

HÖNEN SHŌNIN AND SHINRAN SHŌNIN : THEIR NEMBUTSU DOCTRINE

1

The Pure Land doctrine and teaching that we shall be saved by the practice of the Nembutsu, is not the exclusive possession of the Japanese Pure Land Buddhists; it was once current in India, where various sutras advocating it were produced and many scholars exhorting it appeared; it still exists in China, though not in so flourishing a state as of old, when "the Nembutsu was heard everywhere on the roads." But it is in Japan that it reached its full development as Shin Buddhism of Shinran Shōnin, who established this sect on the foundation of the Pure Land teaching of Hōnen Shōnin. Here the Nembutsu has its deeper meaning unfolded, which was long latent in the previous Pure Land doctrine.

2

Hōnen Shōnin (1132-1212) studied Buddhism on Mt. Hiei, the then centre of Buddhist learning and discipline in Japan, and was reputed as a man of great piety and erudition; but, failing to attain the way of deliverance, he experienced great spiritual sufferings. From the study of the various writings by the Pure Land masters, especially of Genshin's *Ōjo-yōshū*,¹ in which the practice of the Nembutsu is exhorted as "the eye-and-foot for those who live in this

¹ The *Ōjo-yōshū* 往生要集 (Collection of the Important Passages Exhorting Rebirth in the Pure Land), A work in three fasciculi, written by Genshin in 985. This is a typical work on the Pure Land doctrine, produced in Japan before Hōnen's time. It contains the detailed descriptions of hell and Pure Land and the various ways of the Nembutsu practice. Genshin (942-1017), author of this book, was a Tendai priest, but he deeply believed in the Pure Land teaching. He is also called Eshin Sōzu and is renowned as a painter and sculptor.

defiled world of this degenerated age," he proceeded to the special study of Zendō's *Commentary on the Meditation Sutra*.¹ This commentary, however, is not a mere commentary of the text as it is really a record of the inner experience of a devout soul who gave up his soul absolutely to the power of Amida. One day when Hōnen Shōnin was forty-three years old, he read this Commentary and came upon the following passage: "To invoke the Name of Amida with singleness of heart, walking or standing, sitting or lying, without regard to the length of time, in which the Nembutsu is practised, and never to abandon the practice even for a single moment, is the right definite cause of your rebirth in the Pure Land; for it is in accordance with the Original Vow of the Buddha." This passage hitherto overlooked now struck his mind, and his eye was suddenly opened to the truth that even the ordinary mortals with their thoughts in all confusion can be reborn in the Pure Land by the practice of the Nembutsu only. Immediately he put aside all other works on Buddhism, becoming an ardent follower of the Nembutsu practice.

The conversion of Hōnen Shōnin was an epoch-making event not only in the history of his own life but in that of Japanese Buddhism; for it turned out to be the starting-point of all the Pure Land doctrines now flourishing in Japan. But apart from such historical significance, the event has an intrinsic value as a case showing the development of a religious soul. Long after the conversion Hōnen Shōnin one day said to a disciple of his, "The words 'For it is in accordance with the Original Vow of the Buddha'

² The *Meditation Sutra* is one of the three sutras on which Pure Land Buddhism stands. It records how Śākyamuni accompanied by Ānanda came to the royal palace in Rājagriha where Queen Vaidehi was imprisoned and what he preached to her concerning the possibility of all sentient beings to be reborn in the Pure Land after the deliverance from this world of suffering. There are many commentaries on this sutra, but Zendō's is the most excellent. Zendō (613-681) the commentator is one of the most famous Pure Land Buddhists in China. His commentary on the Meditation Sutra consists of four fasciculi.

went deep into my soul and has become fixed in my mind." How was it that such apparently simple-looking words could produce such a significant effect on Hōnen Shōnin? To understand it we must trace the psychological background which led to his conversion; his spiritual suffering was long and arduous which steadily moved his mind towards a self-awakening, culminating with his conversion.

