment of
the Vow of necessary attainment of nirvana, one is certain to
realize great nirvana.

The Tathāgatas appear in this world

Solely to teach the ocean-like Primal Vow of Amida

26 The fundamental intent of the Buddhas in appearing in this
world is solely to proclaim the teaching of the ocean of Amida’s
27 Vow, which is the One Vehicle. Thus the *Larger Sutra* states:

The Tathāgatas appear in the world seeking to save the
multitudes of living beings by blessing them with the
benefit that is true and real.

28 Know that Buddhas appear in this world because they desire to
save all sentient beings by teaching Amida’s Vow. . . .

When the one thought-moment of joy arises

29 *Arises* means to awaken, to unfold.

30 *The one thought-moment of joy:* Know that when true and
real shinjin that is one thought-moment of joy unfolds, you will
be born without fail in the land fulfilled by the Primal Vow.

31 *Joy:* the joy upon realizing shinjin. . . .

*When the ignorant and wise, even grave offenders and
slanderers of the dharma, all alike turn and enter shinjin*

32 This is a metaphor stating that when lesser sages, foolish be-
ings, those committing the five grave offenses, those reviling the
dharma, those keeping no precepts, those devoid of seeds for
Buddhahood—when any such people have experienced a turn-
about and entered the ocean of true and real shinjin, they are
like river waters becoming one in taste with the ocean upon
33 entering it. Thus: *They are like waters that, on entering the
ocean, become one in taste with it.*

*The light of compassion that grasps us illumines and protects us
always*

34 The compassionate light of the Buddha of unhindered light
always illumines and protects the person who has realized shin-
jin; hence the darkness of ignorance has already cleared, and the
long night of birth-and-death is already dispelled to dawn. Let

35 this be known. Thus: *The darkness of our ignorance is already broken through.* Know that when one realizes shinjin, it is as though dawn has broken. . . .

But though the light of the sun is veiled by clouds and mists, Beneath the clouds and mists there is brightness, not dark

36 Know that in the same way, although shinjin is overcast by the clouds and mists of greed, desire, anger and hatred, there is no obstruction to birth in the Pure Land.

When one realizes shinjin, seeing and revering and attaining great joy

37 [This] describes the person who has realized shinjin and is
38 filled with great joy and reverence. *Great joy* is experiencing immense joy upon attaining what one shall attain.

One immediately transcends crosswise, cutting off the five evil courses

39 *Immediately* means that the person who realizes shinjin becomes settled in the stage of the truly settled without any lapse of time or passage of days.

40 *Crosswise* means laterally or transcendently; it indicates the power of Amida's Vow. It refers to the working of Other Power.

41 *Transcends* means to go beyond. It means easily going crosswise beyond the vast ocean of birth-and-death and realizing the enlightenment of supreme nirvana.

42 Know that shinjin is the true intent of the Pure Land teaching. When one has understood this, then as our teacher Master Hōnen declared, "Other Power means that no selfworking is true working." "Selfworking" is the calculating heart and mind
44 of each practitioner. As long as one possesses a calculating mind,
45 then, one endeavors in self-power. You must understand fully
46 the working of self-power.

NOTES

HYMN

lines 1-4

The hymn is highly compressed, frequently employing expressions from Pure Land writings in Chinese. This stanza presents the major aspects of the working of Amida's Primal Vow: true practice (line 1), shinjin (line 2), and realization (lines 3-4). Thus, it sets forth an outline of the Pure Land way. From the perspective of the practitioner, the same outline may be stated, "If one says the Name entrusting oneself to the Primal Vow, one attains Buddhahood" (*Tannishō*, 12).

act of true settlement (shōjōgō). Saying the Name, which is the act by which one's birth in the Pure Land becomes definitely settled. This term is adopted from Shan-tao, who singled out the saying of the Name from "auxiliary acts" such as sutra recitation and worship of Amida.

Vow of entrusting with sincere mind. Name for the Eighteenth Vow.

Vow of necessarily attaining nirvana. Name for the Eleventh Vow.

lines 5-8

It is through the teachings of Śākyamuni and the other Buddhas that Amida's Vow becomes known to beings throughout the universe. In Shinran's view, all of Śākyamuni's teachings were expounded to lead beings to the Primal Vow.

five defilements. Conditions that impede Buddhist practice: defilements of the age (war, famine, disease, etc.); of views and values; of passions grown intense; of beings weakened morally, physically and intellectually; and of life reduced in span.

lines 9-12

The significance of the realization of shinjin, which brings about a transformation of one's existence.

lines 13-20

Through the everyday image of an overcast sky, in which clouds are present but which nevertheless is not dark, Shinran describes the condition of one who has realized shinjin.

five evil courses. Modes of existence characterized by ignorance, suffering, and aimless repetition: life in hell, as an animal, famished ghost, human being, or god.

21

practice. Shinran identifies the Name (Namu-amida-butsu) with beings' utterance of it. It is through the activity of the Vow that the Name spreads throughout the universe (Seventeenth Vow) and that beings come to hear it as Amida's call, which is to realize shinjin (Eighteenth Vow). Further, their shinjin naturally manifests itself in utterance, and this utterance, which is one with shinjin, is the practice that results in birth in the Pure Land. Thus, the Name (Namu-amida-butsu), shinjin, and utterance (nembutsu), are all inseparable, and together form the act or practice that results in attainment of birth:

Saying the Name is the right act, supreme, true, and excellent. The right act is the nembutsu. The nembutsu is Namu-amida-butsu. Namu-amida-butsu is right-mindedness (shinjin). (Practice, 12)

selected Primal Vow (senjaku hongan). *Selected*, a crucial term in Hōnen's thought, refers to the process by which Dharmākara Bodhisattva, in making his Vows, determined their content so that their fulfillment would enable all beings to attain enlightenment. Thus, he selected the nembutsu as the practice by which beings would attain birth in his land, putting aside all other practices. *Selected Primal Vow* usually refers to Amida's forty-eight Vows as a whole or to the Eighteenth Vow in particular; in line 1 however, Shinran seems to have in mind the Seventeenth Vow also, which is inseparable from the Eighteenth, and which he calls "the Vow in which the saying of the Name is selected" (Practice, 1).

22

shinjin is the very cause for attainment. In the hymn, Shinran states that the Eighteenth Vow is the cause of birth; beings attain birth through Amida's activity, and not through any cause in themselves. Specifically, this Vow works to bring beings to realization of shinjin, in which their minds become one with the mind of wisdom-compassion. It is this realization of the Buddha's mind, which is given to them, that is the essential cause of birth.

23

equal of enlightenment (tōgaku; also "equal of perfect enlightenment" tōshōgaku). Shinran adopts this term from the Eleventh Vow as it appears in the T'ang dynasty translation of the *Larger Sutra*, the *Sutra of the Tathāgata of Immeasurable Life*. Shinran takes special note of this variant translation of the Vow because of the significance he finds in this term.

The Eleventh Vow states that beings in the Pure Land 1) dwell in the stage of the settled—those whose attainment of Buddhahood is decisively settled—and 2) necessarily attain nirvana. Literally, this means that on attaining birth in the Pure Land, beings reach the stage of non-retrogression, and thereafter unfailingly progress to enlightenment; this was the understanding of Hōnen and other masters prior to Shinran.

Shinran, however, understands this Vow to mean that beings attain non-retrogression on realizing shinjin, and attain nirvana with birth in the Pure Land:

When foolish beings possessed of blind passions . . . realize the mind and practice that Amida directs to them for their going forth, they immediately join the truly settled of the Mahāyāna. Because they dwell among the truly settled, they necessarily attain nirvana. (Realization, 1)

In the T'ang dynasty translation of the *Larger Sutra*, to "dwell among the settled" is expressed to "attain *tōshōgaku*." *Tōshōgaku* is the name of the fifty-first of the fifty-two stages in the bodhisattva path, penultimate to the realization of supreme enlightenment; when the present life ends, one will realize complete Buddhahood. Literally, it is the stage of "perfect, right enlightenment," nearly indistinguishable from final attainment. The term connoting "perfect" here, however, also has the meaning of "equal," and Shinran understands it in this latter sense. He teaches that on realizing shinjin, beings attain the "equal of perfect enlightenment," for their minds have become one with the mind of the Buddha and they have "entered the wisdom of shinjin" (*Shōzōmatsu wasan*, 34).

immediately entering the stage of the definitely settled. From Nāgārjuna's paraphrase of the Eighteenth Vow and his hymn based on it. The hymn reads:

The person who thinks on Amida Buddha's
Immeasurable power and virtues
Immediately enters the stage of the definitely settled.
("Chapter on Easy Practice," Practice, 15)

In "Chapter on Easy Practice," Amida's Vow is set forth as a prime example of the easy practice of thinking on and entrusting oneself to the Buddhas as a means to non-retrogression. Nāgārjuna does not teach birth in the Pure Land, but his teaching clearly asserts the attainment of non-retrogression in this life.

entering the group of the truly settled. See Practice, 18.

30

one thought-moment of joy. Synonymous with "one thought-moment of shinjin and joy" in Passage 2. *One thought-moment* has chiefly a temporal sense: shinjin and joy arise in the briefest moment of time. Further, at that very instant, "nirvana is attained without severing blind passions." This line is derived from T'an-luan:

When foolish beings possessed of blind passions attain birth in the Pure Land, they are not bound by the karmic fetters of the three realms. That is, without severing blind passions, they realize nirvana itself. (Realization, 9)

It should be noted, however, that while T'an-luan employs this phrase with regard to the time of birth into the Pure Land, Shinran places it at the moment of realizing shinjin. This does not mean that one immediately attains nirvana in this life. Upon realizing shinjin, one's attainment of nirvana with birth into the Pure Land has become settled, and further, "one has attained what one shall attain." One has entered the working of nirvana as the Primal Vow while carrying on one's life in this world, and in this sense, nirvana is attained without severing blind passions.

32

those committing the five grave offenses. . . . The exclusion clause of the Eighteenth Vow mentions those who commit grave offenses or slander the dharma; the *Nirvana Sutra* includes in addition those lacking the seed of Buddhahood among the "three kinds of beings who are difficult to cure" (Shinjin, 114).

Those devoid of seeds for Buddhahood (*S. iccantika*) are said to lack any goodness or potentiality for attaining enlightenment. In Shinran's

thought, the awareness of being precisely such a person is a central aspect of the wisdom of shinjin.

river waters. Shinran illuminates the transformation stated doctrinally in the preceding two lines of the hymn—the entrance into the state in which "nirvana is attained without severing blind passions"—with the image of rivers flowing into the ocean (lines 11–12). The image is derived from T'an-luan:

The term "ocean" signifies that the Buddha's all-knowing wisdom is profound, vast, and fathomless; it does not keep within it the dead bodies of the sundry good acts of the two vehicles, that is, the middle or lower vehicles. This is likened to an ocean. (Practice, 94)

"Two vehicles" refers to those of the Hīnayāna path; hence Shinran's reference to "lesser sages."

In Shinran's usage, all people—including those who have performed practices according to their own capacities, which is a form of self-attachment, as well as those who have committed the gravest of evil acts—lack any cause in themselves for attaining enlightenment. But when their attachment to their own powers falls away and they take refuge in Amida, their existence is pervaded by the wisdom of the Vow. We have discussed this metaphor in Chapter 4; also see Practice, 91.

