

## VIEWS AND REVIEWS

### Shinran's Vision of Absolute Compassion

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#### *Introduction*

WE CAN interpret religion from its most primitive to its most sophisticated and profound expressions as an endeavor to free people from the bondage of the unknown and from the enslavement of egoism. The history of Buddhism provides a significant illustration of this process. It is clear that the Buddhist insight into the workings of karma and the goal of nirvana relieved ancient man of the anxieties concerning his life and destiny based in ancient Indian folk religion where man had to placate gods and fend off demons. Faith in Buddha enabled people to rise above the superstitions of their day. Those folk beliefs played no role in Buddhism. Unfortunately the institutionalization of Buddhism brought about the reinterpretation of those beliefs now in the service of Buddhism.

Within the Buddhist tradition we can observe, nevertheless, the attempt to relieve anxiety and fear in the story surrounding the Obon festival. Here we must call attention to ancient man's fear of evil spirits and avenging ghosts because of lack of proper treatment of the dead. These beliefs are still current today. However, in the story which relates the origin of Obon we find that the monk Moggallana, as a result of attaining spiritual insight, was able to see his mother suffering in the other world as a hungry ghost. He was disturbed and asked Buddha what he could do to save his mother. Buddha recommended gifts to the Order and the services of feeding the hungry spirits began.

What is important to note in this story is that Moggallana's mother was not bothering anyone even though she had not been properly treated by her son. Without spiritual insight from the practice of Buddhism he could not know what

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

was happening to her. Buddhism is telling us in story that evil spirits, or spirits of the dead, cannot harm us, but we can help them. At that stage of intellectual and religious development, that would have been a great liberating message reflecting the compassion of Buddhism for the sufferings and fears of the masses. Unfortunately, again, in the course of the history of institutions, this legend focussed anxiety on both the danger of the dead and appealed to one's guilt and anxiety concerning the future well-being of departed loved ones. A large part of the economic foundation of Buddhist temples came to be based on practices to relieve anxiety concerning the dead.

The point we wish to make is simply that religion has as its chief aim to dispel anxiety, to overcome fear, to provide strength and courage to face the challenges of existence. It should have no part in using anxieties and fear to maintain its hold over the life of the individual. Thus even in Buddhism, the concepts of heaven and hell, which have been used in tradition to secure adherence and to threaten unbelievers, have no part in the essential meaning and teaching of Buddhism.

The thesis of this paper is that it was not until Shinran that Buddhism attained a theoretical position where such concepts became irrelevant and meaningless as ways to stimulate religiosity and adherence to a particular teaching. There are no statements in Shinran's writings which indicate that one would go to hell because he did not believe or follow Shinran's teaching. Shinran dedicated himself to giving hope to those who thought they were hopeless. We can see this clearly if we compare Shinran's statements on human destiny with descriptions as to who goes to Avici hell or with Nichiren who was quite clear that those who opposed his teaching were doomed to hell. When Shinran declares that even though he might be consigned to hell for reciting Nembutsu, he is reflecting, perhaps, Nichiren's insistence on *Nembutsu Mukun Jigoku*, hell without interval, awaiting those who recite Nembutsu.

We cannot go into Shinran's own experience in detail, except to say that he realized his utter powerlessness to release himself from egoism and karmic bondage through the prescribed disciplines of traditional Buddhism. The more deeply he experienced his own imperfection and spiritual powerlessness, the more deeply he penetrated the meaning of Amida's compassion until he perceived that compassion, like truth or wisdom, could not be a relative quality, but had to be a totally embracing, absolute quality completely beyond any criteria or distinctions invoked by the moralism of ordinary society.

It is for this reason that Shinran's religious faith has been called "a religion

beyond good and evil" and why he could state paradoxically that if it was easy for a good man to be saved, how much more the evil man.<sup>1</sup> As he notes, it is the general opinion of mankind that the good people have an advantage through their goodness over the evil person. Hence, the usual position is that if an evil man can be saved, how much more the good man. The two statements seem a hair's breadth apart, but actually they embody totally different understandings of the meaning of Buddha's compassion. The moralist view sees compassion in a relative way, correlated to the degree of goodness a person possesses. There is only a grudging recognition that even the evil person has a claim on compassion. In Shinran's view, compassion is absolute and may be claimed equally by the evil person, and perhaps even a little more so because the plight of the evil person calls forth the depth of Buddha's compassion.