"As I had a deep desire to be delivered from the round of birth-and-death," Hōnen Shōnin tells of his period of storm and stress, "I practised various kinds of meritorious deeds, believing in the various teachings ascribed to Buddha. There are indeed many doctrines in Buddhism, but they may be summed up in three disciplines: the precept-observance, meditation and knowledge. They are practised by adherents of the Hinayana and of the Mahayana, both esoteric and exoteric. But the fact is that I do not keep even one of the precepts, nor do I practise any form of meditation. A certain priest has said that without the observance of the precepts there is no realisation of *samādhi*. Moreover, the heart of the ordinary mortals, because of his surroundings, is always liable to change, just like the monkey jumping from one tree to another. It is indeed in a state of confusion, easily moved and difficult to control. In what way does the right knowledge of non-outflowings arise? Without the sword of the knowledge of non-outflowings, how can one get free from the chains of evil karma and evil passions? Unless one gets free from evil karma and evil passions, how shall he obtain deliverance from the bondage of birth-and-death? Alas! Alas! What shall I do? The like of us are incompetent to practise the three disciplines of precept-observance, meditation, and knowledge. So I visited and inquired of many scholars and wise men whether there is any other doctrine than these three disciplines that is equal to my poor understanding, and whether there is any other practice that is suited for my poor abilities; but I found none who could either teach it to me or even suggest it to me."

Such was his state of mind at the time when he was seeking after the truth. Here we find him in a miserable condition, with his deep desire to be delivered from the round of birth-and-death on the one hand, and his inevitable recognition on the other of his own poor abilities insufficient to effect this. The fierceness of the conflict between these two opposing forces was about to make him a spiritual wreck, when suddenly there dawned upon him a light of emancipation, bringing him into a realm of joy and peace.

3

When viewed as a doctrine, the teaching of Hōnen Shōnin is plain enough and there is nothing abstruse about it: Invoke Amida's name with singleness of heart, without doubting that this will issue in rebirth, and you will assuredly be reborn in Amida's Land, because it is in accordance with his Original Vow.

Hōnen Shōnin states in the concluding remarks of the *Senjākushū*, his chief literary work: "If you wish immediately to get out of the round of birth-and-death, there are two excellent doctrines, of which you should just leave the Holy Path Gate and enter the Pure Land Gate in preference. If you wish to enter the Pure Land Gate, there are two kinds of work, pure and mixed, of which you should just lay aside the mixed works and practise the pure works in preference. If you wish to practise the pure works, there are two kinds of cause, right and helping, of which you should still render the helping cause secondary and devote yourself to the practice of the right definite cause. The right definite cause is to invoke the Buddha's name. The invoking of the Name assures your obtaining rebirth, for it is the virtue of the Original Vow of the Buddha."

The Original Vow of the Buddha here referred to is the Vow awakened in Amida while he was yet in his disciplinary stage and was called the Bodhisattva Dharmākara, as is described in the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*. The

Bodhisattva Dharmākara's Original Vow consists of forty-eight items but the nucleus is the Eighteenth Vow, which runs thus: If those beings in the ten quarters should believe in me with serene thoughts, after my attainment of Buddhahood, and should wish to be reborn in my country, thinking of me [or repeating my Name], say ten times 乃至十念, and if they should not then be reborn there, then might I not obtain perfect knowledge.

Now the words 乃至十念 are interpreted by the Chinese commentators in two different ways: according to which of the two meanings of the word 念 (*nien* in Chinese) is adapted: the one is "to think" and the other "to recite." Some commentators preferring the first interpreted the 乃至十念 as meaning "should think of me, say, ten times;" while the others who took to the second explained the phrase as meaning "should repeat my Name, say, ten times." Each of these interpretations was reasonable and supported by the various sutras.

Hōnen Shōnin advocated the latter interpretation and took 念 to mean the vocal practice. The reason was as follows: Amida is Mercy itself; as he is merciful, he wishes to embrace all suffering beings who, owing to their poor abilities, are unable to achieve by themselves any kind of works deserving emancipation; and this is the reason of his Vow. Therefore 念 of the Original Vow of Amida is the excellent and easy vocal practice which can be practised even by the ordinary mortals of confused thoughts, and not the difficult practice of meditation which the abled alone can practise.

Now Hōnen Shōnin identified this 念 of the Original Vow meaning vocal utterance with the 念 of the Nembutsu of the *Meditation Sutra*. In the *Meditation Sutra* we have, "The light of Amida illumines all the worlds in the ten quarters and takes in and never forsakes those beings who practise the Nembutsu."

