

from SHINRAN: AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS THOUGHT

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TEACHING, PRACTICE AND REALIZATION

The following passages have been selected to illuminate the structural elements and major themes of *Teaching, Practice and Realization*. They have been drawn from the first four chapters, and headings and notes have been appended. Chapter and passage numbers in the original are indicated in brackets, and where the selection has been drawn from a quotation, the author or source is given. In many of the selections we have not given the complete passage.

1 Preface

In his preface, Shinran expresses the sense of gratitude that pervades the work—gratitude for the Primal Vow, established to bring to enlightenment those without any cause in themselves, and for all the conditions that have brought about his encounter with it, including Śākyamuni's teaching of it, the figures who occasioned his teaching, and the work of all the masters who have transmitted it down through history.

I REFLECT within myself: The universal Vow difficult to fathom is indeed a great vessel bearing us across the ocean difficult to cross. The unhindered light is the sun of wisdom dispersing the darkness of our ignorance. Thus it is that, when conditions for the teaching of birth in the Pure Land had matured, Devadatta provoked Ajātaśatru

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to commit grave crimes. And when the opportunity arose for explaining the pure act by which birth is settled, Śākyamuni led Vaidehī to select the land of peace. In their selfless love, these incarnated ones—Devadatta, Ajātaśatru, Vaidehī—all aspired to save the multitudes of beings from pain and affliction, and in his compassion, Śākyamuni, the great hero, sought indeed to bless those committing the five grave offenses, those slandering the dharma, and those lacking the seed of Buddhahood. We know, therefore, that the auspicious Name embodying the perfectly fulfilled supreme virtues is true wisdom that transforms our evil into virtue, and that the diamond-like shinjin so difficult to accept is true reality that sweeps away doubt and brings us to attainment of enlightenment.

This, then, is the true teaching easy to practice for small, foolish beings; it is the straight way easy to traverse for the dull and ignorant. Among all the teachings the Great Sage preached in his lifetime, none surpasses this ocean of virtues. Let the one who seeks to abandon the defiled and aspire for the pure; who is confused in practice and vacillating in faith; whose mind is dark and whose understanding deficient; whose evils are heavy and whose karmic obstructions manifold—let this person embrace above all the Tathāgata's exhortations, take refuge without fail in the most excellent direct path, devote himself solely to this practice, and revere only this shinjin.

Ah, hard to encounter, even in many lifetimes, is the decisive cause of birth, Amida's universal Vow! Hard to realize, even in myriads of kalpas, is pure shinjin that is true and real! If you should come to realize this practice and shinjin, rejoice at the conditions from the distant past that have brought it about. But if in this lifetime still you

are entangled in a net of doubt, then unavoidably you must pass once more in the stream of birth-and-death through myriads of kalpas. Wholly sincere, indeed, are the words of truth that one is grasped, never to be abandoned, the right dharma all-surpassing and wondrous! Hear and reflect, and let there be no wavering or apprehension.

How joyous I am, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Śākya-muni! Rare is it to come upon the sacred scriptures from the westward land of India and the commentaries of the masters of China and Japan, but now I have been able to encounter them. Rare is it to hear them, but already I have been able to hear. Reverently entrusting myself to the teaching, practice, and realization that are the true essence of the Pure Land way, I am especially aware of the profundity of the Tathāgata's benevolence. Here I rejoice in what I have heard and extol what I have attained.

2 General Structure

At the beginning of Chapter on Teaching, Shinran presents the organizing concepts of the first four chapters: the two aspects of Amida's activity—for beings' birth in the Pure Land and for their return to save others—and the elements of the first aspect, including directing to beings not only the Pure Land teaching, but also practice, shinjin, and realization itself. He also states that the true teaching is the *Larger Sutra*, the basic assertion of this chapter.

Reverently contemplating the true essence of the Pure Land way, I see that Amida's directing of virtue to sentient beings has two aspects: the aspect for our going forth

to the Pure Land and the aspect for our return to this world. In the aspect for going forth, there is the true teaching, practice, shinjin, and realization.

To reveal the true teaching: It is the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life*. The central purport of this sutra is that Amida, by establishing his incomparable Vows, has opened wide the dharma-storehouse, and full of compassion for small, foolish beings, he selects and bestows his treasure of virtues. [The sutra further reveals that Śākya-muni appeared in this world and expounded the teachings of the way of enlightenment, seeking to save the multitudes of living beings by blessing them with this benefit that is true and real. Thus, to teach the Tathāgata's Primal Vow is the true intent of the sutra; the Name of the Buddha is its essence.

[CHAPTER ON TEACHING, 1-2]

3 The Vow of Practice

Each chapter is identified with a Vow (except for Chapter on Teaching, which is identified with the *Larger Sutra* as a whole), which is indicated by name in an epigraph. The Vow expressing practice is the Seventeenth Vow, and that expressing shinjin is the Eighteenth Vow (see 19 below).

The Vow that All the Buddhas Say the Name

The True Practice of the Pure Land Way
The Practice Selected in the Primal Vow

[CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, EPIGRAPH]

4 Great Practice

Great practice is to say the Name, *Namu-amida-butsu*. "Great" implies true and authentic, that is, the functioning of Buddha. The saying of the Name by the person of *shinjin* holds the significance of suchness or true reality, for it is itself the activity of the mind of the Vow.

