

THE PURE LAND DOCTRINE AS
ILLUSTRATED IN SHŌKŪ'S
"PLAIN-WOOD" NEMBUTSU

I

INTRODUCTION

It seems to us that there is a universal miscomprehension in the West concerning the nature of Pure Land Buddhism, interpreting it as a kind of salvation doctrine in its Christian form. Strictly speaking, the word salvation is not appropriate for the work Pure Land Buddhism proposes to effect. It may be more proper to call it a form of self-enlightenment. Because it is not a doctrine which teaches us deliverance from sin and its consequences. On the other hand, it teaches us how to get free from the bondage of birth and death and attain peace of mind by exhausting our own will-power which originates from egoism.

It is true that the Pure Land doctrine disapproves of self-power (*jiriki*) and upholds other-power (*tariki*), but we must remember the words "self" and "other" here are not used in their relative sense, that is to say, when the Pure Land followers speak of self-power they refer by it to a relative world, while by other-power is meant a realm where there is no more relativity, for in the realm of other-power there is no distinction between given and giving, between received and receiving. It is where transcendental unity prevails.

The Pure Land doctrine emphasises the signification of our sin. It holds that we are sinful mortals suffering the pain of birth and death from time immemorial, wandering through the six paths of existence, because we know no clue whatever as to the way to escape from transmigration. But the Pure Land follower's conception of sin is

different from that of Christians. We are sinful not because we have transgressed the laws of God who is the creator, but because we are ignorant of the truth, *tathatā*, or suchness of things. As the result, all that we do is evil, not only such deeds as are generally considered evil, but also even such as are recognised as good by men of the world. As this existence dualistically conceived is sin as the result of our ignorance of truth, so our existence itself, according to the Pure Land believers, is something to be abandoned as the creation of self-power. When this abandonment is effected, we are reborn to a world of higher order where we are united with Buddha.

The foundation of Pure Land doctrine is laid upon the Forty-Eight Vows of Amida who vowed them in order to lead all sentient beings to his own Pure Land where they all can attain Buddhahood. To make the vows effective, he contemplated for five eons and practised austerities for endless eons and finally attained Buddhahood; and thereby all sentient beings are now assured as to their rebirth into his Land of Purity which is under his government. This land is situated in the western quarter beyond hundreds of thousands of millions of lands, where his believers are reborn to attain Buddhahood. To effect the rebirth into Amida's Land of Purity, what is required of believers is simply to recite the name of Buddha. This may sound quite easy—this reciting of Buddha's name. But in fact this is just as hard as is experienced by followers of Zen, for example, who endeavour to attain *satori* after so many years' self-discipline. Self-power asserts itself in spite of the desperate attempt which devotees of Nembutsu put forward in order to be taken into the Land of Amida. Self-power is such an obstinate instinct in all of us, to uproot which more than our will-power is needed. When this will-power comes to an end, we throw ourselves at the feet of Buddha who will now pick us up in his boat of salvation to cross the ocean of birth and death. Let me remark here that Amitābha

Buddha and his Land are not to be conceived of as belonging to a world of relations. This being the case, the salvation offered by the Pure Land doctrine is not to be identified with that of Christianity. If we could say so, the Christian salvation still is on this side of existence where dualism prevails, whereas that of the Pure Land is in a realm of the absolute, that is, of *tariki* in its transcendental sense. Masters of the Pure Land doctrine have tried in various ways to bring forth this characteristic point in the doctrine of *tariki* salvation. In the following we have the document known as "Shiraki no Nembutsu" or "Plain-wood Nembutsu", which was written by Shōkū, founder of the Seizan branch of the Pure Land Sect, and which will help us to understand what is really meant by *tariki* salvation.