The Nembutsu (*nien-fo* in Chinese, and *buddhānusmṛiti*

in Sanskrit), however, has not always been regarded as a vocal practice. Historically speaking, the Nembutsu started as one of the three devotions: the devotion to the Buddha, to the Dharma and to the Sangha; but along with the development of the idea of Buddha, it made itself independent of the other two devotions. As there are various bodies of Buddha, so various types of the Nembutsu developed. Generally speaking, it has four kinds: (1) the meditation on Buddha as he manifests himself in the thirty-two major and eighty minor features, (2) the meditation on Buddha as the absolute truth itself, (3) the meditation on Buddha's images and pictures, and (4) the reciting of his Name.

Now many scholars regarded the Nembutsu of the *Meditation Sutra* as one or another of the three types of meditation, and it was Zendō who, from a careful study of the Pure Land scriptures, concluded it to be the vocal practice of reciting the Buddha's name. Hōnen Shōnin followed Zendō and founded a new sect in Japan under the banner of "For rebirth, the Nembutsu is essential."

Now Hōnen Shōnin exhorted this vocal utterance of the Nembutsu in all his sayings and writings. The typical one is the *Ichimai-kishōmon* ("One-Sheet Document"), which was given as his last message to Genchi, one of his disciples, "By Nembutsu I do not mean such practice of meditation 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 invoke the name of Amida, without doubting that this will issue in the rebirth of the believers in the Pure Land. Just this, and no other considerations are needed. Mention is often made of the three-fold mind and the four forms of exercise, but these are all included in the belief that a rebirth in the Pure Land is most conclusively assured by the *Namu-Amida-Butsu*. If one imagines something more than this, one will be excluded from the blessings of the Two Holy Ones, Amida and Śākya-

muni, and left out of the Original Vow. Those who believe in the Nembutsu, however learned he may be in all the teachings of Śākyamuni, shall behave like an ignoramus who knows nothing, or like a simple-hearted woman-devotee; avoid pedantry, and invoke the Buddha's name with singleness of heart."

The Nembutsu is indeed an easy practice; but is it effective in bringing realisation? In fact as to the efficacy of the oral Nembutsu, there was a difference of opinion among scholars of all ages. Many of them regarded it as no more than a means subsidiary to some other work with which it should be practised. But Hōnen Shōnin considered it more efficient than any other work, so that it has an independent value by itself. The reason is as follows. In the first place, the name itself is excellent, "because it contains in it all the virtues. All the merits of inner realisation of the Buddha, such as the four kinds of wisdom, the threefold body, the ten powers, the four forms of confidence, and all the merits of outward activities, such as features, light, sermons, and the benefitting of others—all these are wrapt up in the name of Amitābha Buddha. Therefore, the name has all-surpassing merits. Not so is it with the other works, which are limited to some one aspect; therefore, they are regarded as inferior." Secondly, the Nembutsu is excellent, because it is dependent upon Vow-power strong enough to break karma-power. In his letter sent to Shōnyobo he states; "...You should practise the Nembutsu with singleness of heart, taking firm hold upon the Original Vow, without harbouring one thought of doubt as to this, that when one invokes Namuamidabutsu even just for once, however sinful he may be, he is reborn in Amida's Land by the power of the Buddha's Vow...."

The Nembutsu is thus excellent and need not be assisted by any other work. Says Hōnen Shōnin, "No prescribed manners are required in the practice of the Nembutsu. No special attention is to be paid to your bodily position, nor

to your mental attitude, good or bad. The only thing that is needed is to let your heart be true." Again, "Set the Nembutsu on its own legs, as is given in the Original Vow. Do not seek assistance in any other work. 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."

Thus the Nembutsu exhorted by Hōnen Shōnin is an easy vocal practice and yet an excellent work. Therefore it is the thing just meant for those who are suffering from the painful inner conflict which they feel taking place between their earnest desire for emancipation on the one hand and their consciousness on the other hand of their utter inability to achieve the desired end by themselves. The Holy Path Buddhism is for the chosen few who are strong enough to discipline themselves according to various forms of self-mortification. But even those who claim themselves competent enough for such hard works, if they are awakened to their actual situation, must acknowledge their poor abilities and accept the Pure Land teaching. We are all weak, and unless we give ourselves up to something higher than ourselves we are unable to save ourselves. Here is the characteristic feature common to all the Pure Land teachings originating from Hōnen Shōnin.

