

## HÖNEN SHÖNIN AND THE JÖDO IDEAL

IN order to understand Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially as it expresses itself in the sects in Japan, it is necessary to be familiar with the teaching of Shōdōmon and Jōdomon.

It was the great patriarch of Buddhism, Nāgārjuna, who taught that there are two ways of life: the one of difficulty (難行道), the other of ease (易行道). In the first, he who seeks salvation must work for his enlightenment through the means of meditation, fasting, study, asceticism, and work out his own realisation according to the Buddha's dying words, "Here is the doctrine, work out your own salvation!" But in the other path the seeker for salvation throws aside his own efforts and pins his faith in another. According to the Paradise sects, that other is of course the Buddha Amitābha, or Amida as he is called in Japan.

Shōdōmon (聖道門) is the holy path. He who walks this road is ever exerting himself, seeking to be saved by his own efforts and not looking for help to any one else. When he attains to enlightenment, it is through his own power, and his way is long and beset with difficulties. But how different is the path of Jōdo (淨土門)! Here, the struggling one can cast all his self-power (*jiriki*, 自力) aside and believing only in Amida and his saving power at one stride can cross over all his difficulties and be saved—born into the Pure Land and attain bliss eternal. On this path, one learns that if he keeps in mind, if only for a day or a week, the holy name of Amida, the Buddha himself will meet him at the hour of death and lead him to the Pure Land (*Sukhāvati*)—the Western Paradise. He who walks the Shōdōmon is beset with difficulties, he is weighted by the practise

of good deeds and discipline. How easy is the lot of his brother upon the Jōdomon, who throws everything away and repeating only the sacred name "*Namu-amida-butsu*," in faith and love, passes happily along towards his birth in the Land of Purity! This simple and easy way to salvation, the Path of Faith is held out to the ordinary man, "the man of the street." "Do not be afraid," he is told, "do not stop to practise austerities, do not spend hours in meditation, practise good deeds indeed, but do not become a slave to them, do not depend upon your own efforts. Come, here is an easier path! Put all your heart into the thought of the Buddha, repeat his name, believe in him — this is all that is necessary; for if you do this with a pure and undivided heart and in perfect faith, the Buddha cannot help but hear you and himself lead you to the land of heart's desire."

How did this Paradise teaching originate in Buddhism? It is said by the Mahāyānists of the Amida sects to have been taught by the Buddha Shākyamuni himself in three great sutras. These sutras are: 1. the *Muryōju-kyō* (無量壽經) *Aparimitayus-sutra*, called also the *Larger Sukhāvati-vyūha*. This gives a history of the Tathāgata-Amitābha and a description of the Western Paradise. It was first translated into Chinese 252 A. D. In this Sutra, we learn that many kalpas ago Amitābha was a man, the Bodhisattva Dharmākara, or Hōzō-bosatsu (法藏) as he is called by the Japanese. He made forty-eight vows to save sentient beings; for like a true Bodhisattva he relinquished Nirvana for himself, and declared:

"O Bhagavat, if those beings who have directed their thought towards the highest perfect knowledge in other worlds, and who, after having heard my name, when I have obtained the Bodhi (knowledge), have meditated on me with serene thoughts; if at the moment of their death, after having approached them, surrounded by an assembly of Bhikshus, I should not stand before them, worshipped by them that is

so that their thoughts should not be troubled, then may I not obtain the highest perfect knowledge.

“O Bhagavat, if those beings who in immeasurable and innumerable Buddha countries, after they have heard my name, when I shall have obtained Bodhi, should direct their thought to be born in that Buddha country of mine, and should for that purpose bring their stock of merit to maturity, if these should not be born in that Buddha country, even those who have only ten times repeated the thought [of that Buddha country], barring always those beings who have committed the [five] Ānantarya sins\*, and who have caused an obstruction and abuse of the Good Law, then may I not obtain the highest perfect knowledge.”

He became the Buddha Amitābha, the Lord of the Western Paradise, the Lord of Eternal Light and Life.

2. The *Kwanmuryōju-kyō* (觀無量壽經) *Amitāyur-dhyāna-sūtra*. In this sutra the Buddha pointed out to the Queen of Bimbisara, who was troubled and unhappy, the comfort and bliss of the Western Paradise and taught her the thirteen meditations.

