

**Shinran's View of the Primal Vow:  
Jōdo Shinshū's Approach to  
Pure Land Faith**

Yukio Yamada

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# Shinran's View of the Primal Vow: Jōdo Shinshū's Approach to Pure Land Faith

by

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## Introduction

The topic I selected for this year's Ryukoku Lecture is "Shinran's View of the Primal Vow." In this lecture, I would like to examine with you Shinran's understanding of the Eighteenth Vow of Amida Buddha in the *Larger Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life* (*Dai Muryōjūkyō*, hereafter, the *Larger Sutra*). Shinran (1173–1262), the founder of the Jōdo Shinshū tradition, comes to realize through his unique understanding that "shinjin" (literally, faith-mind or entrusting mind) is the true cause for birth in the Pure Land and realization of buddhahood. I will particularly focus my discussion on Shinran's interpretation of the Eighteenth Vow in his major work *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way* (*Ken Jōdo shinjitsu kyō-gyōshō monrui*, hereafter *Kyōgyōshinshō*), especially the Chapter on Shinjin.

### 1. What has Amida Buddha Established in the Eighteenth Vow?

In the Jōdo Shinshū tradition, the Eighteenth Vow of Amida Buddha in the *Larger Sutra* is known as the Primal Vow (*hongan*). In the vow, Dharmākara Bodhisattva (Hōzō Bosatsu) vowed to establish the fundamental cause for all sentient beings to be able to attain birth in the Pure Land. Shinran cites the passage of the vow in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Chapter on Shinjin, as follows:

If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma.<sup>1</sup>

In the Eighteenth Vow, Dharmākara Bodhisattva aspired for the emancipation of all sentient beings through receiving the Name (*myōgō*) of Amida, or “Namu-Amidabutsu,” which is praised by all Buddhas in the ten quarters as vowed in his Seventeenth Vow.<sup>2</sup>

What is the significance of sentient beings’ receiving Amida Buddha’s Name? It obviously does not mean that we are playing catch with Amida Buddha using the Name “Namu-Amidabutsu.” In order to understand the significance of Amida’s Name, Shinran turns to the passage of the fulfillment of the Primal Vow (*hongan jōju mon*) in the *Larger Sutra*. In the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran cites the passage as follows:

All sentient beings, as they hear the Name, realize even one thought-moment of shinjin and joy, which is directed to them from Amida's sincere mind, and aspiring to be born in that land, they then attain birth and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma.<sup>3</sup>

Shinran points out that the passage of fulfillment of the Primal Vow is crucial because the accomplishment of Amida Buddha's vow is confirmed through the words of Śākyamuni Buddha to Ānanda: "All sentient beings, as they hear the Name [myōgō], realize even one thought-moment of shinjin and joy, ...."

Shinran discovered the significance of this passage of the fulfillment of the Eighteenth Vow, because it explains how Dharmākara Bodhisattva realized the Vow when he attained buddhahood. Shinran also identifies the Name of Amida Buddha as the referent in the phrase "hearing the Name," which appears in the passage on the fulfillment of the Seventeenth Vow, wherein all Buddhas praise the Name.

What is the meaning of "hearing" that Name then? In the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran answers this question by saying that hearing the Name means "sentient beings, having heard how the Vow arose—its origin and fulfillment—are altogether free of doubt."<sup>4</sup> "Hearing," in this context, does not mean that you are hearing someone sitting next to you saying, "Namu-Amidabutsu." Shinran explains that when we understand the origin and fulfillment of the virtue of Amida Buddha's Name and become free of doubt, we can confidently say, "I have heard the Name!"