II

THE PLAIN-WOOD NEMBUTSU

"Those of the self-power apply some paints to the Nembutsu. Some colour it with the enlightenment of Mahayana doctrine, some with profound learning, some with the observance of morality, some with tranquillisation of body and mind. Some are exulted to be assured of their rebirth in the Pure Land, because they have practised the Nembutsu tinged with contemplation or morality; while others feel dejected over their inability of being reborn there, because their Nembutsu is not coloured with any paint. Both the exultation and the dejection are delusions which come from their reliance on self-power.

"The Nembutsu which, according to the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*, will last for one hundred years after the disappearance of the Right Law, and the Nembutsu which the *Meditation Sūtra* prescribes for the three inferior grades of beings, is the plain-wood Nembutsu, devoid of all paints. 'Believing with serene thought' in the Original Vow of Amida was understood by Zēndō to mean 'repeating the

name of Amida ten times', and this is no other than to return to a plain-wood state of mind.

“The lowest grade of being so called in the *Meditation Sūtra* means an ordinary mortal with no merit, worldly or unworldly. In him there is no paint whatever with which to colour the Nembutsu. Is he not moreover a being who is oppressed with the agony of death not knowing what to do, as he has lost all his control over his speech, body, and thought? He has been a wicked man through his life, so he has acquired no merit on which he can specially rely. Now at this last moment he is harassed with the pangs of death, and has no time to think of ceasing from evils and practising virtues, nor can he be mindful of enlightenment taught by the various schools of Buddhism. In this state of mind he cannot think of erecting a pagoda or a statue, nor has he time to think of abandoning the life of a householder and of worldly enjoyments. He is indeed the most wicked of all beings. He knows of no means whereby to save himself.

“A teacher may try to awaken him to the faith, hoping that he will comprehend the meaning of other-power or that he will meditate on the mystery of the Buddha's name. But neither of these hopes avails, since the pangs of death harass him to the extreme and his mental powers are gradually leaving him. The teacher may now take up another form of teaching, that is, the recitation of Buddha's name, telling him to call out the Amida's name aloud even if he fails to fix his mind on Amida. Thereupon, the man utters the name of Amida ten times, though his mind is in a state of perfect confusion. Each utterance then cancels his sins of eighty thousand millions of kalpas, and he will get the favour of seeing the 'Golden Lotus like the Sun'. In this state, he has no special wish to be enlightened, nor is he tainted with any paint of contemplation or morality. And yet he will be reborn in the Pure Land by virtue of uttering the Buddha's name in a plain-wood state of mind, while he knows of no contrivance other than following the advice of

the teacher. This is likened to a child learning how to write with its hand guided by another; the child has no claim for the writing. So is the practice of the Nembutsu of the lowest grade of being. Guided by the teacher and embraced by the merciful heart of Amida, this simple utterance of His name enables the sinner to be reborn in the Pure Land.

“The Original Vow of Amida is the Vow and Work, whereby He practised austerities for the sake of those who are heavily burdened with the five deadly sins. Therefore, it is in the plain-wood Nembutsu which is uttered [at the time of death] when one’s mental powers are exhausted, that one finds Amida’s Vow contemplated for five kalpas and His merit accumulated for endless ages all livingly active. This Nembutsu of one thought holds in it all the birth and death of endless duration, and accomplishes in one utterance all the discipline of countless eons.

“Again the Nembutsu which, according to the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*, will continue after the disappearance of the Three Treasures,¹ is also the plain-wood Nembutsu. The reason is: Sutras, Sastras, and Vinayas, Hinayana as well as Mahayana, being all stowed away in the palace of Nagas, the Three Treasures will no more be seen in this world. Then in this Jambudvīpa, there will be nothing left but ignorant beings and their evils, and the word ‘good’ will be unknown. With the disappearance of the Vinaya texts in which the moral life is taught, where should we go for instruction to stop our evil-doings and to practise good deeds? When the Sutra which teaches us how to cherish the desire after enlightenment has already disappeared among us, to which Sutra should we look for enlightenment? As there is no one who knows this truth, there is no way to learn it. Therefore, the sole reality that will be still abiding in this world, will be the plain-wood Nembutsu, containing the Buddha’s name in six characters,² devoid of all sorts of

¹ The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

² Namuamidabutsu consists of six Chinese characters, 南無阿彌陀佛.

colouring, contemplative or moral. It is said in this Sutra that those who then hear and recite the name shall all be reborn in the Pure Land. That they are all reborn there by reciting the name once or for ten times, means that those beings who are outside of Buddhism are able to be reborn there simply by virtue of the Buddha's name recited in a plain-wood way.