In various ways throughout his writings Shinran gives expression to his awareness of the absoluteness of Amida's compassion, beyond quantity and criteria. He sees faith in the Vow as dispelling fear, particularly fears concerning the evils that we as human beings perform as a result of our passionate and imperfect natures. No evil we do separates us from Amida's compassion. We can illustrate the anxieties of guilt which Shinran addressed from the *Heike Monogatari*, a famous novel of the Kamakura period. There is an account of the visit of an aristocrat to Hōnen in repentance for his sins of killing in war. He states:

My mind was clogged with the evil desire of killing others and saving my own life, so that no good thoughts could dwell in me. . . . So whatever shame may overwhelm me I know that it is but retribution for this deed. Therefore I would shave my head and go as a mendicant priest, practising austerities and seeking only the Way of Buddha. But even if I could do this in the body, I cannot believe that my heart would be changed; for whatever austerities I might practise would not be enough to attain salvation. Alas! When I think over the conduct of my past life, my guilt is greater than Mount Sumeru, while all my righteousness is less than a speck of dust; and if thus in vain I end my life, without doubt I shall be reborn in the Three Ways of Torment.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Tanishō* 3, Ryukoku Translation Series II (Kyoto: Ryukoku Translation Center, Ryukoku University, 1966), p. 22. (Hereafter other texts in this series are referred to as RTS).

<sup>2</sup> A. L. Sadler, trans., *The Heike Monogatari*, Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan (Vol. 46, pt. II, 1918), pp. 184-185.

It is common also in Christian circles that people believe they are too evil to be saved, or live in guilt and fear because of supposed evils they have done. Shinran's message must have been tremendously liberating for the people of his day as it may be in ours.

Shinran's interpretation of Buddhism combines the insights he received as a result of the long years of anxious spiritual search on Hiei, his association with Hōnen and his life among the common people during his teaching career. All his experiences enabled him to perceive the deeper nuances of compassion in Buddhist tradition. In order to make clear his position in the broadening perspective of compassion which he observed in Buddhist history, we shall survey briefly the background of his teaching within the context of the evolving Buddhist tradition.

### 1 *Compassion in Buddhist Tradition*

As we are well aware, the basis of Buddhism are the qualities of Wisdom and Compassion in the Buddha. These aspects of Buddha are particularly emphasized in the Mahayana tradition. Thus for the Mahayanist the figure of the Bodhisattva replaces that of the Arhat as the symbol of spiritual life. The Bodhisattva begins his spiritual cultivation motivated by the search for his own salvation, and at the same time ends dedicated to the salvation of all beings. The deeper he probes wisdom, the more he finds the heart of compassion.

In the history of Buddhism there has been significant growth in the depth and scope of the meaning of compassion. In this development Pure Land Buddhism is remarkable for its focus on compassion as the motivating force of life. We observe this clearly in comparing Gautama Buddha and Bodhisattva Dharmakara.

In the case of Gautama, he engaged in religious discipline in order to liberate himself from the evils of finite life such as illness, old age, and death. Through this he came to understand the true nature of existence. His first impulse was to leave the world because his way was too subtle and difficult for the masses of people. He at first refused to teach, but an Indian god, Brahmā Sahampati, implored him to remain and work among the people. He conceded and stayed.

In the story of Dharmakara's career, we can see that he was motivated to take up his discipline after he observed the sufferings of the masses and hence dedicated himself to find a way to emancipate them. He contemplated for five kalpas in perfect sincerity and purity and practiced for innumerable kalpas in order to lay the basis for the Pure Land. He became Amida Buddha.<sup>1</sup>

## VIEWS AND REVIEWS

Śākyamuni represents the typical Arhat approach. Dharmakara is the archetypical Bodhisattva. Many critics of Pure Land teaching claim that it replaces Śākyamuni with Amida. However, it was part of the Pure Land revolution to establish new symbols and images to dramatize the way of compassion. The gradual growth in popularity of Amida Pure Land Buddhism in China and Japan is due to the fact that it presented a comprehensive and universal ideal of compassion which gave hope to even the lowest and most sinful person. The system of 48 Vows included every contingency—even the salvation of women in the 35th Vow. The Vows evidence a solidarity among all beings since the Bodhisattva refuses to accept complete enlightenment unless all other beings can share it with him. It is a profound expression of the indivisibility of compassion.

