

A Preface to the *Kyōgyōshinshō*

(unfinished)

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SHIN Buddhism, officially known as *Jōdo Shin Shū* in Japanese, that is, the “True Sect of the Pure Land,” is a unique development in Japan of the thought that constitutes the kernel of Mahāyāna Buddhism—Mahāyāna as distinguished from Hīnayāna, or as it is more generally called these days, Theravāda Buddhism. This development took place in Japan during the Kamakura Era (1192–1333). The founder of Shin Buddhism is Shinran (親鸞, 1173–1262).

Genkū (1133–1212), more popularly known as Hōnen, was the first who devoted himself exclusively to the propagation of the Pure Land doctrine. His school is known as Jōdo Shū (the Pure Land Sect). The doctrine originally appeared in Japan under the leadership of Genshin (源信, 942–1017), who expounded its principal tenets in the book entitled *Ōjō Yōshū* (往生要集), *Essential Passages on the Rebirth [in the Pure Land]*. Genshin finished this work in 986 when he was 44 years old. Hōnen succeeded him and further developed the Pure Land idea in his book *Senjaku Hongan Nembutsu Shū* (選択本願念仏集), *Collection of Passages Relating to the Selected Prayer and the Nembutsu*. A copy of it was given to Shinran, whom he probably considered as one who truly understood his teaching.

* This article was to have been used as an introduction to the author's English translation of Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō* to be published in July of 1973. Because his sudden passing in 1967 left the manuscript in an unfinished state, the original plan was abandoned. It is here printed in the incomplete form in which it was left, with a provisional title added by the editors, as well as slight editorial revisions and footnotes. We wish to thank the Matsugaoka Library of Kamakura for permission to use it.—Eds.

Shinran later wrote a book further developing Hōnen's idea of birth in the Pure Land. Shinran claimed his exposition to be the "true" (*Shin*) interpretation of the doctrine promoted by his teacher Hōnen. Shinran's disciples established an independent sect calling itself the True Pure Land Sect, which later came to be known in its simpler title, the True Sect, that is, *Shin Shū*. It is now beginning to be better known in English as Shin Buddhism.

Thus Shin Buddhism, as one of the schools growing out of the original Pure Land teaching, builds all its ideas on the story of Amitābha (or Amida in Japanese) as it is given in the three Pure Land texts:

1. *The [Larger] Sutra of Eternal Life* (無量壽經, *Mu-ryō-ju kyō*); translated into Chinese by Sanghavarman in 252.
2. *The Sutra of Meditation on Eternal Life* (觀無量壽經, *Kan mu-ryō-ju kyō*); translated into Chinese by Kālayāśas in 424.
3. *The [Shorter] Sutra of Eternal Life* (阿彌陀經, *Amida kyō*); translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva in 402.

The story of Amida Nyorai is the story of Hōzō Bosatsu, i.e., Dharmākara the Bodhisattva. As told in *The Larger Sutra*, it runs like this:

Dīpaṅkara was the first Buddha to appear in the world innumerable kalpas ago to lead all beings to a life of Enlightenment. Then followed fifty more Buddhas all engaged in the work of enlightening all beings.

When a Buddha called Lokēśvararāja ("World-ruler") appeared there was a king who, wishing to learn the wonderful Dharma taught by the Buddhas, gave up his worldly position and became a bikshu ("homeless monk"). He went to Lokēśvararāja Buddha, expressing his earnest desire to attain Buddhahood and establish his own kingdom which would be incomparable in every sense for all beings who should come there. They would be universally benefited by his loving, compassionate teaching and finally attain to the Supreme Enlightenment. Dharmākara the Bikshu further expressed his irrevocable resolution (*pranidhāna*) that he would go through every disciplinary measure he had to undergo for the sake of achieving his purpose of universally enlightening all beings. For the creation of such environment as needed to bring his extraordinary inspiration of love and compassion to an effective fruition, he would even to the end of time tirelessly amass an inexhaustible stock of merit and value.

Lokeśvararāja Buddha then instructed him concerning all the kinds of lands in existence and how to bring them to maturity. Thereupon, Dharmākara spent five incalculable kalpas of meditation and austere self-discipline in order to perfect himself for attaining Buddhahood and for carrying out every means for the establishment of a Pure Land where every being born there will be awakened to a state of enlightenment and eternal peace and happiness.

In this undertaking Dharmākara is encouraged by Lokeśvararāja Buddha who tells him, "Even the great ocean can be exhausted to the very bottom by carrying away a bucketful of water at a time if one is determined to continue the operation to the endless end of eternity." This is an extraordinary saying. Accordingly, unless Dharmākara's determined will is completely identified with the Great Will or Compassion (*mabākaruṇā*), he can never expect to see his prayer (*pranidhāna*) brought to a successful consummation, if there be any such.

The *Larger Sutra* specifies forty-eight items referred to in Dharmākara's prayers, which are technically known in Japanese as his *seigan* (誓願), or simply *gan* (願). These prayers, as summarized in the *Jūsei-ge*, are¹:

The Prayers Summarized
(*Jūsei-ge*)

1. I now proclaim these prayers not of this world,
Which would assuredly make me attain the Incomparable Way.
If my prayers are not fulfilled,
May I not attain the Supreme Enlightenment.
2. If I, in innumerable kalpas to come,
Becoming a great benefactor,
Were unable to help universally all the poor and suffering,
May I not attain the Supreme Enlightenment.

¹ A complete translation of the forty-eight prayers themselves may be found in *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism*, which was published as a companion volume to Dr. Suzuki's translation of *Kyōgyōshinshō* in April 1973. The *Jūsei-ge* 誓願偈 (*The Prayers Summarized*) is a *gāthā* in eleven stanzas that appears in the *Larger Sutra* immediately following the exposition of the forty-eight prayers. As the name suggests, it attempts to summarize the essence of the forty-eight prayers.—Eds.