3. The *Amida-kyō* (阿彌陀經) or *Smaller Sukhāvati-vyūha-sūtra* tells of the joys and happiness and peace to be found in the country of the Pure Land.

It is believed that the Buddha taught this doctrine to the Bodhisattva Maitreya (彌勒) and the Mahāyānist of the Pure Land teachings claims that the doctrine was already well known in the Buddha's time. It certainly seems to have been taught very early indeed, and from the beginning it had a wonderful success, for it was attractive to the ordinary man, the common people, to whom the older Buddhist philosophy seemed cold. It was an easy doctrine and a pleasant one and from the early days of the Mahāyāna to its later development in Japan as found in the Jōdo and Jōdo-Shin sects, it has

---

\* These are the sins that will bring immediate retribution.

had a wide influence and gained everywhere many converts.

Aśvaghosha (馬鳴) in a chapter of his *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (起信論) speaks of rebirth in the Western Paradise. Nāgārjuna (龍樹), the next great teacher, in the *Jūjūbībasha-ron* or *Daśabhūmivibhāṣā-Śāstra* (十住毘婆沙論) was the one to teach the two paths of difficulty (難行道) and ease (易行道). Vasubandhu (世親), the great Vasubandhu who left 1,000 written volumes of his pen and brain more definitely taught this Paradise doctrine, and his work, *Wōjōjōdoron* (往生淨土論), is considered with the before mentioned sutras the great authoritative works.

The modern Jōdo sect recognises eight patriarchs. The first is Aśvaghosha, the author of the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*. Many sects claim him as their founder, so he has been called the father of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The second great teacher was Nāgārjuna, also revered by other sects, and following came in succession Vasubandhu, Bodhiruci (菩提留支), Douran (曇鸞), Dōshaku (道綽), Zendo (善導), and the last—and to the Japanese the greatest—is the Japanese teacher, Hōnen Shōnin (法然上人).

Buddhism had been introduced into China from India 67 A. D. In 252 A. D. Saṃghavarman (僧伽跋摩) translated into Chinese the *Larger Amitayus-sutra* on which the Jōdo sect bases its teachings. It is this sutra which is most important for presenting Amitābha and the Paradise doctrine. It is Zendo who was the greatest exponent of the Jōdo in China. Zendo is most interesting. His turning to the Amida teaching is striking. He had studied all the various teachings of all the sects, and he was troubled and confused. One day he went into the library of the monastery, and after praying for guidance, he chose some book which would be of help to him, he reached out his hand and took up the *Amitayur-dhayaṇa-sūtra* which tells of Amida and his mercies, and when Zendo read this, he was comforted and took heart again.

This led to further study of this teaching, and for some time he retired to a solitary place. Afterwards he studied with the patriarch Doshaku and emerged from his tutelage as a teacher of the salvation doctrine. It was Zendo who pushed the doctrine to its fullest, and unlike others recognised Amida only of all the Buddhas.

There are many interesting stories told of Zendo. His seems to have been a striking personality—he was a natural leader, and many were the devotees of his teaching. In China he is considered the greatest exponent of the Jōdo teaching. When we come to Japan and wish to trace the Jōdo way of life here, it is to another that we must look for leadership in the salvation doctrine, and that is to Hōnen Shōnin whose name in this country is always associated with the name of Jōdo, and with the thought of Amida and in the invocation of his blessed name. With him must be united the name of his illustrious pupil, Shinran Shōnin, the founder of the Jōdo-Shin sect, who carried the Jōdo teaching even further than his master Hōnen Shōnin.

However, before Hōnen the Sukhavāti or Paradise teaching had found its way to Japan. It was taught by the priests of other sects, especially by the Tendai priest Genshin (源信), 942-1017, who recommended the invocation of the name of Amitābha. Then in the period between 1087 and 1165 came the founding of the Yudzū-nembutsu sect (融通念佛宗), established for the practise of the invocation of the Buddha's name, but still affiliated with the teachings of the older sects of Kegon (華嚴) and Tendai (天臺). It was in 1175 that Hōnen began to preach the invocation of the Buddha's name, but before taking up his doctrine more particularly, let us see who this Hōnen was.

