

The Core of Shinshū

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1. The wish to be born in the Pure Land—result of Amida's Summons—as the Principle of the Awareness of non-retrogression in the present life.

Already more than seven-hundred and thirty years have elapsed since Shinran Shōnin wrote his *Kyōgyōshinshō* and founded the Shin sect of Pure Land Buddhism (*Jōdo Shinshū*). In these seven centuries several spiritual leaders who have held up for us the light of the Dharma have, of course, appeared: Kakunyo, Zonkaku, Rennyo, and others. Nevertheless, up to the present day, the doctrine of Shin Buddhism invariably focuses on one thing, namely, future birth in the Pure Land. There is indeed talk of non-retrogression in the present life and Birth in the midst of everyday life, but, all in all, we simply continue a tradition that does not get free from the expectation of the saving appearance of Amida at the moment of death.

In many peoples' opinion, the first problematic in Shin Buddhism is that of the "direction and form" of the Pure Land itself, [whether Pure Land lies far beyond this world in the Western direction, and whether Amida in a very personal form resides there] and indeed there can be no doubt but that this is an important question for the Pure Land school in general. However from the standpoint of Shin Buddhism, this is by no means a question of life and death. When we read carefully our founder's *Kyōgyōshinshō* and Rennyo's *Ofumi* (Epistles), it is clear that, following

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the text on the fulfillment of the Primal Vow of **The Larger Sūtra on Immeasurable Life** (*Daimuryōjūkyō*), they take the essential meaning of Shin Buddhism to lie in the taking of the Name of Namu Amida Buddha as the quintessence of praxis. Consequently, they teach us clearly about a once-and-for-all abandonment, about Birth in the midst of everyday life, and about non-retrogression in the present life. Apart from this there is no Shin Buddhism.

At the beginning of the Faith chapter of the *Kyōgyō-shinshō*, Shinran writes:

It is not the unsurpassed result [of awakening] that is hard to attain. Rather the true gaining of authentic entrusting faith is what is difficult.

This means that the core of Shin Buddhism does not lie in realizing the unsurpassed result of awakening but in obtaining the faith of a once-and-for-all abandonment as the true cause. When reading the scriptures, there can evidently be no doubt that to be born in the Pure Land far beyond a myriad of lands and thus to become a Buddha corresponds to the original, ultimate and ideal goal of Buddhism. However, when we turn this question around in our minds, the practical realization of just how we can be born there becomes yet another important problem of a particularly pressing nature.

In general the central meaning of the Buddha's Primal Vow in **The Larger Sūtra** lies precisely there. At a first look, the Eighteenth vow appears to correspond to the causal Primal Vow wherein a future birth for all sentient beings whatsoever is promised and effected by Amida. But, when we read the text more deeply, we realize that this sūtra does not take Birth and Awakening as merely abstract ideals, but that its primary concern is how one might go about translating these ideals into the concrete practice of one's present life. It is the passage on the fulfillment of the Primal Vow in **The Larger Sūtra** that makes it clear that the basic meaning of the Primal Vow

treats precisely this point.

The three scriptures that explain the path of Birth in the Pure Land are: **The Larger Sūtra** (*Daimuryōjukyō*), **The Meditation Sūtra** (*Kanmuryōjukyō*), and **The Smaller Sūtra** (*Amidakyō*), but, in overall terms, we can say that there are two traditions: that of **The Larger Sūtra** and that of **The Meditation Sūtra**. In India the most important of these was **The Larger Sūtra**. It has been translated twelve times into Chinese at different times. Five of these translations are extant and transmitted in the present Buddhist canon, but the other seven have been lost. There was no other single sūtra translated twelve times at different periods and we are safe in asserting that **The Larger Sūtra** is unique among all Buddhist scriptures in this regard. When we ask ourselves what this means, I am inclined to say that it tells us how wide-spread the impact of this text must have been in India.

In contrast, **The Meditation Sūtra** was translated into Chinese only once. We can thus surmise that this text was not very wide-spread in India, or at least much less so than **The Larger Sūtra**. However, once it had been translated into Chinese, **The Meditation Sūtra** appears to have suited the spirit of the Chinese people perfectly, with the result that the Pure Land doctrine of **The Larger Sūtra** was eclipsed and that of **The Meditation Sūtra** came to dominate the total field of Pure Land doctrine.