34–36

compassionate light. The concept of Amida's light shining on beings is a frequent one in Pure Land writings (Passage 1, 8), but to express the condition of the person of shinjin, Shinran develops a unique, extended metaphor. First he states that the darkness of ignorance has been swept away and the night of samsaric existence has ended; with realization of shinjin, the bonds of birth-and-death have been broken in the immediate present. The force of Shinran's image may be grasped by comparing it with one used by Seikaku, who states that the Vow "is a great torch in the long night of ignorance" (*Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, p. 65). For Seikaku, the night has not ended, and will not end until death.

This does not mean that one has attained enlightenment; thus, Shinran employs the image of a clouded sky (36). Blind passions persist; nevertheless, they form no obstruction to enlightenment, and in fact have become the vehicle of the light of wisdom, just as, in the metaphor of ice and water, karmic evil has become the substance of virtues (Chapter 4).

37-38

Allusion to the *Larger Sutra*:

The one who, hearing and never forgetting this dharma,
Sees, reveres, and attains it and greatly rejoices—
That person is my excellent, close companion;
Therefore, awaken this mind! (Shinjin, 6)

39

transcend crosswise. See Passage 11.

43

Other Power. See Passage 5.

4 NAMU-AMIDA-BUTSU

SHINRAN copied the tract *Essentials of Faith Alone* a number of times, recommending it to others for its explanation of the origin of Amida's Vows. In it, the author Seikaku points out the significance of the Seventeenth Vow, which states that the Name be praised by all the Buddhas: "Because the Buddha sought to guide sentient beings everywhere with his Name, he vowed that it be praised as the first step." Seikaku then quotes the following verse on the Name. Line 4 mentions Amida's attendant bodhisattvas. Source: *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,'* pp. 30-32.

FROM A HYMN BY THE CHINESE MASTER FA-CHAO:

The sacred Name of the Tathāgata is exceedingly distinct and clear;
Throughout the worlds in the ten quarters it prevails.
Solely those who say the Name all attain birth;
Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta come themselves to welcome them.

FROM SHINRAN'S COMMENTARY:

- 1 *The sacred Name of the Tathāgata*
The Tathāgata: [Amida,] the Tathāgata of unhindered light.
- 2, 3 *The sacred Name* is Namu-amida-butsu. *Sacred* means holy, excellent. *Name* (gō, 号) indicates the name of a Buddha after the attainment of Buddhahood; another term (*myō*) indicates the name before this attainment.
- 4 The sacred Name of Amida surpasses measure, description, and conceptual understanding; it is the Name of the Vow embodying great love and great compassion, which brings all sentient

5 beings into the supreme nirvana. The Name of this Buddha surpasses the names of all the other Tathāgatas, for it is based on the Vow to save all beings.

6 *Is exceedingly distinct and clear*

Exceedingly here means “utterly,” “unsurpassed.”

Distinct implies “to distinguish”; here it means to distinguish each sentient being.

Clear means “evident.”

7 It is evident that Amida, distinguishing every sentient being in the ten quarters, guides each to salvation; thus his compassionate concern for us is unsurpassed.

8 *Throughout the worlds in the ten quarters it prevails*

Prevails means that the Name spreads universally throughout the worlds in the ten quarters, countless as minute particles, and guides all to the practice of the Buddha’s teaching.

9 This means that, since there are none—among either the wise of the Mahāyāna or the Hīnayāna, or the ignorant, whether good or evil—who can attain supreme nirvana through their own self-cultivated wisdom, we are encouraged to enter the ocean of the wisdom-Vow of the Buddha of unhindered light, for his form is the light of wisdom. This form comprehends the wisdom
10 of all the Buddhas. It should be understood that light is none
11 other than wisdom. . . .

12 *Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta come themselves to welcome them*

Namu-amida-butsu is the Name embodying wisdom; hence, when one accepts and entrusts oneself to this Name of the Buddha of inconceivable wisdom-light, holding it in mindfulness, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta accompany one constantly as shadows do things.

13 The Buddha of unhindered light appears as Avalokiteśvara;
14 he manifests himself as Mahāsthāmaprāpta. A sutra states that

Avalokiteśvara, with the name Bodhisattva Treasure-Response, reveals himself as the god of the sun and dispels the pitch darkness of ignorance in all beings; and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, with the name Bodhisattva Treasure-Happiness, reveals himself as the god of the moon and illuminates the long night of birth-and-death. Together they bring forth wisdom in all beings.

NOTES

HYMN

Fa-chao (J. Hosshō, 766-822). T’ang dynasty Pure Land master strongly influenced by Shan-tao. Known especially for the chant elements he introduced into formal nembutsu recitation. This hymn, based on the *Smaller Sutra*, may be found in Practice, 35.

Avalokiteśvara (J. “He who perceives the sounds of the world”; Kanzeon or Kannon). Bodhisattva of compassion; with Mahāsthāmaprāpta, one of the two revered bodhisattva attendants of Amida. Fa-chao draws on the teaching that Avalokiteśvara and other bodhisattvas accompany Amida in coming to take nembutsu practitioners to the Pure Land at death. Avalokiteśvara is also said to take on various forms in the world of samsara, and Shinran considered Prince Shōtoku to have been a manifestation (*Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, p. 57).

Mahāsthāmaprāpta (J. “He who has attained great power”; Daiseishi or Seishi). Bodhisattva of wisdom. Said to have attained birth in the Pure Land through realizing nembutsu-*śamādhi*, and now to embrace people of nembutsu and take them to the Pure Land (*Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, pp. 39-41). Shinran considered Hōnen to have been a manifestation of Mahāsthāmaprāpta.

3

name before this attainment. That is, in the stage of bodhisattvahood, when practices that are the cause of Buddhahood are performed. The compound term *myōgō* is commonly used in Buddhist writings to indicate the name of a Buddha. Shinran’s analysis here, breaking the

term into two components, is unusual, though it is repeated at the beginning of some texts of his letter on *jinen* (as appended to *Shōzōmatsu wasan*). In fact, Shinran does not apply the distinction he makes here in his writings, and his intent is probably to indicate that the Name, often referred to as *myōgō*, embodies the entire dynamic of authentic practice—as cause (Dharmākara's aeons of practice) and result (realization as Amida Buddha).

4

Name of Amida surpasses measure. It may be heard and apprehended (realization of shinjin), but it cannot be grasped intellectually and incorporated into our own designs. If we make it the object of our calculations to accumulate merit, then it is no longer the Name that embodies “the perfectly fulfilled supreme virtues” and that is “true wisdom that transforms our evil into virtue” (Preface), but only another instrument of our delusive thinking.

5

surpasses the names of all the other Tathāgatas. In “Chapter on Easy Practice,” Nāgārjuna teaches the practice of thinking on the Buddhas and saying their names. According to Shinran, Amida's Name surpasses all others, for Amida has vowed to save *all* beings, meaning that he saves those who have no cause of Buddhahood in themselves. Other Buddhas aid those who perform practices and enter contemplative states, but cannot awaken people completely lacking such seeds of enlightenment.

9

Even those who seem to be accomplishing religious practices cannot achieve enlightenment through their own powers, for at bottom they are “filled with blind passions” and “lack a mind true and real” (Passage 1), the pure mind necessary for such practice to be authentic and effective. All beings are therefore encouraged to take refuge in Amida's Vow, for he is the Buddha of “unhindered light,” the light of wisdom that becomes one with the blind passions of human beings.

10

This form comprehends the wisdom of all the Buddhas. Amida's light, being unhindered by the karmic evil and blind passions of beings, manifests the fundamental nondichotomous nature of wisdom or true reality.

Amida has two essential “forms,” Name and light, and for Shinran these share the same qualities. Both embody and manifest wisdom-compassion, and are unified as the Buddha's activity to awaken all beings universally. Shinran states:

Without the virtuous Name, our compassionate father, we would lack the direct cause of birth. Without the light, our compassionate mother, we would stand apart from the indirect cause of birth. Although direct and indirect causes may come together, if the karmic-consciousness of shinjin is lacking, one will not reach the land of light. The karmic-consciousness of true and real shinjin is the inner cause. The Name and light—our father and mother—are the outer cause. (Practice, 72)

12

accompany one constantly as shadows do things. While Fa-chao in his hymn states that the bodhisattvas come to receive nembutsu practitioners at death and take them to the Pure Land, Shinran emphasizes that they come to the practitioner in the present life. Shan-tao also teaches this, and the image of shadows is probably drawn from him (*Methods of Contemplation on Amida*, SSZ, 1, 628).

For Shinran, those who realize shinjin, hearing and saying the Name, are immediately filled with the virtues of Amida's enlightenment; hence, it is said that the bodhisattvas of wisdom and compassion always accompany them. These bodhisattvas are one with the Buddha's activity to awaken beings, and “together they bring forth wisdom in all beings” (14).

14

sutra. Quoted in Tao-ch'o's *Passages on the Land of Happiness*:

The Sutra of the Four Areas of Sumeru (J. *Shumi shiiki kyō*) states: “When heaven and earth first unfolded, there was no sun, moon, or stars. Though devas descended, they had only their aureoles for light. Human beings suffered greatly. Then Amida Buddha sent two bodhisattvas, one named Treasure-Response and the other Treasure-Happiness.” (SSZ, 1, 427).

COMMENT

The importance of the Name for Shinran may be grasped from his practice late in life of placing scrolls inscribed with it, in one of its different versions, in the altar, in place of statues or painted depictions of Amida. The Name, *Namu-amida-butsu*, is itself the Buddha (wisdom, suchness), the form that the Buddha takes in the activity of awakening beings.

One of the fundamental analyses of the Name in the Pure Land tradition is that of Shan-tao, who divides it into *Namu* and *Amida-butsu*. He states that *Namu* ("I take refuge") expresses aspiration and *Amida-butsu* holds the significance of practice; thus, in saying the Name, the practitioner fulfills the two requirements for birth (Practice, 30).

Shinran develops Shan-tao's interpretation, shifting the perspective from the practitioner's activity to the power of the Vow. He states that *Namu* is "the command of the Primal Vow calling to and summoning us" (Practice, 34); further, it is "to respond to the command and follow the call" of Śākyamuni and Amida (*Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, p. 51). Thus, the Name is Amida's activity calling to us, and further, it is our response to that call, our utterance arising from *shinjin*. *Amida-butsu*, then, is not recitation as a form of religious endeavor; it is "none other than the Primal Vow," arising from the working of Amida.

5 SELF-POWER, OTHER POWER

IN answer to questions sent by people in the distant Kantō region, Shinran provides clear explanations of what is meant by self-power and Other Power, and of the relevance of this distinction for people who seek to enter the Pure Land path. Source: *Letters of Shinran*, pp. 22–23.