In the *Larger Sutra*, the Name was established by Dharmākara Bodhisattva and confirmed by Śākyamuni. In the *Kyōgyōshinshō*,



Shinran explains how to hear the Name. One remaining question is what will happen to us when we hear the Name? According to Shinran, it has already been revealed in the passage of the Eighteenth Vow. When people truly hear the Name, they become awakened to the “threefold mind” (*sanshin*) and recite the Name “even ten times” (*naishi jūnen*). When the Name has reached us, it is called realization of “shinjin.” When the Name comes out of our mouths that is called “recitations of the Name” (*shōmyō*).<sup>5</sup>

There is one thing we have to be very careful of when we discuss Shinran’s view of shinjin and recitation of the Name. Shinran teaches us that it is not “I/myself” (*ware*) who believes in the shinjin or recitations of the Name. It is not “I” who induces “myself” to recite the Name. Japanese Shin followers often call shinjin “*go-shinjin*.” The character *go* is an honorific prefix. But we do not usually add an honorific character to the things created by ourselves. For example, you usually do not say, “This wonderful dress (*o-kimono*) made gracefully (*o-tsukuri ni natta*) by myself.” However, for Shin followers, it is not strange to talk about “shinjin” as *go-shinjin* with an honorific prefix, because we understand that shinjin is not a substance we made by ourselves. Almost all religious traditions talk about faith. However, I believe, calling faith with an honorific prefix is, perhaps, unique to Shin followers.

If Shinshū’s shinjin is not created by ourselves, then our recitations of the Name of Amida Buddha are not originated by ourselves, either. Therefore, Shin followers often say “*o-nembutsu* (wonderful recitation of the Name of the Buddha).” “*O*” of “*o-nembutsu*” is also an honorific word. If we think our recitations of the Name are originated in ourselves, we do not add an honorific word to our own actions. In Japanese, it sounds strange to say, “This is gracefully made by myself” (*watashi ga o-tsukuri ni narimashita*), or “I wonderfully walk” (*watashi ga o-aruki ni narimashita*). However, for Shin followers, it is natural to say “*o-*

nembutsu" because we understand that we do not recite the Name of the Buddha by ourselves. Shinran teaches us that we do not induce ourselves to recite the Name of Amida Buddha by our self-power.

When the Name has reached the minds of sentient beings, that is called realization of "shinjin." The Name becomes "recitations of the Name" at the moment it manifests itself as its recitations through our voices. In other words, shinjin and recitations of the Name are different terms for the same wonderful Name (*o-myōgō*). This is, ultimately, an autonomous working of the wonderful Name of Amida Buddha.

## 2. Shinjin or Nembutsu: Which One is the Most Essential?

In the Primal Vow (the Eighteenth Vow), Amida has established "shinjin" (sincere mind, entrusting, and aspiration for birth in the Pure land [threefold mind (*sanshin*)]) and "nembutsu" (saying the Name even ten times [*naishi jūnen*]). Therefore, Shinran understands that sentient beings' birth in the Pure Land is attainable solely through recitations of Amida's Name, because Amida established "shinjin" as the fundamental cause for birth in the Pure Land. Some of you may, however, become a little bit confused about the relationship between shinjin and nembutsu. Shinjin or nembutsu, which one is the most essential? Nembutsu is the true practice for birth in the Pure Land. But if you say "shinjin" is the decisive cause for birth, what is the significance of the nembutsu practice? This may be one of the most important questions for practitioners of the Jōdo Shinshū path. Both "nembutsu" and "shinjin" are revealed in Amida's Primal Vow. But which one is the most essential?

Shinran provides us a clue to answer this question in the beginning of the Chapters on Practice and Shinjin. In the Chapter

on Practice, Shinran says, “The great practice is to say the Name of the Tathāgata of unhindered light” (Mugekō Nyorai=Amida Buddha).<sup>6</sup> In this passage, Shinran defines the great practice (*daigyō*) as saying the Name of Amida Buddha. The great practice is, therefore, Amida’s Name (*myōgō*), which reveals Amida through the recitations of sentient beings. Here, Shinran defines Amida Buddha’s Name as the great practice (*daigyō*) of the Buddha. In the opening passages of the Chapter on Shinjin, however, Shinran simply introduces the virtues of shinjin without specifying what the essence (*tai*) of great shinjin (*daishin*) is.<sup>7</sup> This means that, in Shinshū’s shinjin, practitioners do not create the essence of shinjin by themselves.