The fact that it was not **The Larger Sūtra** but rather **The Meditation Sūtra** that flourished in China teaches us about one aspect of the mentality of the Chinese people. **The Meditation Sūtra** offers a doctrine of Birth in the future, a doctrine for people who have come to despair of this world and who thus want at least a salvation in a future world beyond this one. People without prospects in this world and who put their hopes of salvation exclusively in a future world are fascinated by the doctrine of **The Meditation Sūtra**. Much more could be said about this than space allows here, so we will simply say that **The Meditation Sūtra** indeed recommends the Nembutsu, but sees that

Nembutsu only as a means for a future Birth. The Nembutsu itself is not the objective. The passage on the "lowest of the low," which promises Birth in the Pure Land to people of the lowest birth of the lowest grade, is in fact the most important part of **The Meditation Sūtra**, for it is regarded as showing the ultimate meaning of the Eighteenth Vow of **The Larger Sūtra**. It is precisely this passage that explains the benefit of the Primal Vow of Birth by Nembutsu precisely in connection with the religious disposition of the subject at the moment of death.

A man who during his whole life did nothing but evil and did not have the slightest thought for Buddha or Dharma now falls seriously ill and sees the end of his life come near without prospect of recovery. Now for the first time he looks back on his life and is gripped by the fear of death. Strangely enough, or perhaps as the fruit of good karma of former lives, at this precise moment a good teacher makes his appearance and starts talking about the Primal Vow of the Buddha. But this talk does not get through because in his life this man had never listened to such talk and was thus not ready to hear, especially since he is now too sick to understand things. Thereupon the teacher changes his tactics and turns from the method of mindfulness of the Primal Vow to that of simply reciting the Nembutsu. He proposes to say the Nembutsu in unison with the sick man and teaches him the method of reciting Amida's name ten times. At that moment the man, in fear of sickness and death, finally responds and, together with the teacher, recites the Nembutsu ten times in one breath. At the moment the recitation ends the patient quietly stops breathing and felicitously obtains Birth in the Pure Land. This in short is the content of the passage on the lowest of the low in **The Meditation Sūtra**.

In China it was precisely this passage that was taken to represent the ultimate meaning of the Eighteenth Vow. A reading of the text on this Eighteenth Vow does not find anything about either ordinary life or about the moment of death, but this passage on the lowest of the low narrowed

down the receptivity of sentient beings, of which the Primal Vow speaks, to that of the hour of death. Furthermore, while the Primal Vow expounds the threefold faith as the three minds of the sincerity, entrusting, and desire for Birth in the Pure Land, the passage on the lowest of the low speaks only of sincerity, thus encompassing all three in this one and skipping the important points of entrusting and desire for Birth. Moreover, the text of the Eighteenth Vow has the phrase "up to ten times," where the meaning includes a broad range from devoting one's whole life to the Nembutsu to saying it only once. But the passage on the lowest of the low says only "managing ten times." The sentence "managing ten times without permitting the voice to stop" means to complete the recitation of the Nembutsu ten times in natural succession in one breath.

Thus in the passage on the lowest of the low in *The Meditation Sūtra*, the Eighteenth Vow is indeed reduced to merely one breath, one respiration of a human being. This is not without meaning, if one reflects that, when all is said and done, a human being's life hangs by a single breath, and the truth of one's life lies in his breath. It can thus be thought that *The Meditation Sūtra* teaches the recitation of the Nembutsu ten times with one's last breath, thus opening our eyes to this central fact of human life. Its true meaning must then lie in the point that thereupon the human being blessedly obtains Birth in the Pure Land.

When looked at in this way *The Meditation Sūtra* can be considered to be an extremely felicitous doctrine that distills the central meaning of the Primal Vow in this one point. However, when we reflect quietly on this passage on the lowest of the low, we may remark that the concrete example there proposed, while not an impossibility, is an extreme exception. Indeed, this passage takes this very rare happening, a case not easily encountered, and presents it as if it were happening all the time. The art and skill of the passage on the lowest of the low consists in

manifesting the benefits of the Buddha through a very special and rare example. It thereby succeeds in eliciting in us an especially warm feeling. But it remains true that it is a special path that cannot be walked in general by all people. I think that we have to open our eyes to this fact.