- 1 ACCORDING to the true essence of the Pure Land way, there are two kinds of people who seek birth: those of Other Power and
- 2 those of self-power. This has been taught by the Indian masters and Pure Land teachers.
- 3 Self-power is the effort to attain birth, whether by invoking the names of Buddhas other than Amida and practicing good acts other than the *nembutsu*, in accordance with your particular circumstances and opportunities; or by endeavoring to make yourself worthy through amending the confusion in your acts, words, and thoughts, confident of your own powers and guided by your own calculation.
- 4 Other Power is the entrusting of yourself to the Eighteenth among Amida's Vows, the Primal Vow of birth through the *nembutsu*, which was selected from among all other practices.
- 5 Since this is Amida's Vow, Hōnen said: "In Other Power, no
- 6 selfworking is true working." "Selfworking" means calcula-
- 7 tion. Since a practitioner's calculation is self-power, it is selfwork-
- 8 ing. Other Power is the entrusting of ourselves to the Primal Vow and our birth becoming firmly settled; hence it is altogether free of selfworking.
- 9 Thus, on the one hand, you should not be anxious that
- 10 Amida will not receive you because you do wrong. A foolish being is by nature possessed of blind passions, so you must

- 11 recognize yourself to be a being of karmic evil. On the other
 12 hand, you should not think that you deserve to attain birth
 13 fulfilled land through such self-power calculation. I have been
 taught that with a shinjin of self-power a person can attain birth
 only in the land of indolence, the borderland, the womb of the
 Pure Land, or the city of doubt.

NOTES

1

true essence of the Pure Land way (Jōdo shinshū). Shinran uses this term for the path revealed in the *Larger Sutra*, of which he states, “to teach the Tathāgata’s Primal Vow is the true intent of the sutra; the Name of the Buddha is its essence” (Teaching, 2). It indicates the teaching he received from Hōnen, in contrast to other interpretations of the Pure Land teaching. It was later adopted as the name for the movement which Shinran founded, and became the designation of the Shin Buddhist schools.

two kinds of people who seek birth. The terms self-power and Other Power were first used by T’an-luan to distinguish the Pure Land path of easy practice (in which one has the support of the Buddha’s power) from other forms of Buddhist practice (which are based solely on self-power) (Practice, 18). Shinran, however, brought about a major change in the tradition by pressing this distinction within the Pure Land way. Even among nembutsu practitioners, there are those who cling to self-power. By refining and deepening the insight into the nature of self-power, Shinran was able to develop the path of Other Power in which nembutsu and shinjin are manifestations of the Vow (Passage 6). Thus he cautions, “You must understand fully the working of self-power” (Passage 3).

3

good acts other than the nembutsu. Shan-tao, for example, teaches such auxiliary acts as sutra recitation, worship, and contemplation of

Amida as supportive of endeavor in nembutsu recitation. The central issue concerns attitude, however:

Those who take up auxiliary good acts are people endeavoring in self-power. “Self-power” characterizes those who have full confidence in themselves, trusting in their own hearts and minds, striving with their own powers, and relying on their own various roots of good. (*Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*, pp. 43–44)

Thus, saying the nembutsu as one’s own act of good is also an expression of self-power.

5

no selfworking is true working (literally, “No working is Other Power’s working” *tariki ni wa gi naki o gi to su*). Shinran adopts this phrase from Hōnen, but imparts his own interpretation. In form it is flatly self-contradictory (“Not-A is A”). Shinran explains that “A” here is the practitioner’s calculation or self-power, but this clearly refers only its first appearance, where it is negated. The second “A” has been interpreted as the “meaning” of the teaching or the “doctrinal principle” behind the nembutsu, but this robs the phrase of its rhetorical force. We have taken it to mean the Buddha’s working, synonymous with Other Power. The general meaning of the entire phrase is clear from other statements, for example: “Other Power means above all that there must not be the slightest calculating on our part” (*Letters of Shinran*, p. 42). That is, self-power and Other Power stand in opposition, and for the mind of self-power to fall away is for one to be grasped by Other Power (see comment).

Shinran’s frequent use of this paradoxical phrase points to the final discontinuity that lies between our efforts in self-power reaching an impasse and falling away and our being grasped by Other Power. It cannot be said that one is the cause and the other is the result. For human beings, there is no method of action or rational understanding that can lead directly to realizing shinjin or receiving the Buddha’s mind. We cannot know why becoming free of self-power is to be grasped by Other Power. As stated here, Other Power is simply “altogether free of selfworking” (8).

But beyond this, it further points to the unity in Other Power of Amida and the being who has realized shinjin, which has come about through the complete negation of the being’s calculation. One remains possessed of blind passions, but through the elimination the attachment in self-power, one’s life and the world itself have become Other

Power. To express this structure of both negation and affirmation in the existence of the practitioner of shinjin, Shinran employs this phrase, which is reminiscent of the prajñāpāramitā formulation, “A is not-A, therefore it is A.” While the latter expresses wisdom or emptiness pervading the world of existence, “In Other Power, no selfworking is true working” expresses being grasped by compassion, so that the Buddha’s mind and the being’s mind have become one.

9-11

Self-power as “calculation” (*hakarai*) includes the belief that we cannot be saved if we do evil (we must do good in order to accord with the Vow) or that it is because we possess some aspect of good (have faith, say the nembutsu) that we are grasped by the Vow. Such assumptions arise from a failure to recognize the self-attachment harbored in our perceptions and judgments, and from the imposition of those judgments on Amida’s working. It is when we become aware of ourselves as beings of karmic evil that reliance on our own judgments drops away, and being grasped by the Vow becomes possible.

13

the land of indolence, the borderland, the womb of the Pure Land, or the city of doubt. Names for “transformed lands”—modes of attainment—established by Amida for beings who aspire for birth in the Pure Land, yet fail to entrust themselves to the Vow and cling instead to their own wisdom and goodness. Such people cannot attain birth into the “true fulfilled land,” which unfolds naturally from realization of shinjin, but neither do they remain caught in samsaric existence. Their limited attainment is taught in the *Larger Sutra*:

The Buddha said to Maitreya: Suppose there are sentient beings who, with minds filled with doubts, aspire to be born in the Pure Land through the practice of various meritorious acts; unable to realize the Buddha-wisdom, the inconceivable wisdom, the ineffable wisdom, the all-encompassing wisdom of the Mahāyāna, the unequaled, peerless, and supremely excellent wisdom, they doubt these wisdoms and do not entrust themselves. And yet, believing in [the recompense of] evil and good, they aspire to be born in that land through cultivating the root of good [that is, reciting the nembutsu]. Such sentient beings will be born within the palace of that land, where for five hundred years they will never see the Buddha, hear the dharma of the sutras, or see the sacred host of bodhisatt-

vas and śrāvakas. Hence, in that land this is known as womb-like birth. (Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands, 7)

Only after a long period during which the karmic evil of the self-attachment of doubt is overcome can they realize enlightenment in the true fulfilled land (*Tannishō*, 17). By delineating this distinction in attainment, Shinran develops his analysis of the nature and significance of self-power thinking within the Pure Land path, and interprets certain Pure Land teachings as intended precisely to lead us from such attitudes.

COMMENT

The central concern of the practitioner is the relationship with Amida Buddha. Shinran probes the nature of this relationship through his use of the concepts of self-power and Other Power. While prior to Shinran this distinction was most widely understood to correspond to that between other forms of Buddhism, which could be accomplished only by sages, and the Pure Land path, Shinran brought it to bear on attitudes of practitioners within the Pure Land tradition itself, and his plumbing of self-power is a major feature of his development of the Pure Land teaching.

Moreover, he asserts that forms of self-power practice—of reliance on one’s own capacities for religious fulfillment and refusal to entrust oneself to the Vow—are also expressed in the Pure Land sutras. Such “provisional” teachings, he states, have been provided precisely to awaken us to the tenacity of self-power attitudes and to guide us to genuine realization of shinjin, or true entrusting.

Shinran distinguishes two major forms of self-power practice found among the Pure Land practitioners: performance of various religious and moral activities, and performance of nembutsu recitation. The first form he finds expressed as a provisional teaching in the *Contemplation Sutra*, which sets forth thirteen contemplative exercises focusing on the Pure Land, Amida, and his attendant bodhisattvas (meditative practice) and further describes three levels in the observance of precepts and performance of moral good acts (non-meditative practice). Shinran identifies this teaching with the Nineteenth Vow. The second form of self-power practice is found in the *Smaller Sutra*, which teaches the merit in saying the Name and encourages reciting it for one to seven days. Shinran identifies the teaching of nembutsu utterance as one’s

own practice—to accumulate merit or attain a state of concentration and tranquility—with the Twentieth Vow. Those who follow these two forms of self-power practice within the Pure Land path are born in transformed lands, not the true Pure Land.

In *Teaching, Practice and Realization*, Shinran describes his process of religious awakening as a movement of three phases, being guided from the first form of self-power (various practices and good acts) to the second (endeavor in nembutsu recitation), and then to genuine entrusting or shinjin (Eighteenth Vow) (Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands, 68). Shin commentators are quick to point out that this is not a prescription that every practitioner is necessarily to follow. Nevertheless, Shinran's sense of process and his concept of provisional teachings as a means are consonant with his assertion that realizing shinjin is "the most difficult of all difficulties." Thus he also quotes Genshin to the effect that few are born in the true Pure Land, while many are born in the transformed lands (Passage 11, 15).

On the one hand, we must make a conscious effort to free ourselves from all the attachments and desires that bind us to egocentric, samsaric existence. Shinran often uses the verb particle *nu*, indicating a perfect tense, in speaking of entrance into the ocean of the Vow. This particle connotes completion of an action—"having come to enter"—implying a process of realization over a period of time. The biographies of exemplary people of shinjin typically show long years of engagement with the teaching before entrance into the world of shinjin. Even though one seeks to follow the Pure Land path intellectually, the impulses first to make oneself good, and then to appropriate the saying of the nembutsu as a sign or activity of one's own merit, are difficult to overcome.

On the other hand, *nu* also implies that this process takes place naturally and is not accomplished through human intentions. With the concept of provisional teachings, Shinran delineates a process to the complete dissolution of self-power; thus, it is seen, finally, to have been indicated by the Buddha beforehand and brought about through the guidance of the Vow.

Other Power

What, then, is the Other Power that lies at the core of Shinran's realization? Fundamentally, it is the power or activity of Amida's Primal Vow that becomes present in our daily lives. Amida is the Other, standing beyond the blind passions and samsaric existence of human beings, and he directs the virtues or the power of his enlighten-

ment to us. In Shinran's writings, however, the term "Other Power" expresses much more than the absolute standing apart from beings. There are two general meanings:

1. "Other Power is none other than the power of Amida Tathāgata's Primal Vow" (Practice, 81).

2. "Other Power is the entrusting of yourself to the Eighteenth [Vow]" (4).

In the first usage, Other Power indicates the activity of Amida's Vow, and in the second, it refers to the mind of beings who entrust themselves to it. Although these meanings differ, they are both aspects of Other Power, which expresses not simply the Buddha but the relationship between Amida and human beings that Shinran realized.

The unity of these two meanings is expressed:

The ocean of beings of the ten quarters [will] be grasped and never abandoned when they have taken refuge in this practice (nembutsu) and shinjin. Therefore he is called "Amida Buddha." This is Other Power. (Practice, 71)

On the one hand, "Amida" signifies "grasping, never to abandon," and it is this that is Other Power.

On the other hand, to have been grasped, never to be abandoned, means that one has realized shinjin; hence, Shinran also states, "It is when one is grasped that the settling of shinjin occurs" (*Letters of Shinran*, p. 42). Thus the settlement of shinjin—the entrusting of oneself to the Vow—is also Other Power. Since to realize shinjin is for the attitude of self-power to fall away, it may further be said that "Other Power means to be free of any form of calculation" (*Letters of Shinran*, p. 39). It is also termed *jinen*: "Jinen is none other than being free of all calculation. It is itself Other Power" (*Tannishō*, 16).

