

## THE "WASAN" OR BUDDHIST HYMNS

### *Preface*

THE religious sentiment, like other great emotional stirrings, always tends to express itself in poetical form, which is called in this case the hymn. A religion worth the name, therefore, has its own hymns and its own ways of chanting or singing them. The Jōdo-Shinshu, or the True Sect of the Pure Land, has a collection of hymns known as the "Sanjō-wasan," that is, hymnals in three volumes. Besides their religious significance, they have also literary merit of a high grade. While the writer was in England during the great war, he translated all the hymns into English in coöperation with Mrs. Adams Beck, a learned English lady who is greatly interested in Japanese literature.

Shinran Shōnin, who is the author of the present hymns as well as the founder of the Shin sect, was born in 1173, in a village near Kyoto. At the age of nine, he left his home to lead a monastic life at Hiyezan. For ten years, that is, from nineteen to twenty-nine, he applied himself with the utmost zeal to the study of the Buddhist scriptures, endeavoring to find the final refuge for his soul. At last he met Hōnen Shōnin, the great teacher of the doctrine of the Pure Land, and through his instruction Shinran came to embrace the great faith, which was now awakened in his heart. After some years, on account of his teachings, he was banished by the government authorities to the northern part of Japan, far away from the center of culture. When he was about fifty-two years old, he completed his work on "Kyō-gyō-shin-shō" 教行信證 (The Teaching, Practice,

Faith, and Enlightenment), which is the foundation of the doctrine of the Pure Land. About twenty-eight years of his last days were peacefully spent in Kyoto where he died at an advanced age of ninety.

Of the three volumes of the Hymnals, the first two have references to his age when he was seventy-six (1248 A. D.), and the third has the date of 1258 A. D. when he was eighty-six. To compose these hymns full of vitality and sentiment when the author was as old as seventy or eighty, shows what a great spirit was moving in him. Especially, in the third volume of the Hymnals, we see how fervently his religious sentiment was stirring in an ever-young soul. His confessions and his strong feelings against the perversities and falsehoods of his days are powerfully expressed here.

The "Sanjo-Wasan" consists of the following hymnals: The *Jōdo-Wasan*, *San-Amida-Ge*, *Kōsō-Wasan*, and *Shō-zō-matsu-Wasan*. The *Jōdo-Wasan*, or Hymns of the Pure Land, contains one hundred and sixteen hymns, praising the virtues of Amida-Butsu, or the Buddha of Eternal Life and the glory of his Pure Land, based on the teachings as expounded in the three main Sutras of the Shin sect, which are: the *Great Sutra of the Land of Bliss*, the *Sutra of Meditation*, and the *Lesser Sutra of the Land of Bliss*. The *San-Amida-Ge*, or the Hymns of Amida-Butsu, was composed by Donran 曇鸞, a great Chinese teacher of the Pure Land doctrine, while the *Kōsō-Wasan*, of one hundred and seventeen hymns, praise the lives of the seven great Jōdo teachers in India, China, and Japan, and the doctrine promulgated by them. The *Shō-zō-matsu-Wasan* contains one hundred and eighteen hymns, some of which describe the periodical changes that will take place in the history of the Holy Law through the three ages, called "Orthodox" (*shō*), "Representative" (*zō*), and "Terminating" (*matsu*), while others are concerned with the merits and demerits of belief,

doubt, repentance, etc. Each hymn has four stanzas.

The chanting of the "Wasan" seems to have begun about one hundred and fifty years after the death of the author, when the Shin sect followers sang them with a certain rhythm in the morning and evening as they do at present.

The hymns most important and popular are arranged under the following six subjects. The numbers refer to the original hymns.

*I. The Supreme Buddha and His Eternal Land*

1. Since He who is infinite attained unto the Wisdom Supreme, the long, long ages of ten kalpas have rolled away. The Light of the Dharmakāya is in this world an eye to the blind.

2. Seek refuge in the True Illumination; for the light of His Wisdom is infinite. In all the worlds there is nothing upon which His light shineth not.

3. Take refuge in the Light Universal, as the Light of His deliverance is boundless: He who is within it is freed from the lie of affirmation or denial.

4. Seek refuge in that which is beyond understanding; for His glory is all-embracing as the air. It shineth and pierceth all things, and there is nothing hid from the light thereof.

5. Take refuge in the Ultimate Strength; for His pure radiance is above all things. He who perceiveth this light is set free from the fetters of karma.

6. Seek refuge in the World-Honoured. Since His glorious radiance is above all, He is called the Buddha of Divine Light. And by Him is darkness of the three worlds enlightened.

7. Excellent is the Light of His Wisdom; therefore is he called the Buddha of Clear Shining. He who is within

the Light, being wasted from the soil of karma, shall attain unto the final deliverance.