The **Larger Sūtra** offers a detailed explanation of the root and branches of the arising of the Buddha's Primal Vow. The text on the fulfillment of the Primal Vow presents the six-character name, Na-mu-A-mi-da-Butsu, as the all-encompassing reality and from a different perspective speaks of the arising of the Buddha's Vow, explaining carefully how the Tathāgata's Pure Land is the root and the Birth of sentient beings there are the branches. This is mainstream Pure Land Buddhism. Over against this main current, **The Meditation Sūtra** represents nothing more than one particular tributary. Seen from the main stream of the great reality of the Primal Vow, the view that takes as its core the stroke of luck whereby one attains realization at the moment of death is simply a particular side channel, used as a pedagogical accommodation or a compassionate method. It is however a feature of the Chinese Pure Land tradition that the tributary thrived enormously, while the main stream dried up. It is this Pure Land tradition that flowed into Japan and took form in Genshin's *Ojōyōshū*, (*Essentials for Attaining Birth*). But, with the writing of Hōnen's *Senjākushū*, a great turn-about in this tradition was brought about. With Hōnen stimulating from the outside and our founder Shinran responding from inside, an end was put to the thinking of **The Meditation Sūtra** and a return made to the thinking of the original **Larger Sūtra**. Herein lies the significance of the Shin sect of Pure Land Buddhism.

As I have already been saying, the Shin sect of Pure Land is the teaching of the text on the fulfillment of the Primal Vow which proclaims that "all who, upon hearing his Name, rejoice in faith and recite the Name of the Buddha mindfully, be it only once . . . shall attain Birth," and which thus takes the Name, *Namu Amida Buddha*, as the

essence of all praxis, for it is by the turning over of its power that we receive the grace of faith of a once-and-for-all abandonment being opened up and fulfilled in us. At the point of this once-and-for-all abandonment and through its power, there takes place a turn-about in the heart's orientation, a mighty shift in our religious receptivity (*ki*).

It was to this reality that our founder Shinran's eyes were opened through the reading of the text on the fulfillment of the Vow. Up to that time for Shinran, "faith in Other Power" simply meant a faith whereby one believed in the doctrine of Birth in the Pure Land by Nembutsu, the Vow of Other Power. It had no other meaning than taking the Dharma power of Nembutsu of Other Power as the content believed, the object towards which the practitioner turns his merits and desires. In Shinran, however, it becomes something that can truly be called "faith of Other Power" in the real meaning, i.e., faith given by Other Power (*tariki ekō no shinjin*), for it is a faith that does not simply have Other Power as its object, but that is itself bestowed by the Other Power. This faith turned towards us by the power of the Primal Vow, transferred to us by the Tathāgata, was discovered for the first time in the text on the fulfillment of the Primal Vow by Shinran. He then grasped the gift of the Tathāgata (*Nyorai no ekō*) in the words, "turning over the sincere mind," and again in the two characters, Na-mu, of the phrase Namu Amida Butsu. Of course as a gift of the Tathāgata, it can be bestowed only by the Tathāgata and as sentient beings we can only receive it. However, the fact that we receive it does not mean that on our side there is any right or capability. Therefore, by the emphatic description of the bestowing of the sincere mind of the Tathāgata through the power of the Primal Vow, we are clearly taught the nullity of our own capabilities. Only then does it become a true "receiving from Amida." It is only after rejecting the transference of self-power that one can begin to trust in the gift of Other Power. Everything is received from the Buddha. On our side, there is nothing but the state of "being given"

through the compassion of the Buddha.

All this is correct, but, from another angle, we can say that the nullity of our self-power is made known to us upon receiving the Other Power. We then receive for the first time the insight that we had for a long time been considering ourselves worthy of receiving Other Power, although in fact we were not worthy at all. That is really a radical turn-about, which is called a conversion (*tennyū*), or more precisely, a conversion through the three Vows (*sangan tennyū*). In the text on the fulfillment of the Vow, the great fact of non-retrogression in this life is realized at the point of this turn-about.

In the patriarch of Pure Land Buddhism, Shan-*tao*, we find different interpretations of the "mind that establishes the Vow of transference." The first is a transference by self-power, technically called "turning the cause toward the effect." This means that one turns all the causal practices, secular and sacred, toward the effect of Birth in the Pure Land. Here one thinks of turning all the "roots of goodness," not only those cultivated by oneself but also those cultivated by all sentient beings, toward Birth in the Pure Land. One gathers in empathy all that wears the name "good," not only of the present age but also of the past and future and directs it all toward one's own awakening and Birth. This is the first interpretation and corresponds to what is usually termed the transference of self-power. The second interpretation is technically called "turning one's thought toward the path." This consists in turning about and rejecting all self-power, deliberation, and discrimination, all the calculating included in "turning the cause toward the effect" in order to make everything turn toward the Great Path of the Tathāgata's Primal Vow. This is the transference of Other Power. For this Shinran read the four characters, *shi-shin ē-kō* (sincere mind transference) to mean: He deigns to transfer merit into the sincere mind. Out of his true Vow-mind, the Tathāgata deigns to give to us the true Name. When the sūtra speaks of a directly attained Birth and non-retrogression in the words,

"He who desires to be born in this Land immediately attains Birth and abides in the state of non-retrogression," Shinran conceives of a great inner turn-about in the Tathāgata's heart, which he then calls the mind of transferring merit surpassing all conceptual understanding. And at the words, "rejoicing in faith upon hearing his Name," he saw with his inner eye the inconceivable reality of the transference of the sincere mind. At that time the reality called "faith of the transference of Other Power" was established for the first time. Before Shinran there was only faith that believed in Other Power. This is the case even with Hōnen. But with our founder the faith of the transference of Other Power was disclosed and this came about through the text of the fulfillment of the Primal Vow.

