

GOODNESS AND NATURALNESS

1

IN Book V, the "True Buddha-land," of *The Doctrine-Work-Faith-Attainment* (*Kyō-gyō-shin-shō*), which is the fundamental text-book of the *Shin-shū* or the Shin sect of Buddhism, Shinran Shōnin (1173-1262), the founder of the sect, declares, quoting from the *Larger Sūtra on Amitabha* (*Dai-Amida-kyō*):

"The Light of the Buddha Amida¹ is the Supreme Good, and the brightest and nicest of all good. It is so pleasant that it is unparalleled and unsurpassed in its pleasantness. The Light of the Buddha Amida is pure and clean; flawless and undefiled. And it never wanes nor diminishes. The Light of the Buddha Amida is so excellent that it is infinitely superior to the light of the sun and the moon. . . . There is no human being, no mollusk that does not see the Light of the Buddha Amida. There is no one who, having gazed upon the Light, does not feel blissful and joyous. Of the people in this world who are given to debauchery, or ablaze with anger, or obscured with ignorance, there is no one who, having gazed upon the Light of the Buddha Amida, does not do good. . . . The Light and the Name of the Buddha Amida pervades the immeasurable and innumerable Buddha-lands in the eastern, southern, western, and northern quarters, above and below, in the cardinal and intermediate points. Of all the celestial and human beings there is no one who does not

¹ That is, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Eternal Life. *Amida* is the Japanese reading of the Sanskrit *Amitābha*, which means the "Infinite (*amita*) Light (*ābha*)," or *Amitāyus*, which means the "Eternal (*amita*) Life (*āyus*)."

hear the Name of the Buddha Amida, and there is no one who, having heard it, does not attain deliverance." Or again in Book VI, he says: "'The Ground of Good' is no other than the Blessed Name of the *Nyorai*.² In the Blessed Name is perfectly embodied all good. The Blessed Name is the ground of all goodness. It is therefore called the 'Ground of Good.'"

The morality of the ordinary people is founded on the sound opinions inculcated in them by education. Their virtue is steadfast loyalty to established tradition which they have imbibed from *outside*, i.e. from their social environment, not loyalty to the claims of a *summum bonum* grasped by *inward* sight. It will be characteristic of their experience that there should be conflicts of desire with the tradition of loyalty, and that a sort of chivalrous sentiment should be required to act as the reinforcement of loyalty to tradition. But a man who has directly gazed for himself on the Supreme Good necessarily desires the good he has beheld. So long as man is holding converse with outward and bodily things through his senses and opinions, and does not withdraw into himself and learn to know his own life, who and what he is, he can never become

² *Nyorai* (*Tathāgata* in Sanskrit) is an epithet of the Buddha. *Nyo* (*tathā*) means "thus," and *rai* (*āgata*) "is come" or "is arrived." Hence, the *Nyorai* (*Tathāgata*) is the "One who has thus come." On the other hand, "tathāgata" can be divided also into *tathā* (*nyo*): "thus," and *gata* (*ko*): "gone" or "departed." Hence, the *Tathāgata* has also the meaning of *Nyoko* or the "One who has thus gone." There is no doubt the *tathā* is connected with the Mahayana conception of the Ultimate Truth as *Tathatā* (Suchness or Thusness). Therefore, the *Tathāgata* is the "One who has the nature of *thusness* or *suchness* in his coming and going," that is, the One who is neither coming nor departing, whose being is not subject to the category of being and non-being.

truly virtuous, good or happy. “Going out were never so good, but staying at home were much better.”

