

THE WAY TO THE LAND OF BLISS

IN my previous article on "Amida as Saviour of the Soul," I elucidated the idea of Amida in which the True Sect can find its only reason of existence, and we know now that there are two aspects in the conception of Amida as a Saviour: first, Amida as the Buddha of Eternal Light and Infinite Life who manifests himself in the Land of Bliss, knowing only of infinite love for all sentient beings; and secondly, he is the absolute truth itself transcending time and space. Now the question is "Through what power shall we be allowed to be born in the Pure Land?"

Amida's way of salvation may be compared to a bridge thrown across the sea of birth and death, connecting the defiled world where prevails the law of causation, and the Land of Bliss where there are no impurities. How is this bridge built, and how can we cross the sea by this bridge? Just as things we think or do, can be expressed by words, so the way or bridge of salvation can be also expressed by words. What are then the words of the saviour of our souls? Among his many vows we find the following most emphatically asserted: "O Bhagavat, if immeasurable and innumerable blessed Buddhas in innumerable Buddha-countries do not glorify my name, after I have obtained the Bodhi (knowledge), if they do not preach my fame and proclaim my praise, and utter it together, then may I not obtain the highest perfect knowledge."

This means that the name of Amida is to be glorified by all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future in the ten quarters, and that in this name is embodied Amida's will to save us, who says to us, "Trust in me, for I will surely

save you from ignorance and suffering." And it is this word of his that awakens in our hearts a firm belief that there is a saviour full of love and wisdom, and thereby we have the bridge of salvation connecting the Pure Land and this world of ours.

Our great worry in this world is that we are always unable to realise our own wishes. We may entertain various desires, but they soon vanish one after another without being realised; for they are nothing but temptations and caprices, and are not deeply rooted in our minds, they are not supported by a power whereby they may become actualities. So long as they have no such power within themselves, they are empty and selfish. But the great desire of our Saviour to save us is not such a worldly desire as ours are, but it rises from the absolute truth itself, and is that truth; it has the power to realise itself, and it is that very power. When his name glorified by all the Buddhas reaches us, that is, when we understand its real signification and believe in his power to save us, it opens our hearts to the truth and power of the Buddha, and at the same moment we get united to the power and truth which is embodied in his name symbolising the Infinite Life and the Eternal Light. As this act contains in itself everything good and meritorious, it is called the "great deed." Hence Shinran's glorification of the name of the Buddha, "All the roots of goodness and all the stock of merit are gathered up in his name, which is called the Ocean of Treasure because it is one in substance with the ultimate reason of being."

When we hear his name and understand the signification of the name of Amida, his own merits become our own and we invoke his name, saying, "*Namu-amida-butsu*". This is a pure act of thanksgiving and the "great deed" coming straight out of our inmost being. Says Shinran, "To recite the holy name of the Buddha of Infinite Light—this is the

great deed." The Saviour is thus said to have accomplished his work when his name is praised and glorified.

We generally think that true enlightenment is to be attained through our own understanding and endeavour, and wonder how Amida's name alone could lead us to a real emancipation. When and how are we able to hear his name and understand its signification? So long as we are not awakened to the true meaning of our inner life, we are unable to understand his voice of salvation. It is only when we examine ourselves inwardly and search deeply into our hearts that we grow conscious of our real nature, ignorant, with no wisdom in it, sinful, and filled with evil desires. However noble, honorable, or beautiful a deed may appear to us, it has no power in itself to lead us to a true enlightenment, inasmuch as it is not rooted in the love of Amida. And this love of Amida can be received only by those who surrender themselves, with all their ignorance and sinfulness, absolutely into the saving hands of an absolute being, that is, of Amida Buddha. This absolute surrender is signified when the name of Amida is invoked. We then pass from a world of disease, old age, and death to the enjoyment of an everlasting life in the Land of Bliss. The happy peaceful state of mind thus gained is an expression in us of Amida's overflowing love. We read in *The Letters of Rennyo* (蓮如) who was one of the great teachers of the Shin sect, "The ultimate signification of all the Buddhist scriptures is found only in the *Namu-amida-butsu*."

What is then the meaning of "*Namu-amida-butsu*"? as an expression of faith *Namu* means "to give up oneself," "to take refuge in," that is, "to believe in." *Amida-butsu* is the name of the Saviour, Lord of Eternal Light and Life. The phrase thus expresses the inseparable relationship existing between the Saviour and the saved. When it is uttered from one's inmost heart and being, there takes place the fact of

salvation, the ignorant and sinful are no more, but there reigns Amida alone with his infinite love and wisdom. Through this mysterious communion all the learned doctrines and all the elaborate systems of philosophy vanish into nothing. Therefore, says Donran (曇鸞) "The '*Namu-amida-butsu*' destroys every trace of ignorance harboured by all beings and satisfies every aspiration felt by all beings."

Amida's way of salvation is thus wonderfully simple. The meaning of salvation is in the *Namu-amida-butsu*, the fact of salvation also lies in the *Namu-amida-butsu*. When the meaning is understood, the whole teaching of the Shin sect unfolds itself, and when the fact is realised, one abides in faith and leads a life of faith. Let the name of Amida be widely proclaimed, and the mission of Shinran is fulfilled

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