From that point on the idea of Birth in the midst of everyday life and of non-retrogression in the present life first became possible. With mere faith that believes in Other Power one cannot but fall into the idea of a realization at the moment of death. Only through the mighty experience of a great awakening, namely the faith of the transference of other Power, may one attain to the true faith of a once-and-for-all abandonment and obtain in supreme cessation the benefit of non-retrogression in the present life. With this there is a full attesting to the fulfillment of the Primal Vow.

When we turn again to the Primal Vow, we find the words: "[believing with] sincerity, joyful entrusting, and desiring for Birth in my Land." It is in this "desire for Birth in my Land" that the Tathāgata's transference-mind appears and that conversion through the three Vows occurs with the abandonment of self. In other words, Shinran grasped that the hinge of the conversion of the three vows is situated at that point. There the principle of Birth in everyday life became clear. In the Shin sect of Pure Land there has been talk of conversion through the three Vows from very early times, but one then mostly thinks of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth vows as of separate and mutually independent entities. If one regards these

Vows as separate entities, however, then a true conversion through these three Vows will not occur. When asked where the Primal Vow attests to itself, the answer can only be that it is at the point of "the desire for Birth in my Land." Therefore, while interpreting these words of the Primal Vow in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* Shinran declares that "the desire for Birth in my Land" signifies the summons whereby the Tathāgata calls out to all sentient beings inviting them to His Land.

Many people say that this summons by the Tathāgata is the Dharma teaching, but more precisely this summons is the true awareness of our religious receptivity (*ki*). It is the principle of self-confirmation of true entrusting faith. It is in this self-confirmation in "the desire for Birth in my Land" that the two compassionate means-Vows, i.e., the Nineteenth and the Twentieth, are enfolded. When we further inquire where the Eighteenth Vow itself came from, we must again say that it is enfolded within its own "desire for Birth in my Land." This desire constitutes its core, for the fact that the Eighteenth Vow's faith of sincere mind and entrusting is true, entrusting faith is confirmed by this desire for Birth. With sincerity and entrusting faith alone one does not yet have true sincerity and entrusting. Through a further interiorization of entrusting faith "the desire for Birth in my Land" appeared. In other words, in *Namu Amida Butsu* one discovers the sincerity of the Tathāgata, in this sincerity one discovers entrusting, and in this entrusting one discovers "the desire for Birth." The desire for Birth is the core of entrusting faith.

Our predecessors did not know what to do with this thing called "desire for Birth." For them the mere mention of a desire for Birth smacked of self-power. With their mouths they strongly professed that the desire for Birth of the Eighteenth Vow is a desire of Other Power, but in their hearts they believed it to be self-power. As a result, they took great pains over it, turning the world in all directions, thinking: "It would have been better if the word had not been there, but we cannot very well suppress

it since it is obviously there in the Vow, so let us try to make it not touch any sore spots. . . ." Because for them the desire for Birth had the smell of self-power, they were inclined to think that it was characteristic of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Vows. At the same time, however, they seem to have been inclined to look for a special meaning in these words, for, since they were found in the middle of the Eighteenth Vow, they could not very well refer to a desire for Birth in an ordinary sense. I think that here they made a fundamental mistake.

"The desire for Birth in my Land" is the core of joyful entrusting and sincerity, and the center of true entrusting faith is "the desire for Birth in my Land." When our founder Shinran speaks of the summons whereby the Tathāgata invites all sentient beings, when he speaks of entrusting faith as being the entrusting faith of the transference of the Tathāgata, he had to confirm this by indicating that this faith enfolds in itself the desire for Birth. In other words, one speaks of believing in Other Power, but, if there is no desire for Birth, this faith means only that one believes in one's heart that it is Other Power, and this act of believing has only a subjective significance. It is only by the desire for Birth that it can be confirmed that it is an objective reality. "The desire for Birth in my Land" of the Eighteenth Vow confirms within that Vow that the faith which believes in Other Power is the faith of the transference of Other Power, or that entrusting faith as active believing is transferred by Other Power. Outwardly it enfolds within itself the Nineteenth and Twentieth Vows, negating thereby the behavior of the self-power transference of these two vows.