“Some may say that we of this age are by far superior to those beings who may be living in the last days of Buddhism, because we are still in possession of Sutras and Sastras, Hinayana as well as Mahayana. But being of imperfect nature we have nothing superior to those who come when the Three Treasures are gone. Though Buddhism may still be prevalent at present, our nature is so imperfect that we have no power sufficient to practise the three kinds of discipline.¹ Though there are Sutras and Sastras, Hinayana as well as Mahayana, we have no ardour enough to study them assiduously. Such imperfect beings as we are have no desire to be enlightened, are born in vain in these days of Buddhism. If this is the case when the Three Treasures are gone, we may say that the matter cannot be improved. But we are living now in the time when Buddhism is still flourishing, and that we have no desire to observe morality and practise meditation and wisdom, shows that we are imperfect and not at all in the way of enlightenment. Amida's Vow-power is thoroughly perfected when it comes upon us so benighted. That is why we cannot be too grateful for the plain-wood Nembutsu. On our part we are lacking in faith and work, and our thoughts succeeding one another are full of folly. Delusions growing out of our false attachment and perverseness are growing stronger everyday and evil karma and evil passions are assailing us night and day. The Nembutsu that comes from such a defiled being may be regarded as not different from an act

¹ The observance of morality, tranquillisation of body and mind, and profound learning.

of evil passion, and it is not even coloured with any virtue, contemplative or moral; but in the Buddha's name once recited, all the virtues of all the Buddhas are concentrated, and on that account the mind-water is not muddied and the supreme virtue is produced. The Namuamidabutsu which is recited simply in the belief that by the recitation our rebirth in the Pure Land is assured, without any effort on our part and thoroughly absorbed in this thought, is the Nembutsu required in the Original Vow of Amida. This is what I call the plain-wood Nembutsu."

III

EXPOSITORY

Shōkū and "the Plain-wood Nembutsu"

Those who are interested in the growth of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan cannot afford to ignore the name of Shōkū. He was one of the most prominent disciples of Hōnen, the founder of the Nembutsu Sect of Buddhism, and finally became himself the founder of the Seizan Branch of the Nembutsu Sect. He had many noted disciples and his spiritual influence was great. Ippen, the founder of the Ji Sect which is also a branch of the Nembutsu school, draws his inspirations from the teaching of Shōkū.

"The Plain-wood Nembutsu" here translated is a brief but excellent statement concerning the doctrine of Nembutsu. It is said that he wrote this discourse with the purpose of making his doctrine intelligible even to the unlettered. In spite of its plain wording it expounds in a most remarkable manner the profound significance of the doctrine, and its value is not limited to the unlettered. It is composed of two parts. The first paragraph which is brief makes reference to the Nembutsu of the *jiriki* follower, which Shōkū designates as coloured, meaning that it is not free from *jiriki* pigments. In the second and the following paragraphs he compares the pure and colourless Nembutsu of the *tariki*

follower to a piece of wood untouched, unsoiled by the dirt of relativity and dualism. According to Shōkū, the only way in which we become united with Buddha is to awaken in us a state of consciousness in which Nembutsu is recited colourlessly.

The Difference Between Tariki and Jiriki

Self-power (*jiriki*) and other-power (*tariki*) are technical terms whereby the Pure Land believers express the philosophy of their religious experiences, and they advise us to give up *jiriki* and take to *tariki*. The interpretation of these two terms, *jiriki* and *tariki*, varies according to the different teachers of the Pure Land doctrine, resulting in the evolution of the different schools. I confine myself here to the exposition of Shōkū's point of view in regard to self-power and other-power.