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3. When finally I reach the Buddha Way
Were my name then not to resound throughout the ten quarters
So that none would fail to hear it,
May I not attain the Supreme Enlightenment.
4. Detached from greed, deeply cherishing the right thought,
Guided by pure *prajñā*, disciplining myself in a life free from blemishes,
And aspiring all the time for the incomparable Way,
I pray to be the leader of gods and men.
5. By means of supernatural power the Great Light will be elucidated,
Illuminating all over the Land that has no limits,
Dispelling the darkness of the three sins,
I shall be the universal saviour of all suffering beings.
6. I shall help them open their *prajñā* eye,
And annihilate the darkness of ignorance.
I shall close up the passages of evil,
And lay open the gates of good.
7. When the work is completely brought to a finish
Let its royal radiance glow all over the ten quarters,
Even to the extent of obscuring the light of the sun and the moon,
Not to speak of the other heavenly bodies.
8. For all beings the Dharma-storage will be opened
And every treasure of merit widely distributed.
Going out into the midst of the multitudes,
I shall always preach the Dharma, like a roaring lion.
9. Respects will be paid to every one of the Buddhas,
All the roots of merit will be brought to maturity,
The prayers and the *prajñā* wisdom will be fully perfected,
I shall be the bravest one in all the triple world.

10. Like unto the Buddha's unimpeded prajñā
Which passes through everywhere and illumines everything—
So I pray that my power of merit and prajñā
Will parallel that of the most excellent one of the world.
11. When these prayers of mine come finally to be concluded in their efficiency,
Let the great chiliocosm reverberate in response
And have all the gods and men filling the Void
Shower down the rarest flowers of incomparable value.

To continue the story of Dharmākara the Bodhisattva:

Ānanda asked Śākyamuni Buddha:

“Has Dharmākara Bodhisattva completed the building up of the Pure Land where he would take all his devotees and see to it that they all finally come to realize the Supreme Enlightenment, for which he has been passing through so many incalculable kalpas of self-discipline with the total will-power of his whole being? Is his Land of Peace and Happiness now come into existence? If so, where is it? and how is it furnished?”

The Buddha says:

“It is now ten incalculable kalpas since this Land came to exist due to the Bodhisattva's inexhaustible patience (*kṣānti*) and never-tiring exertion (*vīrya*) which cannot be surpassed by any being. It is situated in the Western quarter $10 \times 10,000 \times 100,000,000$ lands away from this land of human beings (*sabālokadhātu*). It is furnished (*vyūha*) with every perfection of all sorts beyond description.”

The compiler of the *Larger Sutra* then tries his best within the limits of his knowledge and imagination to depict for us scenes of beauty and harmony, of purity and luminosity, which envelop the lives of the inhabitants, innerly as well as outwardly.

Bodhisattva Dharmākara, now known as Amitābha (or Amitāyus) Buddha, presides over this Land of Peace and Happiness that came into existence as a result of his compassionate heart and inflexible will. In Sanskrit, Amitābha means “infinite light” and Amitāyus “eternal life.” Any being or person qualified to inhabit his land naturally partakes of the same qualifications as

those of the creator himself. The Pure Land of Amida is a land of infinite wonders. Unless we who are of limited existence are once ushered into this Land, we can never experience a life free from all the fears and insecurities, miseries and annoyances, which characterize this *sabā* world of finitude and limitations.

What concerns us here most, as it did Shinran Shōnin, the founder of the Shin Sect, and the author of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, is not the description of the Pure Land itself, but the means that leads us there, the means that frees us from all forms of worries and uncertainties that constantly torment us while on earth. This is what affects us human beings more personally, more immediately, and more poignantly. What is or are the means of enlightenment and salvation, then?

The eighteenth prayer (*gan*) is the one selected specifically out of the forty-eight by the Pure Land School as their most significant statement, assuring its devotees of being born in Amida's country if only they pronounce his Name (*sbōmyō*) or think of him (*nembutsu*) once in all faith and sincerity.

This prayer (*gan*) may sound very simple and easy to the devotee. But when we probe what lies underneath it, we find there deeply buried such ideas as constitute the very basis of our being. When then, are these ideas?

1. In the beginningless beginning is Being, that is, Thought, that is, Reality. Buddhist philosophers call it Dharma that is no-Dharma, or simply This, or It. But Buddhists generally prefer to designate it personally as Buddha or Tathāgata, which may be considered to correspond to such expressions as "The God who is," or "I am that I am," or in short, "I am."

But the truth is that as soon as we undertake to designate It in any sense, abstract, or concrete, or personal, It ceases to be itself and is brought down to the human level of thinking. This is inevitable because it is we who make the mysterious wheel that has never revolved to start moving, and this moving means a bifurcation: there is "what is" and "what is not." The Alone has come down from its seat and we have subject and object, this and that, and a world of intelligibility and karmic relationship (*betu-pratyaya*).

We now have Amida the Buddha and Hōzō the Bodhisattva and all beings. Amida is the Buddha of Infinite Light and Eternal Life; Hōzō is the Bodhisattva of Enlightenment and Love, and all beings are we humans groaning in the

abyss of Ignorance, struggling to get out of the hell of fears and anxieties.

This is one way of writing a history "chronologically," starting with "the beginningless beginning" as if the narrator were living a life of timelessness, but in actuality we are all living this moment existentially, and it is best for us to fix the starting point at this Here-Now and reflect on Amida "backward" as it were. We then discover that we are strange beings involving ourselves in a maze of contradictions. We tend to be individualistic, self-asserting, and overbearing, and at the same time we are desirous of going out of ourselves and doing things for others for no other reason than helping them, even to the extent of sacrificing the self. Self-aggression and self-denial go side by side and this contradiction is at the basis of our being, for the "I am" is no more simply that, but is practically "not-I-am."