In a word, "the desire for Birth in my Land" is the element that rejects the self-power transference and instead enfolds within itself the entrusting faith of Other Power. From there we can understand how this desire for Birth of the Eighteenth Vow is extremely important and deeply significant. But precisely because it is so important it may look forbidding. For this reason some have done

their best not to touch it. If the true teaching of Shin Buddhism does not succeed in manifesting itself, the root of that illness must lie here.

Desire for Birth in Pure Land must mean something like awaiting the coming of the Pure Land, for it also corresponds to what is called "the sequel to entrusting faith." At least this is what some people say. They explain the the word "desire" in the phrase "desire for Birth" as really meaning "to make up one's mind" and thus the sentence could read: "to resolve to be born in the Pure Land." For these people, a desire for Birth would mean that one always and ever is thinking of the Pure Land and awaiting its coming. But this is not so. The word means to truly awaken to the real aspect of the self, to the self that is strangled by its blind attachment to self-power. This is the meaning of the Tathāgata's inviting call, for it is a call to awakening. It calls out to all sentient beings to truly awaken to the fact that their self is led astray by self-power illusions and is ineffective and powerless. Amida's call awakens us to our sin of not knowing our ignorance precisely because of that ignorance.

"The desire for Birth in my Land" is the call of the Tathāgata, whereby he invites us sentient beings and truly awakens us from the illusions and wrong ideas that we have long entertained. This calling voice of the Tathāgata is not itself the Dharma (*hō*). The fact that "the desire for Birth in my Land" is the calling voice of the Tathāgata means that the self has a basic receptivity for teaching (*shō-ki*). But [the desire for Birth] is a receptivity (*ki*) within that receptivity (*ki*). Sincerity is Dharma (*hō*), while entrusting is the receptivity (*ki*) [for salvation] from within that Dharma (*hō*). Desire for Birth is yet another receptivity (*ki*) from within that receptivity (*ki*). It is this meaning that Shinran tries to convey in symbolic language when he speaks of the summons whereby the Tathāgata calls and invites all sentient beings. It is therefore a self-awareness whereby one is aware and attests that it is truly a faith of transference of Other Power which rejects the illusions of

self-power. "The desire for Birth in my Land" is precisely the principle of the awareness that Other Power faith is to be found in the rejection of self-power and that a once-and-for-all abandonment is the important thing. Of such great importance is the desire for birth that it can be called the center and heart of entrusting faith.

With this desire as the principle, the Eighteenth Vow arose and therein Amida Buddha took on concrete form. In other words, Namu Amida Butsu is the concretization of "the desire for Birth in my Land;" and that is the Eighteenth Vow.

Faith, which has such an important and deep meaning for us, is not simply believing a doctrine. It is a question of the unity of the Dharma and human receptivity (*kihō-ittai*) and this unity is precisely situated in "the desire for Birth in my Land." There is a parable about the two streams by Shan-tao, which can be found in his commentary on the passage from *The Meditation Sūtra* about the "mind that establishes the Vow of transference." When we look for this same mind in the Primal Vow, we find it in "the desire for Birth in my Land," which is the Tathāgata's mind of transference, Amida's heart. It is because we are not really awake to the mind of desire for Birth that we are attached to self-power and it is by truly awakening to the Tathāgata's mind of desire for Birth that we come to rue our transference of self-power. Through this mind we realize the diamond-like mind of a faith that is absolutely determined and impervious to the siren songs of deviating theories and opinions, of variant interpretations and practices. Through it, Birth in the midst of everyday life becomes possible and the true faith of Other Power is born. Through it, we come to know the ground of Namu Amida Butsu. In it, we touch on the Tathāgata's heart together with our own living self.

The mind of desire for Birth is the mind of transference. In it, for the first time, the meaning of the Primal Vow becomes clear. By it, the transference of merit, outgoing as well as returning (*ōsō-gensō*), comes about

together with my Birth and Awakening. Through it, our salvation in this life is brought to awareness and our future Awakening is assured. All this takes place because the mind of desire for Birth is truly the principle of the saving activity of the Tathāgata and, at the same time, the principle whereby this salvation confirms itself to us. Thus the mind of desire for Birth testifies to the truth of the Tathāgata, or better, this mind is the fundamental principle for the distinguishing of truth and means, truth and falsehood, reality and illusion. It is at the point of the desire for birth that we receive the Buddha's wisdom. At that point there is not the least uncertainty about the way we ourselves have to go, with the result that we are also able to guide others. Moreover, the direction the country and even the world should follow is shown there. Without it we do not know where we are going. It is "the desire for Birth in my Land" that sheds light on the spot on which we stand as well as on the path that lies before us.