However, there was development in the Pure Land tradition as it gradually overcame the essential moralism of traditional Buddhism. Initially, compassion was a relative quality and depended on the performance of various good deeds whether meditation or recitation of the name. Even though there was an easier way, it was necessary for the individual to be purified of his karmic evil. Amida Buddha was also one Buddha among other Buddhas offering various ways to enlightenment. With Shan-tao (善導, 613–681) the centrality of Amida becomes clear. Only those practices directed to him are most effective. Practices to other Buddhas are to be set aside. They are not wrong—they are unnecessary.

With Hōnen, Amida becomes the sole object of worship, no other Buddha should be addressed. Only the recitation of the name is effective in the last age in the decline of the Dharma, (*Mappō*, 末法). Other practices are rejected as not being in harmony with Amida's Vow.

With Shinran a further step in understanding Amida took place which was one of degree, but also one of a kind. He exalted Amida Buddha as the expression of ultimate reality and his Vows as guarantees of salvation, rather than justification for particular practices.

### 11 *The Status of Amida Buddha in Shinran's Thought*

In Shinran's thought Amida Buddha became the primary and ultimate symbol of reality and its essential compassionate nature. Amida was Reality. Shinran capped the evolution of Amida thought as it developed from the concep-

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<sup>1</sup> *Shinshū Shōgyō Zenshō* 1 (Kyoto, 1957), p. 7. (Hereafter referred to as SSZ).

tion of Amida as a supplementary Buddha who could be worshipped and invoked along with other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the general Mahayana tradition to a superior Buddha in the Pure Land tradition, which singled Amida out as the most effective source of salvation for this age of decline, to the Supreme Buddha as the ultimate foundation of all reality and the basis of all compassion however it was expressed in Buddhist tradition.

The indication of this transition may be seen in Shinran's use of the term *kuonjitsujō* (久遠実成) which refers to the eternity of the Buddha, that is, Buddha has been Buddha from the most infinite past, there never being a time when he was not Buddha. This term or similar notations appear in Shinran's hymns and invite attention.

*Wasan 88* in Shinran's *Jōdo Wasan* collection states:

Amida, the Buddha existing from the eternal past  
 (*kuonjitsujō Amida Butsu*, 久遠実成阿弥陀仏)  
 Pitying the common fools (in the world) of the five  
 defilements,  
 Appeared in the Castle of Gayā  
 Manifesting Himself as Śākyamuni Buddha.<sup>4</sup>

Further, stanza 55 provides an interesting contrast in which Shinran juxtaposes the myth of the *Pure Land Sutra* (*Amidakyō*) to the *Lotus Sutra*. According to the *Pure Land Sutra*, Amida became Buddha ten kalpas ago.<sup>5</sup> However, influenced by the *Lotus Sutra*, Shinran declares that he is actually a Buddha of infinite duration in the past. Thus he writes:

Since Amida became Buddha,  
 Ten kalpas have passed. So (the sūtra) says.  
 But He seems to be a Buddha  
 Older than the innumerable  
 mote-dot kalpas (*jinden kuongō* 塵点久遠劫).<sup>6</sup>

Evidence for the influence of the *Lotus Sutra* on Shinran's thought concerning the eternity of Amida Buddha can be found in his comment concerning the meaning of the innumerable mote-dot kalpas (*jinden kuongō*) found in an anno-

<sup>4</sup> *Jōdo Wasan*, RTS iv, (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1965), p. 122.

<sup>5</sup> *Amidakyō*, SSZ 1, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> *Jōdo Wasan*, p. 87.

## VIEWS AND REVIEWS

tated copy of the *Jōdo Wasan*<sup>7</sup> made by Shinran. He employs a figure in which the age of the Buddha is compared to the amount of time that would pass were the universe to be ground into a powder like that used in ink and a grain was placed in each country in the three thousand-fold worlds of the cosmos. As there are thousands upon thousands of lands, so there have been thousands upon thousands of kalpas since Amida became Buddha. This imagery was adopted from the *Lotus Sutra*, chapter sixteen, where it is offered in slightly different form to emphasize the eternity of the Buddha Śākyamuni.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the bare statement of only ten kalpas of the *Pure Land Sutra*, Shinran sought a heightened perspective to emphasize that Amida Buddha's eternity, and hence absoluteness, transcends the human ability to calculate.