Reverently contemplating Amida's directing of virtue for our going forth to the Pure Land, I find that there is great practice, there is great *shinjin*.

The great practice is to say the Name of the Tathāgata of unhindered light. This practice, embodying all good acts and possessing all roots of virtue, is perfect and most rapid [in bringing about birth]. It is the treasure ocean of virtues that is suchness or true reality. For this reason, it is called great practice.

This practice arises from the Vow of great compassion, which is known as "the Vow that all Buddhas extol the Name," "the Vow that all Buddhas say the Name," and "the Vow that all Buddhas praise the Name." It might also be called "the Vow of directing virtue for our going forth" and "the Vow in which the saying of the Name is selected."

[CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 1]

5 Saying the Name

Shinran identifies "saying the Name" and "*Namu-amida-butsu*," for great practice is the Name given to people of true *shinjin*, and remains so whether they vocally express it

or not. Receiving this practice, "people of true *shinjin* constantly recall the Primal Vow without interruption" (*Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,'* p. 37); hence, the great practice that is the Name—"the ocean of virtues that is suchness or true reality"—is always present in their hearts and minds.

These passages reveal that saying the Name breaks through all the ignorance of sentient beings and fulfills all their aspirations. 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. Let this be known.

[CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 12]

6 Easy Practice of Entrusting

In the Buddha's teaching there are countless gates. Just as there are difficult and easy among the paths of this world—for journeying overland is full of hardship while sailing on board a boat is pleasant—so it is with the paths of *bodhisattvas*. Some engage in rigorous practice and endeavor; others quickly reach the stage of non-retrogression through the easy practice of entrusting as the means [for attaining it]. . . .

If one desires quickly to attain
The stage of non-retrogression,
One should, with a reverent heart,
Say the Name, holding steadfast to it.

If bodhisattvas desire to realize the supreme, perfect enlightenment through attaining the stage of non-retrogression while in their present existence, they should think on the Buddhas of the ten quarters. The saying of the Name is taught thus in "Chapter on Non-retrogression" of the *Sutra of the Questions of the Lord Ratnacandra*.

[NĀGĀRJUNA, IN CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 15]

7 Path of Easy Practice

Reverently contemplating the *Commentary on the Ten Bodhisattva Stages* of Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, I find it stated that there are two paths by which bodhisattvas seek the stage of non-retrogression—the path of difficult practice and the path of easy practice.

With the path of difficult practice, it is seeking non-retrogression in this world of five defilements at a time when there is no Buddha that is difficult. . . .

In the path of easy practice, one aspires to be born in the Pure Land with solely one's entrusting to the Buddha as the cause, and allowing oneself to be carried by the power of the Buddha's Vow, one quickly attains birth in the land of purity. Supported by the Buddha's power, one immediately joins the truly settled of the Mahāyāna. The stage of the truly settled is none other than the stage of non-retrogression. Thus the path of easy practice may be compared in its comfort to being carried over waterways in a ship.

[T'AN-LUAN, IN CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 18]

8 Directing Virtue

Directing merit to others is the fifth element of the Pure Land aspirant's practice according to Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land*. Shinran, however, through the indication of honorific verbs, expresses his understanding of this practice as above all the activity of the Buddha.

[The *Treatise on the Pure Land*] states:

How is directing of virtue accomplished? It is by never abandoning any sentient being in suffering, but constantly aspiring in the heart to fulfill the mind of great compassion, taking the directing of virtue as foremost.

The directing of virtue has two aspects: that for going forth to the Pure Land and that for return to this world. "Directing for going forth" means to give one's virtues to all sentient beings and to aspire to bring them all to birth in Amida Tathāgata's Pure Land of happiness.

[T'AN-LUAN, IN CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 19]

9 Grasp and Never Abandon

This phrase expresses the essential nature of Amida's Buddhahood.

Watching solely over the sentient beings of the nembutsu, he grasps and never abandons them; hence he is called Amida.

[SHAN-TAO, IN CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 25]

10 Analysis of "Namu-amida-butsu"

Namu means "to take refuge." It further signifies aspiring for birth and directing virtue. *Amida-butsu* is the practice. Because of this import, one necessarily attains birth.

[SHAN-TAO, IN CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 30]

11 Commentary on Shan-tao's Analysis

Shinran explores the meaning of "necessarily" attaining birth through the nembutsu.

Aspiring for birth and directing virtue indicates the mind of the Tathāgata who, having already established the Vow, gives sentient beings the practice necessary for their birth.

The practice is the selected Primal Vow.

One necessarily attains birth elucidates the attainment of the stage of non-retrogression. Concerning this, the [Larger] Sutra states, "immediately attains," and [Nāgārjuna's] commentary, "definitely settled." "Immediately" reveals the ultimate brevity of the instant in which the true cause of one's birth in the fulfilled land becomes definitely settled through one's hearing the power of the Vow. "Definitely" characterizes the realization of the diamond-like mind.

[CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 34]

12 Choosing the Act of True Settlement

Hōnen established the path of wholehearted practice of the nembutsu through developing and applying a principle of selection and rejection.