The reason for this is that our being is constituted of finitude and infinitude. Because of his finitude the individual is ego-centric and because of infinitude he breaks himself up and identifies himself with things beyond himself. It is in the nature of love that it refuses to be confined within any form of limitation. Love is the infinite itself transcending the bounds of karmic relationship.

This truth is symbolized in the bodhisattvahood of Hōzō Bosatsu. In the presence of Buddha Lokeśvararāja, standing for all the Buddhas of the past, present and future, the Bodhisattva gives utterance to his Prayer, numerically particularized in forty-eight items but in truth innumerable beyond human calculation. The Prayer is no more than the demonstration of human aspiration to transcend himself and be one with the Infinite.

The Prayer therefore in essence consists in making all beings come out of the darkness of Ignorance and thereby experience the Supreme Enlightenment. In accordance with the law of karmic relationship, however, the Bodhisattva will go through every form of self-discipline for an indefinite period of time until he establishes a suitable environment for all beings where they can be reborn by the easiest means, made possible for them by the Bodhisattva's self-sacrificing disciplinary measures. For his Prayer, originally issuing from the source of all things in existence, has the power of realizing itself. The Bodhisattva harbours within himself a life of eternity. Anything coming out of his being in all sincerity and faith will thus surely bear fruit however immeasurably long the process may take. The Prayer is the Bodhisattva himself, and he is no other than the Dharma incarnation of the Highest Buddha himself. All the

Buddhas inestimable in number have appeared since the beginningless beginning to lead to Enlightenment all beings whose number is also altogether beyond human measurement. All those innumerable Buddhas are now working in the body (*kāya*) of Hōzō Bosatsu as one person. While this Bodhisattva appears now to Lokeśvararāja Buddha as a self-humiliating individual being, as in fact one of us human beings, he is no less than the Supreme Buddha himself, identifiable with "the One who is" in the beginningless beginning of all things. Hōzō Bosatsu even as he is is Amida, in whom all the Buddhas past, present, and future are embodied as one Buddha. And Amida, though he never leaves his seat as the Supreme Buddha, is actively engaged in the work of leading all beings to the final Enlightenment. Hōzō Bosatsu is Amida Buddha and Amida Buddha is Hōzō Bosatsu. In reality, there is no difference between Buddha and Bodhisattva. The Alone is manifested as two simply because of our human way of understanding. Thus Amida Buddha manifests himself simultaneously throughout the ten quarters in any form that is needed in any particular surroundings.

From this point of view Hōzō Bosatsu is going through the stage of self-discipline for the sake of all beings. He will in all probability not attain the Supreme Enlightenment and settle down quietly and complacently as Amida Buddha in the Land of Peace and Happiness. Rather, he prefers to retain his Bodhisattvahood forever, that is, until all beings are assured of attaining Enlightenment. His own attainment of this final stage will become possible at the very moment all beings come to theirs. The Supreme Enlightenment, it may be said, is something which can never come to realization until all beings including the Bodhisattva himself realize it. Or we can say this: it is we ourselves who make the Bodhisattva attain it. Or, it may be better to say: the Bodhisattva will wait for his attainment until we ourselves have it, for he wishes to share its benefit with us who are the object of his deepest and most sincere prayer and love.

It is from this point of view that it is best for us not to make a distinction between Amida Buddha and Hōzō Bosatsu. Even while going through an incalculable amount of self-discipline, Hōzō Bosatsu is already Amida himself. Buddhahood is not something in the nature of a reward to be conferred upon the Bodhisattva when he finishes his schooling. Buddhahood is already shining through every movement of the Bodhisattva when he is exercising himself

in a life of love and self-sacrifice. He is the Buddha himself, though he appears to us as a Bodhisattva. For it is in this capacity that he can work for us, shouldering every hardship in the way of self-discipline, and turn the merit thus accumulated over to all us sentient beings and make every one of us attain to the Supreme Enlightenment.

It is indeed to this end that Amida has assumed the body of Hōzō Bosatsu and teaches us "the easy way" of being born in his Land of Purity. By this I mean the Truth has converted itself into the Name, *myōgō*. Amida the Buddha of Infinite Light and Eternal Life has converted himself into the Name, not mere concept abstracted from substance but the living reality itself embodied in the Name of six characters: *Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu*. This may sound like a mystic phrase, a *mantram* which when pronounced makes an unearthly, uncanny spirit appear before one. The Name of our concern here is the most exquisite and wonderful Essence or Spirit that sinks into our very being when uttered in all sincerity and faith, and conveys us instantly to the Presence of Amida himself.

2. The above is our practical point of view in regard to the relationship between Hōzō Bosatsu and Amida Buddha. In which view, we ignore the distinction between the two terms, considering one as being in the stage of self-discipline and the other as the karmic outcome of the first. But it is conceptually speaking perhaps most intelligible to our rational habit of viewing the situation to make Amida stand absolutely at the core, to consider the Bodhisattva as already being at the end of his course of apprenticeship and in the transformation-Body of Buddhahood, helping us to the Supreme Enlightenment. This human way of understanding makes us observe in the movement of Amida something circular, outgoing and returning.

Let us now turn our attention to Amida himself and see how dynamically he is related to all beings. Personally, he is Dharmākara the Bodhisattva who is deeply engaged in the work of self-perfection so as to accumulate the stock of merit for the sake of all beings. This stock of merit is stored in the Name, which is now the most efficient agent in leading all beings to the awakening of Enlightenment. The dynamism of this mysterious event is due to Amida's *mabākarunā*, which produces a circular movement, outgoing and returning.

The outgoing movement, called in Japanese *āsō-ekō*, passes over to all beings and makes them turn toward the Pure Land, while the returning movement is what makes beings once awakened to Enlightenment wish to go back to their fellow-beings in the *sabālokadbātu*, this world of limitation and finitude. This is technically known as *gensō-ekō*.