Thus the teaching of Hōnen Shōnin may be summarised as the teaching of "Rebirth by the Nembutsu" and should be understood as meaning that the believer obtains his rebirth not by the merit of his Nembutsu practice but by the power of Amida's Vow as was experienced by Hōnen himself in his Nembutsu practice. He often warned his

followers not to become involved in doubt as to their rebirth by relying upon the inconceivable power of Amida's Vow and not to forget that the Nembutsu practice and the realisation of Amida's Vow-power are inseparable. Hōnen Shōnin said, "We sinful mortals have no such faith-power as to effect our desire by ourselves alone. Our rebirth is indeed due to the inconceivable power of Amida's Vow."

The real significance of the Nembutsu practice is thus to give up oneself to the power of the Buddha. When the believer invokes the Buddha's name, he is reminded of the Buddha and is made inseparable from the Buddha, and protected by the Buddha's power he is enabled to obtain rebirth. This is why the Nembutsu in which the substance of Buddhahood is comprised is regarded as superior to the other works, each of which represents only one aspect of the Buddha. Again this is why those who invoke the Buddha's name are considered to be related with the Buddha in three ways, "intimate," "near," and "helpful." All hinges on the Vow-power. Here is the fundamental principle of Hōnen Shōnin's doctrine.

4

Now the reader will admit that the teaching of Hōnen Shōnin outlined above is comparatively simple, containing nothing abstruse; but he will also recognise that it is too comprehensive; there are many points in it which are likely to become subjects of controversy. In fact, various problems arose even while Hōnen Shōnin was living, and after his death these problems came to be vehemently discussed among his followers.

Of these problems, the most current was the one concerning the length of time in which the Nembutsu is to be practised. Hōnen Shōnin declared, "The right definite cause for the rebirth is to invoke the Buddha's name." But "to invoke the Buddha's name" does not settle the question how many times of such invocation really make up the right

definite cause? Therefore, there arose the question: Is it necessary to invoke the Buddha's name throughout one's life, or is it enough to invoke it just for once?

Some maintained that, faith being important for our rebirth, the Nembutsu once invoked is enough; and that the invoking of the Buddha's name more than once belies the Original Vow of Amida. Others maintained that, work being important, the Nembutsu is to be practised during one's whole life; and that the Nembutsu practice is completed in one's hour of death, while the Nembutsu in ordinary times is the deed of necessary preparation.

Another problem no less current was the one concerning the way of dealing with the so-called good works. Since we are living in this world, we encounter various occasions to do good works so-called. Are they to be wholly given up as deeds of no value or to be encouraged as works for rebirth? Some maintained that we should devote ourselves to the Nembutsu practice, paying no attention to the nature of the work we accomplish, for this is in accordance with the Original Vow of Amida; while others maintained that we should do every work of good as well as the Nembutsu practice, for we differ in natural endowments and live in different circumstances, and the way of deliverance is not always the Nembutsu but sometimes is the so-called good works; for this is also in accordance with the Vow of Amida who vowed the rebirth by the practice of good works as well as by the Nembutsu practice.

Of these two kinds of controversy, the first came naturally out of logical inquiry into the idea of the right definite cause. In logic, however, everything is relative; merits are always attended by defects. In this controversy between adherents of the once-invoking theory and those of the many-times-invoking theory, they both may be right and both wrong. The former may be asked: Why should they not consider the Nembutsu which is repeated after the once invoking to be the right definite cause of rebirth? To ad-

herents of the latter theory, we say this: Why should they not consider the Nembutsu in ordinary times to be the right definite cause of rebirth? Logically reasoning, we have to inquire what is really meant by the right definite cause of rebirth, and also by the Nembutsu?