True goodness lies in *one* thing alone, and nothing else. And if ever man is to be made good, that one thing alone must be in his heart. Now what is that one thing? It is the Supreme Good. It is neither this good nor that, which we can name or perceive or show; but it is *all* and above all things. Moreover it need not enter into the heart, for it is there already, only it is unperceived being hidden under so many layers of vile and wicked passions. And since it is One, unity and singleness is better than manifoldness, for goodness lies not in much and many, but in One and oneness. Therefore we must wait only on Amida and His work, and leave on one side all beings and their works, and first of all ourselves, and must love, know, taste, and feel within us only the working of the One Good Will in and through us. In other words, goodness lies not in any being, or work of the beings, but it lies alone in Amida and His work. Therefore, Shinran Shōnin declares in *The Tract on Deploing the Heterodoxies (Tanni-shō)*:

“...I don't know at all what is good nor what is evil, for if I knew something good as completely as the *Nyorai* knows it good, then I could say that I know it good. And if I knew something evil as completely as the *Nyorai* knows it evil, then I could say that I know it evil. But I am a wretched sinner utterly blinded by vile and wicked passions, and this world is transitory and changeable as if it were a burning house. All is vain and false, and nothing is true. True remains, however, the *Nembutsu*³ alone...” (Chapt.

³ *Nembutsu* (*Buddha-anusmṛiti* in Sanskrit) means literally

XVIII). Or "The *Nembutsu* is the One Unimpeded Path, for a man who practises the *Nembutsu* with firm faith is not only respected by the gods in heaven and on earth, but he is hindered neither by evil spirits nor by anti-Buddhists, and sin itself can have no influence upon him. Therefore, the *Nembutsu* is the One Unimpeded Path, as it supercedes all goodness." (Chapt. VII).

However, let no one suppose that we may attain to this One Unimpeded Path by much questioning, or by reading and study, nor yet by high skill and great learning. The *Nembutsu* or the union with Amida stands not in any man's *self-power* (*jiriki*), in his working or abstaining, perceiving or understanding, nor in that of all the beings taken together, for this union is that we should be purely, simply and wholly at one with the One Eternal Good Will, or altogether without will, so that the *self-will* (*hakarai*) should be swallowed up and lost in the Eternal Will, so that the Eternal Will alone should work in us. Now neither exercises, nor words, nor works, nor any being, nor any being's work can help or further us towards this end. Therefore we must renounce and forsake all things, and must not imagine or suppose that any words, works, or exercises, any skill, or cunning, or contrivance can help or serve us thereto. We must suffer these things to be what they are, and enter into the union with Amida simpleheartedly. So the *One-sheet Document* (*Ichimai-kishō-mon*) written by Hōnen

"thinking of (*nen*: *anusmṛiti*) the Buddha (*butsu*: *Buddha*)." But it has come to be synonymous with *shōmyō* or "reciting or uttering (*shō*) the Name (*myō*)." For the followers of the Shin teaching of Buddhism, *nembutsu* means *shōmyō*, to think of the Buddha Amida is to utter His Name: *Namu-amida-butsu!*

Shōnin, the teacher of Shinran Shōnin, declares :

“By the *Nembutsu* I do not mean such practice of meditation on the Buddha as is referred to by the wise men of China and Japan, nor is it the invocation of the Buddha’s Name, which is practised as the result of study and understanding as to the meaning of the *Nembutsu*. It is just to utter the Name of Amida: *Namu-Amida-Butsu*!⁴ without doubting that this will issue in the believer’s *Rebirth*⁵ (*ōjo*) in the Pure Land (*jōdo*)... Those who believe in [the Unthinkable Power of] the *Nembutsu*, however learned they may be in all the teachings of Sakyamuni, shall behave themselves like an ignoramus who knows nothing, or like a simple-hearted woman-devotee: avoid pedantry, and utter the Buddha’s Name with singleness of heart.” Or Shinran Shōnin says: “. . . A man who opines that good deeds are helpful towards attaining Rebirth, while evil deeds are harmful to it, does not trust the Unthinkable

⁴ *Namu-amida-butsu* is the transliteration of the Sanskrit, *namo mitābhāya buddhāya* or *namo mitāyuse buddhāya*. *Namo* or *namas* (= *namu*) means “adoration” or “salutation,” and *ami’abhāya* (or *amitāyuse*) *buddhāya* means “to the Buddha of Infinite Light (or of Eternal Life).” So “adoration to the Buddha of Infinite Light (or of Eternal Life)” is the meaning of *Namu-amida-butsu*. But in the Shin sect, the full form of “*Namu-amida-butsu*” is regarded as the Name of the Buddha Amida, because in it is embodied His Eternal Good Will to enlighten and deliver us from the night of ignorance. It is the Buddha Amida (*Amida-butsu*) that causes us to trust or *have faith in* (= *namu*) Him as our Light and Life. “*Namu*” and “*Amida-butsu*” are therefore essentially inseparable, being the two aspects of the One Eternal Power. *Namu* is *Amida-butsu* and *Amida-butsu* is *namu*.