Thus we see that what issues from Amida Buddha as the movement for universal salvation is circular: that which goes out from him comes back to him via all beings, and that which all beings get from Amida returns once more to him. In other words, what all beings imagine as going out of themselves by their own virtue is really what they get from Amida's Infinite Light and Eternal Life. All beings aiming at Enlightenment are in truth going back to their home land. Amida is thus their "Oyasama."

"Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Man is limited and finite in every way, while God transcends all this. We, all beings (*sarvasattva*), are conditional and have our extremities. Amida Buddha is infinite and eternal and knows no "impediments," no "obstructions," and is free and creative in every sense of the word. When we reach our extremities and look beyond, we find that what is beyond is not "formless void," not *nihil*, not desperation, not "giving-up all your hopes," not sheer zero, not hell; what lies beyond human extremity is rather a mysterious "storage" (*ālaya*) of infinite possibilities, the perfection of ten thousand values (*puṇya*; *asambhaya*). There we execute a "leap" (*cbōyaku* 超躍²), which is not a forward leap (*jucbō* 豎超³), but a crosswise one (*ōcbō* 横超⁴); it is the entering into a psychosphere that we have never experienced in the domain of finite existences, an order which we could never dream of while in this world of relativities. Existentialists reach a final negation beyond which they imagine they cannot go, because their logic or dialectic tells them so. They are not aware of the fact that their last negation is their absolute affirmation itself, and that it is in this absolute affirmation that all the negations they have gone through and thought were of no more use are actually held together in good order, peacefully and in all serenity. What is lacking in philosophers and logicians generally is the personal inner quality

² Chinese, *cb'ao-yüeh*.

³ Chinese, *shu-ch'ao*.

⁴ Chinese, *heng-ch'ao*.

or virtue of being "in all faith and in all sincerity." They may have enough of intellectual integrity but unfortunately they think their intellect is the last thing and that there is nothing beyond it. They are not aware of a something that makes them think that way. They forget that there is a thinker, a person, an absolute "subject." They forget to step backward or inward to him or it, they simply keep on looking ahead imagining that there is something without and not within. They are not aware of the fact that "something" or that "nothing" they think they are facing is really within themselves, or, better, that they themselves are "it." As long as one is outside oneself dichotomizing oneself, leaving the "within" behind, one can never be one's "self." "To be true and sincere" means throwing down the totality of being, living by dying, being crucified and resurrected. This is the greatest mystery of being we humans can experience. This is what is known in Shin Buddhism as Amida's *ekō* experience, something issuing from him toward them.

The trouble with the intellectual dualists or dichotomizers is that, because of their habit of looking forward or turning outside for an ultimate decision which they so desperately crave, they fail to turn inwardly to realize the fact that what they have been wanting is already actually there in spite of themselves. In other words, this neglected "stranger" residing within them has been pursuing them with the most loving persistency and in the most unvarying consistency. In reality he is no "stranger," no "other," but one's original and most intimate "Self." It is only due to our usual intellectual way of interpreting the world that we give him a specified name and call him Amida, the other power. He is an infinite value, we argue, other than ourselves, while we are altogether finite and self-limiting. But the truth is that we become conscious, however faintly, of the infinite as soon as we turn within and recognize we are finite, instigated by the presence or entrance of Amida in us. Thus Shin followers are called upholders of the "other power"—this "other power" is also known as "the power of original prayer" (本願力 *bon-gan-riki* in Japanese and *pūrva-praṇidhāna* in Sanskrit).

3. A ray of Amida's Infinite Light does not go out as a straight line but is circular, and when it strikes a devotee, it takes him up to itself, which event is experienced by him as a "leap." The leap is not however an ordinary one over a gap; it is from one order or plane to another, which is technically known

as "crossing athwart" (*ōcbō*) from the finite to the infinite. The leap-experience is spoken of as formally "joining the order of those who are definitely destined for Amida's Land" where they will finally have the Supreme Enlightenment.

The leap-experience is also known as "pronouncing Amida's Name" (*sbōmyō*). The experience takes place at a critical point in the life of the devotee when he feels he must give his decision. He throws his whole being against the door and, lo and behold! "It is opened unto you." The opening is the pronouncing the Name of Amida.

The pronouncing is not just a moving of the lips. The critical decision is given by your whole being, body and soul, and nothing is left with you, you are a nothing, and you are the Name itself. It is not you who pronounce the Name, but the Name itself: *Namu-amida-butsu!*

Here a few words about the "Name" may be needed. Abusive uses of a name are quite common and we are liable to forget the truth that an object comes into existence by being named. So long as it is not named it is practically non-existent, because we cannot take it into account. That is, it is of no significance. But when it is properly named in its full value it is as good as the reality itself. This is the reason why an evil spirit hates to see its name known. You know it and the spirit is always at your command. You can use it in any way you like. Some may say that the rose is sweet in whatever name it is known. But that is not true. The rose loses its beauty and fragrance when it is called by an ugly name. Confucius therefore tells us to choose the proper name for an object if it is to be used in the way it ought to be. The Name is then the reality itself with all its power and in its full significance and effectiveness.

This is truly the case with Amida's Name. When the devotee is awakened to Amida's Light, the Light strikes him in the name of the Infinite, it produces something really magical. Because it is then that the devotee performs "a leap" in an instant which is eternity itself. At the same time however this is the moment when our discriminative reason (*vijñāna*) steps in and makes us feel that the naming or the pronouncing of the name is everything and that there is a miracle here performed on the part of Amida. This is where conceptualization not backed by experience is the most dangerous thing in the religious life of mankind.