With regard to Amida, Other Power is the grasping of beings, never to abandon them; with regard to beings, it is the realization of shinjin. Amida Buddha and sentient beings stand in the opposition of wisdom (reality) and delusion, or enlightenment and blind passions; beings are people of karmic evil who have been grasped by the Buddha, and the relationship is one of dualism. At the same time, Other Power expresses an interaction and a point of unity. The Buddha's mind and the mind of beings have become one, so that beings have become the equal of the Buddhas. Wisdom-compassion has grasped, never to abandon, the mind of blind passions, and that mind of passions has become free of the calculation and attachments of self-power and entrusted itself to

Other Power. In this latter aspect, Other Power has become the beings'; their lives manifest the power of the Vow.

Thus, in Other Power, the relationship between Amida and beings is dualistic, and at the same time that dualism is transcended, so that Other Power expresses the fundamental nature of the existence of people who have realized shinjin. *Tannishō*, 13, states:

It is when a person leaves both good and evil to karmic recompense and entrusts wholly to the Primal Vow that he is one with Other Power.

When the small, limited self, together with the restricted sphere in which it has struggled to exert its will and impose its judgments, has been abandoned, and one entrusts oneself to the wisdom-compassion of the Vow, then life opens forth with the freedom and strength of Other Power, which manifests itself in all things. The *myōkōnin* Saichi (1850-1932) states:

In Other Power, there's no self-power and no other-power. Other Power's everywhere. *Namu-amida-butsu*. (*Tariki ni wa jiriki mo tariki mo ariwasen. Ichimen tariki. Namu-amida-butsu.*)

6 SHINJIN AND NEMBUTSU

MANY who entered the Pure Land path encountered difficulty because they understood saying the nembutsu with trust to be a condition one had to fulfill to be saved. In their efforts, they tended to emphasize either practice, diligently saying the nembutsu as often as possible, or trust, which they understood to mean giving up special efforts to say the nembutsu or lead a religious life. In answer to questions, Shinran states that entrusting oneself to the Vow and saying the Name, properly understood, are inseparable, for both arise as Amida's activity in beings. Source: *Letters of Shinran*, pp. 39-40 and 37.

ON SHINJIN AND PRACTICE:

- 1 Although the one moment of shinjin and the one moment of nembutsu are two, there is no nembutsu separate from shinjin, nor is the one moment of shinjin separate from the one moment
- 2 of nembutsu. The reason is that the practice of nembutsu is to say it perhaps once, perhaps ten times, on hearing and realizing that birth into the Pure Land is attained by saying the Name
- 3 fulfilled in the Primal Vow. To hear this Vow and be completely without doubt is the one moment of shinjin. Thus, although shinjin and nembutsu are two, since shinjin is to hear and not doubt that you are saved by only a single pronouncing, which is the fulfillment of practice, there is no shinjin separate from nembutsu; this is the teaching I have received. You should know further that there can be no nembutsu separate from shinjin. Both
- 4 should be understood to be Amida's Vow. Nembutsu and shinjin on our part are themselves the manifestations of the Vow.

ON THE VOW AND THE NAME:

7 Although we speak of Vow and of Name, these are not two dif-
 8 ferent things. There is no Name separate from the Vow; there is
 9 no Vow separate from the Name. Even to say this, however, is
 10 to impose one's own calculation. Once you simply realize that
 the Vow surpasses conceptual understanding and with single-
 ness of heart realize that the Name surpasses conceptual under-
 standing and pronounce it, why should you labor in your own
 calculation?

11 It seems to me that with all your attempts to understand by
 12 reasoning and by learning you have fallen into confusion. It is
 13 completely in error. Once you have simply come to realize that
 Vow and Name surpass conceptual understanding, you should
 14 not calculate it in this way or that. There must be nothing of
 15 your calculation in the act that leads to birth. You must simply
 entrust yourself to Amida.

NOTES

1

one moment of shinjin . . . one moment of nembutsu (shin no ichinen, gyō no ichinen). More fully, the "one thought-moment of [realizing] shinjin" and the "one utterance [that is the fulfillment] of practice." The term *ichinen* (translated "one moment") is the same in both instances, but the implications differ. In the case of shinjin, *nen* is taken in its meaning of "thought" ("be completely without doubt," 3), for it implies the awakening and entrusting that arises as the realization of shinjin; it also holds the temporal sense of one instant (Passage 2). In the case of practice, *nen* is understood to mean "utterance" of the Name, and refers to the saying of the Name that emerges from shinjin.

Both senses of "one moment" may be found in the *Larger Sutra* as interpreted by Shinran, the one thought-moment of shinjin in the

passage on the fulfillment of the Eighteenth Vow (Passage 2) and the one utterance of nembutsu in Śākyamuni's closing words (Passage 10).

2

perhaps once, perhaps ten times. Based on Passages 10 and 1.

7

Vow and Name. From the perspective of the Buddha's activity, the inseparability of the practitioner's realization of shinjin and utterance of the nembutsu is the inseparability of the Vow to save all beings and the Name that calls them.

COMMENT

These passages are from letters written in response to questions from followers in the Kantō region. The first was written in 1256 to Kakushin-bō, who later undertook the arduous journey from Shimotsuke province (modern Tochigi) to see Shinran, falling ill in travel and dying in Kyoto (*Letters of Shinran*, pp. 48–50). We see that the relationship between shinjin and nembutsu was a difficult, persistent question for nembutsu practitioners.

The nature and significance of this problem may be grasped from a statement by Hōnen:

If, because it is taught that birth is attained with but one or ten utterances, you say the nembutsu heedlessly, then faith is hindering practice.

If, because it is taught that you should say the Name "without abandoning it from moment to moment," you believe one or ten utterances to be indecisive, then practice is hindering faith.

As your faith, accept that birth is attained with a single utterance; as your practice, endeavor in the nembutsu throughout life. (*Ichigon hōdan*, trans. in *Plain Words on the Pure Land Way*, Kyoto, 1989).

Hōnen taught that one must say the nembutsu with faith, but it is clear that the dualism between faith and practice was a major issue among his following. The problem arose when people posed the question of what was required in order to conform with the Vow, for the two aspects of faith and practice harbored an interior contradiction and, as Hōnen points out, were liable to become impediments to each other.

Emphasis on the importance of genuine faith spawned a popular belief that simply saying the nembutsu occasionally was sufficient to ensure one's salvation through the Buddha's power, and that no further concern or reflection was necessary. In its extreme form, it led to the belief that, since Amida established the Vow to save all beings, including the evil, one should have no compunctions concerning wrongdoing. No act, however evil, could obstruct the power of the Vow, and to fear that it might betrayed a lack of faith. This antinomian tendency brought severe criticism of Hōnen's teaching from the traditional schools, and it survived among Shinran's followers. Shinran writes in a letter:

You are telling people who are appallingly self-indulgent and lacking in shame that a person should do evil just as he desires. This is absolutely wrong. . . . If a person, justifying himself by saying he is a foolish being, can do anything he wants, then is he also to steal or to murder? (*Letters of Shinran*, p. 51; also see Passage 14)

Extreme emphasis on the quality of the practitioner's attitude or faith underlying utterance was also developed doctrinally, in particular by Kōsai (1163–1247), also a disciple of Hōnen. He taught that the genuine nembutsu was the awakening of faith, which fused with and became the Buddha's wisdom. This was the decisive cause of birth, and endeavor to recite the Name repeatedly was unnecessary.

On the opposite side, emphasis on the aspect of repeated utterance is expressed by Seikaku:

Though one utterance suffices as the act for birth, some may think that it is important to accumulate more and more merit while passing their days and nights in vain, and so, if they say the Name, they recite it day and night, and the merit increases more and more and the cause for birth becomes even more determined. (*Essentials of Faith Alone*)

Aspects of this emphasis are the belief that one could accumulate merit through saying the nembutsu and that one thereby ensures to a greater degree one's attainment of birth.

This tendency of thought is closely connected with the belief that Amida comes to welcome nembutsu practitioners who say his Name and think on him at the point of death. For followers of this teaching, attainment of birth is settled only at the end of life, and as long as one is alive, one cannot be certain that one will be able to receive Amida's

coming at death (see Passage 12). Thus, it was important to accumulate merit and eliminate the effects of one's evil acts by saying the nembutsu, and to prepare oneself so that one could utter the Name and concentrate on Amida in one's final moments.

These two positions were debated among Hōnen's following, and though he was critical of each extreme, he did not define a resolution. He himself lived as a monk observing precepts and is said to have uttered the nembutsu constantly. At the same time, it is said that he felt no need for Amida's coming at death.

Shinran, like Hōnen in the quotation above, rejects the negative assertions of each side—that is, that saying the nembutsu many times is wrong, or that saying it only once is wrong (*Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*). He goes on, however, to articulate a resolution in the inseparability of shinjin and nembutsu set forth here.

Shinran recasts the entire issue by stating that “nembutsu and shinjin on our part are themselves the manifestations of the Vow” (6). They are the Buddha's practice and mind given to and realized by beings. Thus, on the one hand, birth is settled with the realization of shinjin, and the person need not await the moment of death. To perform good acts, disciplines, and accumulation of merit through saying the nembutsu in order to accord with the Vow is to follow the provisional Pure Land path and not the true teaching. In these points, Shinran's stance resembles that which emphasizes faith.

On the other hand, however, Shinran's path as a Buddhist teaching is founded on practice. There is no teaching in Buddhism of attainment of enlightenment without practice. The unique aspect of Shinran's teaching is that authentic practice is inseparable from shinjin, and emerges from it. Practice is not only to say “Namu-amida-butsu,” which is the Name by which Amida makes us aware of his wisdom-compassion and which naturally expresses that awareness. Shinran recognized other forms of the Name—such as, “I take refuge in the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light Filling the Ten Quarters” (*J. kimyō jinjippō mugekō nyorai*)—and it might further be said that shinjin is itself the voiceless expression of the nembutsu, just as nembutsu is the vocal expression of shinjin. To realize shinjin is to enter a process in which one's existence is constantly brought to light and transformed into the Buddha's virtues (Passage 8), and out of this ongoing transformation the nembutsu spontaneously emerges from one's lips:

If shinjin has become settled, birth will be brought about by Amida's working, so there must be no designing on our part. . . .

Whatever may occur, as far as birth is concerned, one should just recall constantly and unselfconsciously the depths of Amida's benevolence and one's gratitude for it, without any contriving. Then the nembutsu will emerge. This is the meaning of *jinen*. (*Tan-nishō*, 16)

Thus, Shinran sets no limit on utterance of the nembutsu, for it is not performed as a good act, but arises as the Buddha's activity. Moreover, Shinran sets forth two kinds of significance of saying the nembutsu:

People who feel that their birth in the Pure Land is not yet settled should say the nembutsu aspiring for birth. Those who feel that their birth in the Pure Land is settled should, responding in gratitude to the Buddha's kindness, say the nembutsu and hold it firmly in their hearts, with the wish, "May there be peace in the world and may the Buddha-dharma spread." (*Goshōsokushū*, SSZ, II, 697).