But, as was said above, for a long time people did not know what to think about this important principle. They had the impression that "entrusting faith" was infinitely pure, but that "desire for Birth" gave off a smell of self-power and was the hotbed for deviating opinions. But deviating opinions came about because they did not understand the real meaning of desire for Birth. Thus from of old the desire for Birth has been feared. For me, however, the desire for Birth illuminates everything, be it the Nembutsu, the Primal Vow, Faith, the Great Practice, or Birth in the Pure Land, and **The Larger Sūtra** from beginning to end enfolds the inner reality of the desire for Birth in the Pure Land. It is **The Larger Sūtra** which discloses the pure inner meaning of this desire as Namu Amida Butsu. For me, it is **The Meditation Sūtra** and **The Smaller [Amida] Sūtra** which describes the outer circumstances of its appearance. The foundation of the Shin sect of Pure Land is "the desire for Birth in my Land." From deep within entrusting faith and sincerity, the Buddha further disclosed the desire for Birth, and precisely therein lies the principle

of the self-awareness of entrusting faith, the principle whereby entrusting faith becomes conscious of itself and illuminated from within. This was the the Shin sect of Pure Land of our founder Shinran!

It may not be obvious from the expressions used, but it is a fact that people have been trying to build a traditional Shin sect "theology" solely on entrusting faith, while treating the desire for Birth as a peripheral matter. That is not my way. In my "theology" the desire for Birth is not placed over against entrusting faith, for that desire for Birth is disclosed from within entrusting faith. It is only at the point where entrusting faith has so disclosed the desire for Birth that the Shin sect of Pure Land begins.

II. EXCERPTS FROM LATER CHAPTERS

The Present Truly Assured State is Cessation (pp. 34-37)

The six character name Na-mu A-mi-da Butsu is the principle for Birth in everyday life . . . and that is enough, for there is nothing lacking in it. In a once-and-for-all abandonment we dwell in a state of non-retrogression in the present life. One is greatly mistaken if he thinks that this non-retrogression is only half of the benefit of the Primal Vow, that the second half is still on deposit. What we now have would then be half, but the lesser and worthless half. It would only be precious because of that second half, the future unsurpassable cessation. The present half, the truly assured state in the present life, would be low in rank, for it is the second half that would be precious and still in deposit. To think this way is a mistake. . . . On the Path of the Saints it would be correct to think this way, (since on that Path there are different stages and entrances to pass through in order to attain full Buddhahood). However, in the transference of merit of the Primal Vow, with the Nembutsu as its essence, that which is bestowed upon us by the Tathāgata is the truly assured state, is cessation. These two are absolutely one. The meaning of the Shin sect of Pure Land is that the truly

assured state and cessation are one and the same. For that reason we can no longer be interested in a cessation in the future. It is true that cessation is the ultimate goal, but the immediate problem is only to attain the truly assured state, for that is sufficient. When one reaches the truly assured state, cessation is at hand. The reality of the truly assured state necessarily contains cessation within itself. There is no cessation apart from the truly assured state, for it is enclosed in that truly assured state. . . . If we attain the truly assured state, cessation will be naturally attained. "They shall certainly reach cessation **because** they abide in the truly assured state." It was T'an-luan who here clarified the relationship between cessation and the truly assured state by adding the word "because" to the sūtra text that reads: "Dwelling in the truly assured state, they shall surely attain cessation."

The Existence and Saving Activity of Amida (pp.44-50)

When we speak of the Buddha or say that the Buddha deigns to help us, we think of some kind of mysterious activity. In Shinshū we are helped by Amida. Amida deigns to help us. The helping Amida and we that are helped are two distinct realities. That is how it is written in the scriptures. Are then Buddha and we completely separate entities? . . . There are many religions that speak of being helped by gods or Buddhas. One relies on or prays to the Buddha, or one addresses his prayers to the gods, and is then helped by gods or Buddhas. What does this really mean? . . . Such a "divine help" is really a mystical idea. Would Buddha's Dharma be something like this? I have the impression that it is necessary for us to rethink this question. By some wondrous power the Buddha would then help each of us. Because the Buddha is such an exalted personage, he can help thousands of people, tens of thousands or more at the same time, something that a mere human could never manage. . . . When we explain things in this way, we have some kind of understanding, but is this the teaching of the Shin sect of Pure Land? According to

the Shin sect the Buddha helps us through the power of the Primal Vow. And since this Primal Vow is being fulfilled, help comes by itself. Because the Buddha fulfilled the power of the Primal Vow in the Namu Amida Butsu, we are helped naturally and without any outward interference. The Buddha fulfills the Dharma whereby one is helped naturally and without anyone's calculation, and in this way He helps, and helps all sentient beings equally. Thus the Buddha does not have a thing to do anymore. May he enjoy his repose!