Amida in his twelfth vow resolves not to attain the Supreme Enlightenment if his Name fails to penetrate every Buddha-country and be heard by every

being inhabiting there. The Name has nothing to do with the reputation of Amida. It is the real truth itself, with every virtue and value ascribable to it. Hence the miraculous experience of "a leap" which is the product of Amida's *ekō*-activity (*parināmanā*).

4. To understand the teaching of the Pure Land School, we must know something about what lies underneath the relationship between Amida and all beings. What is it that ties Amida to us? What makes him so anxious about our being free from all the miseries of this world as even to pledge his attainment of the Supreme Enlightenment?

His *mahāprajñā* is above all forms of contradiction. His Infinite Light penetrates even to the very midst of the Naraka Hell. At the same time Amida is the embodiment of *mābakarunā*, which makes him feel for all beings as if they were his own children. He thus appears among them in his Transformation Body (*nirmāṇa-kāya*) as Dharmākara Bodhisattva and demonstrates this fact by proclaiming his forty-eight Prayers (*pramīdbhāna*) before Lokeśvararāja Buddha and putting himself under severe discipline, moral and spiritual, for five long incalculable (*asamkhyeya*) kalpas. (The number five is symbolical of an immeasurable period.) Dharmākara as Bodhisattva becomes thus more accessible to us as one of us. There is a kind of human relationship between him and all beings. He comes down in a way to the level of finite beings, sharing with them in all their worries and woes and tribulations in order that he may thus thoroughly understand them and find out the best ways (*upāya-kauśalya*) to their Enlightenment.

On the part of all beings, Amida is not one looking down on them from heaven or somewhere unreachably far away. Amida is their Oyasama, and not the awe-inspiring Father of righteousness and vengeance. Oya, or the more familiar Oya-sama, is concretized parenthood, as it means both father and mother, sometimes singly, sometimes conjointly. In English there is no word corresponding to it. "Parent" is either mother or father. It does not indiscriminately apply to either of them. To Buddhists Amida means both motherhood and fatherhood, that is, Oyasama. This feeling of intimacy characterizes the mental attitude of the Shin devotee, Asahara Saichi (浅原才市), who sings:

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My Oyasama,
I once met you:
When I closely looked at you,
My Oyasama is no other than
Namu-amida-butsu!

This expression of intimacy is the outburst of the feeling of identity between Infinite Light and finite individual beings. It is due to this fact that the forty-eight *gan* (*pranidhāna*) of Dharmākara so miraculously appeal to the hearts of the Shin devotees. The pronouncing of Amida's Name touches the very core of their being, and they surrender whole-heartedly to the "call" of Amida. What is ordinarily objectively considered Amida's *gan* is in truth no other than the *gan* issuing out of their own inmost being. They are the *gan* itself, they are Amida, they all partake in Infinite Life and Eternal Life, which is no other than the Pure Land. All beings are primarily its citizens, with Amida as their Oyasama. Temporarily, they emerge from there to establish the *sabhalo-kadbātu* ("present relative world") and for a while they forget their native land. As soon as they remember they visit the Home at once. This event is known as attaining the Supreme Enlightenment. Their destiny is not to lie buried there for long. They appear again among their brothers and sisters to work with them, for them, in order to let them realize that ultimately the *sābalo-kadbātu* is no other than the Pure Land itself.

5. The meaning of the *gan* (*pranidhāna*) now gains its original significance and begins to demonstrate itself dynamically. The following is my interpretation of it.

Gan is the abbreviated form of *seigan* (誓願, *shib-yuan*) and *pranidhāna* is its original Sanskrit form. *Pranidhāna* generally means "a (highly religious) strong desire," and is translated in English Buddhist texts as "vow," which I have used in most of my previous works on Shin Buddhism. In this translation of Shinran's work⁵ I have come to think "prayer" is better than "vow,"

⁵ A reference to the English translation of the *Kyōgyōshimbō*. See the asterisked footnote on page one.—Eds.

though "prayer" may be said to have a Christian flavour. My "prayer" is not, however, to ask any special favour of God, it simply expresses a fervent, sincere desire or resolution or will. It does not look forward to any specifically set result or reward or favour or compensation. This absolute prayerful will is love—*agape*, *mahāmaitrī*, *mahākaruṇā*, *mahākriṣṇā*—that does not expect a return of any sort from any quarter high or low; it is absolutely free, absolutely sportive (*vikrīḍita*) for no other reason than to be sportive. This may be misleading unless one experiences it oneself. It is to be like a pine tree that has no desire but to be itself, it is like a flower that blooms when spring comes, it is like a child that is whole-heartedly given to play just for its own sake.

This is known in Buddhism technically as "sportively displaying the supernatural powers" (*abbijñā-vikrīḍita*), not in the sense of "supernaturalism" but altogether "naturally" just like the ears hear and the eyes see.

The natural functioning of the senses is "sportive" because of its naturalness; it is "supernatural" because we humans, limited in every direction, cannot fathom the mystery of being and becoming. Amida's *gan* (prayers) issuing from his "original power" as is imbedded in his being (*pūrva-praṇidhāna-bala*⁶), functions to no other purpose than to be itself. His Prayers have no objectives other than working their way, true only to themselves. They are expressed in a human way as we limited beings are thus enabled to understand them. We are not to impose upon them our humanly intelligible interpretation. The contradiction herein involved is one of the mysteries surrounding our existence inside and outside. The Supreme Enlightenment consists in accepting them quietly, serenely, joyously and with our whole being. No questions are raised (in fact they vanish of themselves) as to Oyasama's "wonderful schemation" (*upāya-kausalya*).

(When this idea of *praṇidhāna* and *pūrva-praṇidhāna-bala* was first introduced into China in the first century, it is quite likely the people did not know how to take it, for it is the remotest possible thought from followers of Lao-tzu and Confucius. More than three hundred years were needed for the teaching of the Pure Land School to take root in the Middle Kingdom, towards the end of the fourth century.)