8. Take refuge in the Mighty Consoler. Wheresoever His merey shineth through all the world, men rejoice in its gladdening Light.

41. Like unto a golden mountain reflecting the myriad rays of these heavenly blossoms, so is the form of the Infinite One.

42. From the Sacred Body, as from a well-spring, floweth this light over the ten regions of the world. By His sacred teaching He leadeth all having life into the law of light.

25. Seek refuge in the Almighty Spirit. By the divine might of His promise, by the Infinite One was the land of Bliss created; yea, and the souls of men that dwell therein. And there is nought that may compare with them.

37. Seek refuge in the heavenly harmony. For the jewel groves and gem trees of the Land of Bliss give forth a sweet and surpassing melody in pure and ordered unison.

38. Seek refuge in the divine promise, the treasury of merit: For the seven jewel trees are fragrant in paradise where the flowers, the fruits, the branches and the leaves thereof cast back their radiance the one to the other.

40. In all the world is no place hidden from the glory shed by hundreds of myriad rays from the heart of every flower of the Land of Bliss.

44. Seek refuge in the All-Honoured. For when sorrow and sighing are fled away, the Holy Land shall rejoice with joy and singing. Therefore is it called the Land of Bliss.

46. He that seeketh refuge in the kingdom of the Infinite One (Amida-Buddha), is a citizen of the kingdom of every Buddha. Let him with single heart give praises unto One Buddha, for in so doing he praiseth all that are set free.

*II. Salvation*

286. The Buddha of the Infinite Light, together with the Bodhisattvas of Compassion and Wisdom, having taken the Ark of the Divine promise that is voyaging on the ocean of birth and death, have gathered and saved mankind therewith.

80. The Eternal Father is called the Buddha of Infinite Light, because very mightily He holdeth in safety all beings dwelling in the ten regions of the world who by His merciful enlightenment, recite His Holy Name.

85. Having great pity Our Eternal Father lighteneth the dark night of ignorance, manifesting Himself in that land of joy as the Buddha of Infinite Light which enlighteneth all the worlds with its immeasurable glory.

86. That Lord most compassionate, the Buddha of Immeasurable Light, He who has attained unto the Supreme Wisdom even before the myriads of kalpas were, pitying them that know not, made himself manifest in the palace of Kapila as the Lord of Shākya-muni.

123. One Ark only, that Ark of the divine promise of Our Merciful Father doth voyage and bear us unto the shore of the eternal peace—even us who so long have drifted hither and thither in the ocean of birth and death.

129. Whoso believeth in the power of the divine promise shall verily be at one with the holy Essence even as the turbid stream is clear and pure within the ocean depth when they have flowed together.

202. Without the almighty strength of the divine promise how should we leave this sinful world? Wherefore we should live in hearty thanksgiving for the grace of our Father thinking ever upon the ocean deeps of His love.

211. Though our eyes are so blinded by illusion that we discern not the light whereby He embraceth us, yet that

great mercy forever shineth upon us and is not weary.

269. The Divine Light shineth over the deep night of ignorance, therefore sorrow not that the wisdom of your eyes is darkened. The holy Ark is at hand that voyageth over the great ocean of birth and death, therefore fear not because your sin is heavy.

270. Great as is the might of the Divine Promise of our salvation, so light is the heaviest of our sins. Immeasurable is the wisdom of our Father, and therefore they that are astray, as also they that are weary shall not be forgotten.

### III. *Faith*

113. Whoso seeketh refuge in Buddha, as a child in the bosom of his mother, shall verily perceive Him now or in the time that shall be. And it shall be soon.

148. He who believeth that the sole Vehicle of the Divine Promise, most perfect, most mighty, receiveth within itself the greatest of sinners, will receive the depth of this essential teaching—namely, that before the eyes of the instructed, illusion and wisdom are in their essence one.

156. Sin is made one with virtue in its essence, even as ice is one with water. The more there is ice, so much the more water is there. So also is the binding up of sin with virtue.

190. Merciful and compassionate parents unto us are the Blessed One and the Lord Shākya Buddha. For they have opened before us the way of good, having so purposed that the great Faith shall be.

193. At that moment when faith in the Enlightened One is perfect, pure and lasting as the diamond, then shall the Spiritual Light shine upon us and guard us, the light which for ever guideth us from re-birth and death.

198. The attainment of the Divine Wisdom shall come unto him who reciteth the Holy Name, for his faith cometh

from the Divine Promise of Him that leadeth him into the Promised Land. He shall not fail to attain unto the Great Nirvana.

256. According to the all-seeing promise of the Blessed One, when the water of the faith He giveth entereth the ocean of soul, illusion passeth straightway into wisdom through the virtue of that true land of the Divine Promise.

88. Our Lord instructeth us that he who rejoiceth in his faith is, in so doing, in unity with the Highest. For true faith is the seed of Enlightenment, and the seed of true light is in itself the potentiality of that which is Deity.