The second controversy is the natural result of regarding the Nembutsu as being on the same plane as with good works. In this case, the Nembutsu like other works is a deed of merit, by means of which the believer wishes to obtain rebirth. If the Nembutsu is practised in this way, when can the believer be assured of his rebirth? Can he ever find peace of mind? There will be no end of practising the Nembutsu and yet there will always be doubts as to his rebirth lingering in his mind. The same may be said of other works as the cause of rebirth. Is the Nembutsu thus ineffectual? Should the Nembutsu be regarded as a deed of merit?

The fault common to adherents of these respective views is that they try to measure what is really beyond logical measurement with their own intellect and do not know the Nembutsu, which is something beyond logic, and something on a higher plane, having no direct relation to any good work. In other words, they do not realise their own actual situation nor the boundless mercy of Amida's Vow.

This being the case, these controversies are never to be settled on the logical and common sense plane. The only way to settle them is to transcend logic and go back deep into the ground of our religious experience, out of which the Nembutsu comes up, and see into the original significance of the Nembutsu practice. This was the task imposed upon the disciples of Hōnen Shōnin, especially upon Shinran Shōnin.

5

While he was staying on Mt. Hiei for twenty years, Shinran Shōnin studied Buddhism in its various forms, but

his chief concern was to obtain purity and sincerity of the heart, which is the first step towards the realisation of the truth. Endeavours were made in various ways, but all were of no effect. "Even though I endeavour to attain a concentrated state of mind, the waves of mentation incessantly move. Even though I endeavour to meditate on the true aspect of mind, the clouds of false discrimination still hover about me."

This made him conscious that all his understanding and deeds were false and untruthful and that he had no merit whatever to be turned over towards enlightenment. "Evil in our nature can never be abolished. We are all in our hearts like vipers and reptiles. Our deeds meant for good are all called untruthful, as they are tainted with the poison of evil desire and falsehood."

Here he was obliged to face an abyss of karma, where the darkness of ignorance prevails. Indeed, everything is governed by karma, and "nothing in this world is in our power"; and all our acts, "even a sin, as insignificant as a particle of dust on the tip of a rabbit's or sheep's hair, is done owing to the karmic laws," by which we reap what we sow; and our karma goes beyond our present existence; it is given to us *a priori* before we are born and it is the result of an accumulation of all our past lives. The root of this karma is the evil passions, of which the nucleus is ignorance. We all transmigrate on account of our karma due to ignorance.

Thus he was cognisant of his own actual situation like Zendō who says, "I am a sinful mortal, suffering the pain of birth-and-death from time immemorial, wandering through the six paths of existence, and knowing nothing whatever as to the way to escape from transmigration." And yet he was an earnest aspirant for deliverance; "Human life is indeed difficult to obtain, and Buddhism is indeed difficult to receive, if I am not delivered in this present existence, when shall I be delivered from this transmigration".

The more one is destined to be in hell, the more one wishes to be in paradise. Furthermore, this life itself is impermanent, Shinran Shōnin thought: "If once my breathing fails me, I shall be gone for ever; why then should I be among the earthly-minded companions of this mundane world and exhaust my power in the pursuit of worthless study for the sake of mere fame?" He came down from Mt. Hiei and visited and prayed at various temples and shrines to be told of the way of deliverance and of a teacher who could teach it to him.

At this climax of his inner struggle, he obtained a revelation from the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara at the Rokkakudō,¹ and came to Hōnen Shōnin to be instructed in the Pure Land doctrine. "Hōnen Shōnin took special pains to explain to him in a most exhaustive way the essentials of the Pure Land teaching and their ultimate signification." As soon as this was done he came instantly to realise that "it was because I was such a karma-bound being, knowing no clue whatever as to the way to escape from transmigration, that Amida devised the easily practicable Nembutsu and vowed to receive me when I practised it." "The Original Vow of Amida issuing from his meditation for five kalpas is, when considered in its full content, all meant for me Shinran alone. Gracious indeed is Amida who has his Original Vow made just for the sake of my salvation and I have been ever so long on the ever-binding chain of karma."