7 TURNABOUT

IN his tract *Essentials of Faith Alone*, Seikaku quotes the following verse to explain the Eighteenth Vow, emphasizing its universality. Shinran, in notes to this verse, focuses on the conversion that lies at the heart of the Pure Land path. This conversion is an overturning of reliance on one's own capacities. At the same time, it is the transmutation through Amida's activity of something base—our own existence—into something precious. Source: *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,'* pp. 39–41.

FROM A HYMN BY THE CHINESE MASTER TZ'U-MIN:

Amida Buddha, in his causal stage, made the universal Vow:
When beings hear my Name and think on me, I will come to
welcome each of them,

Not discriminating at all between the poor and the rich and
wellborn,
Not discriminating between the inferior and the highly gifted;

Not choosing the learned and those upholding pure precepts,
Nor rejecting those who break precepts and whose evil karma is
profound.

When beings just turn about at heart and abundantly say the
nembutsu,
It is as if bits of rubble were changed into gold.

SHINRAN'S COMMENTARY ON THE FINAL THREE LINES:

- 1 *Nor rejecting those who break precepts and whose evil karma is profound*

Break precepts applies to people who, having received the precepts for monks or laity mentioned earlier, break and abandon them; such people are not rejected.

- 2 *Evil karma is profound*: evil people who have committed the ten transgressions or the five grave offenses, people of evil karma who have reviled the teaching or who lack seeds for Buddhahood, those of scant roots of good, those of massive karmic evil, those of shallow inclination to good, those of profound attachment to evil—such wretched people as these, profound in various kinds of evil karma, are described by the word *profound*. *Profound* means bottomless.

- 3 Good people, bad people, noble and low, are not differentiated in the Vow of the Buddha of unhindered light, in which
4 the guiding of each person is primary and fundamental. Know that the true essence of the Pure Land way is that when we realize true and real shinjin, we are born into the true fulfilled land. . . .

- 5 *When beings just turn about at heart and abundantly say the nembutsu*

When beings just turn about at heart instructs us, “Singleheartedly make your heart turn about!”

- 6 *Turn about* means to overturn and discard the mind of self-power.

- 7 Since those people who are to be born in the true fulfilled land are without fail taken into the heart of the Buddha of unhindered light, they realize diamond-like shinjin. Thus, they “abundantly say the nembutsu.”

- 8 *Abundantly* means “often” in the sense of great in number, “exceeding” and “supreme” in the sense of excelling and sur-

- 9 passing all good acts. This is because nothing excels the Primal Vow embodying Other Power.

- 10 “To abandon the mind of self-power” admonishes the various and diverse kinds of people—masters of Hīnayāna or Mahāyāna, 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 passions, they attain the supreme nirvana.

- 11 “Shackled” describes us, who are bound by all our various blind passions. Blind passions are the pains that torment the
12 body and the afflictions that distress the heart and mind. The hunter is he who kills the many kinds of living things; this is one
13 who slaughters. The peddler is he who buys and sells things; this
14, 15 is the trader. They are called “low.” Such peddlers, hunters, and others are none other than we, who are like stones and tiles and pebbles.

- 16 *It is as if bits of rubble were changed into gold*

- This is a metaphor. When we entrust ourselves to Amida’s Primal Vow, we, who are like bits of tile and pebbles, are turned
17 into gold. Peddlers and hunters, who are like stones and tiles and pebbles, are grasped and never abandoned by Amida’s light.* Know that this comes about solely through true shinjin.
18 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 diamond-like.

- 19 *In a variant text, this sentence reads: [This line] states that it is like tile and pebbles being turned into gold. Hunters, peddlers, and others are we, who are like stones and tile and pebbles. When we entrust

ourselves without any doubt to Amida's Vow, we are taken into the light that grasps, and without fail the enlightenment of great nirvana is made to unfold in us; that is, for hunters and peddlers, it is like stones and tiles and pebbles being turned into gold.

NOTES

HYMN

Tz'u-min (J. Jimin, 680-748). Chinese Pure Land master renowned for his long practice in India; founder of his own branch of Pure Land teachings. This hymn, based on the *Sutra of the Samādhi of All Buddhas' Presence* (J. *Hanju zammai kyō*), appears in Practice, 35.

line 1

causal stage. The period of vows and practice as Bodhisattva Dharmākara.

1

precepts. Precepts for laity include, for example, the "five precepts" against destruction of life, theft, adultery, false speech, and taking intoxicants.

7

diamond-like shinjin. See Passage 16, 10-11.

12-13

hunter. . . *peddler*. Considered to belong to the lowest level of society because their livelihoods involved the chronic breach of Buddhist precepts against destruction of life and against flattery and false speech.

8 EVIL INTO GOOD

THE verse taken up in Passage 4 states that the bodhisattvas who attend Amida come to guide people of the nembutsu to the Pure Land when they die. Shinran rejects the moment of death as crucial to religious attainment, and in his commentary emphasizes instead the activity of Amida's wisdom and compassion in the immediate present, functioning free of human intentions and designs. He focuses on the word "themselves" (*ji*, 自), which may mean a person or thing "itself," and also "of itself," that is, naturally and spontaneously. Source: *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,'* pp. 32-33.

LINE FROM A HYMN BY FA-CHAO:

Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta come themselves to welcome [people who say the Name]

FROM SHINRAN'S COMMENTARY:

1 *Come themselves to welcome*

Themselves (*ji*) means "in person." Amida and a vast and numberless saintly host, consisting of innumerable manifestation-bodies of Buddhas, of Avalokiteśvara, and of Mahāsthāmaprāpta, appear in person to be alongside and always protect those who have realized true and real shinjin, at all times and in all places; hence the word "themselves."

- 2 *Ji* also means "of itself." "Of itself" is a synonym for *jinen*, which means "to be made to become so." "To be made to become so" means that without the practitioner's calculating in any way whatsoever, all his past, present, and future evil karma
- 3 is transformed into good. To be transformed means that evil kar-

ma, without being nullified or eradicated, is made into good, just as all waters, upon entering the great ocean, immediately become ocean water. We are made to acquire Amida's virtues through entrusting ourselves to his Vow-power; hence the expression, "made to become so."* Since there is no contriving in any way to gain such virtues, it is called *jinen*.

The person who has attained true and real shinjin is taken into and protected by this Vow that grasps never to abandon; therefore, he realizes the diamond-like mind without any calculation on his part, and thus dwells in the stage of the truly settled. Because of this, constant mindfulness of the Primal Vow arises in him naturally, by *jinen*. Even with the arising of this shinjin, it is written that supreme shinjin is made to awaken in us through the compassionate guidance of Śākyamuni, the kind father, and Amida, the mother of loving care. Know that this is the benefit of the working of *jinen*.

*In a variant text, this sentence reads: Since, without his seeking it, the person who entrusts himself to the Buddha's Vow is made to attain all virtues and all good, it is said "made to become so."

9 ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE FOOLISH

THE following verse by Shan-tao was regarded as evidence that there was no upper or lower limit to saying the nembutsu; one was saved by the power of the Vow, not one's recitation. Shinran, however, found special meaning in the final two lines. Interpretations of the third line are given in Passages 18 and 19. The last line teaches that upon realizing shinjin, the "foolish" person—one possessed of ignorance and passions—immediately attains birth and will reach supreme enlightenment. Source: *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*, pp. 47-49.

FROM A HYMN BY THE CHINESE MASTER SHAN-TAO:

When we say the nembutsu, whether throughout life, or down to ten,
Or three, or five utterances, the Buddha comes to welcome us.
This Amida accomplishes directly with his universal Vow,
replete with compassion.
Foolish beings, when they become mindful of it, are
immediately brought to attain birth; this is made the
essential purport.

SHINRAN'S COMMENTARY ON THE LAST LINE:

1 *Made the essential purport*

To take as central or fundamental. It also means to reach. "To reach" is to attain the true fulfilled land.

2 *Foolish beings*

None other than ourselves. Thus, "You should take entrusting to the power of the Primal Vow to be essential."

3 *Become mindful of it*

Entrusting ourselves to Amida's Vow without any doubt.

4 *Immediately (soku)*

At once. *Immediately [attain] birth* is to become settled in the stage of the truly settled without any time elapsing, without a day passing. This is expressed, *When they become mindful of [the Vow], they are immediately brought to attain birth.*

5 *Soku* also means to ascend, which describes the status of one
6 who will necessarily rise to a certain rank. In secular usage, to
rise to the throne of the country is "ascension to rank." The per-
son of the rank of crown prince necessarily rises to the rank of
king. Likewise, ascending to the stage of the truly settled is
similar to holding the rank of crown prince, with ascension to
rank—enthronement in the case of the prince—corresponding
to the attainment of supreme great nirvana.

7 Amida has vowed that the person of shinjin, having reached
the stage of the truly settled, shall necessarily attain nirvana.
8 This is called *the essential purport*, meaning that the realization
of the enlightenment of nirvana is taken to be fundamental.

9 *Foolish beings*

As expressed in the parable of the two rivers of water and fire,
we are full of ignorance and blind passions. Our desires are
countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelm-
ing, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they
do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves.

10 When we, who are so shameful, go a step or two, little by lit-
tle, along the White Path of the power of the Vow, we are taken
in and held by the compassionate heart of the Buddha of
unhindered light. It is fundamental that because of this we will
unfailingly reach the Pure Land of happiness, whereupon we
will be brought to realize the same enlightenment of great nir-
vana as Amida Tathāgata, being born from the flower of that
11 perfect enlightenment. This is expressed, *Foolish beings, when*

*they become mindful of [the Vow], are immediately brought to
attain birth; this is made the essential purport.*

12 In the parable of the two rivers, "going a step or two"
13 signifies the passage of one or two years. The direct teaching for
which all Buddhas have appeared in this world—Śākyamuni's
fundamental intention in his attainment of the way—has been
to make central the bringing of sentient beings to think on
Amida's Primal Vow so that they immediately attain birth.

NOTES

HYMN

The translation follows Shinran's interpretation, which takes into ac-
count a number of meanings of the characters probably not intended in
the original. The last two lines may be more literally rendered:

Solely through the greatness of Amida's universal Vow,
Foolish beings, when they become mindful of it, are immediately
brought to attain birth.

This verse, from *Hymns of the Nembutsu Liturgy (J. Hōjisan)*, is
quoted in *Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands*, 52.

1

Made the essential purport. Shinran focuses on an auxiliary verb of lit-
tle importance in the original and distinguishes two common meanings:
to take as essential and to reach. Throughout his commentary he
employs these meanings, revealing their significance in the true Pure
Land path by making them reflect the meanings of the other terms of
the passage. Thus, to reach means to attain the stage of the truly settled
(7) and the Pure Land (1, 10); it therefore also implies attaining nir-
vana. To take as essential means to aspire for the realization of shinjin
(2), but it is also defined as the "fundamental purport" (8), and implies
the natural working of the Vow to bring people of shinjin to enlighten-
ment.

By unfolding these meanings thus from a single term, Shinran con-

veys his understanding of the center of the Pure Land path as the activity of wisdom-compassion, by which people of shinjin are brought to attainment of non-retrogression and birth.

2

foolish beings. Those who are childish and immature, that is, constantly agitated by deep-rooted self-centeredness and the desires and passions it gives rise to. This term expresses not a concept of human frailty or evil that is to be accepted as doctrine, but rather the turnabout or religious transformation in which, by becoming free of self-attachments and realizing the wisdom of shinjin, one is able to know the nature of one's own existence just as it is.