Hōnen was born in Mimasaka province in 1133 A. D., the son of Tokikuni Uruma (漆間時國), a descendant of a princely family connected with the Imperial court. His par-

ents were childless and wished very much for a son for whom they fervently prayed. At the time of his birth it is said that a purple cloud appeared in the sky, and two white banners alighted upon the branches of a *muku* tree, and after seven days they ascended to heaven. Thereafter, a number of miraculous things happened near his home, so that the people held the place in great reverence, and later built a temple in his honour. The child was called Seishi-maru (勢至丸) and it was said that even while a little one, he was remarkable and had a habit of sitting with his face towards the west. He studied Buddhism while still quite young, and was well spoken of by the learned priests of the Hosso, Sanron, Tendai, and Kegon sects. When he first went up to the great Tendai monastery, his superior wrote to the abbot, "I am sending you a miniature of Manjuśri." (Manjuśri called Monju in Japanese is the Bodhisattva who represents wisdom.)

Seishi-maru, or Genku (源空) as he was called then, was not satisfied among the learned priests with their profound studies. He was troubled about the way of attaining deliverance; he studied very hard hoping to find a solution to his difficulties. One day, while reading a commentary by Zendo on the *Amitāyur-dhyāna-sūtra*, he came upon this passage and his heart halted: "Only repeat the name of Amitābha with all your heart, whether walking or standing, whether sitting or lying; never cease the practise of it for a moment. This is the very work which unfailingly issues in salvation; for it is in accordance with the original vow of that Buddha." His mind opened and he felt that he understood the truth. He then and there abandoned preaching, all other teachings and every kind of religious practise, and began to invoke the name of Amitābha. He was then forty-three years old. From that time on, he devoted himself to the name of Amitābha, and urged the people to practise the *Nembutsu* (念佛) as the invocation is called in Japanese.

He had many followers and pupils, among them three emperors. His influence was very great, spreading all over the land. He lived in different places, teaching and explaining. He was called Hōnen Shōnin by order of the emperor. (Hōnen means "the truth as it is," and Shōnin a "superior man.") He founded the Jōdo sect of Japan which is still at this time one of the large and influential sects in Japanese Buddhism. Shinran Shōnin, the founder of the Jōdo-Shin sect, was his disciple.

How much Shinran thought of Hōnen may be seen from the following extracts from his Psalms :

"For from the strength of the wisdom of light, Hōnen, the Great Teacher, came into the world and hath taught the chosen doctrine of the Divine Promise, and he hath built Jōdo-Shinshu upon the rock.

"Though Zendo and Genshin, those great teachers, have well instructed us, yet had Hōnen Shōnin kept silence, wherewith should we know the holy teaching of Shin-shu, we who dwell in remote country and in an evil day?

"Throughout the long, long kalpas of my lives that are overpast could I never find the way of Deliverance, and if Hōnen Shōnin, the Great Teacher, had not arisen in this world, vainly had I spent the precious hours of my life.

"Before the eyes of men Hōnen Shōnin stood as the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, or, yet more, as the Blessed One again made flesh.

"A chosen vessel of the Blessed One that men might be saved, Hōnen Shōnin was manifested in the world, and he opened wide the gates of perfect wisdom, having instructed mankind in the Holy Faith.

"That Buddha, whose light is infinite, was made flesh in this world as Hōnen Shōnin, and when his merciful work was accomplished, he returned into the Land of Purity."

Let Hōnen speak for himself in regard to his view of

Jōdo. "Having a deep desire to obtain salvation, and with faith in the teaching of the various scriptures, I practised many forms of self-discipline. There are many doctrines in Buddhism, but they may all be summed up in these three disciplines: the Precepts, Meditation, and Wisdom, all of which are practised by the Followers of the Hinayana and the Mahāyana, and by those of the esoteric and the exoteric sects. But the fact is that I do not keep even the precepts, nor do I practise any one of the many forms of meditation. A certain priest has said that without the observance of the precepts, there is no such thing as the realisation of samadhi. Moreover the heart of the ordinary unenlightened man is always liable to change, due to his surroundings, like a monkey jumping from one branch to another. It is indeed in a state of confusion, easily moved and with difficulty controlled. In what way does correct and faultless knowledge arise? Without the sword of faultless knowledge, how can one get free from the chains of evil passions, from which arises evil conduct? And unless one get free from evil conduct and evil passions, how shall he obtain deliverance from the bondage of birth and death? Alas! What shall I do? The like of us are incompetent to practise the three disciplines: precepts, meditation, and knowledge. And so I inquired of a great many learned men and priests, whether there was any other way of salvation. At last I went into the library where all the scriptures were, all by myself, and with a heavy heart read them all through. I hit upon a passage in Zendo's commentary on the *Amitāyus-sutra*, which runs as follows: 'Only repeat the name of Amitābha with all your heart, whether walking or standing, whether sitting or lying; never cease the practise of it for a moment. This is the very work which unfailingly issues in salvation; for it is in accordance with the original vow of that Buddha.' On reading this I was impressed with the fact that even ignorant people like