⁵ *ōjo* means literally “to go (*ō*) and be born (*jō*)” in another world, that is, in the Pure Land of Amida. In the Shin teaching, *Rebirth* (*ōjo*) or *Nirvāna* is used in the sense of Enlightenment. *Rebirth* and *Nirvāna* and *Enlightenment* are synonyms.

Power of the *Vow*⁶ [of Amida], but, counting upon his own self-power, endeavors to accumulate various merits for the sake of Rebirth, and thus makes the *Nembutsu*, which he utters, a practice for his own sake. . . .”

Now a man who is in union with Amida and walks the One Unimpeded Path is in a state of absolute *fearlessness*, because he has lost the fear of pain or hell, and the hope of reward or the Pure Land, but is living in pure submission to the Eternal Goodness, in the perfect freedom of fervent love. Thus Shinran Shōnin declares: “As far as I, Shinran, am concerned, I simply and purely do believe what my good teacher Hōnen Shōnin told me: ‘Leave your salvation with Amida by uttering his Name with singleness of heart.’ I don’t know at all whether the *Nembutsu* is the cause of Rebirth in the Pure Land or of descent into hell. I shall never regret, even if, deceived by Hōnen Shōnin, I should descend into hell because of my practising the *Nembutsu*. The reason is as follows. If I should descend into hell because of my practising the *Nembutsu*, while I am so constituted that I can attain Buddhahood by steadily performing other good deeds, then I might regret having been deceived by Hōnen

⁶ The Vow (*gwan* or *seigwan* in Japanese; *praṇidhāna* in Sanskrit) or more precisely, the Original Vow (*hongwan* in Jap.; *pūrvapraṇidhāna* in Skt.) of Amida, which is mentioned in the “Myth of Bodhisattva Dharmākara” told by Sakyamuni in the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* (*Dai-muryōju-kyō*), is in essence as follows: “If, after my obtaining Buddhahood, all beings in the ten quarters should not desire in sincerity and trustfulness to be born in my Country, and if they should not be born by repeating my Name even for ten times only, may I not attain the Highest Perfect Enlightenment.” The Vow expresses Amida’s immovable determination to carry out His Eternal Will to deliver us from this world and make us attain Enlightenment in His Land of Purity and Bliss.

⁷ *The Tract on Deploring the Heterodoxies* (*Tanni-shō*), Chapt. XI.

Shōnin. But in truth I am so constituted that I can perform no good work, and therefore I am doomed to hell, which will be my ultimate dwelling place anyway”⁸

It goes without saying that this *fearlessness* is spiritual, not merely moral. It is not the sort of courage demanded of the good soldier, which is absolute loyalty to a code of honour, but it is a state of *absolute dependence* or *absolute passivity*, which is nothing less than *absolute activity*; for a man who, bereft of the self-will, is obedient, resigned and submissive to the One Good Will, is also resigned, obedient and submissive to all things, in a spirit of yielding, and not of resistance, and takes them in silence, resting on the hidden foundation of his soul, and having a secret inward patience that enables him to take all chances or crosses willingly, whatever may befall him, neither calls for nor desires any redress, or deliverance, or resistance, or revenge, but is always in a loving sincere humility. “. . . Once we obtain firm faith, our Rebirth [in the Pure Land] will be left entirely to the Will of Amida, and therefore no room will be left for our self-will to take part in the matter. The more we realize our wickedness, the more we shall come to rely upon the Power of Amida’s Vow, and then it is that we become persevering and meek of heart as a natural result. As regards our Rebirth, we had best in all things abandon sagacious contrivance, and affectionately recollect His Boundless Grace, day in day out. Then the *Nembutsu* will rise of itself from the depths of our hearts. This is *naturalness* (*jinen*). Where there is no self-will, there is *naturalness*. In other