That is Buddhism. Help in Buddhism means that the helping Dharma is fulfilled, that one is helped by the Primal Vow, by the power of the Dharma of Namu Amida Butsu. It certainly does not mean that sentient beings are helped directly by the Buddha. The Buddha does not help anybody individually. He fulfills the Dharma whereby all can make progress and then says: "From now on it is your own responsibility whether you are helped or not. . . . If you want to be helped, rely on this Dharma teaching. It is no longer my affair." . . . Therefore, while the gods of other religions may be busy, the Buddha is not particularly occupied. There is of course the thousand-armed Kannon. The Bodhisattva Kannon-sama may have a thousand arms with which to help sentient beings, but Amida has no need of a thousand arms. Two are quite enough. . . . At the present time the four characters A-mi-da-Butsu are the spiritual power wherein Amida Buddha resides. Apart from this there is no longer any working of the Buddha, for it is sufficient for us to rely upon the Namu Amida Butsu. There is no need to rely on Buddha apart from this Namu Amida Butsu. To go a step further, there is only Namu Amida Butsu and apart from Namu Amida Butsu there is no Buddha. This way of speaking is legitimate. The Buddha is present in these six characters. . . . There is no doubt that in the past there was the human being, Dharmākara Bodhisattva in his stage of cultivating the causes for awakening. But it is permissible to say that in the present that which we call Amida Buddha is the Name, Namu Amida Butsu. Thus Amida Buddha refers only to the Name. Apart from

this there is nothing, for there is only the Name. Many people may think that this does not sound like much to hold onto, but it is precisely this name that is the soul of the Tathāgata Amida. We rely on this spirit. When reading Rennyō Shōnin's biography, we find the remark: "In other sects one prefers figurative paintings to the written Name and wooden statues to paintings. In our sect we prefer paintings to statues and the name to paintings." The authentic object of worship is the Name.

Vow and Faith (pp.55-57)

The Shin sect of Pure Land Buddhism has faith as its essence. . . . The total principle of this faith is the Vow. Faith comprises within itself an urgent prayer or a Vow by which it is determined. The Vow is the determining factor of faith. Or again, the Vow is the cause of faith, and faith is the effect of the Vow. . . . In the stage of faith as faith it cannot yet be determined that faith is Other Power. Faith makes clear that it is in fact faith of the transference of Other Power by always looking deeper into itself. Faith of the fulfillment of the Primal Vow is attested only by the Vow that illuminates it from inside.

Voice and Thought (pp.78-86)

To obtain faith necessarily means to be made to obtain it. In that "being made to" there lies a truth of inner necessity. When we speak of receiving the gift of faith, there is to that faith no theory, but there is truth. Meaning in the term "meaningless" is theory or logic. But meaning in the phrase "to take as meaningful" is real truth. The Path of the Saints takes theory as its essence, while the Path of Pure land leaves theory behind and relies on truth. There is truth beyond theory. . . . Real truth appears when theory runs out. . . . Truth is something that is made known to us as a gift, but theory is something that humans make up themselves. Theory is a weapon of the self. . . . (Our founder) heard the concretely calling voice whereby the Tathāgata invites all sentient beings. "Voice"

is the first concrete thing. True words are something concrete. It is by abstracting from words that we construct thought. Thought is abstract, only words are concrete. But we tend to reject these concrete words and consider only abstract thought as important. It is not words that are imperfect, but our own words are imperfect. When we take thought as original and words as derived therefrom, then those words are imperfect. Words themselves are elemental and thought exists only as a reflection upon words. To consider thought as original and words are derived is putting the cart before the horse. . . .