myself, by reverent meditation on this passage, by an entire dependence on the truth in it, never forgetting the practise of repetition of the sacred name of Amitābha, may, with absolute certainty, lay the foundation for that karma which will issue in birth into the Land of Bliss. Not only was I led to believe in this teaching bequeathed by Zendo but also earnestly to follow the great vow of Amitābha.

“And so I, following the teaching of Zendo and in accordance with the advice of my predecessor, Genshin, repeated the *Nembutsu* over sixty thousand times every day, and I came nearer to the end of life I added ten thousand more and repeated it seventy thousand times a day.

“The reason why I founded the Jodo sect was that I might show the ordinary man how to be born in the Buddha’s land of real compensation. According to the Tendai sect, the ordinary man may be born in the so-called Pure Land, but that land is conceived of as a very inferior place, and although the conception of it as held by the Hossō sect (法相宗) is indeed profound, still even they do not admit that the ordinary man can be born in the Pure Land. And all the sects, while differing in many points, agree that it is not possible for him to be born in the Buddha’s land of real compensation: but, according to Zendo, this is possible and I believe in the truth of it. . . . If I did not start a new sect, the truth that the common man may be born in the real Buddha’s land will not be understood nor will the deep signification of Amitābha’s original vow be realised.”

Hōnen Shōnin died in 1212 A. D. at eighty years of age, and his last words were a passage from the *Amitāyur-dhyāna-sūtra*. The light of Amitābha illumines the ten worlds, and all the sentient beings who call upon the sacred name, it protects and never forsakes them.” (光明遍照十方世界念佛衆生攝取不捨)\*

---

\* The idea was once expressed by Hōnen in the following verse:

We must consider not only the character and personality of a man while he is living, but also the character of his followers. We know how wide was the influence of Hōnen, people from all classes of society and priests from all sects listened to him, and at his death he left a large number of disciples to continue the teaching of his doctrine.

The Jōdo sect consists of two main branches, the Chinzei (鎮西) and the Seizan (西山). The powerful Jōdo-Shin sect founded by his spiritual pupil, Shinran Shonin, must be considered as deriving its early inspiration from Hōnen.

In regard to Hōnen's teaching, we have already seen from the quotations from his own words what the main points are. We know that for him the study of metaphysics, philosophy, and doctrinal differences are not necessary for salvation. All that is necessary is the continual invocation of the Buddha's name, "Adoration to the Eternal Buddha. *Namu-amida-butsu.*" By continually remembering the Buddha and calling on his name, the devotee will be born in the Western Paradise, the Pure Land of the Lord of Life and Light. To be born there on the part of the believer, there must be absolute trust in the all-saving power of Amida.

We will consider the Jōdo teaching a little more fully. As mentioned before, the sect teaches that ten Kalpas ago, Amitābha then called Dharmākara heard Lokeśvara Buddha preaching the Dharma. He himself wished to reach the highest and truest way, and he gave up his family and kingly life and became a religious recluse under the name of Hōzō-Bosatsu or Dharmākara-Bodhisattva. Looking upon the beings in the three worlds, he took pity upon them and wished to save them, and then he made his forty-eight vows,

---

"While there is no hamlet  
Where the gleam of the moon  
Reaches not,  
It abides only in the heart  
Of the one who gazes upon it."

as recorded in the *Larger Sukhāvati Sūtra*. The vows are all to the effect that the Buddha will give up obtaining the highest perfect knowledge, i. e. Nirvana, unless all beings in all the worlds are able to be happy, to attain wisdom, and to know of him and his mercy and his vows to save them.