Sometimes I encounter Shin followers who maintain that “I absolutely believe in what is written in the sutra,” or, “I absolutely believe in what Shinran says.” I am afraid that they might have misunderstood Shinran’s view of shinjin, if their absolute belief were depending on their own minds of believing. Shinshū’s shinjin does not depend on a certain essence (*tai*), such as “I,” or “oneself.” In the Eighteenth Vow, what is to be received by practitioners as “shinjin” does not include any essence of the practitioners’ own minds nor does it depend on their own efforts.

Another clue is found in the opening passage of the Chapter on Shinjin, too. In the first section, Shinran lists five names identifying the Eighteenth Vow, after he introduces the twelve virtues of shinjin. The five names are:

1. The Vow of birth through the nembutsu (*nembutsu ōjō no gan*)
2. The selected Primal Vow (*senjaku hongan*)
3. The Vow of the threefold mind of the Primal Vow (*hongan sanshin no gan*)
4. The Vow of sincere mind and entrusting (*shishin shingyō no gan*)

5. The Vow of shinjin, which is Amida's directing of virtue for our going forth (*ōsō shinjin no gan*)

The first and second names are also used by his master Hōnen (1133–1212). As for the first name, according to Hōnen, the Chinese Pure Land master Shan-tao (613–681) is the first to call it the Vow of birth through the nembutsu (*nembutsu ōjō no gan*).<sup>8</sup> The third, fourth, and fifth names are introduced by Shinran.

Scholars agree that Shinran did not list these names in an arbitrary manner. In particular, the order of names 3, 4, and 5 is very important. The “threefold mind” (*sanshin*) in the third name, “the threefold mind of the Primal Vow” (*hongan sanshin no gan*), means sincere mind (*shishin*), entrusting (*shingyō*), and aspiration for birth (*yokushō*). The fourth name indicates sincere mind (*shishin*) and entrusting (*shingyō*). Although the mind of aspiration for birth (*yokushō*) does not appear in the fourth name, traditionally most Shin scholars agree that the mind of aspiration for birth is implied within the mind of entrusting. As for the fifth name, “the Vow of shinjin, which is Amida's directing of virtue for our going forth” (*ōsō shinjin no gan*), only the mind of “entrusting” of the threefold mind is mentioned.

Why can “shinjin” be identified with the mind of entrusting (*shingyō*) in the fifth name? In order to understand this, we need to read Shinran's interpretation of the threefold mind (*sanshin shaku*) in the Chapter on Shinjin of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*.<sup>9</sup> In this section, Shinran explains the threefold mind in two different ways. One is called the interpretation of the meanings of the characters (*jikun shaku*). The other is called the interpretation of the doctrinal significance (*hōgi shaku*). First, Shinran explains the literal meanings (*jikun*) of each of the characters of the threefold mind. Then, he explains the doctrinal significance (*hōgi*) of each of the three minds.

In the interpretation of the threefold mind, however, the word “shinjin” appears only in the section on the interpretation of “entrusting” (*shingyō shaku*). Shinran does not use the word shinjin in the sections on the interpretation of “sincere mind” (*shishin shaku*) and the interpretation of “aspiration for birth” (*yokushō shaku*). Only in the section on the interpretation of “entrusting” (*shingyō shaku*) does he use the word shinjin.<sup>10</sup>

As I mentioned above, Shinran does not list the names of the Eighteenth Vow in an arbitrary manner. In particular, the order of names 3, 4, and 5 is very important. Shinran lists the names in order to clarify the significance of the mind of entrusting (*shingyō*) within the threefold mind:

The threefold mind of the Primal Vow (*hongan sanshin*):

3 minds

Sincere mind and entrusting (*shishin shingyō*): 2 minds

Shinjin, which is Amida’s directing of virtue for our going forth (*ōsō shinjin*): single mind=*shingyō*

By listing the names in this order, Shinran demonstrates that, although there are the three minds of sincere mind (*shishin*), entrusting (*shingyō*), and aspiration for birth (*yokushō*) in the passage of the Primal Vow, shinjin, or entrusting mind (*shingyō*) is singularly the most essential.

