

SHINRAN

AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS THOUGHT

With Selections from the
Shin Buddhism Translation Series

by YOSHIFUMI UEDA and DENNIS HIROTA

HONGWANJI INTERNATIONAL CENTER
Kyoto

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 to 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
11 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
13 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 light, never to be abandoned. "To grasp" (*sesshu*) means to 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'ō, 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.

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.

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.

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 because you are good. You cannot be born into the true and real
 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" *tarikini 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 unequalled, 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 manifestatons 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.

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:

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."

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 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:

Made the essential purport

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

Foolish beings

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

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 attain-
- 2 ment 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.
- 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—excusing acts that should not be committed, words that should not be said, and thoughts that should not be harbored—and to say that
- 7 one may follow one's desires in any way whatever. It is like offering more wine before the person has become sober or urging him to take even more poison before the poison has abated.
- 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 continued 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 remain as we were?

15 GRASPED AND PROTECTED

SHAN-TAO states that nembutsu practitioners gain various benefits, including being "grasped"—guided and supported—by Amida Buddha at the time of death. As evidence, he cites the Eighteenth Vow, paraphrasing it to reflect his interpretation. For Shinran also, being grasped by Amida is decisive, but he emphasizes that it properly 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.