⁶ In Japanese, *bongan-riki*; in Chinese, *pen-yuan-li*.

The Prayer is indeed an outburst from the very being of all existences non-sentient as well as sentient. When we dig down to the groundwork of our personality, we hear this Prayer, this "still small voice." And when we become aware of it, it reverberates like the lion's roar throughout the universe and makes us wonder how it was that we failed to hear it until then. The truth is that the voice always appears to us historically conditioned and symbolically dressed in the sanctified shape of tradition. Let me present this Reality shorn of all its aged, awe-inspiring mythological trappings. It may then seem to stand more or less prosaically before us, but to moderners it will be more intelligible and acceptable. For instance, the Buddhist story of the Pure Land as narrated in the sutras might have been plausible in ancient India, China, and in Kamakura Japan, but it requires a good deal of stripping and cleaning to make it more readily comprehensible for sophisticated modern minds.

I will give here the forty-eight prayers as given in Sanghavarman's Chinese translation of the *Larger Sutra of Eternal Life*.⁷ By this the reader will be able better to understand what underlies Shinran's expositions of Shin Buddhism, which were written principally to appeal to scholars of his day who were brought up in the classical atmosphere then prevailing. If Shinran were alive among us now he would surely have interpreted the *Sutra* differently to conform with modern ideas.

6. What characterizes Shin Buddhism is the doctrine of absolute "other-power" (*tariki*⁸), in distinction from "self-power" (*jiriki*⁹). Shin followers claim that the so-called *tariki* the other schools of Buddhism speak of is not pure, but mixed with *jiriki*, and that therefore their faith in Amida's power is not absolute and may not lead them to the Pure Land as they desire. As long as we are limited, conditioned, and bound by karma causation, we can never be enlightened and emancipated. It is only by means of Amida's infinite and unimpeded light that we can effect a leap from the finite to the infinite and realize that we are primarily "unborn" (*anutpāda*) and therefore never subjected to the law of birth and death.

⁷ See footnote 1.—Eds.

⁸ Chinese, *ta-li* 他力.

⁹ Chinese, *tsu-li* 自力.

A PREFACE TO THE KYŌGYŌSHINSHŌ

We generally think that Amida lets down the hook of salvation and that it is we who take hold of it by our own efforts or power. But Shin tells us that the power we think as primarily belonging to us is not at all ours but comes from Amida. We are all limited beings, and there is nothing in us that actively lifts us to Amida's hook of salvation. We are absolutely passive in this respect. Everything comes from Amida, and it is only when we recognize this truth of absolute passivity or unconditioned dependence that we are really enlightened and saved. The *tariki* (other-power) is everything and the *jiriki* (self-power) is nothing: this is the position of Shin toward Amida of Infinite Light and Eternal Life.

We must however remember that inasmuch as we can make any statement, positive or negative, about absolute passivity or unconditioned surrender, there is something or somebody that is conscious of all this: and a being that is at all conscious of what it is doing in whatever form, passive or active, must be said to be an agent of some sort distinguishing itself from others. A being conscious of itself is to that extent an independent being. It is one endowed with a mind capable of judgment. A hook is dropped into the stream, and if a fish that seizes the bait is conscious of its own behaviour, that fish is not a mere mass of bones and muscles; it has a mind, and this presence of a mind entitles it to be different from other fishes. When a man surrenders himself with his whole being to the all-swaying power of Amida's *mabakaruna*, the very moment he does this he is both an active agent and a passive recipient. The contradiction is identified here. "A" is "A" and at the same time "not-A." This is a mystery. And we are all *living* this mystery. In fact, life itself is it, and the Supreme Enlightenment is no other than this experience. Therefore, Buddhists would say: Instant is Eternity, Zero is Infinity, Enlightenment (*bodhi*) is no other than the passions (*kleśa*). Further, they state that to be born in the Pure Land is a "birth of no-birth" (無生之生), and that when you interpret it in the worldly sense of birth and death which takes place in the realm of finitude and karma causality, you do not know where or what the Pure Land is. This is a significant statement in the teaching of Shin Buddhism.

What, then, is the Pure Land where devotees of pure *tariki* are allowed to enter? If to be born into it is a "birth of no-birth," if it is a realm where all forms of contradiction are unified or identified and where "all-knowing" is "no-knowing" and all is done by non-doing, it must truly be a kingdom of

no-existence whatever. If it is the product of absolute "other-power" and there is no room for a conscious "self-power," can it be anything that would engage our human ways of doing and thinking? If Amida rules the entire Land, even when his administration is of the most beneficial, altruistic kind of *mahākaruṇā* quality, it cannot admit the entrance of a *jiriki*-conscious individual being; for to be conscious of oneself doing or thinking in one way or another is to be conscious of a self, that is, *jiriki*. Where *jiriki* is not permitted in any mode of self-demonstration, every inhabitant in the Pure Land of absolute *tariki* power must be turned into a piece of stone or a block of wood with no self-consciousness. But self-consciousness is the prerogative allowed to every human individual. To feel within oneself that one is now in "the group of those who are definitely destined for the Land of Amida" is a form of self-consciousness. Unless such a one is privileged to share in the quality of Amida-hood, even to the extent of an infinitely small modicum of it, he cannot be one of the members of the Pure Land. Thus it is asserted by all Buddhist thinkers regardless of what school they belong to, that beings all are endowed with the Buddha-nature, and that we are all mutually, uniformly, and universally destined to become Buddhas and inhabitants of the Pure Land. Logically this is impossible; but life is not logically constructed; indeed, logic is built upon life. Life rules logic and not conversely.