It is in remembrance of these vows of Amitābha that the worshippers repeat the invocation. The Jōdo teaches that the most important thing for the Buddhist is faith or belief. This is called *anjin* (安心) or settling of the mind. We must first of all believe or have faith in Amida and his Pure Land. *Anjin* is of two kinds, the general feeling or wish to believe, called *So-no-anjin* (總安心), where the mind desires to be born in the Pure Land and dislikes to live in this world of difficulties. But this is not enough for one's religious life. So particular or *Betsu-no-anjin* (別安心) partakes of three characteristics: first, *Shūjo-shin* (至誠心), sincerity. The devotee must be sincere or he cannot see Amida. Of what use is it to worship the Buddha and to repeat the Buddha's name with an impure mind? There must then be *Jinshin* (深心) or devotion, and there must also be *Eko-hotsugwan-shin* (廻向發願心), or the mind which wishes to transform its meritorious acts into births in the Pure Land. Briefly, *Anjin* is the way of putting complete faith in the Buddha. As Zendo stated it, "Any one who is endowed with these minds is sure to be born in the Pure Land, while if one is wanting in any one of them he will fail to be born there." The devotee of Jōdo must believe in Amida, the Buddha, with these three minds or mental outlooks.

Now as to practise, *Kigo* (起業, starting practise). 1. Recitation of the three sutras, the *Larger and Smaller Sukhāvativyūha*, and the *Amitāyur-dhyāna*; 2. Meditation upon the Pure Land; 3. Worship of Amida only; 4. Invocation of his name only; and 5. Making offerings to

Amida only. It is the fourth practise on which the greatest stress is laid and which is the direct cause of rebirth into the Pure Land. This is the most important practise, everything else is entirely secondary to it.

*Kigo* is the starting practise and *Sago* (作業) is the performing practise: 1. Respect and honour to Amida, Kwannon (Avalokiteśvara), and Seishi (Mahāsthāma), and other saints, contemplation of Paradise, and praise of the sutras; 2. Single-heartedness, not allowing one's thought to be mixed with the teachings or practises of other sects; 3. Constant practise, not to waste time; and 4. Perseverance in practise and enthusiastic ardent practise.

As Hōnen says, "You should make the *Nembutsu* the business of your life." Is this not another way of practising the presence of God, for surely to him who practises the *Nembutsu* as the true believer should, Amida will reveal himself to his devotee. However, all this practise is not the essential part of the Jōdo doctrine. The whole kernel of the doctrine is to repeat the Buddha's name with a pure and believing heart. In the "Ichimai-Kishōmon (一枚起請文)," Hōnen says.

"By *nembutsu* I do not mean such practise of meditation on the Buddha as referred to by the wise men of China and Japan, nor is it the invocation of the Buddha's name, which is practised as the result of study and understanding as to the meaning of the *nembutsu*. It is just to say 'Namu-amida-butsu' without doubting that this will insure the birth of the believer in the Land of Bliss. Just this, and no other considerations are required. Mention is often made of the three states of mind (*sanshin*) and the four exercises (*shishu no sago*), but these are all included in the belief that a birth in the Pure Land is most conclusively assured by the 'Namu-amida-butsu.' If one imagines something more than this, one will be excluded from the blessings of the two Holy Ones and left out of the Original Vow. Those who believe

in the *nembutsu*, however learned they may be in all the teachings [of Shakyamuni], shall behave themselves like an ignorant who knows nothing, or like a simple-minded woman-devotee; avoid pedantry, and invoke the Buddha's name with singleness of thought."

So it is seen that *anjin*, *kigo*, and *sago* are all contained in the *Nembutsu*. The followers of Jōdo need nothing else.

What are the benefits to be gained by the practise of the *Nembutsu*? The great benefit is of course that the devotee who repeats it with a pure and sincere heart is born in the Land of Purity and Bliss. Then too the good qualities of Amitābha are all contained in the invocation and through the invocation may be participated in. A further benefit is that this is the easiest way.

The invocation is to be practised every day as often as possible, besides there should be special times of practise set aside, abstaining from animal food and with thought directed towards the west. Above all, the invocation should be practised at the hour of death, for this will ensure rebirth in the Pure Land. Therefore, the Buddha's name should be repeated with the whole heart and be assured it will be heard by him to whom it is directed—the Lord Buddha Amitābha of Infinite Life and Light.