Now we can all agree that Shinran identifies “shinjin” with the mind of “entrusting” (*shingyō*). Then, how does he understand the relationship between the mind of “entrusting” and the other two minds in the Eighteenth Vow? This is one of the most important issues discussed in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. In the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, there are two sections written in the form of question and answer by Shinran himself.<sup>11</sup> The first section is found in the Chapter on Shinjin. In that section, Shinran raises the question “Why does Bodhisattva Vasubandhu (Tenjin Bosatsu,

ca. 4th–5th century C.E.) call the threefold mind of sincere mind (*shishin*), entrusting (*shingyō*), and aspiration for birth (*yokushō*) the single-mind / mind that is single (*isshin*)?"

Why does Vasubandhu say *shinjin* is singularly most essential? Shinran answers that Vasubandhu uses the word single-mind (*isshin*) "in order to make the matter easily comprehensible for ignorant and foolish sentient beings. Although Amida Tathāgata discloses three minds, the true cause of attaining nirvana is *shinjin* alone; it appears to be for this reason that Vasubandhu takes the three together as one."<sup>12</sup>

The other question and answer section is in the Chapter on the Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands.<sup>13</sup> In that section, Shinran raises the question as to whether the Three Pure Land Sutras expound the same teaching or different teachings. If the teachings of the three sutras are the same, shouldn't one sutra be enough for us? Why does the Buddha expound these three different Pure Land sutras?<sup>14</sup> In this section, Shinran concludes that the most fundamental teachings expounded in these three Sutras are the same teaching. The teaching is that all sentient beings can attain birth in the Pure Land through realization of *shinjin*, which is singularly most essential.<sup>15</sup> He says, "I find that they all teach the true, diamondlike mind to be what is most essential. The true mind is great *shinjin*."<sup>16</sup>

In these two sections, Shinran raises two different questions: 1. Whether the "three minds" and the "single mind" are the same or different; 2. Whether the teachings of the Three Pure Land Sutras are the same or different. Shinran's true intention behind these questions is to emphasize the issue of *shinjin* that is singularly most essential. These question and answer sections appear in the Chapter on *Shinjin* and the Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands, which are wide apart from each other in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. However, the issue discussed in the sections is the same: *shinjin* that is singularly most essential.

Rennyō (1415–1499), the eighth abbot of the Hongwanji, made great efforts to address the issue of the significance of shinjin in Shinran’s teaching. After having tattered five copies of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, he summarizes that the most significant point in Shinran’s teaching is shinjin. In a letter addressed to followers, he says,

What is taught by master [Shinran] and in his school is that faith [Shinjin] is fundamental.<sup>17</sup>

Shinran introduces his interpretation of the threefold mind of the Eighteenth Vow in the Chapter on Shinjin, in which he explains why shinjin is the most essential.<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned above, Shinran provides five different names for the Eighteenth Vow in the beginning of the Chapter on Shinjin. Among the five names, the fourth name, “the Vow of sincere mind and entrusting” (*shishin shingyō no gan*), is considered to be the most significant in Shinran’s understanding of the Eighteenth Vow, because he also uses this name in the opening caption of the Chapter on Shinjin with an additional note identifying that the vow is for the “Person in the Stage of the Truly Settled” (*shōjōju no ki*).<sup>19</sup> Shinran uses this name in the *Hymn of True Shinjin and the Nembutsu* (Shōshinge) to represent the Eighteenth Vow by saying, “the Vow of entrusting with sincere mind is the cause of birth.”<sup>20</sup>

### 3. What is the Significance of the Recitation of the Name Selected in the Primal Vow?

As discussed above, Shinran understands that shinjin is the most essential cause for sentient beings’ birth in the Pure Land.