Amida's true heart penetrated into him and Amida's will to save was realised by him in this experience of salvation. Amida and Shinran, they are not separate now though they are not one; they commune with each other. There is a union of the Buddha and Shinran. All his past struggles were, as he realised in this experience, no more than the

¹ This temple is in Kyoto, and called Chōjōji Temple. It has a hexagonal construction; hence the name Rokkakudō ("Hexagonal Temple"). It belongs to the Tendai Sect and enshrines a statue of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, which tradition ascribes to the work of Prince Shōtoku.

workings of Amida, whose Light illumines all the worlds in the ten quarters; and His salvation was brought out through this Light of Amida and his Name into which he compressed his merciful heart. He realised that all came from Amida's heart and all was received by him as such.

His trouble is gone; for he is now assured to be reborn in the Land of Purity, freeing himself from the bondage of transmigration. A new life has begun in him. He feels himself protected and his deeds praised by the unseen being and Buddhas. He shares now in the purity and sincerity of Amida's heart and all evil is turned into good. He is now embraced in Amida's Light and his heart is filled with blessed joy. He feels immensely indebted to Amida who has saved him and also to all the teachers who have taught this teaching to him and his wish now turns towards the exhortation of the Nembutsu in order to bring those beings into Amida's mercy who are still suffering in the sea of birth and death.

6

True to the spirit of the Pure Land doctrine, Shin Buddhism takes its stand upon the teaching of the Nembutsu-Rebirth. In the *Tannisho* in which Shinran Shōnin's sayings are recorded, we have, "As far as I, Shinran, am concerned, I have no other intention than believing in the good teacher's admonition that I should be saved by Amida through the invoking of the Buddha's name." The good teacher here referred to is Hōnen Shōnin, and to believe in Hōnen Shōnin's admonition is to believe in the Nembutsu-Rebirth, which is the significance of the Original Vow of Amida.

Now in Shin Buddhism this faith in the Nembutsu-Rebirth and the invoking of the Buddha's name are inseparable, and this inseparableness of the two constitutes the chief characteristic of the teaching of Shinran Shōnin. He says in one of his letters to a certain disciple of his, "...The

significance of Amida's Vow is where he vowed that he will receive those who invoke his name into his Land of Purity; therefore, it is very good for one to invoke the Buddha's name deeply believing in the Nembutsu-Rebirth. Even though one may have faith, it is not worth the while, unless he invoke the Buddha's name; while, on the other hand, even though one may invoke the Buddha's name with singleness of heart, he will not obtain rebirth, if he has no deep faith. This being the case, those who invoke the Buddha's name, deeply believing in the Nembutsu-Rebirth, do not fail to be reborn in the Land of Compensation...."

"To invoke the Buddha's name, deeply believing in the Nembutsu-Rebirth" signifies, in its ultimate sense, to thoroughly recognise that we are poor in our abilities and Amida is boundless in his mercy. Or rather we should say according to the believer's experience, as it is inevitable for him to recognise that he is poor in his abilities, and Amida is boundless in his mercy, so it becomes inevitable for him to invoke the Buddha's name, deeply believing in the Nembutsu-Rebirth. What makes it inevitable for him to do so? It is no other than the power of Amida's Original Vow, which is expressed as his Light and Name.

Nevertheless, as there are those who are not awakened to this fact, there is the teaching of the three Vows, three Sutras, three Beings, and three Rebirths. Now according to the general idea of Buddhism, the Buddha has various skilful means to lead all sentient beings to final salvation. Shin Buddhism maintains that this is well expressed in Amida's Vow and Śākyamuni's teaching. As there are those who wish to obtain rebirth by the merit of diverse works, Amida vowed in his Nineteenth Vow that their rebirth take place in the Land of Artificiality, and this Śākyamuni expounded in the *Meditation Sutra*. As there are those who wish to obtain rebirth by the merit of the Nembutsu practice, Amida vowed in his Twentieth Vow that they be reborn in the Land of Artificiality, and that was expounded by Śākya-

muni in the *Smaller Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*. All these are provisional establishments made out of the skilful means of the Buddha in order to lead those beings to the true way of salvation. The true way of salvation is vowed by Amida in the Eighteenth Vow and expounded by Śākyamuni in the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*. Those who are awakened to the mercy of Amida without harbouring one thought of doubt about it are instantly assured of their rebirth in the True Land of Immeasurable Light.