9

parable of the two rivers. See *Teaching, Practice and Realization*, passage 22, below.

10 GREAT BENEFIT

At the close of a sutra, Śākyamuni often reiterates its central significance and entrusts it to a disciple for transmission in the world. In the corresponding passage of the *Larger Sutra*, the Buddha summarizes the essence of the nembutsu teaching. In his commentary on this passage, Shinran stresses that the person of shinjin will attain supreme nirvana and focuses on an auxiliary particle, "as such," as expressing the natural working of the Vow. Source: *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*, pp. 39-40.

FROM ŚĀKYAMUNI'S CLOSING WORDS IN THE LARGER SUTRA:

The Buddha said to Maitreya, "If there is a person who, having heard the Name of Amida Buddha, dances with joy and says it even once, know that that person receives the great benefit and, as such, is furnished with the unexcelled virtues.

FROM SHINRAN'S COMMENTARY:

- 1 *If there is a person who, having heard the Name of Amida Buddha*

Śākyamuni's words exhorting us to entrust ourselves to the Name that embodies the Primal Vow.

- 2 *Dances with joy and says it even once*

Joy is to rejoice beforehand at being assured of attaining what one shall attain.

- 3 *Dance (yuyaku)* means to dance in the air (*yu*) and to dance on the ground (*yaku*); it is the form of boundless joy and manifests the state of gladness and delight. "Gladness" is to rejoice upon attaining what one shall attain and "delight" is hap-

piness. Attaining the stage of the truly settled expresses itself in this form.

5 *Even* indicates the indeterminateness of the number of times one should say the Name.

6 *Say [the Name] once* is virtue at its fullness. The countless virtues are all included and the various merits all held in a single utterance.

7 *Know that that person*

The person realizing shinjin.

8 *Receives the great benefit**

The person will realize supreme nirvana. Hence, it is further stated:

9 *And, as such, is furnished with the supreme virtues*

10 *As such* means immediately; it also indicates "dharmicness."

In entrusting ourselves to Amida's Primal Vow and saying the Name once, necessarily, without seeking it, we are made to receive the supreme virtues, and without knowing it, we acquire the great and vast benefit. This is dharmicness, by which one will immediately realize the various facets of enlightenment naturally. "Dharmicness"[†] means not brought about in any way by the practitioner's calculation; from the very beginning one shares in the benefit that surpasses conception. It indicates the nature of *jinen*. Dharmicness expresses the natural working (*jinen*) in the life of the person who realizes shinjin and says the Name once.

SHINRAN'S NOTES:

13 **Receives the great benefit*: Know that one receives the benefit of definitely attaining Buddhahood.

14 [†]*Dharmicness*: the way that things are in themselves.

NOTES

10

dharmicness. Shinran examines a term that, while functioning as a conjunction of negligible significance in context, also has the meaning of "law" or "norm." He develops this latter meaning as the working of the Vow arising from suchness or true reality.

11 TRANSCEND CROSSWISE

In the *Larger Sutra*, Śākyamuni Buddha describes the turmoil of ordinary human life—the need to possess and the fear of loss, and the ceaseless anxiety and friction these impulses generate—and urges all beings to go beyond such existence by seeking birth in Amida’s Land of Peace. In the Buddha’s injunction, Shinran finds expressed not human effort to reach the Pure Land, but rather the free working of the Primal Vow to bring beings beyond birth-and-death. Source: *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, pp. 36–38.

ŚĀKYAMUNI URGES BEINGS TO SEEK THE PURE LAND:

Necessarily one achieves the abandoning of this world, transcending and parting from it, and attains birth in the land of peace. One cuts off crosswise the five evil courses and the evil courses close naturally. Ascending the way is without limit; to go is easy and yet no one is born there. Never at variance with that land, one is drawn there by its spontaneous working.

SHINRAN’S COMMENTARY:

- 1 *Necessarily one achieves the abandoning of this world, transcending and parting from it, and attains birth in the land of peace*
Necessarily means it has become settled. It further expresses the working of *jinen*.
- 2 *Parting from:* to sever, cast away, and become free of.
- 3 *Abandoning:* to cast away, go forth, depart.
- 4 This passage means that one transcends, becomes free of, and departs from transmigration in birth-and-death, cutting off and
- 5 abandoning this saḥā world. It means that one shall definitely at-

6 tain birth in the Pure Land of peace. *Peace* expresses praise of Amida and indicates the Pure Land of happiness.

7 *One cuts off crosswise the five evil courses*

Crosswise: laterally, transcendently. This means that because one entrusts oneself to the power of Amida’s Vow—this is the absence of calculation on the part of the practitioner—one cuts off and abandons the five evil courses and becomes free of the four modes of birth naturally (by *jinen*); it signifies Other Power. This is the meaning of “transcend crosswise.”

8 *Crosswise* is used in contrast with lengthwise, *transcend* in contrast with going around. “Lengthwise” and “going around” characterize the self-power Path of Sages; transcending crosswise is the fundamental intent of the true teaching of Other Power.

9 *Cut off:* to sever crosswise the bonds of the five evil courses.

10 *And the evil courses close naturally (jinen)*

When a person takes refuge in the power of the Vow, the five courses of birth-and-death are closed off; hence, *close naturally*. That is, drawn by the Primal Vow as the karmic cause, one attains birth in the Pure Land naturally (by *jinen*).

11 *Ascending the way is without limit*

Ascending: attaining the supreme nirvana.

12 *Way:* the enlightenment of great nirvana.

13 *To go is easy and yet no one is born there*

To go is easy: When one allows oneself to be carried by the power of the Primal Vow, one is certain to be born in the land that has been fulfilled through it; hence *to go is easy*.

14 *No one is born there:* Because people of true and real shinjin are extremely rare, those born in the true fulfilled land are few.

15 Hence, Master Genshin states that few are born in the fulfilled land, but many are born in the transformed lands.

16 *Never at variance with that land*

That land is the Pure Land of peace.

17 *Never at variance:* not upside down, not in discord.

18 Through the karmic power of the great Vow, the person who has realized true and real shinjin naturally is in accord with the cause of birth in the Pure Land and is drawn by the Buddha's karmic power; hence to go is easy, and ascending to and attaining the supreme great nirvana is without limit. Thus the words:

One is drawn there by its spontaneous working (jinen)

20 One is drawn there naturally by the cause of birth, the entrusting with sincere mind that is Other Power. This is the meaning of *drawn*.

22 *Spontaneous working (jinen)* means that there is no calculating on the part of the practitioner.

NOTES

1

Necessarily. Shinran frequently notes this term, which literally means "without fail," as expressive of the natural and unobstructed working of the Vow beyond human calculation and intentionality.

7

Crosswise. This term connotes abruptness and discontinuity in both logical and temporal senses. Thus, attainment is not the result of one's gradual progress guided by one's own judgments and designs; further, it occurs instantaneously.

8

Shinran gives a fuller, and slightly different, classification of Buddhist teachings based on the expression "transcend crosswise" in Shinjin, 73, below.

11

Ascending the way is without limit. For it is not merely crossing to the other shore, but entrance into the all-pervasive working of *jinen*.

12 NO AWAITING DEATH

SHINRAN rejects forms of nembutsu practice, widespread in his day, in which people sought to attain "right-mindedness" through utterance of the Name. The goal of this practice was to establish a relationship with Amida so that he would appear before one at the point of death. It was thought that, with such a vision, one would be freed of all doubt and distraction in one's final moments, and that birth into the Pure Land in the next life would thus be assured. For Shinran, genuine right-mindedness is shinjin or true entrusting, and its realization frees one from deep anxiety and unsettledness in the present, not at the moment of death. Source: *Letters of Shinran*, pp. 19-20.

- 1 THE idea of Amida's coming at the moment of death is for those who seek to gain birth in the Pure Land by doing religious practices, for they are practitioners of self-power. The moment of death is of central concern to such people, for they have not yet attained true shinjin. We may also speak of Amida's coming at the moment of death in the case of people who, though they have committed the ten transgressions and the five grave offenses throughout their lives, encounter a teacher in the hour of death and are led at the very end to utter the nembutsu.
- 2
- 3
- 4 People who live true shinjin, however, abide in the stage of the truly settled, for they have already been grasped, never to be abandoned. There is no need to wait in anticipation for the moment of death, no need to rely on Amida's coming. At the time shinjin becomes settled, birth too becomes settled; there is no need for the deathbed rites that prepare one for Amida's coming.
- 5
- 6
- 7 "Right-mindedness," then, is the settling of the shinjin of the

8 Primal Vow. Because of realizing this shinjin, a person necessari-
 9 ly attains the supreme nirvana. Shinjin is the mind that is single;
 the mind that is single is the diamond-like mind; the diamond-
 like mind is the mind aspiring for great enlightenment; and this
 is Other Power that is true Other Power.

10 There are, in addition, two other types of right-mindedness:
 that achieved through meditative and that through non-
 11 meditative practices. These are right-mindedness of self-power
 12 within Other Power. The terms "meditative good" and "non-
 meditative good" are used with reference to birth through
 religious practice and indicate the good practices of self-power
 13 within Other Power. Without awaiting Amida's coming, the
 practitioner of self-power will not attain birth even into the
 borderland, or the womb of Buddha Land, or the realm of in-
 14 dolence. For this reason Amida created the Nineteenth Vow,
 vowing to appear at the moment of death to welcome people
 who wish to attain birth by turning the merit of their ac-
 15 cumulated good toward the Pure Land. Thus, it is the person
 endeavoring in meditative or non-meditative practices who must
 be concerned about awaiting the moment of death and attaining
 birth through Amida's coming.

NOTES

6

deathbed rites. Among some Pure Land practitioners, great attention was given to ways of attending the dying so that the mind would remain focused on Amida and they would be capable of utterance of the nembutsu to the very end. For example, an image of Amida was often placed before dying people and strings leading from it were attached to their hands. At the same time, nembutsu practice throughout life was considered useful for maintaining such mindfulness at death.

10

meditative and non-meditative practices. Reference to the contemplative exercises and religious and moral good acts taught in the *Contemplation Sutra*.

13 TRUE DISCIPLE OF BUDDHA

IN the realization of shinjin—the true entrusting of oneself to the Primal Vow—a person’s mind becomes one with the wisdom and compassion of Amida Buddha. One continues to experience anger, envy, and all the other feelings that arise from the long blindness of self-attachment, but at the same time one has been transformed into a being who has attained the equal of enlightenment. To express the nature and significance of this transformation, Shinran cites phrases from the sutras and writings of the masters, and in his letters assures others that the person of shinjin, though not yet fully a Buddha, is in the present the equal of the Buddhas. Source: *Letters of Shinran*, pp. 50 and 24–25.

ON BEING EQUAL TO THE BUDDHAS:

- 1 The person who has attained true shinjin is already certain to become a Buddha and therefore is taught to be “equal to the
- 2 Tathāgatas” in the *Garland Sutra*. Although Maitreya has not yet attained Buddhahood, it is certain that he will, so he is
- 3 already known as “Maitreya Buddha.” In this manner, the person who has attained true shinjin is taught to be equal to the Tathāgatas.