If you desire to free yourself quickly from birth-and-death, of the two excellent teachings leave aside the Path of Sages and choosing, enter the Pure Land way. If you desire to enter the Pure Land way, of the two methods of practice, right and sundry, cast aside all sundry practices and choosing, take the right practice. If you desire to perform the right practice, of the two kinds of acts, true and auxiliary, further put aside the auxiliary and choosing, solely perform the act of true settlement. The act of true settlement is to say the Name of the Buddha. Saying the Name unfailingly brings about birth, for this is based on the Buddha's Primal Vow.

[HŌNEN, IN CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 68]

13 Taking Refuge in Practice and Shinjin

When one attains the true and real practice and shinjin, one greatly rejoices in one's heart. This attainment is therefore called the stage of joy. It is likened to the first fruit: a sage of the first fruit, though he may give himself to sleep and to sloth, will still never be subject to samsaric existence for a twenty-ninth time. Even more decisively will the ocean of beings of the ten quarters be grasped and never abandoned when they have taken refuge in this prac-

tice and shinjin. Therefore he is called "Amida Buddha." This is Other Power. Accordingly, the Mahāsattva Nāgārjuna states [that such a person] "immediately enters the stage of the definitely settled." Master T'an-luan states [that he] "enters the group of the truly settled." We should reverently entrust ourselves to this [practice and shinjin]; we should single-heartedly practice it.

[CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 71]

14 Consummation of Practice

On the significance of "one utterance." The "one thought-moment" of shinjin is explained in 26 below.

Concerning the practice and shinjin that Amida directs to us for our going forth: in practice there is "one utterance" (*ichinen*), and in shinjin there is "one thought-moment" (*ichinen*). The one utterance of practice reveals, in terms of the number of voicings, the consummation of the easy practice selected in the Primal Vow.

[CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 73]

15 The Ship of the Vow

In the realizing of shinjin, blind passions are transformed into great compassion even while remaining as they are, and karmic evil becomes one with the Buddha's virtues.

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

of perfect virtue blow softly and the waves of evil are transformed. The darkness of ignorance is immediately broken through, and quickly reaching the land of immeasurable light, one realizes great nirvana and acts in accord with the virtue of Samantabhadra.

[CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 78]

16 One Vehicle

In Shinran's thought, "One Vehicle" refers to the sole path to realization, by which all beings possessed of blind passions attain Buddhahood.

In the term, "ocean of the One Vehicle," "One Vehicle" refers to the great vehicle (Mahāyāna). The great vehicle is the Buddha vehicle. To realize the One Vehicle is to realize the highest perfect enlightenment. The highest perfect enlightenment is none other than the realm of nirvana. The realm of nirvana is the ultimate dharma-body. To realize the ultimate dharma-body is to reach the ultimate end of the One Vehicle. There is no other Tathāgata, there is no other dharma-body. Tathāgata is itself dharma-body. Reaching the ultimate end of the One Vehicle is without bound and without cessation. In the great vehicle, there are no "two vehicles" or "three vehicles." The two vehicles and three vehicles lead one to enter the One Vehicle. The One Vehicle is the vehicle of highest truth. There is no One Vehicle other than the One Buddha-Vehicle, the Vow.

[CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 84]

17 Ocean of the Vow

The transformative character of the Vow, which brings the person who is evil to attainment of Buddhahood, is likened to an ocean. Upon entering, even the good acts of sages do not remain unchanged, much less minds of ignorance and blind passions; all are transformed into great compassion.

Concerning the term “ocean”: since the infinite past, the river waters of the sundry practices and disciplines performed by ordinary people and sages, and the ocean waters of the ignorance—infinite as the sands of the Ganges—of those who commit the five grave offenses, who slander the dharma, or who lack the seed of Buddhahood, have been transformed into the waters of the great treasure ocean of all the true and real virtues—countless as the sands of the Ganges—of the great wisdom-compassion of the Primal Vow. This is likened to an ocean. We know truly, then, that it is as a sutra states, “The ice of blind passions melts and becomes the water of virtues.”

The ocean of the Vow does not keep within it the dead bodies of the sundry good acts of the two vehicles, that is, the middle and lower vehicles. Hardly does it keep, then, the corpses of the empty, transitory, false, and deceitful good acts and poisoned and impure minds of men and devas.

[CHAPTER ON PRACTICE, 91]

18 Preface to Chapter on Shinjin

Since shinjin is the Buddha’s mind embodied in the Vow, it is neither an aspect of our usual consciousness nor can it be generated by us; it is acquired from the Buddha. In this chapter, Shinran explains that this shinjin realized by beings arises from Amida’s mind.

An asterisk is added to the term “shinjin” where the original is “entrusting” (*shingyō*), adopted from the Eighteenth Vow.

As I reflect, I find that our attainment of shinjin* arises from the heart and mind with which Amida Tathāgata selected the Vow, and that the clarification of true mind has been taught for us through the skillful works of compassion of the Great Sage, Śākyamuni. But the monks and laity of this latter age and the religious teachers of these times are floundering in concepts of “self-nature” and “mind only,” and they disparage the true realization of enlightenment in the Pure Land way. Or lost in the self-power attitude of meditative and non-meditative practices, they are ignorant of true shinjin, which is diamond-like.