*IV. Those who never face back on the way of  
birth and death*

57. Whoso attaineth unto the true Faith is in unity with them that return no more to birth and death. For having thus attained, they pass onward into Nirvana, their lives being ended.

121. Whoso would quickly attain unto that resting place where illusion ceaseth, should recite the Holy Name holding his mind in steadfast piety.

154. The Buddha of that inexpressible Light that shineth into the worlds of ten regions, being forever enlightened the night of ignorance, hath most certainly opened the way of Nirvana to every man who even for one moment rejoiceth in receiving His Divine Promise.

192. By that faith alone, like unto a jewel of price, we who in this sinful world have our being, may enter into the Eternal Kingdom, being eternally freed from the yoke of birth and death.

320. Whoso attaineth unto the holy faith that is the power of divinity, must, in the ten regions of the world, breed the twofold gift of the Enlightened One that he may live in thankfulness for his grace.

134. He whose heart is great and who shall attain unto the true enlightenment is he also that desireth the salvation of all living, and verily the true faith given of that Blessed One is salvation.

350. Since we have believed the Divine Promise, how is it possible we should be in the power of life or death? Unchanged may be our sinful body, but our heart is in the land of purity forever.

48. Let him that hath faith praise the Virtue of the Divine Wisdom. Let him strive to declare it unto all men that he may offer his thankfulness for the grace of Buddha.

292. It is very meet that our souls rejoice exceedingly in the grace of the great compassion of the Buddha. Yea, even to the extinction of the body. And for the gracious giving of our spiritual teachers, we must in like manner rejoice, yea, though our very bones be broken.

*V. The Attainment of Buddhahood and Rebirth on Earth*

150. Unto us hath our Father given those two spiritual gifts—of these the first is the Virtue whereby we attain unto His kingdom, and the second is the Virtue whereby having so attained we return into this world for the salvation of men. By the merit of these two gifts are we initiates of the true faith and of its deeds.

151. When we shall have attained unto the faith and the faith and deeds of the merciful promise through our Father that is in all things able to give them unto us, birth and death are henceforward united as Nirvana. And this is called the Gift of Departure.

152. And when we shall have attained unto that height which is desire for the ingathering of all beings into the Land of Bliss, shall we return again into this world that we may be saviour of men. And this is called the Gift of Returning.



282. Casting aside the sorrow of birth and death—that sorrow which is timeless in its beginning, I hope now solely for the Great Nirvana. There is no end to my thankfulness for the two mighty gifts of our Eternal Father.

284. Because in the gift of the Holy Name is a grace great and wonderful, if man attain unto the gift of departing, that of itself shall guide him unto the gift of returning.

285. Through the great mercy of the gift of departing shall we attain unto the compassion of the gift of returning. If it were not the free gift of the Blessed One, how should we attain unto wisdom in the land of purity?

279. If we accept not the two divine gifts, the gift of entering the Promised Kingdom, and the gift of return into this evil world, then shall the wheel of birth and death turn with us forever. How shall we endure to sink into the sea of suffering?

#### *IV. Confessions and Lamentations*

327. Though I seek refuge in the true faith of the Pure Land, yet hath not mine heart been truly sincere. Deceit and untruth are in my flesh, and in my soul is no clear shining.

328. In their outward seeming are all men diligent and truth-speaking, but in their souls are greed and anger and unjust deceitfulness, and in their flesh do lying and cunning triumph.

329. Too strong for me is the evil of my heart. I cannot overcome it. Therefore righteous deeds, being mingled with this poison, must be named the deeds of deceitfulness.

330. Shameless though I be and having no truth in my soul, yet the virtue of the Holy Name, the gift of Him that is enlightened, is spread throughout the world through my words, I being as I am.

331. There is no mercy in my soul. The good of my

fellow-men is not dear in mine eyes. If it were not for the Ark of Mercy, the divine promise of the Infinite Wisdom, how should I cross the ocean of misery?

332. I whose mind is filled with cunning and deceit as the poison of reptiles, am impotent to practice righteous deeds. If I sought not refuge in the gift of our Father I should die the death of the shameless.

333. It is a token of this evil age that in this world, the priests together with the people in secret serve strange gods, while bearing the appearance of the devout son of Buddha.

334. Sad and corrupt is it that the priests and people following after the superstitions of auspicious time and days, seek soothsaying and festivals, and worship the gods of heaven and earth.

337. Sad and sorrowful is it that all the priests and people now in the land of Japan, should worship the devils of heaven and earth, in the name of the holy rites of Buddhism.

341. Great sorrow is it in the wicked world of this age now so near its end that the high priests who are borne in the palanquin, and the monks who bear it now in Nara and Mount Hiyei, desire high secular rank as the greatest honour.