According to him, the difference does not lie in the outward behaviour but the inner consciousness of the believers. He says:

“Suppose there are two persons reciting Nembutsu before Buddha. As far as their outward appearances go, they are the same, but [innerly] there is a wide difference; the one is the *tariki* follower while the other the *jiriki*.

“The *jiriki* follower sincerely wants to have the desire to be reborn in the Pure Land and asks Buddha surely to implant that desire in him. As he thinks that, when his desire is sincere and his distrust of worldly life is by no means feeble, Buddha will not fail to receive him in the Pure Land, so he feels encouraged about the nearness of his rebirth when his believing heart grows stronger; but he feels discouraged as if his rebirth were a most distant fact if his mind is full of delusions and becomes ungovernable. Apparently he is an earnest seeker of religious faith, but really he is further away from the Vow of Amida. As he tries to work out his rebirth by his own efforts, he is further away from the Mercy of Buddha.

“But it is not so with the *tariki* follower. The less capable he finds himself of stopping evil thoughts and of desiring for his rebirth in the Pure Land, the more keenly he is awakened to the sense of gratitude for Buddha’s Vow and discipline. If Buddha’s Vow-power nourished in his meditation for five kalpas were not the devotee’s own desire and discipline for rebirth, I would no more cherish the hope of rebirth; but as is the case, I feel so grateful for the fact that our own desire and discipline for rebirth had already been fulfilled on the part of Buddha. This being so, his Nembutsu may continue night and day, there is nothing of *jiiriki* Nembutsu in him. Each Nembutsu as it is recited fulfils the merit of *tariki*.”¹

Here we see the difference between *tariki* and *jiiriki*: the *jiiriki* follower is uncertain of his rebirth and endeavours to work it out by destroying his evil passions, while the *tariki* is convinced of his rebirth and all his evil passions are converted into opportunities of feeling grateful towards Buddha. What then is the cause of this difference? The *jiiriki* consciousness is that he is strong enough to destroy his evil passions all by himself, while the *tariki* feels that he is too weak to cope successfully with his own sins.

Human Nature

Is our nature really too feeble to destroy evil thoughts and passions and to practise works good enough for a rebirth in the Pure Land?

“Good works may be grouped under two heads, contemplation (*jōzen*) and morality (*sanzen*). Contemplation keeps mind collected so that nothing of evil thought would ever creep into it. Morality stops evil doings and practises good deeds with utmost vigilance.

“But we are not able to practise contemplation. When we try, we soon grow confused being attacked by various delusive thoughts. When we endeavour to meditate on the

¹ *Jutsujō* 述誠

sublime views of the Pure Land, worldly affairs are sure to upset us. When we try to meditate on the excellent features of Buddha, our minds are perturbed by the six senses. Our ears seem to be listening to the teaching of Buddhism, but innerly we have arrogance and evil thoughts more tempestuous than the ocean. In our mouth we speak of the emptiness of things, but in our heart egotism towers higher than a mountain.

“Nor can we practise morality. When we wish to practise it, evil deeds are multiplied and nothing good is accomplished. We are not filial to parents, nor are we truthful to our elders. Though our heads are shaven and our bodies are wrapped in the monkish robe, our actual life is far from being in accord with the rules of discipline. As there are very few true followers of Buddhism who are faithfully observing all the disciplines, to whom should we go for instruction even when we desire so? As there is no serious wish for Mahayana enlightenment, we find ourselves to be mere seekers of fame and profit instead of doing seriously what is good. Even though there is a touch of good intention, it is like writing on water; waves of greed and anger are too high, no traces of goodness are left.”¹

Buddha

Jiriki followers are ignorant not only of human nature but of Buddha. Buddha is conceived by them as one who keeps himself away from them and to whom they do not stand in an intimate relationship; for this reason they want to win Buddha over to their side by their own efforts. On the other hand, *tariki* followers know their own impotence to attain Buddhahood by performing any good work, and they realise how closely Buddha is related to them.