Here I, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Śākyamuni, reverently embrace the true teaching of the Buddhas and Tathāgatas and look to the essential meaning of the treatises and commentaries of the masters. Fully guided by the beneficent light of the three sutras, I seek in particular to clarify the luminous passage on the “mind that is single.” I will pose questions concerning it and then present clear testimony in which explanation is found.

Mindful solely of the depth and vastness of the Buddha’s benevolence, I am unconcerned about being per-

sonally abused. Let companions who aspire for the Pure Land and all who abhor this defiled world accept or discard what they will of this work, but let them not ridicule the teaching.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, PREFACE]

19 The Vow of Shinjin

The Vow of Sincere Mind and Entrusting

The Person in the Stage of the Truly Settled

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, EPIGRAPH]

20 Great Shinjin

As with great practice, "great" implies the wisdom and compassion of the enlightened mind, in contrast to thoughts and feelings arising from self-attachment and ignorance. Shinjin, like the Name (nembutsu), is itself true reality or suchness. The religious experience expressed as realization of shinjin, or as being given great practice and shinjin by Amida, is therefore none other than to enter suchness. Thus, the person who realizes shinjin attains the stage of non-retrogression and receives the love of all enlightened beings.

Shinran emphasizes the difficulty of realizing shinjin, for it is impossible for the finite mind of human beings to attain, through its own endeavor, the mind of Buddha that transcends all forms. Thus, between our own efforts to realize shinjin and Amida's giving the mind of the Vow to us there lies a complete discontinuity; finally realization lies beyond conceptual understanding, and must be said to

"come about wholly through the power of great compassion."

Reverently contemplating Amida's directing of virtue for our going forth, I find there is great shinjin. Great shinjin is the superlative means for attaining longevity and deathlessness. It is the wondrous way to awaken aspiration for the pure and rejection of the defiled. It is the straightforward mind directed to us through the selected Vow. It is shinjin* that actualizes Amida's profound, vast benefiting of others. It is true mind that is diamond-like and indestructible. It is pure shinjin by which a person easily reaches the Pure Land where no one goes. It is the mind that is single, realized by the person who is grasped and protected by compassionate light. It is great shinjin, rare and unsurpassed. It is the quick path difficult for people to accept. It is the true cause of attaining great nirvana. It is the white path by which all virtues are fulfilled instantly. It is the ocean of shinjin that is itself suchness or true reality.

This mind arises from the Vow of birth through the nembutsu. This great Vow is known as "the selected Primal Vow," "the Vow of the threefold mind of the Primal Vow," "the Vow of sincere mind and entrusting," and, further, may be called "the Vow of shinjin, which is Amida's directing of virtue for our going forth." For the foolish and ignorant who are ever sinking in birth-and-death, the multitudes turning in transmigration, it is not attainment of the unexcelled, incomparable fruit of enlightenment that is difficult; the genuine difficulty is realizing true and real shinjin*. Why? Because this realization takes place through the Tathāgata's supportive

power, because it comes about wholly through the power of great compassion and all-embracing wisdom. If pure shinjin should be realized, that mind will not be inverted; that mind will not be vain or false. Thereupon the sentient being of extreme evil, profound and immense, will realize the mind of great joy and receive the veneration and love of all the sacred honored ones.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 1]

21 Two Aspects of Deep Mind

The *Contemplation Sutra* teaches that practitioners should possess “three minds”—sincerity, deep mind, and aspiration for birth. These were traditionally identified with the threefold mind presented in the Eighteenth Vow. Shinran distinguishes explicit and implicit meanings in the sutra, and in their implicit meaning, the three minds of the *Contemplation Sutra* are identical with those of the Vow. Thus, “Deep mind is true and real shinjin” (*Passages on the Pure Land Way*, p. 54). In this mind, the awareness that one lacks any cause for Buddhahood in oneself and the awareness that one will decidedly attain Buddhahood through the Vow exist together as an interfused whole, reflecting the core of the path as the attainment of enlightenment by the person who is evil. For Shinran’s personal awareness, see 33 below.

Deep mind is the deeply entrusting mind. There are two aspects. One is to believe deeply and decidedly that you are a foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death, ever sinking and ever wandering in transmigration from innumerable kalpas in the past, with never a condition that would lead to emancipation. The second is to

believe deeply and decidedly that Amida Buddha’s Forty-eight Vows grasp sentient beings, and that allowing yourself to be carried by the power of the Vow without any doubt or apprehension, you will attain birth.

[SHAN-TAO, IN CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 13]

22 Parable of the White Path

This is one of the best known parables in Pure Land literature; Shinran comments on it in 25 below.

Suppose there is a traveler journeying one hundred thousand li toward the west, when suddenly, along the way, he comes upon two rivers [in a single channel]—one of fire, extending southward, and one of water, extending north. Each river is one hundred paces across, immeasurably deep, and endless to the north and south. Dividing the fire and water is a single white path four or five inches wide. This path, from the eastern bank to the western bank, is one hundred paces in length. Billows of water surge over the path and flames sweep up to scorch it. Water and fire thus alternate without break.