⁸ Id., II.

words, *naturalness* is the working of the *Other Power* (*tariki*)⁹¹⁰

Indeed the good soldier has a courage which no fear of pain or death and no bait that can be offered to cupidity is able to overcome. Clearly a courage like this will carry a man over the top, make him volunteer for a desperate enterprise or win him a decoration for gallantry in action. But there are situations in life which make a demand for a still higher degree of fortitude. It is matter of experience that the self-devotion of the good soldier may not be equal to the task of duty imposed, for example, on a priest whose business it is to tend daily the last hours of the victims of some foul pestilence in a plague-smitten city. Or again a brave soldier, who will face deadly peril when his blood is up and the eyes of his comrades and his commander are on him, may not have the nerve of the scientific man who will quietly inoculate himself with some loathsome disorder to study its symptoms, or try the effects of some new and powerful anaesthetic upon himself, in order to decide on its possible utility in medicine. This is the sort of courage which is only possible to a man who realizes the relative insignificance of the duration of any individual personal life from his habitual contemplation of all time and all existence. Both in the case of the priest and in the case of the man of science, the agent is inspired by an absolutely assured conviction about the universal order and his own place in it. Without this absolute assurance of conviction, one is never wholly free from liability to illusion about one's own personal importance, and so

⁹ Amida's Power wholly *other* than our self-power.

¹⁰ *The Tannishō*, XVI.

never quite *free* and *natural* in his conduct. Therefore, clearly in the soul of the man who sees by *spiritual insight* the Whole and the Perfect, all the fragments and parts which have been distinguishable at a lower level of moral development will be finally fused. His life will have only *one* spring of action or active principle, his vision of the Supreme Good itself. The forms of virtue, at its highest level or in the realm of *spirituality*, will therefore lose their distinction. Indeed it might be possible for the average good citizen as well as for the good soldier of the State to be characterized by one form of goodness more than by another, but it is not meant that so long as the shop-keeper or the farmer is temperate, it does not matter whether he is a coward. He could not be a good man at all, if he were that, and a society in which no one had any courage except the members of the army and police would be morally in a bad way. But if a man is inspired in all the acts of his life by the vision of the Supreme Good, he will be equal to all the emergencies of life alike; in having *one* virtue, he will necessarily have *all*. " . . . Once you have faith in the Original Vow, you need not seek after any other sort of goodness, for there is no goodness that is better than the *Nembutsu*; nor need you fear evil, for there is no evil powerful enough to obstruct the way of Amida's Original Vow . . ." ¹¹ Only the man who is inspired by the direct vision of the Supreme Good can *create* the national traditions by which the rest of society is to live, for he has a goodness which is not simply the product of those conditions themselves.

¹¹ Id., I.

2

“The Light of the Buddha Amida is the Supreme Good.”¹²

“As His Light surpasses that of the Sun and the Moon,
He is known as the Sun-and-Moon-Surpassing Light;
Sakyamuni could not praise Him enough:
Take refuge in the One who is peerless.”¹³

“As His wondrous Light transcends form and
description,
He is known as the Buddha of Inexpressible Light;
His Light has the power to enlighten all beings:
So He is praised by all the Buddhas.”¹⁴

“The Unimpeded Light that pervades the ten quarters,
For ever enlightening the night of ignorance,
Opens the Way of Nirvāna
To those who rejoice even for once only in His
Grace.”¹⁵

The Supreme Good or the Sun-and-Moon-Surpassing Light is to the objects of inward sight and to inward sight itself what the sun is to visible objects and to outward sight. As the sun both makes the colours we see and supplies the eye with the source of all its seeing, so the Supreme Good supplies the objects of inward sight with their being and renders them visible to inward sight. And as the sun is neither the colours we see nor the eye which sees them, so the Supreme Good is something even more exalted than being. It “transcends form and description.” It transcends, and is *wholly other* than every particular real thing. It is the *Other Power* (*tariki*) which, indestructible and imperishable, holds everything together and is thus the cause of all order in the universe. So:

“The Light is called the ‘Indestructible;’ the

¹² *The Doctrine-Work-Faith-Attainment* (*Kyō-gyō-shin-shō*), Book V.