Shoku illustrates this close relation between Buddha and *tariki* followers in these three respects: “Intimate”, “Near”, and “Helpful”.

¹ *Nyoinogsho* 女院御書

“First, by ‘intimate’ relation I mean that Buddha’s virtues in his threefold activity pertaining to body, speech, and thought, are not separable from our evil deeds which will be committed with our threefold activity pertaining to body, speech, and thought, because Buddha is an Unobstructible Light which constitutes the essence of Buddhahood and to which he attained in order to bring all sentient beings under his protection, no matter how imperfect and ignorant they may be. Hence it is said that, when we recite his name, he hears us; when we worship him, he sees us; when we think of him, he knows it. This means that when we trust in him without troubling ourselves about how good or how bad our hearts are, Buddha hears our recitation, sees us worshipping him, and knows us thinking of him, and he is sure all these deeds are decidedly leading us to rebirth in the Pure Land. This is why Zendō says that Buddha’s threefold activity (pertaining to body, speech, and thought) is inseparable from our threefold activity (pertaining to body, speech, and thought).

“Secondly, by ‘near’ relation I mean that we can see Buddha when we long to see him, because when this ‘intimate’ relationship between Buddha and ourselves has reached its height, he knows all about our threefold activity pertaining to body, speech, and thought, and at the same time we come to know Buddha’s threefold activity pertaining to body, speech, and thought. It is also due to this relation that Buddha appears to us in a dream or at the time of death.

“Thirdly, by ‘helpful’ relation I mean that the above-mentioned two relations between Buddha and ourselves are effected by other-power (*tariki*). As Zendō says, ‘all sentient beings who recite his name shall get rid of all their sins for which they have to suffer through countless kalpas. When their lives draw near to the end, Buddha and his holy retinue come to welcome them, and all their evil deeds and karma relations would offer no hindrance whatever. This is what we call helpful relation.’ The sentence, ‘all sentient

beings who recite his name shall rid of all their sins for which they have to suffer through countless kalpas', explains the 'intimate' relation effected by *tariki*, and the following sentence, 'when their lives draw near to the end... would offer no hindrance whatever', explains the 'near' relation effected by *tariki*. Therefore, this 'helpful' relation expresses other-power (*tariki*) by which the above-mentioned two relations are effected.

"When we understand this, our recitation of his name which is according to the 'intimate' relation between Buddha and ourselves cancels all our sins for which we have to suffer through countless kalpas. Actuated by this cancellation of sins, we shall surely come to tremble at evils and abandon them altogether never allowing ourselves to be influenced by them. Again, our seeing of Buddha which is the 'near' relation perfects the highest virtue. Impelled by this virtue, we rejoice at the good we have done, and our hearts are bent more than ever on practising good. This is what is meant by the so-called 'helpful' relation."¹

In this manner Buddha is closely related to all sentient beings. Why is this so? Because Amida, while he was in his Bodhisattvahood, vowed that all sentient beings should be reborn in his Pure Land, through the merit of good works carried out by himself; and finally through this merit he attained enlightenment, proving that all sentient beings' rebirth in the Pure Land has thus become an accomplished fact. Therefore, when we believe in his Vows he enters into our hearts thereby attaining his enlightenment, and at the same time assuring our own rebirth. This being the case, we should not keep Buddha away from us but feel embraced by Buddha believing that Buddha's Vows and works are the cause of our own rebirth.