Now the traveler has already gone far into the vast and solitary wilderness; there is no one to be seen. But bands of brigands and wild beasts lurk there, and seeing the traveler alone, they vie with each other to kill him. Fearing for his life, the traveler at once flees toward the west, when without warning the great river appears. He reflects, “I can see no end to this river either to the north or south. In the middle is a white path, but it is exceedingly narrow. Although the two banks are but slightly separated, how is

it possible to cross? Assuredly this day I shall die. If I turn back, brigands and wild beasts will press closer and closer upon me. If I run north or south, beasts and poisonous insects will contend with each other to attack me. If I venture on the path westward, surely I will plunge into the two currents of water and fire.”

There are no words to express the terror and despair that fill him at this point. He thinks further to himself: “If I turn back now, I die. If I remain here, I die. If I go forward, I die. There is no way for me to escape death. Therefore, I choose to go forth, venturing on this path. Since this path exists, it must be possible to cross the rivers.”

When this thought occurs to him, he suddenly hears an encouraging voice of someone on the eastern bank, “O traveler, just resolve to follow this path forward! You will certainly not encounter the grief of death. But if you stay where you are, you will surely die.”

Further, someone on the western bank calls to him, “O traveler, with mind that is single, with right-mindedness, come at once! I will protect you. Have no fear of plunging to grief in the water or fire.” The traveler, having heard the exhortation on his side of the river and the call from the other, immediately acquires firm resolution in body and mind and decisively takes the path, advancing directly without entertaining any doubt or apprehension.

When he has gone one or two paces, the brigands on the eastern bank call out to him: “O traveler, come back! This path is treacherous and permits no crossing. You are certain to meet death. None of us address you thus with evil intent.”

The traveler hears the voices calling him, but he gives no

backward glance. Thinking only of the path, he advances directly forward with mind that is single, forthwith reaches the western side, and is free forever of all afflictions. He meets his good friend, and his joy is boundless. This is the parable.

Now to apply the parable: *The eastern bank* is the burning house that is this saha world. *The western bank*: the precious land of perfect bliss. *The brigands and wild beasts calling with treacherous familiarity*: a sentient being's six sense organs, the six forms of perception, the six kinds of objects, the five aggregates, and the four elements. *The wilderness where no one is to be seen*: one constantly joins with evil companions, without ever meeting a true teacher. *The two currents of water and fire*: sentient beings' greed and desire are likened to water, their anger and hatred to fire. *The white path in the middle, four or five inches wide*: amidst sentient beings' blind passions of greed and anger, a pure mind that aspires for birth in the Pure Land is awakened. Since the greed and anger are intense, they are like the water and fire. Since the good mind is slight, it is like the white path. Further, *billows of water constantly surge over the path*: desires arise incessantly to defile the good mind. *Flames ceaselessly scorch the path*: anger and hatred consume the dharma-treasure of virtue. *The traveler follows the path and advances directly westward*: turning away from all practices, he advances directly westward. *He hears a voice of someone on the eastern bank encouraging and exhorting him, and following the path, advances directly westward*: Śākyamuni has already entered nirvana and people of later times cannot meet him. His teachings still remain,

however, and we can follow them. They are like that voice. *When he has gone one or two paces, the brigands call him back:* people of different understandings, different practices or false views, with their own misguided opinions, one after another seek to confuse him, claiming that he will commit evil and fail. *Someone on the western bank calls to him:* this is the intent of Amida's Vow. *The traveler forthwith reaches the western side; he meets his good friend, and his joy is boundless:* sentient beings long sinking in birth-and-death and for innumerable kalpas lost in transmigration, being bound in delusion by their own karma, have no means of gaining emancipation for themselves. Reverently embracing Śākyamuni's teaching in his exhortations to advance westward and obeying Amida's call to us with his compassionate heart, the traveler accepts and accords with the mind of the two honored ones; never giving a thought to the two rivers of water and fire and taking the call of the honored ones to heart at every moment, he entrusts himself to the path of the power of the Vow. After his death, he attains birth in that land and meets the Buddha. How boundless is his joy!

[SHAN-TAO, IN CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 13]

23 Practice and Shinjin as Directed to Beings

All elements of the practitioner's path are given by the Buddha through the activity of the Vow; this includes attainment of non-retrogression and supreme enlightenment (see 39 below).

Whether with regard to practice or to shinjin, there is nothing whatever that has not been fulfilled through Amida Tathāgata's directing of virtue to beings out of his pure Vow-mind. It is not that there is no cause or that there is some other cause. Reflect on this.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 18]

24 The Threefold Mind

At the beginning of the *Treatise on the Pure Land*, Vasubandhu states that he takes refuge in Amida "with mind that is single." Shinran regards this "single mind" or "one mind" as a synonym for shinjin, expressing the purity and freedom from doubt that is the essence of each of the "three minds" presented in the Eighteenth Vow. Because sentient beings are possessed of blind passions, Amida fulfilled the mind of truth and reality (identical with the Name) and gives it to them.

QUESTION: We can accept Vasubandhu's intentions—the significance of taking the three (sincere mind, entrusting, and aspiration for birth) as one—as indicated by the literal meanings of the terms. But Amida Tathāgata has in fact established the Vow of the *threefold* mind for the sake of foolish and evil sentient beings. How are we to understand this?