This true way of salvation comprises what is technically known as two kinds of *ekō* (*parināmanā*, "turning over") and four *hō* (*dharmā*, "category"). Shinran Shōnin says in his *Ken-jōdo-shinjitsu-kyō-gyō-shō-monrui*, his chief literary work, popularly known as the *Kyō-gyō-shin-shō*: "As I reverentially consider the true doctrine of the Pure Land, there are two kinds of *parināmanā*: the first is the going-out and the second is the coming-back; and in the going-out form of *parināmanā* we distinguish the real doctrine, work, faith, and attainment."

Now Mahayana Buddhism generally teaches to seek enlightenment by going through the stages of Bodhisattvahood, where one is expected to awaken the faith in the Buddha, to understand the truth of suchness, to practise the ten *pāramitās*, and to turn over his merits towards attaining enlightenment and towards helping others to do the same. But in Shin Buddhism we are made to realise how we are situated in this matter of enlightenment. We may seek enlightenment sincerely and earnestly but we find ourselves incapable of doing those works above-mentioned. Are we not defiled and impure in our hearts? Are we not false and untruthful in our deeds and understanding? Are we not lacking in merits which we wish to turn over to others? Are we not lacking in all these qualifications?

Shin Buddhism contends that this is why Amitābha Buddha, having contemplated for five eons in the sincere wish to save those beings, vowed the achievement of the

Buddha's name, in order that they might be reborn in his Land of Purity through the invoking of it; and this is why he effected it through the practice of austerities for endless eons, during which he performed all work always with a pure and truthful heart, and constantly with the idea of benefitting all sentient beings.

This being the case, the Buddha's name is the crystallisation of Amida's truthful will to save, and in it are wrapt up all the meritorious works of his disciplinary stage and all the merits of his Buddhahood. Therefore, the moment his truthful will to save penetrates into the heart of the believer in the form of the Buddha's name, all the virtues belonging to it are instantly transferred to him. He need not turn his faith and works over towards attaining enlightenment. All is given by the Buddha as a gift in the form of the Buddha's name.

This gift (*parināmanā*) is divided into two kinds: *ōsō* which means "going-out" and *gensō* which means "coming-back." By the former the believer is given by the Buddha all that is needed for attaining Buddhahood, and this is considered under four heads: *kyō* (doctrine), *gyō* (work?), *shin* (faith), and *shō* (attainment or realisation). In the coming-back form of *parināmanā* the believer is given the work of compassion: after his enlightenment in the Pure Land, he comes back to this world in order to save those beings who are still suffering here.

These two forms of *parināmanā* are called the *tarikī* *parināmanā*, because they come from Amida's Vow-power, and *tarikī* is another name for the Vow-power. This is one of the special phases of Shin Buddhism and its purport is that our attaining Buddhahood is wholly due to the inconceivable power of Amida's Vow.

Now in this scheme of doctrine, what is the Nembutsu? In the first place, it is the only true doctrine, which is the Buddha's name. It is the vow-object vowed by Amida in his Original Vow, and is the only true teaching expounded

by Śākyamuni in the *Larger Sukhāvātīyūha Sutra*. In the *Kyō-gyō-shin-shō*, we read, "Now to disclose the True Doctrine, this is no other than the *Larger Sukhāvātīyūha Sutra*. The general idea of this sutra is that in Amida the all-surpassing vows were made, the treasury of the Dharma was widely opened, and taking pity on beings ordinary and lowly, he bestowed the jewel of merit upon them; while Shaka coming on earth expounded at length the teachings of the way, and as he wished to save all sentient beings, he blessed them with real benefit. This being the case, the exposition of the Tathāgata's Original Vow is the pivot of the Sutra and the Buddha's name is its substance."

Again the Nembutsu is the only True Work and True Faith: faith is inseparable from work and work is inseparable from faith. The Buddha's name which is work, as the expression of the Buddha's will to save, makes it inevitable for the believer to believe in the Buddha and the believer's faith in the Buddha makes it inevitable for him to invoke the Buddha's name, which is work too. Faith is no other than the believer's realisation of the Buddha's will, and the Buddha's name, *Namu-Amidabutsu*, means "I will receive those who will invoke my Name." The instant this will to save penetrates into the heart of the believer, faith is awakened in him, and this is where salvation is experienced. technically known as "*jushōjōju*," attaining the stage where Buddhahood is definitely promised. This experience of salvation brings with it an exalted feeling and the invocation of the Buddha's name becomes the expression of gratitude towards Amida. This instantaneously attaining that stage, which is to take place in ordinary times, is the most significant phase of Shin Buddhism. It especially distinguishes Shin Buddhism from all other Pure Land doctrines.