^{13 14 15} *Psalms* (*wasan*) by Shinran Shōnin.

Indestructible is called the *Nyorai*. The Light is also called the 'Wisdom.'"¹⁶ And further :

"Deliverance (*gedatsu*) is called the 'Empty Nothing (*komu*).' The Empty Nothing is Deliverance; Deliverance is the *Nyorai*; the *Nyorai* is the Empty Nothing; for it is not the effect attained by any human work. Or : True Deliverance is beginningless and endless, and therefore it is the *Nyorai*. The *Nyorai* is also beginningless and endless, ageless and deathless, and indestructible and imperishable; it is not a reality subject to vicissitudes. . . . Nirvāna is called 'Deliverance,' the Empty Nothing is called the 'Non-Good,' and it is also called 'Unimpededness.'"¹⁷

The distinguishing characteristic of the Supreme Good is that it is the transcendent source of all the reality and intelligibility of everything other than itself. It is rightly regarded as distinct from and transcendent of the whole system of its effects or manifestations. And it transcends the distinction, valid everywhere else, between value and existence. It is the supreme value and the source of all other value and at the same time it is, though *wholly other* than being, the source of all existence. And since the distinction between value and existence falls away in the Supreme Good, it should no longer properly be called a "value" or a "reality," and hence it is called the "Non-Good" or the "Empty Nothing." No one could tell what the Supreme Good is except negatively, or he can only characterize it positively by imperfect analogy, because it can only be apprehended by the most incommunicable and intimate personal insight—*faith* or the "*wisdom* of the believing

^{16 17} *The Kyō-gyō-shin-shō*, Book V. Shinran's quotations from the *Nirvāna Sūtra*.

heart (*shinjin-no-chië*.)”

The Good is only seen by the man who *lives* it, who keeps adapting himself to it, who “affectionately recollects His Boundless Grace, day in day out,” to make himself conformable to His Will. Thus when a modern biologist explains the structure of an organism by the notion of “adaptation” to its environment by proving that it is *best* that it should have just that structure and no other, he is using on a small scale the supreme universal principle of unification. Only, of course, the biological conception of “adaptation” stops short with a relative “best”; the particular environment of a particular species is taken as (relatively) constant and independent; the “best” realized in the development of the species is adequate adaptation to that given environment. When the principle is made universal, the “best” becomes an *ethical* and *absolute* best, since no place is left for an “environment” of everything. The Goodness of Amida takes the place of the fixed “environment” as that to which the structure of things is conceived as “adapted.”

It is needless to say that Shinran Shōnin did not imagine Enlightenment or Rebirth or Nirvāna as capable of actual execution by human beings. He says: “There are some who hold the view that a man of faith attains Enlightenment here in this present life even before he is bereft of the mortal body filled with vile and wicked passions. But such a view is absurd and out of the question.”¹⁸ Now as often as and as long as a man dreams that he is already firm in faith and given up wholly to the Other Power alone, there arises a false peace and satisfaction, and then it follows

¹⁸ *The Tannishō*, XV.

that he thinks he has already attained Enlightenment and abides in a state where he suffers nothing and is moved by nothing, however things fall out well or ill. But this puffed-up feeling of exaltation or elation is a form of self-assertion. We must be ever watchful about this. So Shinran Shōnin says: "If it happens that we are so joyful as to leap to our feet and very anxious to make an early start from this world for the Pure Land, we may well ask ourselves: 'Why this feeling of exaltation? Because I am already bereft of vile and wicked passions?'"¹⁹