ANSWER: The Buddha's intention is difficult to fathom. Nevertheless, reflecting on this [threefold] mind for myself alone, I find that all beings, an ocean of multitudes, have since the beginningless past down to this day—this very moment—been evil and defiled, completely lacking the mind of purity. They have been false and

deceitful, completely lacking the mind of truth and reality. Thus, when the Tathāgata, in profound compassion for the ocean of all sentient beings in pain and affliction, performed bodhisattva practices for inconceivable millions of measureless kalpas, there was not a moment—not an instant—when his practice in the three modes of action was not pure, or lacked the true mind. With this pure, true mind, the Tathāgata brought to fulfillment the perfect, unhindered, inconceivable, indescribable, and inexplicable supreme virtues. The Tathāgata gives this sincere mind to all living things, an ocean of beings possessed of blind passions, karmic evil, and false wisdom. This mind manifests the true mind of benefiting others. For this reason, it is completely untainted by the hindrance of doubt. This sincere mind takes as its essence the revered Name of supreme virtues.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 21]

25 Commentary on the White Path

Truly we know that, in the parable of the two rivers, the *white of the white path four or five inches wide* contrasts with dark. *White* is the pure act selected and adopted [in the Vow], the pure act that is the directing of virtue to us for our going forth. “Dark” is the black activity of our ignorance and blind passions, the sundry good acts of those of the two vehicles and of men and devas.

Path contrasts with trail. It is the one real, direct path of the Primal Vow, the supreme great way to complete nirvana. “Trail” refers to the by-paths of those of the two or the three vehicles, of the myriad good acts and practices.

Four or five inches wide refers to the four elements and five aggregates that make up sentient beings.

Awakens the pure mind of aspiration means to realize the diamond-like true mind. Since this is the ocean of great shinjin directed to us through the power of the Primal Vow, it cannot be defeated or broken. It is likened to diamond.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 46]

26 One Thought-Moment of Shinjin

Contemplating true and real shinjin*, I find there is the one thought-moment. One thought-moment expresses the ultimate brevity of the instant of the realization of shinjin* and manifests the vast, inconceivable mind of joyfulness.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 60]

27 Ten Benefits in the Present Life

When we realize the diamond-like true mind, we transcend crosswise the paths of the five courses and eight hindered existences and unflinchingly gain ten benefits in the present life. What are these ten?

First, the benefit of being protected and sustained by unseen powers.

Second, the benefit of being possessed of supreme virtues.

Third, the benefit of our karmic evil being transformed into good.

Fourth, the benefit of being protected and cared for by all the Buddhas.

Fifth, the benefit of being praised by all the Buddhas.

Sixth, the benefit of being constantly protected by the light of the Buddha's heart.

Seventh, the benefit of having great joy in our hearts.

Eighth, the benefit of being aware of Amida's benevolence and of responding in gratitude to his virtue.

Ninth, the benefit of constantly practicing great compassion.

Tenth, the benefit of entering the stage of the truly settled.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 65]

28 Transcending Crosswise

Shinran adopts this phrase describing the attainment of Pure Land practitioners from a hymn by Shan-tao (based on the *Larger Sutra*) and employs it, together with its opposite terms, to classify all Buddhist teachings:

Transcend crosswise: the true Pure Land teaching (direct, effortless attainment through Other Power; Eighteenth Vow).

Transcend lengthwise: true Mahāyāna teachings (sudden attainment through self-power practices; Zen, Shingon, Tendai, etc.).

Depart crosswise: provisional Pure Land teachings (gradual attainment through self-power practice taught as a device to guide beings; the various practices and nembutsu recitation of the three levels [*Larger Sutra*] and nine grades [*Contemplation Sutra*] of practitioners).

Depart lengthwise: Hīnayāna and accommodated Mahāyāna teachings (gradual, progressive attainment through self-power practices; Hossō, Jōjitsu, Kusha, etc.).

Let us consider the words, *transcending crosswise, cut off the four currents*.

In *transcending crosswise*, *crosswise* stands in contrast to transcending lengthwise and departing lengthwise. *Transcending* contrasts with going roundabout and following a winding path. "Transcending lengthwise" characterizes the true and real teaching of the Mahāyāna. "Departing lengthwise" is the accommodated, expedient teaching of the Mahāyāna and the roundabout teachings of the two-vehicle and three-vehicle schools.

Transcending crosswise is the true teaching based on the fulfillment of the Vow, which embodies the perfectly consummate true reality. This indeed is the true essence of the Pure Land way.

Further, there is "departing crosswise." This is the teaching of meditative and non-meditative practices of the three levels of practitioners and the nine grades of beings; it comprises the good acts of going roundabout that lead to the transformed land, the realm of indolence.

In the pure fulfilled land of the Great Vow, grade and level are irrelevant; in the space of an instant, one swiftly transcends and realizes the supreme, perfect, true enlightenment. Hence, *transcending crosswise*.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 73]

29 True Disciple of Buddha

Shinran contrasts "true" with "false" and "provisional," which he discusses in 31 and 32 below.