Thus in Shin Buddhism, faith and work are not the required condition by which the believer is allowed to be reborn in the Pure Land, but they are the inevitable out-

bursts coming out of the boundless mercy of Amida's Vow. The believer is demanded neither to believe in Amida nor to invoke the Buddha's name, but when his religious experience comes to maturity, he is made spontaneously to believe in Him and to invoke the name. Here all kinds of "scheming" the believer may conceive are abandoned and his being is lost in Amida and all becomes spontaneous with him. May I not say that in this experience of the Shin devotee all the Buddhist experiences of all ages, which are expressed in such terms as "anātman," "sūnyatā," "tathatā" and so on, are found crystalised, although in Shin Buddhism these terms are not so frequently met with.

Now the Nembutsu is not the required work but the inevitable work which is beyond our scheming. Therefore it is called "the Irrational Nembutsu." It is not the work to be turned over by the believer towards the realisation of the highest truth. Therefore it is called "the Nembutsu not to be turned over." Again it is not the work practised by the believer in order to obtain some results. It is utterly purposeless. Therefore it is called "the Nembutsu not being a special deed of merit or goodness."

On the other hand, the Nembutsu is the Vow-power, which is not obstructed by any evil karma. Therefore, it is called "the Nembutsu Un-obstructed." It is called "the Right Wisdom to turn evil into virtue," because it drives away the darkness of ignorance. Again it is called "the True Law of Exquisite Communion, because through it the Buddha and the believer commune with each other.

7

In concluding this paper, let me quote two passages from the *Tannishō*, one showing the deep spiritual relation between Hōnen Shōnin and Shinran Shōnin and the other showing the all-importance of the Nembutsu.

(1) "Your intention of coming here after a long journey through more than ten different provinces even at

the risk of your lives, was simply to hear from me concerning the way of rebirth in the Pure Land. It would, however, be a great mistake on your part, if you assume my knowledge of some other ways of being reborn in the Pure Land than saying the Nembutsu, and also my knowledge of some secret religious texts, and envy me on that account. If you hold such a belief, it is best for you to go to Nara or to Mount Hiei, for there you will find many learned scholars of Buddhism, and learn from them as to the essential means of being reborn in the Pure Land. As far as I, Shinran, am concerned, I have no other intention than believing in the good teacher's admonition that I should be saved by Amida through the invoking of the Buddha's name. I am entirely ignorant as to whether the Nembutsu is really the cause of rebirth in the Pure Land, or whether it is the deed meant for hell. I should never regret even if I were to go to hell by being deceived by Hōnen Shōnin. The reason is that if I were so constituted as to become Buddha by performing some deeds of merit and went to hell by reciting the Nembutsu instead, then, I might regret that I was deceived. But I am the one who is incapable of observing any deed of merit, and for that reason, my ultimate abode is no other than hell itself. If the Original Vow of Amida were true, the teaching of Śākyamuni could not be untrue; if the teaching of Śākyamuni were true, the commentaries of Zendō could not be untrue; if the commentaries of Zendō were true, the teaching of Hōnen Shōnin could not be untrue; if the teaching of Hōnen Shōnin were true, how could it be possible for me, Shinran, to utter untruth? In short, such is my faith. Beyond this, you are at liberty as to whether you would believe in the Nembutsu or discard it altogether."

(2) "Whether things are good or bad, I know absolutely nothing about it. The reason is this. If I were able to penetrate into the goodness of things as completely as Amida knew it in his insight, I might be allowed to say

that I knew the goodness of things. If I were able to penetrate into the badness of things as completely as Amida knew it in his insight, I might be allowed to say that I knew the badness of things. But, with the ordinary mortals full of evil passions and in this world of impermanence and of pain and suffering which is like a house on fire, all is empty, there is nothing true. The Nembutsu alone is true."

SHIZUTOSHI SUGIHIRA.