In the *Sukhāvati-vyūha Sutra* there are full descriptions of the Pure Land, Amida's World of Bliss: "The world called Sukhāvati belonging to that Bhagavat Amitābha is prosperous, rich, good to live in, fertile, lovely, and filled with many gods and men . . . The world Sukhāvati is fragrant with several sweet-smelling scents, rich in manifold flowers and fruits, adorned with gem trees, and frequented by tribes of manifold sweet-voiced birds, which have been made by the Tathāgata on purpose . . .

"There are lotus flowers there, half a yojana in circumference. There are others, one yojana in circumference; and

others, two, three, four, or five *yojanas* in circumference. And from each gem-lotus there proceed thirty-six hundred thousand *kotis* of rays of light. And from each ray of light there proceed thirty-six hundred thousand *kotis* of Buddhas, with bodies of golden colour, possessed of the thirty-two marks of great men, who go and teach the Law to beings in the immeasurable and innumerable worlds in the eastern quarter. Thus also in the southern, western, and northern quarters, above and below, in the cardinal and intermediate points, they go their way to the immeasurable worlds and teach the Law to beings in the whole world.

“In that world of *Sukhāvātī*, there flow different kinds of rivers; there are great rivers there, one *yojana* in breadth; there are rivers up to twenty, thirty, forty, fifty *yojanas* in depth. All these rivers are delightful, carrying water of different sweet odour, carrying bunches of flowers adorned with various gems resounding with sweet voices. And there proceeds from an instrument which consists of hundred thousand *kotis* of parts, which embodies heavenly music and is played by clever people, the same delightful sound which proceeds from those great rivers, the sound which is deep, unknown, incomprehensible, clear, pleasant to the ear, touching the heart, beloved, sweet, delightful, never tiring, never disagreeable, pleasant to hear, as if it always said, Non-eternal, peaceful, unreal. Such a sound comes to be heard by these beings.

“And again, the borders of these great rivers on both sides are filled with jewel trees of various scents, from which bunches of flowers, leaves, and branches of all kinds hang down. And if the beings, who are on the borders of those rivers, wish to enjoy sport full of heavenly delights, the water rises to the ankle only after they have stepped into the rivers, if they wish it to be so; or if they wish it, the water rises to their knees, to their hips, to their sides, and to their ears. And heavenly pleasures arise. Again if the beings then wish

the water to be cold, it is cold; if they wish it to be hot, it is hot; if they wish it to be hot and cold, it is hot and cold, according to their pleasure.

“And there is nowhere in that Sukhāvati world any sound of sin, obstacle, misfortune, distress, and destruction; there is nowhere any sound of pain, even the sound of perceiving what is neither pain nor pleasure is not there, how much less the sound of pain. For that reason, that world is called Sukhāvati, shortly, but, not in full. For the whole kalpa will come to an end, while the different causes of the pleasure of the world Sukhāvati are being praised, and even then the end of those causes of happiness could not be reached.

“And again, the beings who have been and will be born in that world Sukhāvati, will be endowed with such colour, strength, vigour, height and breadth, dominion, accumulation of virtue; with such enjoyments of dress, ornaments, gardens, palaces, and pavilions; and such enjoyments of touch, taste, smell, and sound; in fact with all enjoyments and pleasures, exactly like the Paranirmitavasavartin gods.

“And again, in that world Sukhāvati, beings do not take food consisting of gross materials of gravy or molasses; but whatever food they desire, such food they perceive, as if it were taken, and become delightful in body and mind. Yet they need not put it into their mouth.

“And if, after they are satisfied, they wish different kinds of perfumes, then with these very heavenly kinds of perfumes the whole Buddha country is scented. And whosoever wishes to perceive there such perfume, every perfume of every scent of the Gandharvarāja does always reach his nose....

“And again, in that Buddha country whatever beings have been born, and are being born, and will be born, are always constant in absolute truth till they have reached Nirvana. And why is that? Because there is no room or mention

there of the other two divisions, such as beings not constant or constant in falsehood.

“And again, in the ten quarters, and in each of them, in all the Buddha countries equal in number to the sand of the Ganga, the blessed Buddhas equal in number to the sand of the Ganga, glorify the name of the blessed Amitābha, the Tathāgata, they preach his fame, they proclaim his glory, they extol his virtue. And why? Because all beings who hear the name of the blessed Amitābha, and having heard it, raise their thought with joyful longing, even for once only, will not turn away again from the highest perfect knowledge.