In the term *true disciple of Buddha*, *true* contrasts with

false and provisional. *Disciple* indicates a disciple of Śākyamuni and the other Buddhas. This expression refers to the practitioner who has realized the diamond-like heart and mind. Through this shinjin and practice, one will without fail transcend and realize great nirvana; hence, one is called *true disciple of Buddha*.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 84]

30 Same as Maitreya

Truly we know that because Mahāsattva Maitreya has perfectly realized the diamond-like mind of the stage equal to enlightenment, he will without fail attain the stage of supreme enlightenment beneath a dragon-flower tree at the dawn of the three assemblies. Because sentient beings of the nembutsu have perfectly realized the diamond-like mind of crosswise transcendence, they transcend and realize great, complete nirvana on the eve of the moment of death. Hence the words, *As such, the same*.

Moreover, the people who have realized the diamond-like mind are the equals of Vaidehī and have been able to realize the insights of joy, awakening, and confidence. This is because they have thoroughly attained the true mind directed to them for their going forth, and because this accords with [the working of] the Primal Vow, which surpasses conceptual understanding.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 103]

31 Provisional Disciples

“Provisional” in contrast to “true” refers to practitioners of all other Buddhist teachings, which Shinran states have been taught to lead beings to the ocean of the Vow. In the Pure Land path, various practices—contemplative exercises as well as precepts and meritorious acts—are taught in the *Contemplation Sutra*. These also guide those who are incapable of taking refuge in the Vow directly.

The term *provisional* refers to those of the Path of Sages and those of the meditative and non-meditative practices within the Pure Land path.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 106]

32 False Disciples

“False” disciples of Buddha are those who in fact follow non-Buddhist paths.

The term *false* refers to the sixty-two views and the ninety-five wrong paths.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 110]

33 Shinran’s Self-Reflection

I know truly how grievous it is that I, Gutoku Shinran, am sinking in an immense ocean of desires and attachments and am lost in vast mountains of fame and advantage; so

that I rejoice not at all at entering the stage of the truly settled and feel no happiness at coming nearer the realization of true enlightenment. How ugly it is! How wretched!

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 113]

34 Beings Difficult to Cure

Concerning beings who are difficult to cure, the Buddha has taught the following. The *Nirvana Sutra* states:

Kāśyapa, there are three kinds of people in the world who are hard to cure: those who slander the great vehicle, those who commit the five grave offenses, and those who lack the seed of Buddhahood (*iccantika*). These three sicknesses are the most severe in the world; they cannot be treated by śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, or bodhisattvas. Good sons, suppose a person is sick with a disease that is certain to be fatal and is without cure, but treatment is given, and there is appropriate medicine. If there were no treatment or appropriate medicine, in no way would it be possible to cure the illness. Know that the person would be certain beyond any doubt to die. Good sons, these three kinds of people are like this. Following the Buddha and bodhisattvas, they have heard and received the cure—they are able to awaken the mind of aspiration for supreme, perfect enlightenment. But śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas, whether they preach the dharma or not, cannot bring such people to awaken the mind aspiring for supreme, perfect enlightenment.

[NIRVANA SUTRA, IN CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 114]

35 Healing

We see, from the true teaching of the Great Sage, that when the three types of beings difficult to save—those afflicted with the three kinds of sickness difficult to cure—entrust themselves to the universal Vow of great compassion and take refuge in the ocean of shinjin that is [Amida's] benefiting others, the Buddha is filled with pity for them and heals them, commiserates with and cures them. It is like the wondrous medicine called *maṇḍa* curing all illness. Beings of the defiled world—the multitudes possessed of corruptions and evil—should seek and think on the diamond-like, indestructible true mind. They should hold steadfast to the Primal Vow, which is the wondrous medicine called *maṇḍa*.

[CHAPTER ON SHINJIN, 118]

36 Realization

In general Mahāyāna thought, realization is expressed as “perfect self-benefit (activity for one’s own attainment of enlightenment) and benefiting others (activity to bring others to enlightenment).” For Shinran, the fundamental nature of supreme Buddhahood itself is the benefiting of others, and since beings’ realization is given by the Buddha, he speaks only of “Amida’s perfect benefiting of others”; there is no self-benefit apart from the Buddha’s activity.

Realization is not confined to reaching the Pure Land after death; since it arises from Amida’s perfect benefiting, it includes in its scope the attainment of non-retrogression; which masters prior to Shinran taught could be realized only in the Pure Land, but which he teaches as occurring in

the present life. This continuity of realization is expressed in his statement, "To necessarily attain nirvana (dwell in non-retrogression upon realizing shinjin) is eternal bliss."

Moreover, he states that when people realize supreme 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" (Passage 16). People of true and real shinjin have attained non-retrogression (entered suchness) and are the equal of Tathāgatas; they have gained the benefit of "constantly practicing great compassion." In this way, they have entered the sphere of realization. Nevertheless, they are still possessed of blind passions and karmic evil; hence, compassion has not yet reached fullness in them. When they realize nirvana, however, all their blind passion is eliminated, and they are able to manifest freely the compassionate activity of benefiting others.

To reveal, with reverence, the true realization: It is the wondrous state attained through Amida's perfect benefiting of others; it is the ultimate fruition of supreme nirvana. It arises from the Vow of necessary attainment of nirvana, also known as the "Vow of realization of great nirvana."