Rebirth and the Nembutsu

Our rebirth in the Pure Land is assured when we have

¹ Shoku's letter to Yoritsune.

the faith that Buddha embraces all sentient beings who do not know how to escape transmigration. This must not be regarded, however, as a kind of creed; because it is not a dogma but an experience. Therefore Shōkū says: "Even though we may understand what *tariki* is or recite Buddha's name, we are not yet to be called *tariki* believers, if we think that our understanding of *tariki* or our recitation of Buddha's name is all by ourselves. We are called true *tariki* believers, only when we have an actual experience of unification with the Buddha and recite his name."¹

It is not we but Amida who awakens us to this unification and occupies our being by entering into ourselves. "When we were *jiriki* believers, we had to run after Buddha asking him to save us; but when we become *tariki*, we realise that Amida has been running after us all the time. Only because we did not know this, we had to transmigrate."²

Shōkū thinks that this is why the *Meditation Sūtra* teaches that even the gravest sinner is reborn in the Pure Land by reciting the Nembutsu at the moment of his death. This "is not due to his understanding of this truth, but due to the following fact, that harassed by the death-agony and though not realising how, putting a stop to the *jiriki* thought of running after Buddha, he utters *Namu-amida-butsu*, which is thus naturally in harmony with *tariki* thought of Nembutsu."³

Shōkū also thinks⁴ that this is why the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* teaches that the Nembutsu will last for one hundred years after the disappearance of the Right Law and that those who will then hear and recite the Nembutsu will be able to be reborn in the Pure Land. That they are assured to be reborn there is not due to their merit but to their having nothing but Buddha's name. As there is nothing but the Nembutsu, the recitation naturally makes the mind of the devotee became concentrated in the Nembutsu

¹ *Tahitsushō* 他筆抄. ²⁻³ *Jutsujō* 述誠

⁴ Cp. "the Plain-wood Nembutsu."

itself, and it is by the strength of this concentration that they are reborn in the Pure Land.

Thus our rebirth is not the thing which is worked out by our own efforts but the thing which is assured to us at the moment when our mind is united with Amida's by abandoning our self-thought which necessarily issues from egoistic impulses. The same can be said of the Nembutsu, because our saying it is not the work of *jiriki* which seeks salvation through the Nembutsu, but because it is recited out of the simple naive belief in the assurance given by the Buddha for our rebirth in the Pure Land. This is what is meant by the Nembutsu not requiring any "colouring" of good works. Shōkū compares the Nembutsu to the virginity of plain wood.

Spiritual Rest

When our rebirth in the Pure Land is thus assured by the Nembutsu which is given in the Original Vow of Amida, there is a state of spiritual rest in which we have the feeling that Buddha is always present with us. So we have: "Even though your nights are passed in sleep, you are active with Amida in accumulating various virtues. Even though your days are spent busy in worldly matters, you are enjoying with Amida the perfect serenity of his inmost realisation."¹

It is a state of mind full of joy and exultation in the assurance of one's rebirth in the Pure Land, though one is imperfect and too feeble to do anything good. "Even though your nature is imperfect," according to Shōkū, "you need not be mortified; for there is Amida's Vow which embraces such inferior souls. Even though your meritorious work is small, you need not doubt your rebirth in the Pure Land; for in the Sutra it is said, 'If you should have repeated my name, say, ten times, and if you should not be reborn in my Pure Land, I might not obtain the perfect enlightenment.'²

¹⁻² *Chinkwanyōjin* 鎮勸要心

With this spiritual rest one comes back to the world where rules of morality are observed. "As far as the *jiriki* rules our heart, all our doings are false; but when *jiriki* is replaced by *tariki*, all that we do is true."¹ "As soon as we realise our weakness in doing good, real goodness is performed. For it is born of *tariki*."²

Shōkū strongly warns against those who misunderstand Amida's saving power of the wicked, for they are apt to grow all the more addicted to the commission of evil deeds. "You should not imagine that you may commit crime," says he, "just because it is taught that Amida loves even a grave sinner. It is on the part of Buddha that he will save grave sinners, and not on the part of sinners. Nor are you to think that the repeated recitation of Buddha's name is to no purpose, as according to the sutra our rebirth is already assured by saying the Nembutsu once for all. Just because of Buddha's assurance sinners such as you are embraced in his love, so you are to grieve over your evil deeds and recite the name of Buddha as frequently as you can."³

In brief, Shōkū's doctrine of *tariki* is to find our spiritual rest where we become united to Buddha by believing his Vows and Works, by realising our utter inability to achieve our own salvation without Buddha's mercy working within ourselves; it is this state of mind that we come back to this world and practise whatever good works we can according to our own individual capacities.

