

The Dharma Seal of True Pure Land Buddhism

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“Pure Land as the true Buddhist teaching” (*jōdo shinshū*; hereafter ‘True Pure Land Buddhism’) is what Shinran called the personal realization of Faith he attained. The outline of this teaching is eloquently delineated in his main work, *Kyōgyōshinshō* (‘The teaching, practice, faith, and realization [of the Pure Land]). This paper seeks to present the manner in which Shinran’s personal realization is characterized by the Tathāgata’s Original Vow as the supreme Buddha way. Emphasis is put on the latter passages of the Chapter on Practice, in which Shinran summarizes the significance of True Pure Land Buddhism:

As regards Amida’s Vow, we are to note that there is true practice-faith as well as provisional forms of practice and faith. The Vow relating to true practice-faith is one which urges we sincerely believe in Amida’s Vow: true practice-faith is that specifically chosen by Amida in the Original Vow. Those beings with whom the Original Vow is concerned are all ignorant beings, good or bad, great or small: birth in Pure Land is a birth beyond their thinking or discoursing. This Buddha land is the land of the truly rewarded, established by Amida, the Buddha rewarded. Here is the wonder of the Vow, here is the ocean of one absolute reality of true suchness. Herein lies the essential teaching of

The Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life. Here is the authentic teaching of the doctrine of the Other Power.

This succinct statement, written down seemingly as a memorandum, brings into intense relief the essence of Shinran's personal realization, that is, the teaching of True Pure Land Buddhism which nurtured Shinran throughout his life. Shinran's realization of the Tathâgata's Vow as the supreme Buddha way is generally contended to be founded on *The Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life*, which he esteemed as the true teaching. In this connection, the above quotation serves to reveal the actual content or the Other Power doctrine of True Pure Land Buddhism. Shinran explicitly designates the realm pervaded by True Pure Land teaching as "practice-faith specifically chosen by the Original Vow." This realm, or dimension of reality, is that of personal realization in Faith (e.g., "the uttering of nembutsu, surrendering oneself to the Original Vow" [*Tannishō*]). In regard to "practice-faith as specifically chosen by the Original Vow," note, first, that the phrase reflects Hōnen's spiritual instruction for which Shinran here expresses his indebtedness, and, second, that it is a statement of Shinran's personal realization of faith (*waga shinnen*; lit., 'my faith'). (The phrase might be expanded to read: "The practice-faith specifically chosen *for Shinran* by Amida in the Original Vow.") It is clearly from reality *as* personal realization that Shinran reveals his realization as issuing from Tathâgata's Original Vow. This process is found in the above reference to the Vow on practice-faith. (Note the similarity with Shinran's 'thinking-in-hearing' as issuing from actual faith experience.) What Shinran comes to appre-

ciate in the course of his realization is the quality of faith—its identity of personal realization of faith in sentient beings with that of the reality of (their) practice-faith as specially chosen by the Original Vow issuing from Tathâgata's Vow Mind itself.

In this paper the character of the phrase “practice-faith as specifically chosen by the Original Vow,” in order to portray its distinctive features, is examined from three aspects: (1) man as Dharma recipient or *ki*; (2) birth as the outcome of this process; and (3) Pure Land as revealed by birth. The Dharma recipient is alluded to by Shinran by the metaphor “this sea of suffering sentient beings,” thus intimating that birth for such beings is beyond their conceiving, no less realizing. Shinran, however, upsetting the traditional notion of rebirth as something attained in an afterlife, contends that *this* life is the right state in which birth is established. The rebirth beyond man's conception is the qualitative transformation of life that makes it inevitable that the devotee will finally reach supreme nirvana. In this sense birth is a stepping forward of life, that nonretrogressive quality inherent in supreme nirvana even while in the midst of this human condition. The Pure Land of this qualitatively transformed living Shinran expresses as ‘the land of the truly rewarded,’ or in terms of his actual experience, as the realm of infinite light identical in quality with that of supreme nirvana. To designate the teaching of True Pure Land Buddhism which he sees as a world whose panorama is vast and boundless, Shinran gives its Dharma seal in terms of his own personal realization: “Here is the wonder of the Vow, here is the ocean of one absolute reality of true suchness.” As

far as Shinran's True Pure Land Buddhism is concerned, this can be regarded as the Dharma seal most characteristic of his personal realization of the Tathāgata's Original Vow as the supreme Buddha way.