The term *kuonjitsujō* which Shinran employed was a technical term of Tendai Buddhism implying the ultimacy and eternity of Śākyamuni Buddha as taught in the *Lotus Sutra*. According to this concept, a Buddha who had neither beginning nor end was more ultimate and spiritually significant than a Buddha who had a beginning but no end (*Mushi-mushū-butsumi* 無始無終仏 versus *Ushimushū-butsumi* 有始無終仏). Having taken over the principle of the *Lotus Sutra* and applied it to Amida Buddha, Shinran could, therefore, declare that Śākyamuni Buddha was really a manifestation of Amida Buddha in *Wasan* 88 quoted above.

In Shinran's effort to exalt Amida Buddha to the highest level of spiritual reality and conception, he also drew upon the distinction of two types of Law Body (*Nishuhosshin* 二種法身)<sup>9</sup> derived from T'an-luan's (*Danzan* 曇鸞 476-542 A.D.) text *Ōjōronchō* (往生論註)<sup>10</sup> and the traditional Mahayana theory of

<sup>7</sup> SSZ v, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Leon Hurvitz, *Scriptures of the Lotus of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp. 190, 237-238 respectively. See *Jōdo Wasan*, RTS iv, p. 87, note 2.

<sup>9</sup> The two types of Law Body appear in T'an-luan's *Ōjōronchō* (SSZ 1, pp. 336-337) when he discusses the meaning of the various descriptions of the Pure Land, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. He states that there are two dimensions in each Buddha and Bodhisattva. One is the Law Body of True Reality (Dharmata-Dharmakāya, *Hosshō-Hosshin* 法性法身) which is defined as formless and indefinable. It is the realm of absolute principle. The second, and inseparable dimension, is the Law Body of Means (*Hōben-Hosshin* 方便法身) by which the ultimate reality takes a form in order to express and mediate compassion to ordinary people.

<sup>10</sup> SSZ 1, 279-349.

*Trikāya* or three bodies of the Buddha.<sup>11</sup> The theory of two types of Law Body reflects the necessity to correlate the absolute and relative aspects of the nature and function of Buddhahood, while the idea of three bodies attempts to unify the metaphysical, mythological-devotional and historical relations among the various conceptions of Buddha in Mahayana tradition. Both theories set forth the metaphysical and spiritual meaning of Buddhahood.

Shinran, therefore, employed the terms offered by Buddhist tradition in order to stress the fact that Amida Buddha expressed the fundamental reality of absolute compassion. Amida Buddha was for him the ultimate symbol to which all other Buddhist symbols become secondary or mere shadows. He set forth his view decisively in the *Yuishūshūmon*'s:

Nirvana is called extinction, non-action (unconditioned), ease, eternal bliss, the True State of things, True Thusness, One Thusness, Buddha Nature, hence, as Buddha Nature, Tathagata. This Tathagata fills the infinite world. Thus he fills the minds of the entire ocean of beings. It is taught that the plants, trees and land all become Buddha. Since all beings in their mind trust the Vow of the Law Body of Means, their entrusting mind is Buddha Nature. This Buddha Nature is the Real State of things; the Real State of things, hence the Law Body.

However, in respect to the Buddha, there are two types of Law Body. One is the Law Body of the Real State of things and the other is the Law Body of Means. The Law Body of the Real State is without color or form. Our thought cannot attain to it and our words fail. When form is manifested from the One Thusness, we call it the Law Body of Means. Its form is called Dharmakara Bhikṣu and he aroused the forty-eight great Vows. The Bodhisattva Vasubandhu called the form which was manifested, having as its essence the Original Vows of Infinite Life and Light, the Tathagata of Universal Unhindered

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<sup>11</sup> The Three Bodies of the Buddha (*Sanshin* 三身) are *Dharmakāya* (*Hasshin* 法身) or Law Body, the ultimate principle; *Sambhogakāya* (*Hōjin* 報身), or Body of Recompense which is the result for the sincere endeavor of the Bodhisattva and based on the realization of the principle of cause and effect, one enjoys the fruits of one's endeavors; and finally, *Nirmānakāya* (*Keshin* 化身) or Body of Transformation (or Manifestation) which refers to the various forms a Buddha may take to deal with beings.

## VIEWS AND REVIEWS

Light. This Tathāgata we call the Tathāgata of the Recompensed Body, being recompensed through the karmic cause of his Vows. Thus we have come to call him Tathāgata Amida.<sup>12</sup>

If we scrutinize this statement closely in its terms and atmosphere, we see that for Shinran Amida is not merely a Buddha among Buddhas. He is a manifestation out of the heart of reality. He fills all and indwells all.