When foolish beings possessed of blind passions, the multitudes caught in birth-and-death and defiled by evil karma, 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. To necessarily attain nirvana is [to attain] eternal bliss. Eternal bliss is ultimate tranquility. Tranquility is supreme nirvana. Supreme nirvana is uncreated dharma-body. Uncreated

dharma-body is true reality. True reality is dharma-nature. Dharma-nature is suchness. Suchness is oneness. Amida Tathāgata comes forth from suchness and manifests various bodies—fulfilled, accommodated, and transformed.

[CHAPTER ON REALIZATION, 1]

37 Inconceivable Working of Buddha

T'an-luan's literal meaning in the following passage is that people who hear of and aspire for the Pure Land will be able to go there after they die and enter the stage of the truly settled. Shinran alters the passage in his reading notes to indicate that two types of people—those who hear of the Pure Land and aspire for birth (realize shinjin) and those who attain birth—immediately enter the stage of the truly settled. In this way, he not only teaches the attainment of non-retrogression at the time of realizing shinjin, but also expresses the continuity of realization as entrance into realm of the Buddha's work of benefiting of others, which spans the present life and birth into the Pure Land.

The sutra declares, "Those who, simply hearing of the purity and happiness of that land, earnestly desire to be born there, and those who attain birth, immediately enter the stage of the truly settled." This shows that the land's very name performs the Buddha's work [of saving others]. How can this be conceived?

[T'AN-LUAN, IN CHAPTER ON REALIZATION, 7]

38 Beings of Blind Passions Realize Nirvana

The *Treatise* states:

Concerning “the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of purity,” the gatha states:

Contemplating the features of that world,
I see that it transcends the three realms.

Why is this inconceivable? 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. How can this be conceived?

[T'AN-LUAN, IN CHAPTER ON REALIZATION, 9]

39 Directing Virtue for Going Forth

Shinran pursues with complete thoroughness his radical interpretation of the concept of directing merit as the Buddha's activity instead of the being's self-power practice.

As I contemplate the teaching, practice, shinjin, and realization of the true essence of the Pure Land way, I see that they are the benefit that the Tathāgata directs to us in his great compassion.

Therefore, whether with regard to the cause or to the fruition, there is nothing whatever that has not been fulfilled through Amida Tathāgata's directing of virtue to

beings out of his pure Vow-mind. Because the cause is pure, the fruit is also pure.

[CHAPTER ON REALIZATION, 13]

40 Emerging into Compassionate Activity

Upon attaining the Pure Land, beings are enabled to fulfill freely the compassionate activity of bodhisattvas. In Chapter on Practice (see 8 above) Shinran interprets this phase of practice as descriptive of the activity of Dharmākara Bodhisattva-Amida Buddha, but here it expresses the attainment of beings in the Pure Land—again brought about through the power of the Vow.

Concerning “the fifth gate of emergence”: With great compassion, one observes all sentient beings in pain and affliction, and assuming various transformed bodies to guide them, enters the gardens of birth-and-death and the forests of blind passions; freely sporting there with transcendent powers, one attains the state of teaching and guiding. This is brought about by the directing of virtue through the power of the Primal Vow; it is called “the fifth gate of emergence.”

[VASUBANDHU, IN CHAPTER ON REALIZATION, 15]

41 Directing Virtue for Return to the World

“Directing virtue for return to this world” means that after being born in that land and fulfilling the power of compassionate means—*śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*—one

returns and enters the thick forests of birth-and-death, teaches and guides all sentient beings, and brings all to enter the Buddha-way together. Whether with regard to the aspect for going forth or the aspect for returning, all has been entirely for the sake of bringing sentient beings across the ocean of birth-and-death. Thus it is stated, "It is to fulfill the mind of great compassion, taking the directing of virtue as foremost."

[T'AN-LUAN, IN CHAPTER ON REALIZATION, 16]

42 Two Dimensions of Dharma-Body

Vasubandhu teaches the features of Amida Buddha, the Pure Land, and the beings born there as the content of contemplative practice. In his commentary, T'an-luan explains that all these features are inseparable from and nondual with the fundamental purity of enlightenment or true reality, which transcends all forms and concepts, but which compassionately manifests form (Amida Buddha) to awaken beings.

T'an-luan's concept of two dimensions of dharma-body is unique in Mahāyāna tradition. Shinran departs from his predecessors in adopting it as the foundation of his thought and in teaching, based on it, that shinjin itself is none other than dharma-body (Passage 17).

The preceding seventeen phrases on the land's adornments, eight phrases on the Tathāgata's adornments, and four phrases on the bodhisattvas' adornments are "extensive." That they *enter into the phrase "one-dharma"* is termed *in brief*. Why is it explained that extensive and brief interpenetrate? Because all Buddhas and bodhisatt-

vas have dharma-bodies of two dimensions: dharma-body as suchness and dharma-body as compassionate means. Dharma-body as compassionate means arises from dharma-body as suchness, and dharma-body as suchness emerges out of dharma-body as compassionate means. These two dimensions of dharma-body differ but are not separable; they are one but cannot be regarded as identical. Thus, extensive and brief interpenetrate, and together are termed "dharma." If bodhisattvas do not realize that extensive and brief interpenetrate, they are incapable of self-benefit and benefiting others.

[T'AN-LUAN, IN CHAPTER ON REALIZATION, 17]