This is what is known as the mystery of mysteries, and all religions of genuine value are established on it. We as individuals are "sinful beings," or "ignorant defiled beings," given up to the dominance of the passions (*kleśa*) and altogether devoid of wisdom (*prajñā*); yet in spite of all this we are capable of being enlightened and cleanly purified by virtue of Amida's *mahākaruṇā*. When this fact or truth is reflected in our consciousness, we say: there is here nothing of self-power (*jiriki*); all is due to Amida's *tariki* power or his "original prayer" (*pūrva-praṇidhāna*). This is altogether beyond our logical solution. Indeed, when this mystery is personally realized we ask no question of any nature. To live in this attitude of mind or "psychological atmosphere" (*citta-gocara*) is to be a resident of the Pure Land.

7. How is the Pure Land described historically or legendarily in Buddhist literature? As far as the description of the Pure Land as is recorded in the Larger and Smaller Sūtras of Eternal Life, it is too materialistic and in some

respects too contradictory and irrational for human beings to live in for any length of time in the way they are used to living in the *sabālokadhātu*, the relative world of finitude and limitation. Of course the Pure Land is not an earthly one but the place built by Amida of Infinite Light and Life. We cannot expect it to have anything resembling or approaching this gray, sombre habitation of ours. To speak the truth, the Pure Land as such must beggar any sort of description on our part. But the Hindu imagination did its best to depict it poetically glorious and beautiful, so that we could feel it the most desirable quarter to reside in, judging from our earthly point of view.

The palaces and towers and pavilions are all embellished (*vyūha*) with precious stones and rare metals, splendidly reflecting the infinite light of the one who presides over the whole region. Soft relaxing breezes blow all over the gardens; the ponds are filled with flowers in bloom and the air is redolent with the most pleasing fragrance. The singing birds are heard sonorously filling every corner of the Land with the praises of the wonderful virtues of the Triple Treasure.

The Pure Land, or Jōdo,¹⁰ is the region in which all beings are advised to aspire to be born after leaving this world. The reader may naturally wish to know how really inviting it is. Superficially, however, it is not a very inviting place to which to transfer our residence. This is due mostly to the Indian imagination, which depicts it in too fantastically rich colours. But the writer never forgets to tell us that it is the product of our or rather the Bodhisattva's meritorious deeds which are promoted by his *mahākaruṇā* for all beings. They are living under the darkness of finitude and hence of limitation and bondage and uncertainty, which inevitably subjects them to all forms of fear and anxiety. The Pure Land is just the opposite of all this, a region where Amida's unimpeded and infinite Light pervades over every restriction unconditionally. It is extremely difficult to let sense intellect-bound mortals realize this state of existence. The Indian genius is compelled to paint the Pure Land rather sportly materialistic. The Land is overloaded with the seven precious stones and dazzlingly illuminated. And at the same time, those who are supposed to be enjoying this style of furnishing (*vyūha*) are characterized as having a body of limitlessness and formlessness, they are neither gods nor men, they are highly

¹⁰ *Cbing-t'u* in Chinese.

abstract and metaphysical beings, as it were, and not of this sensuous world (*sabālokadhātu*).

This apparently contradictory form of existence causes no inconvenience to the devotees of Amitabha Buddha, because the very moment they pronounce the Name of the Buddha in all sincerity and in all faith, throwing their whole being to the wind, all these contradictions vanish, and they are ushered all at once into the Land of Peace and Happiness, absolutely "pure" of blemishes of every possible form. This is the realm of creativity and freedom. The miraculous transformation that takes place here is really a mystery beyond human comprehension. The devotees ascribe it to the Infinite Light of Amida that knows no obstacles. The Pure Land is symbolic of this truth. We must remember that "pure" does not mean just to be free from dirt or mixture or blemish; it means here "absolute," "to be transcending every form of finitude, limitation, conditionality," and so on. Being so, not only all the buildings and gardens, but also pieces of furniture—in fact everything in the Pure Land is so made and arranged as to symbolize or particularize the general idea of the Land. The Land is the Infinite Unimpeded Light itself, and when it is reflected through the prism of the human mind it splits itself into infinite varieties of *vyūba* (furnishing). An empty room is now fully decorated with various pieces of furniture fit for "human beings," now transferred into the Pure Land, to live in.

Vasubandhu's *Gāthā*¹¹ as well as the sutras never fail to remind us that there is One Absolute Reality at the base of all these infinite varieties of *vyūba*, spiritual as well as material. Vasubandhu designates it as *Eka-dharma-padam*, that is, the One Absolute Being. Another name for it is *mahāprajñā*, the "absolute knowledge" that corresponds to the Christian Godhead. It is a mystery from the human way of thinking that the Godhead moves and transforms itself into God and creator. This creator is the Buddhist *mahākaruṇā*, for it is due to *mahākaruṇā* that the Pure Land furnishes or provides itself with multitudes of *vyūba*. The *vyūba* is value or merit. When Vasubandhu tells about a "*vyūba* perfected" he means that a value, moral or spiritual, has attained a full realization, that a stock of merit has come to maturity.

¹¹ A translation of Vasubandhu's *Gāthā* (*Gāthā-ge*) by Dr. Suzuki follows on page 21.—Eds.

One has to note that whatever *vyūba* we have in the Pure Land as symbolization of the *Eka-dharma-padam* is the completion or realization of thoughts and feelings of great significance, personal and social. Technically, they are generally called the "good stock of merit" flowing from the spring of *mahākaruṇā*. Thus, we see that the Buddhist conception of *mahākaruṇā* corresponds to the Christian God as the creator.

Thus, the One Absolute *Dharmapadam* presents itself to our human understanding in two respects: *mahāprajñā* and *mahākaruṇā*. As one, it is the Absolutely Pure, and as two, it is Being or Being Aware (眞実智慧) and the Dharma-Body of Non-doing (Becoming or Acting or Working or Creating). The One Absolute Dharma Word is thus the Body of Identity of the Being Aware and the Becoming, which is personified in Japanese as Amida the Infinite. The realization of this truth is experienced by the human mind as "a leap," designated as "crosswise" by Shinran in contrast to "straightforward."