Although the above statement is unequivocal in asserting the ultimacy of Amida, it could be argued that such terms may apply to other Buddhas as well and they do not in themselves imply absoluteness. It is here that the application of the term *kuonjitsujō* to Amida gains its significance. According to Professor Tamura Yoshirō, the concept derives from the theory of the original-unproduced-enlightenment (*Hongaku* 本覺) taught in Tendai Buddhism.<sup>13</sup> Shinran, relying on this thought, considered Amida Buddha as the expression of the trans-historical Law Body of the Real State of things (*Dharmāta-Dharmakāya*, *Hosshō-Hosshin*, 法性法身). He thus gave a firm theoretical foundation to Pure Land faith and experience, not only in terms of human need, but as a profound way to understand life and reality.

### Conclusion

If we try to assess the meaning of these teachings in terms of our contemporary life, we must stress that the Pure Land tradition, and notably Shinran, was showing that despite the problems and sufferings of existence, there is hope. Compassion is the essence of life and reality even when we are unaware of it. It fills the cosmos and it embraces without excluding any. In Shinran's stress on the fulfillment of Amida's Vow, we can see salvation is a present reality. We need no longer fear for our destinies because of our sins and our guilt. The dynamic, existential features of Shinran's thought have been frequently overlooked because he is regarded as teaching otherworldliness which was characteristic of traditional Pure Land thought. In a truly functional way, however, Shinran turned the center of attention of religion from the future world to this world. Religion became a matter of living *now*. Shinran wished to liberate man

<sup>12</sup> SSZ II, pp. 630-631.

<sup>13</sup> Tamura Yoshirō, *Kamakura Shinbuddhō Shisi no Kenkyū*, (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1966), p. 532.

from his fears generated through centuries of traditional doctrine that failure to believe or practice properly would lead a person to damnation.

The logic of Shinran's understanding of the nature of Amida and the perfection of his Vows leads to the conclusion that one is saved whether or not he consciously knows about it, or whether he is good or evil. For Shinran Amida's compassion is totally inclusive and universal. His view is expressed poetically in his *Kōsō Wasan*:

By the benefit of the Unhindered Light,  
The virtuous, great Faith is obtained;  
Assuredly does our evil passion turn into Enlightenment  
As ice melts to water.

Hindrances of evil become the substance of virtue.  
As with the example of ice and water:  
The greater the ice, the greater the water;  
The greater the hindrance, the greater the virtue.

In the ocean of the inconceivable Name  
*Even the corpses of the evil ones and the Dharma-abusers  
cannot remain as such:*  
All rivers of evil entering the ocean  
Become one taste with the water of virtue.

When many rivers of evil passion enter  
Into the ocean of the Great Compassionate Vow  
Of the Unhindered Light throughout the ten quarters,  
They become one in taste with the water of Wisdom.<sup>14</sup>

We should note in this passage that Shinran extends the meaning of the statement by the patriarch T'an-luan concerning the paths of the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas, two early types of Buddhist devotees, to cover all evil persons and slanderers of Buddhist teaching who were virtually consigned to

<sup>14</sup> *Kōsō Wasan*, RTS vi, (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1974), pp. 62-65.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64. The passage in T'an-luan's *Ōjōranishi* (SSZ, 1, p. 302) on which this stanza is based reads:

The 'ocean' refers to the fact that the Buddha's all-knowing Wisdom is deep, broad and endless, not leaving as they are the corpses of middle and lower sages (i.e., pratyekabuddhas and śrāvakas) of the Two Vehicles who perform miscellaneous good deeds. Thus it is likened to an ocean.

## VIEWS AND REVIEWS

hell and excluded from the hope of salvation in Buddhist tradition.<sup>15</sup> Similar condemnation is suggested by the exclusion clause appended to the Eighteenth Vow of the *Larger Pure Land Sutra*.<sup>16</sup> For Shinran, however, compassion could not be compassion in its deepest sense and exclude anyone. Thus he is quoted in the *Tanishō*:

We should know that Amida's Original Vow does not discriminate whether one is young or old, good or evil, and that Faith alone is of supreme importance, for it is the Vow that seeks to save the sentient beings burdened with grave sins and fiery passions.