ON BEING THE TRUE DISCIPLE OF THE BUDDHA:

- 4 It is very rare that people of this corrupt world of five defilements embrace the teaching of the Buddha, Śākyamuni, alone, and for this reason all the Buddhas in the ten quarters, numerous as the sands of the Ganges, have become witnesses to the attainment of birth through the nembutsu; this Master
- 5 Shan-tao has written in his commentary. He explains that

Śākyamuni, Amida, and the Buddhas in the ten quarters, all with the same mind, are no more apart from sentient beings of
6 the nembutsu than shadows from things. Hence it is that Śākyamuni rejoices in one who has realized shinjin, saying, “That person is my true companion.”

7 People of shinjin are the true disciples of the Buddha; they
8 are the ones who abide in right-mindedness. Since they have been grasped never to be abandoned, they are said to have attained the diamond-like mind. They are called “the best among the best,” “excellent people,” “wonderfully excellent people,”
9 “the finest of people,” “truly rare people.” They have become established in the stage of the truly settled and are declared,
10 therefore, to be the equal of Maitreya Buddha. This means that since they have realized true shinjin, they will necessarily be born in the true and real Pure Land.

12 Know that this shinjin is bestowed through the compassionate means of Śākyamuni, Amida, and all the Buddhas throughout
13 the ten quarters. Therefore you should not disparage the teachings of other Buddhas or the people who perform good acts other than the nembutsu. Neither should you despise those who scorn and slander people of nembutsu; rather, you should have compassion and care for them. This was Hōnen’s teaching.

NOTES

1

Garland Sutra. The passage is quoted in Shinjin, 34:

The person who hears this dharma, rejoices
In shinjin, and is free of doubt
Swiftly attains the supreme enlightenment;
Such a person is equal to the Tathāgatas.

Shinran distinguishes the term "equal" (*hitoshi*) from "same" (*onaji*). People of shinjin are said to be both the same as and equal to Maitreya, the bodhisattva in the stage preceding perfect enlightenment, because they too will unfailingly realize nirvana after this lifetime. With regard to the Buddhas, however, only the term "equal" is used, for such people have not yet realized Buddhahood. "Equal" implies both difference (people of shinjin remain possessed of blind passions) and sameness (their minds have become one with Amida's mind).

9

the best among the best, etc. Phrases descriptive of Pure Land practitioners from Shan-*tao's Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*. "Wonderfully excellent people" (*myōkōnin*) is now a general term for outstanding people of shinjin.

14 SELF-AWARENESS

SOME people, misunderstanding the Pure Land teaching, assumed rejection of self-power to mean that one should make no effort to lead a religious life, but should instead give in to any impulses that might arise. This attitude caused disruption in the community and occasioned censure of the nembutsu. Shinran, in letters, repeatedly states that genuine awareness that Amida saves the person who is evil leads not to willful self-indulgence, but rather to a spontaneous turning from evil deep within oneself. Source: *Letters of Shinran*, pp. 60-62.

- 1 It has not been uncommon for people like yourselves, who do not read the scriptures and are unfamiliar with them, to distort the teaching, having heard that no evil interferes with the attainment of birth. It seems that this is still the case. To hear that you are all falling deeper and deeper into error following the words of Shinken-bō and others who know nothing of the Pure Land teaching is truly lamentable.
- 2
- 3 There was a time for each of you when you knew nothing of Amida's Vow and did not say the Name of Amida Buddha, but now, guided by the compassionate means of Śākyamuni and
- 4 Amida, you have begun to hear the Vow. Formerly you were drunk with the wine of ignorance and had a taste 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.
- 5 In contrast, how lamentable that people who have not fully awakened from drunkenness are urged to more drunkenness and those still in the grips of poison encouraged to take yet more

- 6 poison. It is indeed sorrowful to give way to impulses with the
excuse that one is by nature possessed of blind passion—excus-
ing acts that should not be committed, words that should not be
7 one may follow one’s desires in any way whatever. It is like of-
fering more wine before the person has become sober or urging
him to take even more poison before the poison has abated.
8 “Here’s some medicine, so drink all the poison you like”—
9 words like these should never be said. In people who have long
heard the Buddha’s Name and said the nembutsu, surely there
are signs of rejecting the evil in themselves.
- 10 When people first begin to hear the Buddha’s Vow, they
wonder, having become thoroughly aware of the karmic evil in
their hearts and minds, how they will ever attain birth as they
are. To such people we teach that since we are possessed of blind
passions, the Buddha receives us without judging whether our
hearts are good or bad.
- 11 When, upon hearing this, their trust in the Buddha has grown
deep, they come to abhor such a self and to lament their con-
tinued existence in birth-and-death; and then they joyfully say
the Name of Amida Buddha deeply entrusting themselves to the
Vow. That people seek to stop doing wrong as their hearts move
them, although previously they gave thought to such things and
committed them as their minds dictated, is surely a sign of their
having rejected this world.
- 12 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 re-
main as we were?

15 GRASPED AND PROTECTED

SHAN-TAO states that nembutsu practitioners gain various benefits, in-
cluding being “grasped”—guided and supported—by Amida Bud-
dha at the time of death. As evidence, he cites the Eighteenth Vow,
paraphrasing it to reflect his interpretation. For Shinran also, be-
ing grasped by Amida is decisive, but he emphasizes that it prop-
erly describes the nature of shinjin, which is realized in the present.
One need not look to the future in anticipation of the Buddha’s
aid at death. Source: *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*,
pp. 52–54.

SHAN-TAO STATES:

[In evidence of the benefit] expressed, *Each living thing being
grasped by Amida, a manifestation of the decisive cause of
birth:*

It is declared among the Forty-eight Vows taught in the *Sutra
of Immeasurable Life*,

If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the
ten quarters, aspiring to the born in my land, saying my
Name even but ten times, and entrusting themselves to the
power of my Vow, were not to be born there, then may I
not attain perfect enlightenment.

This means that practitioners who aspire to be born are grasped by
the power of the Vow and brought to attainment of birth when
their lives end.

FROM SHINRAN'S COMMENTARY:

1 *Each living thing being grasped*

In the Vow, Amida grasps every sentient being throughout the ten quarters. . . .

2 *The sentient beings of the ten quarters*

All the beings throughout the ten quarters—ourselves. . . .

3 *Even but ten times*

This means that neither those who say the Name more than ten times nor those who only hear the Name are omitted or excluded from birth in the Pure Land.

4 *Entrusting themselves to the power of my Vow*

Entrust is a command to allow oneself to be carried by the power of the Primal Vow. It further connotes wisdom. Wisdom is to know that Amida brings one to ride on the power of his Vow. It is to know that, being carried by the power of the Vow, one will be born in the Pure Land of bliss.

5 *[If such beings] were not to be born there, then may I not attain perfect enlightenment*

“If people who entrust themselves to the Vow are not born in the true land fulfilled by the Primal Vow, I shall not become a Buddha.”

6 *This means that practitioners who aspire to be born are grasped by the power of the Vow and brought to attainment of birth when their lives end*

Grasped by the karmic power fulfilled through the great Vow, one is brought to the attainment of birth. This refers to the person who has already realized shinjin in ordinary times, not to one who becomes definitely settled in shinjin and who is blessed with Amida's compassionate grasp for the first time at the point

8 of death. Since those who have realized the diamond-like mind have been grasped and protected by the light of Amida's heart from ordinary times, they dwell in the stage of the truly settled. Thus the moment of death is not the crucial matter; from ordinary times they have been constantly grasped and protected, never to be abandoned, and so are said to be *grasped by the power of the Vow and brought to attainment of birth*. . . .

9 There may be people lacking true shinjin in ordinary times who, by the merit of having long engaged in saying the Name, first encounter the guidance of a true teacher and realize shinjin at the very end of their lives; at that moment, being grasped by
10 the power of the Vow, they attain birth. But those who await Amida's coming at the end of life have yet to realize shinjin and so are filled with anxiety, anticipating the moment of death.

NOTES

8

grasped and protected. Various lists of benefits enjoyed by practitioners are given in Pure Land literature, and Shinran also records ten benefits that people of shinjin receive in the present (see Shinjin, 65, below). There he mentions “being protected and cared for by all the Buddhas” and “being constantly protected by the light of the Buddha's heart.”

Shinjin, being in essence the mind of the Buddha, is said to be diamond-like, “never breaking, or degenerating, or becoming fragmented” (Passage 16). This indestructibility, described in terms of the activity of enlightened beings, is spoken of as one's being “protected.” Shinran states:

“Protected” means that one cannot be deterred by those who have taken up other teachings and beliefs, nor obstructed by those of different understandings and practices; one is not threatened by the heavenly demon Pāpiya, nor troubled by evil gods and demons. (*Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*, p. 38)

Pāpīya, the king of demons, seeks to hinder Buddhists in their path to enlightenment. Thus, whatever may occur in the life of people of shinjin, their attainment of nirvana cannot be obstructed, for it is the natural unfolding of their realization of shinjin. Moreover, because they have become free of the egocentric will, they can never be plunged again into samsaric bondage.

16 GOING AND RETURNING

THE expression “come to welcome” (*raigō*) meant throughout most of the Pure Land tradition that Amida and a host of bodhisattvas would appear at the deathbed to take one to the Pure Land. Shinran disregards the traditional understanding in explaining this term and thoroughly reinterprets the dynamic movement it implies. It is not an event to be awaited, but the full, natural unfolding of enlightenment in people of shinjin and their return to this world to save others. Source: *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,'* pp. 33-34.

SHINRAN'S COMMENTARY ON “COMING TO WELCOME”:

- 1 *Come* means “to cause to come to the Pure Land”; it is a word which expresses the actualizing of Amida's Vow, “If any should not be born in my land, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment.” It indicates that a person is made to reject the defiled world and come to the true and real fulfilled land. In short, the word indicates the working of Other Power.
- 2
- 3 *Come* also means “to return.” To return is to attain the supreme nirvana without fail because one has already entered the ocean of the Vow; this is called “returning to the city of dharma-nature.”
- 4 The city of dharma-nature is none other than the enlightenment of Tathāgata, called dharma-body, unfolded naturally. When people become enlightened, we say they “return to the city of dharma-nature.” It is also called “realizing true reality or suchness,” “realizing the uncreated or dharma-body,” “attaining emancipation,” “realizing the eternal bliss of dharma-nature,” and “attaining the supreme enlightenment.”
- 5
- 6 When people attain this enlightenment, then with great love

and great compassion immediately reaching their fullness in them, they return to the ocean of birth-and-death to save all sentient beings; this is known as attaining the virtue of Bodhisattva

7 Samantabhadra. To attain this benefit is *come*; that is, “to return to the city of dharma-nature.”

8, 9 *To welcome* means that Amida receives us, awaits us. Hearing the inconceivable selected Primal Vow and the holy Name of supreme wisdom without a single doubt is called true and real
10 shinjin; it is also called the diamond-like mind.* When sentient beings realize this shinjin, they attain the equal of perfect enlightenment and will ultimately attain the supreme enlightenment, being of the same stage as Maitreya, the future Buddha. That is, they become established in the stage of the truly settled.
11 Hence shinjin is like a diamond, never breaking, or degenerating, or becoming fragmented; thus, we speak of “diamond-like
12 shinjin.” This is the meaning of *to welcome*.

*The translation of this sentence follows a variant text. Our basic
13 text reads: Hearing the revered Name of the inconceivable selected Primal Vow—the shinjin of supreme wisdom—and being without a single doubt is called true and real shinjin.