In truth a human being, with respect to himself and his own power, is nothing, has nothing, can do and is capable of nothing but only infirmity and evil, so long as this mortal life lasts. Hence, once he is awakened to this, thorough humility and poorness of spirit is the true state of his mind, for he finds himself altogether unworthy of all that has been or ever will be done for him, by the Other Power or the other people, and that he is a debtor to all and nothing is owing to him, so that he will be ready to bear all things from others, and also, if needs be, to do all things for others. It is only in the man who is awakened to his nothingness that the Eternal Good works, and then it is that *naturalness* or *absolute passivity*, which is no other than *absolute activity*, pervades his conduct. And when the man in whom the Eternal Good works, has and ought to have a will towards anything, his will and endeavor and works are for no end, but that the Good may be seen and manifested. In him is no willing, nor working, nor desiring but has for its end, goodness as goodness, for the sake of good-

¹⁹ Id., IX.

ness, and he has no other wherefore than this. He would say: "I must do this, and cannot do otherwise, for it is my duty; but this my duty, and the work I do, is not of myself, and I do not call it mine;" just as Shinran Shōnin says: "The *Nembutsu* is 'non-deed' and 'non-good' for those who practise it. It is 'non-deed' because when they practise it, the practice does not originate in their self-will. It is 'non-good,' because it is not an act of goodness originating in their self-will. Since it is entirely the working of the Other Power (*tariki*) and free from their self-power (*jiriki*), it is 'non-deed' and 'non-good' for those who practise it."²⁰

Now it should be unnecessary to dwell on the point that the man who is illuminated by the vision of the Supreme Good is not a mere contemplator divorced from practical social activity, for the Good is only seen by the man who *lives* it. He is necessarily a missionary and a sort of lesser Good Will to mankind, because the Good cannot be seen without drawing all who see it into its service. And his social activity is all the more effective that it is not pursued directly for its own sake, in the spirit of well-meaning but tiresome persons of our own day who take up social work as they might take up typewriting or civil engineering, but issues naturally and inevitably, as a sort of by-product, from his aspiration after something else, just as the great inventions of modern times regularly issue from discoveries of men who were not thinking at all of the applications of science to convenience and commerce, or as art, literature, social life have all owed an incalculable debt to Shōtoku Taishi (572-

²⁰ Id., VIII.

621)²¹ who had no other end than goodness as goodness, for the sake of goodness.

Kenryo Kanamatsu

²¹ Second son of the Emperor Yomei. He was surnamed Umayado, because his mother, whilst walking in the Palace, was suddenly seized with the pangs of child-birth and brought forth her child in the Imperial stables (*umaya*). At the accession of his aunt Suiko to the throne (593), he was named "heir to the throne" (*taishi*) and exercised a real regency. He is one of the great figures of Japanese history, especially on account of his activity in the propagation of Buddhism. He followed the teaching of Eji, priest from Koma (Korea). As soon as he came to power, he selected the Three Sutras of the Mahayana doctrine and ordered them to be taught everywhere; he built the temples of Shitennō-ji, Hōryū-ji, Chūgū-ji, Hōkō-ji, etc., and at the time of his death, Buddhism numbered already 46 temples (*tera*), 820 priests (*sō*), and 560 nuns (*ama*) in Japan. It was Shōtoku Taishi who promulgated a Code of laws in 17 chapters based on the Buddhist spirit of compassion and tolerance (604) and who adopted the Chinese calendar (604). It was also he who for the first time sent an embassy to China (607). With the help of Soga-no-Umako, he published two historical works, the *Tennō-ki* and the *Koku-ki* (620). He died the following year, at the age of 49. Shinran Shōnin praises him as follows: "Kwannon (Avalokiteśvara), the Great Bodhisattva who is the Saviour of the world, was made manifest in this world as Shōtoku the Prince, who, like Father has not forsaken us, and like Mother is ever among us. Since the beginningless past until today, has Shōtoku the Prince been dwelling among us like Father and Mother, for ever exercising his Compassionate Heart."