Therefore, if we have Faith in the Original Vow, no other good is needed because there is no good surpassing the Nembutsu. Nor should evil be feared, because there is no evil capable of obstructing Amida's Original Vow.<sup>17</sup>

Since there are no qualifying criteria which control the arising and reception of faith, Shinran, in line with his awareness of the ultimacy of Amida Buddha and the fulfillment of his Vows, rejected all distinctions and conceptions employed in traditional Buddhism to describe Great Faith:

As I contemplate the ocean-like Great Faith, I see that it does not choose between the noble and the mean, the priest and the layman, nor does it discriminate between man and woman, old and young. The

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<sup>15</sup> SSZ 1, p. 9. The Vow reads: If all those beings hear that name, believe and rejoice even for one thought (moment), and sincerely transfer (the merit of the thought) desiring to be born in that Land, then they will obtain rebirth and abide in the state of non-retrogression. *Only those are excluded who have committed the five deadly sins and slandered the Dharma.* (Author's translation)

The five deadly sins include parricide, matricide, killing an arhat, shedding the blood of a Buddha and destroying the harmony of the Sangha. (See W. E. Soothill, and L. Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* [Kaohsiung, Taiwan: Buddhist Culture Service, n.d.] p. 128a.) The five deadly sins incur the penalty of perpetual hell (*Asci*) where one suffers continually. They represent the most profound and serious sins contemplated in Buddhism. (See H. Nakamura, *Bukkyō Daijiten* [Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki Kabushiki-gaisha, 1975] 1, p. 957.) Those who slander the Dharma are also reborn in the hell of perpetual suffering and lack the basis for becoming Buddhas. (H. Nakamura, *Bukkyō Daijiten*, 2, p. 1322, *Mutanjigoku*).

<sup>17</sup> *Tanishō*, RTS 2, p. 16.

#### THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

amount of sin committed is not questioned, and the length or practice is not discussed. It is neither 'practice' nor 'good', neither 'abrupt' nor 'gradual', neither 'meditative' nor 'non-meditative', neither 'right meditation' nor 'wrong meditation', neither 'contemplative' nor 'non-contemplative', neither 'while living' nor 'at the end of life', neither 'many utterances' nor 'one thought'. Faith is the inconceivable, indescribable, and ineffable Serene Faith. It is like the *agada* which destroys all poisons. The medicine of the Tathāgata's Vow destroys the poisons of wisdom and ignorance.<sup>18</sup>

According to Shinran, salvation is entirely a matter of the Vow. It does not hang on events and conditions of time and space, or the impositions of man and society. Salvation cannot rest on chance factors. Shinran makes it clear that the completion of the Vow requires nothing from the side of man, including the act of faith, as the casual basis for birth in the Pure Land. Otherwise the emphasis on the fulfillment of the Vow would be devoid of meaning and significance. Our residual karmic bondage may influence the point in our experience when we become aware of Amida's compassion, but it is not a factor in determining whether or not we actually receive that compassion.

We are suggesting that from the standpoint of the Vow all are equally saved even now, despite the presence or absence of the experience of faith itself. The reason for this is that salvation depends on the Vow and not on any finite condition.

Someone may ask then what is the point of being religious, if we are saved in any case? This is an important question. However, it reflects the virtually universal notion that religion is a means to an end. We get the benefit of salvation from being religious. For Shinran, however, religion becomes the way to express gratitude for the compassion that supports all our life. It is not a tool for ego advancement or gaining benefits.

The point of being religious for Shinran is that when we come to have faith in the Original Vow and live in its light, we truly become free to live a full and meaningful existence in this life. If there is some advantage over not being religious, it lies in the fact that people who are religious in the so-called self-powered way and the non-religious are filled with anxiety and fears or a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness in their lives.

Shinran's perspective permits a person to see deeply into his life to detect the

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<sup>18</sup> *Kyōgyōshinshō*, RTS v, (Kyoto: Ryūkoku University, 1966), pp. 113-114.

#### VIEWS AND REVIEWS

springs of compassion which sustain it; it allows him to participate and associate with all types of people despite their unattractiveness or difficulty because he understands the potentiality that works in their very being. In perceiving the compassion that embraces all life, the man of faith can himself become an expression of that compassion touching the lives of others.

Though perhaps we have poorly expressed Shinran's vision of absolute compassion and travelled a complicated path of Buddhist philosophy and interpretation, we hope that we have not distorted too severely the fundamental intention of Shinran to enable people to live with meaning, depth and hope in this life, and leave matters of destiny up to the mystery of Amida's Vow.