*Vasubandhu's Gāthā on a Birth [in the Pure Land]
(Ganshō-ge)**

O World-honored One, I pay homage single-mindedly to the Tathāgata
whose Light reaches unimpededly to the end of the ten quarters.
I pray to be born in the Land of Peace and Happiness.
Depending on the sutras, which tell us about the true merit, I write this
Gāthā outlining my desire to be born [into the Pure Land]. What fol-
lows is in accord with the Buddha's teaching.
As I observe, this Land exceeds all things we can see in the triple world.
After all, it is like the emptiness of space. It extends in every direction
and has no boundaries.

* This translation by Dr. Suzuki is reprinted under circumstances similar to those of the preceding article, set forth in the asterisked footnote on page one. *Ganshō-ge* (願生偈) is the popular title of the *Muryōju-kyō upadāśha* (*Amitāyus-sūtrapadāśha*), a short work partly in verse and partly in prose ascribed to Vasubandhu (fifth cent.), expounding the essence of the *Larger Sutra of Eternal Life*, the main scripture of the Pure Land schools. The above is a translation of the verse portion only.—Eds.

It grows out of the Right Way, Great Love and Compassion, and the Great Stock of Merit of transcendental nature.

The light pure and undefiled pervades everywhere in perfection. It is like a brightly shining mirror, like the sun or the moon.

Every object furnishing the Land is like precious stones in full brilliancy and exquisitely beautiful.

It is without any trace of blemish, flamingly, spotlessly, illuminating all around. There is nothing in this Land that is not radiantly shining.

Things you touch here give the agreeable feeling of the leaves of the Kācālindi plant, soft, yielding, surpassingly pleasing to the senses.

Beautiful plants are growing all over the Land, and the ponds, streams, and the fountains covered with flowers in luxurious abundance sparkle beamingly.

Waters of any kind, springs, ponds, streams, are all covered with flowers radiantly, luxuriously blooming.

Where there is a soft breeze, the leaves and flowers swing and sway in pleasing confusion.

Towers, palaces, pavilions, and other magnificent structures, furnished with railings and porticos, and with various trees weaving between, are erected, where one can survey the surroundings unobstructedly extending in every direction.

They are all aglow with unusual brilliance.

An extraordinarily fine network of all kinds of precious stones interminglingly fills the vast expanse of space.

Bells of every description are sending out sonorous notes proclaiming the wondrous truth of the Dharma.

Flowery robes descend from above like showers to enhance the beauty of the Land, and a fragrance beyond measure fills the air all around.

The sun of the Buddhajñā is bright and pure and annihilates the darkness of ignorance prevailing in the world.

[The Buddha's] pure and unstained voice is mysterious, deep, far-reaching, and secretly inspiring, and is heard everywhere throughout the ten quarters.

Amida Buddha of the Supreme Enlightenment is the Dharma King who supports the Land and holds it together.

A PREFACE TO THE KYŌGYŌSHINSHŌ

Beings are born here from the pure flowers of Buddhahood. They are all of the Transformation Body of the Supreme Enlightenment Flowers. They are all delighted with the taste of the Buddha-Dharma, they feed themselves on the contemplative samādhi.

They are forever free from illness of any sort, they are uninterruptedly pleased with everything about them.

The Land which grows out of the Mahāyāna root of good merit is free from discriminatory iniquities and there are no such words as infancy, disreputability, woman-likeness, or deformity of any sort. There are no seeds here of other vehicles [than the Mahāyāna].

Everything that the beings there may feel like enjoying comes to reality instantly. There is nothing that they fail to have as they wish.

It is for these reasons that I pray to be born in the Land of Amida Buddha.

There are pedestals exquisitely decorated with beautifully pure flowers which are made of innumerable precious stones of the best quality. [The Buddha sitting on these pedestals] is most excellently formed in radiancy with rays of infinite length and surpassing in every way all worldly figures.

The Tathāgata's wonderful voice beyond comparison sounds sonorously throughout the ten quarters.

[His mind is not subject to discrimination.] It is evenly attuned like unto the earth, water, fire, air, or empty space.

All the beings, gods (*devas*) and men, occupying the Land have attained the stage of immovability and are the products of the Tathāgata's ocean of undefiled Prajñā.

[The Tathāgata is] like unto Mount Sumeru, king of mountains, supremely majestic, and there is nothing comparable to him.

Gods and men and all beings look up to him, bow and pay homage in every possible way.

As regards Buddha's original power of prayer (*pūrva-pranidhāna-bala*), it is such that there are none who, coming across it, shall pass by it to no purpose; for every one of them shall have his great treasure ocean of merit instantly brought into its perfect fruition.

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

The Land of Peace and Happiness is thoroughly pure and the wheel of non-defilement is always in motion. The sun of the Bodhisattvas of Transformation Body (*nirmāṇa-kāya*), like Mount Sumeru, carries on its work [of propagating the Buddha's Dharma].

The pure undefiled light [emanating from the Bodhisattvas in the Land of Peace] is so destined as to shine instantly, with no interruption, and uniformly, upon all beings, wherever there are Buddha assemblages, and benefit them all universally.

Heavenly music, flowery robes, exquisitely scented aromatics and other objects come down like showers, which they, without cherishing any discriminatory thoughts, offer to the Buddhas and praise their meritorious virtues.

Wherever they may go they find the Buddha's Dharma and its merit-treasure. For it is their prayer to see Buddha's Dharma proclaimed as if they were in his presence.

By writing a treatise and composing a *gāthā* [on the teaching of the Land], my prayer is to see, together with all beings generally, the person of Amida Buddha and to be born in this Land of Peace and and Happiness.