“And again, those beings who meditate on the Tathāgata by giving him the ten thoughts, and who will direct their desire towards that Buddha country, and who will feel satisfaction when the profound doctrines are being preached, and who will not fall off, not despair, not fail, but will meditate on that Tathāgata, if it were by one thought only, and will direct their desire towards that Buddha country, they also will see the Tathāgata Amitābha, while they are in a dream, they will be born in the world Sukhāvati, and will never turn away from the highest perfect knowledge.

“And, after thus seeing the cause and effect, the Tathāgatas of the ten quarters, in immeasurable and innumerable worlds, glorify the name of the Tathāgata Amitābha, preach his fame and proclaim his praise. And again in that Buddha country, Bodhisattvas equal in number to the sands of the Ganga approach from the ten quarters, and in each quarter towards that Tathāgata Amitābha, in order to see him, to bow before him, to worship him, to consult him, and likewise in order to see that company of Bodhisattvas, and the different kinds of perfection in the multitude of ornaments and excellences belonging to that Buddha country.”

As we shall see later, some believers take this description literally and believe in the joys and bliss of a real paradise,



but there are others who explain it as wholly symbolical and transcendental.

It is necessary now to consider some of the chief differences between the Jōdo teachings and other Amida sects, especially the Shin. We have seen that the great Jōdo teachers have laid the greatest stress upon faith in Amida, and the repetition of his name, but they do not ignore karma, the merit of good works. But the Shin insists that good works are done as acts of gratitude to the Buddha and are not necessary to entrance to the Pure Land, for even the sinful can enter if their faith in Amida is sufficient. The heart of Faith is the one necessary condition. The Jōdo teaches that at the hour of death Amida with his retinue of Bodhisattvas will come to conduct the faithful believer to the Pure Land. But the Shin believes that the coming of Amida is now. As soon as one believes in Amida, he at once enters into his care and protection and is saved. So salvation begins already in this world according to the Shin and is not a matter of the after-death life as it is in the Jōdo. There is a custom observed in the Jōdo sect in connection with the death of a believer. A picture of Amida is hung up on the wall near the dying person and a cord fastened to the picture is also fastened to the wrist of a dying one. This symbolises the rope, the great Vow which Amida throws to this life of trouble, by which the true believer grasping it in faith may be drawn out into peace and joy.

The Jōdo recognises not only Amida Buddha whom it considers supreme, but other Buddhas like Kwannon (Avalokiteśvara), Seishi (Mahāsthāma), Monju (Mañjuśrī), and Śakyamuni, the human Buddha who revealed the teaching. The Jōdo teaches that Amitābha is the compassionate saviour on whom we should depend for birth into Paradise, but it realises that however noble and grand were the vows of Amitābha, if it had not been for the revelation by Śakyamuni,

the world would never have known of them. Therefore, this sect is known as a *Ni-son Ikkyo*, (二尊一教) one religion with two divinities, because it gives worship and reverence to Śakyamuni as well as to Amida. In this respect it differs from the Shin sect which allows worship to Amida alone. In the Jōdo petitions for temporal blessings are offered to Amida, but in the Shin these are offered for salvation only. Another difference is that in the Jōdo there are acts of religious devotion, but in the Shin there is nothing but the invocation of the Buddha's name. The Jōdo makes a strong distinction like the older sects between laity and priesthood, but the Shin makes no difference and the Shin priests marry and live actively in the world like ordinary men. The Jōdo accepts women in the order as nuns, but in the Shin they are supposed to lead the regular family life.

There are two other sects in Japan besides Jōdo and Shin, which practise the invocation. They are small sects but still living, each with an interesting history. These are the Yuzū-nembutsu sect (融通念佛宗) founded by Ryōnin (良忍), 1072-1132, the oldest of the Amida sects in Japan, and the Jishū (時宗) founded by Ippen Shōnin (一遍上人), 1239-1289. We cannot speak of these in detail here. The Jōdo and the Shin remain the great exponents of the Amida teaching.

Now when all is said, after all who or what is Amida?