The Nembutsu by Other Pure Land Masters

What corresponds to this "plain-wood Nembutsu" of Shōkū is the "Independent Nembutsu" of Hōnen, his master and the father of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan. It runs thus: "Set the Nembutsu on its own legs, as is given in the Original Vow. Do not seek assistance in any other work.

¹⁻² *Jutsujō* 述誠

³ *Nyōingoshō* 女院御書

Those who seek assistance in any other work shall be reborn in the outskirts of the Pure Land. To seek assistance in any other work means to seek assistance in wisdom, to seek assistance in morality, to seek assistance in the wish for enlightenment, and to seek assistance in charity. Therefore, let a good man practise the Nembutsu as he is, let a bad man practise the Nembutsu as he is; just to practise the Nembutsu according to his inborn nature is what I mean by the Nembutsu not seeking assistance in any other work.”¹

Again, the “Plain-wood Nembutsu” corresponds to Shinran’s Nembutsu which he defines as “not being as special deed of merit or of goodness.” Shinran was Shōkū’s fellow-disciple and the founder of the Shin Sect. We read in his Tannisho VIII: “The Nembutsu is neither a deed of merit nor one of goodness, as is practised by the believers. It is not a deed of merit because it is not that which should be practised by our self-efforts. It is not a deed of goodness because it is not that which should be practised by our self-efforts. It is solely due to Other-power, therefore, it is not a deed of merit nor one of goodness, as is practised by the believers.”

Shinran in another place defines the Nembutsu as “Irrational” that is, beyond logical calculation. “The master (Shinran) said in regard to the Nembutsu that its reason is where it transcends all reasonings because it is inexpressible, indefinable, and inconceivable.” In one of his letters, Shinran says: “Reasoning is contrivance, contrivance is on the side of devotees which means self-power, and it is called reasoning. As other-power lies where the Original Vow is believed and rebirth in the Pure Land is assured, there is no reasoning whatever in this. Therefore, it is called ‘Irrational’.”

Ippen, the founder of the Ji Sect, who was inspired by Shōkū’s teaching, treats the Nembutsu in a similar manner. He says:¹ “Do not give a foundation to the Nembutsu.

¹ *Wagotōroku* 和語燈錄

What enables you to be reborn in the Pure Land is neither your deed of goodness, nor our way of saying it, nor your way of acting, nor your mental attitude towards it; just say *Namu-amida-butsu*. It is enough."

All these statements by the masters of Pure Land Buddhism—the "Independent" *Nembutsu*, the "Irrational" *Nembutsu*, the *Nembutsu* "not being of any special deed of merit nor of goodness", the *Nembutsu* "without any foundation", and the "Plain-wood" *Nembutsu*—they all aim at attaining the one and same end which is our union with Buddha. Here we naturally come back to Hōnen's "One Sheet Document" which was given as the last message to Genchi, one of his disciples. It runs thus: "The *Nembutsu* is not the practice of meditation on Buddha nor the invocation of Buddha's name which is practised as the result of study and understanding as to the meaning of the *Nembutsu*. It is just to recite the name of Amida, without doubting that this will issue in the rebirth of the believer in the Pure Land. Just this, and no other consideration is needed. . . ."

Just to recite *Namu-amida-butsu*, without doubting that this will issue in the rebirth of the believer in the Pure Land—this is the secret of Pure Land Buddhism by which its followers are enabled to free themselves from the bondage of birth and death.

SHIZUTOSHI SUGIHIRA

¹ His *Sayings*, 一遍語錄