NOTES

6

Samantabhadra (J. *Fugen*). Preeminent bodhisattva of practice whose activity epitomizes the compassion of all bodhisattvas; see the Twenty-Second Vow.

8

awaits us. As in the case of “come,” Shinran presents an interpretation that expresses Other Power. Instead of our waiting for the Buddha to come to save us at the point of death, Amida already grasps the person

of shinjin in the present, and awaits the natural unfolding of enlightenment at the end of life.

9

diamond-like mind. The bodhisattva in the final stage of practice is said to attain a diamond-like mind of indestructible wisdom that eradicates the last, deep traces of blind passion. Shinjin, being the mind of the Buddha, is also indestructible, and those who realize it necessarily attain nirvana; hence, Shinran describes it as “diamond-like.”

17 NIRVANA

IN a hymn, Shan-tao states that the Pure Land is itself nirvana; it is true reality that transcends all human conception and lies beyond the frameworks of time and space. Thus, attaining it through our own devices—through practices determined by our particular capacities and circumstances in the world—is extremely difficult. For this reason, Amida established the Primal Vow. Shinran, in his notes to the first line, presents his understanding of how formless reality or Buddha becomes active in the world of forms to liberate and enlighten beings. Source: *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,'* pp. 41–44.

FROM A HYMN BY SHAN-TAO:

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

SHINRAN'S COMMENTARY ON THE FIRST LINE:

- 1 *The land of bliss is the realm of nirvana, the uncreated*
Land of bliss is the Pure Land of happiness, where there are
always countless joys and never any suffering mingled with
them. It is known as "Land of Peace." It was Master T'an-luan
2 who praised and called it Land of Peace. Also, the *Treatise on*
the Pure Land describes it as "the lotus-held world" and as the
uncreated.

- 3 *Realm of nirvana* refers to the place where one overturns the
delusion of ignorance and realizes the supreme enlightenment.
4 *Realm* means "place"; you should know it as the place of at-
taining enlightenment.
5 *Nirvana* has innumerable names. It is impossible to give them
6 in detail; I will list only a few. Nirvana is called extinction of
passions, the uncreated, peaceful happiness, eternal bliss, true
reality, dharma-body, dharma-nature, suchness, oneness, and
Buddha-nature.
7, 8 Buddha-nature is none other than Tathāgata. This Tathāgata
pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the
ocean of all beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Bud-
dhahood.
9 Since it is with these hearts and minds of all sentient beings
that they entrust themselves to the Vow of the dharma-body as
compassionate means, this shinjin is none other than Buddha-
nature. This Buddha-nature is dharma-nature. Dharma-nature
10 is the dharma-body. For this reason there are two kinds of dhar-
ma-body in regard to the Buddha. The first is called dharma-
body as suchness and the second, dharma-body as compas-
sionate means.
11 Dharma-body as suchness has neither color nor form; thus,
12 the mind cannot grasp it nor words describe it. From this
oneness form was manifested; this form is called dharma-body
as compassionate means. Taking this form, the Buddha pro-
claimed his name as Bhikṣu Dharmākara and established the
13 forty-eight great Vows that surpass conceptual understanding.
Among these Vows are the Primal Vow of immeasurable light
and the Universal Vow of immeasurable life. To the form
manifesting these two Vows Bodhisattva Vasubandhu gave the
title, "Tathāgata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters."
14 This Tathāgata has fulfilled the Vows, which are the cause of
his Buddhahood, and thus is called "Tathāgata of fulfilled
15 body." This is none other than Amida Tathāgata. "Fulfilled"
means that the cause for enlightenment has been fulfilled.

- 16 From the fulfilled body innumerable personified and accommodated bodies are manifested, radiating the unhindered light of wisdom throughout the countless worlds. Thus appearing in the form of light called "Tathāgata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters," [Amida] is without color and without form, that is, identical with the dharma-body as suchness, dispelling the darkness of ignorance and unobstructed by karmic evil.
- 17 For this reason [Amida] is called "unhindered light." "Unhindered" means not obstructed by the karmic evil and blind
- 18 passion of beings. Know, therefore, that Amida Buddha is light, and that light is the form taken by wisdom.

18 ONE VEHICLE

SHINRAN'S most frequent image for the Primal Vow is the ocean: it embraces the multiplicity of all beings and transforms them so that they become one with itself. The corresponding image in traditional Mahāyāna writings is the One Vehicle: the Buddha's teachings are diverse, but they are meant to lead every being to the one, universal vehicle that carries all to supreme enlightenment. Shinran created an expression for the Vow in which he combined these two images, and in his explanation, indicates that they characterize not simply the verbal teaching, but the nature of reality itself. Source: *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*, pp. 45-46.

SHINRAN'S EXPRESSION FOR THE PRIMAL VOW:

- 1 *The great treasure ocean of true and real virtue—the Primal Vow, perfect and unhindered, which is the One Vehicle*
- 2 *One Vehicle* here refers to the Primal Vow.
- 3 *Perfect* means that the Primal Vow is full of all merits and roots of good, lacking none, and further, that it is free and unrestricted.
- 4 *Unhindered* means that it cannot be obstructed or destroyed by blind passion and karmic evil.
- 5 *True and real virtue* is the Name.
- 6 Since the wondrous principle of true reality or suchness has reached its perfection in the Primal Vow, this Vow is likened to
- 7 a great treasure ocean. True reality-suchness is the supreme
- 8 great nirvana. Nirvana is dharma-nature. Dharma-nature is
- 9 Tathāgata. With the words, "treasure ocean," the Buddha's non-discriminating, unobstructed, and non-exclusive guidance of all sentient beings is likened to the all-embracing waters of the great ocean.

10 From this treasure ocean of oneness form was manifested, tak-
 ing the name of Bodhisattva Dharmākara, who, through
 establishing the unhindered Vow as the cause, became Amida
 Buddha. For this reason Amida is the “Tathāgata of fulfilled
 11 body.” He has been called “Buddha of unhindered light filling
 the ten quarters.”

12 This Tathāgata is also known as *Namu-fukashigikō-butso*
 (Namu-Buddha of inconceivable light) and is the “dharma-
 13 body as compassionate means.” “Compassionate means”
 refers to manifesting form, revealing a name, and making
 14 oneself known to sentient beings. It refers to Amida Buddha.

15 This Tathāgata is light. Light is none other than wisdom;
 wisdom is the form of light. Wisdom is, in addition, formless;
 16 hence this Tathāgata is the Buddha of inconceivable light. This
 Tathāgata fills the countless worlds in the ten quarters, and so is
 called “Buddha of boundless light.” Further, Bodhisattva
 Vasubandhu has given the name, “Tathāgata of unhindered
 light filling the ten quarters.”

NOTES

1

Passage 9 states that Amida accomplishes his activity “directly with his universal Vow.” In developing his commentary, Shinran interprets “directly” to mean that the Vow is the true teaching for which Śākyamuni and all the Buddhas have appeared in the world. Further, all other Buddhist teachings, including the provisional Pure Land teachings, are meant to guide beings to enter “the great treasure ocean” of the Primal Vow, stated here.

“One Vehicle,” traditionally used in contrast with the diversity of the teachings expressed as the three vehicles (śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva), refers to the way by which all beings without exception may reach enlightenment. It is not one teaching among many, but the manifestation of true reality that is the true intent of all the teachings.

12

Namu-fukashigikō-butso. On the altar scrolls that he inscribed himself or had made, Shinran used different versions of the Name, including this one—based on one of twelve epithets for Amida describing his light in the *Larger Sutra*—and “Tathāgata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters” (11), drawn from Vasubandhu. He also states that saying other versions of the Name together with *Namu-amida-butso* is permissible (*Letters of Shinran*, p. 46).

19 OCEAN OF VIRTUES

THE Primal Vow as an "ocean" expresses not only its source in true reality or suchness (Passage 18), but also its relationship with beings. Vasubandhu, in describing the nature of Amida Buddha, states that all who encounter his Vow swiftly reach supreme enlightenment. For Shinran, this means that on realizing shinjin, one is immediately filled with the virtues of enlightenment—wisdom and compassion. They are like an ocean that pervades one's entire existence. Source: *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*, pp. 46–47.

FROM A HYMN BY VASUBANDHU:

Contemplating the power of the Buddha's Primal Vow,
I see that no one who encounters it passes by in vain;
It quickly brings to fullness and perfection
The great treasure ocean of virtues.

SHINRAN'S COMMENTARY:

- 1 *Contemplate* means to bring to mind the power of the Vow. It also means to know.
- 2 *Encounter* means to entrust oneself to the power of the Primal Vow.
- 3 *No one passes by in vain*: no one who has shinjin meaninglessly remains in the world of birth-and-death.
- 4 *Bring* means to cause; it also means good.
- 5 *Virtues* signifies none other than the Name.
The great treasure ocean: all roots of good and all virtues being full to the utmost is likened to the ocean.
- 6 By these words we know that these virtues quickly and rapidly

7 become perfectly full in the heart of one who entrusts oneself to them. Thus, though people of the diamond-like mind neither know nor seek it, the vast treasure of virtues completely fills them; hence it is likened to an ocean of great treasure.

20 JINEN

At the age of eighty-six, Shinran composed the following explanation of the expression *jinen hōni*. The two words in this term are synonymous, and both were originally adverbial: *jinen*, which occurs frequently in the *Larger Sutra*, means “naturally” or “spontaneously,” and *hōni* literally means “in accord with dharma” or the way things really are. In Buddhist usage, this term refers to the nature of the world of enlightenment. Shinran explains its meaning in the Pure Land way. Source: *Letters of Shinran*, pp. 29–30.

1 As for *jinen*:

Ji means “of itself”—it is not through the practitioner’s calculation; one is made to become so.

2 *Nen* means “one is made to become so”—it is not through the practitioner’s calculation; it is through the working of the Vow of Tathāgata.3 As for *hōni*:

It means “one is made to become so through the working of the Vow of Tathāgata.” *Hōni* means that one is made to become so (*ni*) by the virtue of this dharma (*hō*), being the working of the Vow where there is no calculation on the part of the practitioner.

5 In short, there is no place at all for the practitioner’s calculation.

6 We are taught, therefore, that in Other Power, no selfworking is true working.

7 *Jinen* means that from the very beginning one is made to
8 become so. Amida’s Vow is, from the very beginning, designed to have each one entrust oneself in *Namu-amida-butsu* and be received in the Pure Land; none of this is through the practitioner’s calculation. Thus there is no room for one to be concerned with

being good or bad. This is the meaning of *jinen* as I have learned it.

9 This Vow is the Vow to make us all attain the supreme Bud-
10 dhahood. The supreme Buddha is formless, and because of be-
11 ing formless is called *jinen*. When this Buddha is shown as being
12 with form, it is not called the supreme nirvana (Buddha). In
13 order to make us realize that the true Buddha is formless, it is ex-
14 pressly called Amida Buddha; so I have been taught. Amida
15 Buddha is the medium through which we are made to realize
16 *jinen*. After we have realized that this is the way it is, we should
not be forever talking about *jinen*. If one always talks about
jinen, then the truth that Other Power is no selfworking will
again become a problem of selfworking. This is the mystery of
the wisdom of Buddhas.