In the Shingon sect, Amida is but one of the five great Buddhas: Vairocana, Akshobya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, and Amoghasiddhi (or Śakyamuni). As Amida presides over the western quarter or Paradise, the other Buddhas each presides over a paradise, for example, Ratnasambhava is the Buddha of the eastern quarter or perfect world. But in the Jōdo as we know, Amida and not Vairocana is the supreme Buddha; to Jōdo believers, Amida is the father of all the worlds and of all beings: i.e. is love, wisdom, and power, above all mercy. Amida is the one Buddha, others are only partial

manifestations. He is "the one altogether lovely", the one alone deserving worship and adoration.

Has Amida personality according to the orthodox Christian view? Popularly he has, and the ordinary believers in Amida and his Paradise without doubt believe in a personal Buddha Amida and a real Pure Land, but if you ask some Buddhist philosopher of the Amida sects, he may tell you that Amida is the principle of wisdom and mercy and his Paradise the symbol of Nirvana. Here we come very close to Indian philosophy and also to certain conceptions in the development of Christianity as, for example, Christian Science which teaches that God is not a person but a principle. Mrs Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, says: "God is life, truth, love. Spirit is divine principle. No form is adequate to represent infinite Love. Infinite mind cannot be limited to a form, or it would lose its infinite character."

A modern Buddhist writer, Sōgaku Shaku, has written: "In Amida Buddha we have the ideal counterpart of the historic Gautama Buddha, who is regarded as dwelling in Sukhāvati, the Land of Bliss, but represents nothing more than Infinite Light dwelling in the heart of man, which, if followed, will lead to the blissful port of Nirvana. The nature of this Western Paradise is our normal nature, confirmed, pure, and at rest, our life of good and bad, right and wrong, love and hatred, while the qualities of this Paradise are those of zeal, wisdom, reflection, investigation, joy, peace, and serenity. In the trees which are tall and straight, we have the virtues symbolised; hatred, jealousy, envy, and ignorance are replaced by the cultivation of purity, calmness, bliss, wisdom, and understanding; while the music that sounds throughout the Paradise, so full of sweetness and harmony, is produced by love and purity. Our minds opening to the higher consciousness, intelligence, and right understanding, are symbolised by different fragrant flowers and as our minds

become changed and renovated and our lives in consequence become sympathetic, kind, self-controlled, we become the birds carrying hope and peace to all around us ; and in the Buddha Amida, the Buddha of eternal light, we see our minds clear and enlightened, shining in all directions, for where the Buddha Amida shines all shadows flee... Amida is the totality of all those laws which pervade the facts of life, and whose living recognition constitutes enlightenment. Amida is the most comprehensive name with which the Buddhist sums up his understanding and also his feeling about the universe."

According to Buddhist philosophy, the Buddha has three bodies: 1. Dharmakāya, the Body of the Law, Perfect Wisdom, Enlightenment, Nirvana; 2, Sambhogakāya, Body of Enjoyment, in which the Dharmakāya manifests as a Buddha or Budhisattva; 3. Nirmānakāya, the Body Human. According to this conception, Gautama Śakyamuni is the Nirmānakāya Buddha. Amida as popularly conceived of as a personal God is the Sambhogakāya. When regarded in a more philosophical way as the Infinite, Absolute, resting in Nirvana, then we have the Dharmakāya Buddha. This philosophy of the three bodies of the Buddha is a very interesting part of Mahāyāna philosophy, and is just touched upon here to show that Amida may be accommodated to different minds. In Hīnayāna Buddhism, we find all the stress laid upon the human Buddha who walked upon this earth as Gautama. In the Amida sects, as popularly believed in, we find the personal God as in Christianity, the God who is love and mercy, who hears our prayers and takes us to heaven. In other Mahāyāna sects, among which we must include the more philosophically minded even of the Amida sects, we find the conception of the Absolute, the Buddha who is beyond description and attributes, in fact Nirvana itself.

This has brought us to philosophical Buddhism which is not really a part of the present paper, which has aimed

merely to give a presentation of the Jōdo ideal of life as taught by Hōnen Shōnin and generally believed in by his followers.

If any one wishes to know who and what Amida really is, let him invoke his name in perfect faith and sincerity, and the secret will be revealed. *Namu-amida-butsu!*

BEATRICE LANE SUZUKI