Vow, Nembutsu, and the Fulfillment of Vow (pp.86-87; 105-106)

Some people think that apart from Namu Amida Butsu there is a Vow-mind that desires Birth. They maintain that, apart from the practice of saying Nembutsu, there is need for another mind that desires Birth. In this way of thinking, one conceives of an abstract mind that vows to be born in the Pure Land, a mind abstracted from the words "desire for Birth in my Land" of the Primal Vow. Such an abstraction is a mind constructed by self-power. Constructions of self-power are abstract. The call and invitation of other Power is concrete. . . . When one thinks from such a Vow-mind constructed by self-power, then Nembutsu and Birth become two. "Nembutsu and Birth" really means that Nembutsu is precisely Birth. Apart from the practice of Nembutsu there is no activity of Birth. To say the Nembutsu as such is being born. . . . When one feels that he has really been able to say the Nembutsu, there the activity of decisive Birth is fulfilled. When somebody says, "I practice the Nembutsu, you know!", Birth is not assured. To practice such a Nembutsu means taking the Nembutsu as a means or a stepping stone towards Birth. What a waste!

. . . Let us think about the name for a moment and ask ourselves where its essence lies. We can say that, during the many aeons of the causal stage of cultivating practices, Namu Amida Butsu existed as the Vow. At the time

of the fulfillment of that Vow, at the time of awakening after ten aeons, this Vow then became practice and was completed as the six character word. Before that, it existed only as a thought, as an inner impulse. . . . When we start from the six character Name, we can say that Namu is the Vow and Amida Butsu is the practice. But Vow and practice are one. Therefore the Vow is fulfilled precisely when one believes in Amida Butsu. . . . There are people who think that the Primal Vow has been fulfilled somehow long, long ago. Such a thing, however, can in no wise be called the fulfillment of the Vow. The fulfillment of the Vow means that the Vow is being fulfilled only at the moment when we are being helped and saved. There is no fulfillment in believing that "the Vow is fulfilled but we are not helped." That I am saved is the fulfillment of the Vow. That is what is called the unity of Dharma and sentient being (kihō-ittai). What kind of thing is the fulfillment of the Vow? It is that I attain the truly assured state in this life at the one moment of abandonment at Namu.

Amida among the Many Buddhas (pp.108-111; p.129)

(All Buddhas are Buddhas of immeasurable light and immeasurable life. What then is special about Amida's Vow of eternal life, about eternal life?) The immeasurable light and life of all the Buddhas is only the self-awareness and self-confirmation of the Buddhas themselves: "I myself am immeasurable light and life." In contrast, the immeasurable light and life of the Buddha Amida means that, at the point where the Tathāgata Amida becomes eternal light and life, we who have Amida in mind also become immeasurable light and life. There lies the difference. . . . It is at this point also that we can discover that "having the Buddha in mind" (nenzuru) has a completely different meaning when we use it in connection with Amida and when we use in regard to other Buddhas. . . . What is then the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha? It is the completion of the six character Name. Within this name I am and you are. Amida Buddha is such a reality. The Primal Vow of light, as well as the Primal Vow

of life is nothing apart from this Name. Amida Buddha is light and is life, but this Buddha is only a present reality at the point when the Namu Amida Butsu is recited. What is the "body" of that light? It is the six character Name that constitutes the body of light. It is in that Name that the Tathāgata is immeasurable light and life. In a word the merit and power of both immeasurable realities, light and life, is the merit-power of the Name.

Dharmākara Bodhisattva is I (p.114)

What is, in the present, given to us is nothing other than Namu Amida Butsu. What we call Buddha is Namu Amida Butsu. It is Namu Amida Butsu that is present to us. If one does not meditate on, for example, eternal light or eternal life, the other Buddhas do not appear. The Tathāgata Yakushi and the Tathāgata Dainichi do not appear if we do not meditate on them. But this is not the case with the Tathāgata Amida. He is there when we say Namu Amida Butsu. To be saved by a Buddha that is the object of one's meditation is merely receiving salvation during meditation. That is not an actual salvation. But where there is Namu Amida Butsu, there is actual salvation and our actual reality is saved.

In regard to the threefold faith of sincerity, entrusting, and "the desire for Birth in my Land," from the side of sentient beings this Vow has its essence in entrusting faith, but from the side of the Buddha's heart, that essence lies in the desire for Birth. At least that is how we can view things, I think. When we truly receive faith, we can sense the calling voice of the Buddha. This means that in the Namu Amida Butsu we sense the voice of the Buddha quietly calling out to us: "Desire for Birth in my Land!" When we feel this calling voice of the Buddha in the Namu Amida Butsu, we sense therein non-retrogression in this life as people awakened to the Buddha, as children of the Buddha. Non-retrogression in this life is the awareness of being a child of the Buddha. A child of the Buddha is a bodhisattva in the causal stage of becoming a Buddha, in

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other words, a Dharmākara Bodhisattva. I feel that
Dharmākara Bodhisattva is I.