Then what is the significance of the recitation of the Name of Amida Buddha? Shinran's master Hōnen primarily called the Eighteenth Vow "the Vow of Birth through the Nembutsu" (*nembutsu ōjō no gan*). According to Hōnen, it refers to this name, "the Vow of Birth through the Nembutsu," as coined by Shan-tao. The Eighteenth Vow was more commonly called "the Vow of birth through ten nembutsu (*jūnen ōjō no gan*)" by many Buddhist masters. Shan-tao, however, called it "the Vow of Birth through the Nembutsu" instead.<sup>21</sup>

Hōnen explains that the Vow of Birth through the Nembutsu is superior, because it does not limit the number of recitations of the Name to ten times. He also emphasizes that lifelong nembutsu practice will lead us to birth in the Pure Land. He also recognizes that every single recitation of the Name is equally virtuous for our birth in the Pure Land, because the number of recitations of Amida's Name is not a decisive factor for birth.

Why should the number of recitations of Amida's name not be a decisive factor? In order to understand this, we need to pay special attention to the word "perhaps" (*naishi*), which modifies the words "ten nembutsu" (*jūnen*) in the Eighteenth Vow, in the passage of the vow.

Shinran has the following four interpretations for the word "perhaps" (*naishi*).

- (1) Identifying "perhaps" as "down to" (*naige gasshaku*: Chapter on Practice): "perhaps" (*naishi*) and "down to" (*geshi*) imply the same meaning.<sup>22</sup>
- (2) Embracing once and many (*itta hōyō*: Chapter on Practice): whether once or many, the number is irrelevant.<sup>23</sup>
- (3) Including many and few (*sōshō tashō*: Chapter on Shinjin): includes both many and few within it.<sup>24</sup>



(4) Omitting the number in between (*kenryō ryakuchū*: *Passages on the Pure Land Way [Jōdomonruijushō]*): indicates the two numbers to abbreviate the middle.<sup>25</sup>

Shinran understands this word “perhaps” (*naishi*) in the Eighteenth Vow as “just/ simply” (*tada*). In *Tannishō*, Shinran says, “Just (*tada*) say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida.”<sup>26</sup> “Just” means to practice “just” nembutsu. Whether a single recitation or lifelong nembutsu, the nembutsu is the practice for birth in the Pure Land. Hence, it is birth through the nembutsu. Each one of our recitations is, therefore, the manifestation of the entire virtue of the Name which has reached us and comes out as “Namu-Amidabutsu” through our mouths.

In the Chapter on the Primal Vow, of the *Senchakushū*, Hōnen further explains why Dharmākara Bodhisattva has chosen the recitation of the Name as the practice for birth in the Pure Land. Hōnen cites passages of the *Larger Sutra* to demonstrate how the selection of the nembutsu practice was made.<sup>27</sup> In the sutra, Dharmākara Bodhisattva asked Tathāgata Lokeśvararāja, “I have an aspiration to practice virtuous deeds for myself and for the sake of sentient beings in the ten directions. Please teach me how to fulfill my aspiration.” Lokeśvararāja answered him, “You yourself should know.”

Dharmākara Bodhisattva was asked to think by himself. Dharmākara Bodhisattva, however, asked Tathāgata Lokeśvararāja again, “Master Buddha, that is beyond my comprehension, so please give me your instruction.” Then Tathāgata Lokeśvararāja presented him two hundred and ten koṭis of Buddha’s pure lands and the practices as to how to attain birth in those pure lands. After examining all the Buddhas’ pure lands and learning how to practice attaining birth in each one of them, Dharmākara Bodhisattva realized that ordinary sentient beings of karmic evil who are caught in birth-and-death cannot attain

birth in any of these pure lands immediately, as they are. Then, after five kalpas of contemplation, Dharmākara Bodhisattva chose the single practice of nembutsu in the Eighteenth Vow as the practice for birth in his Pure Land.<sup>28</sup>

The next question is why is the recitation of the Name superior to the other methods of practice? Hōnen continues his discussion on this issue in the same chapter of the *Senjakushū*. First, he humbly says, “the Buddha’s holy intention is difficult to fathom”<sup>29</sup> by our ordinary minds. Although Hōnen admits that it is not easy to understand, he tries to explain why nembutsu practice is superior by using the following two criteria. One is Superior vs. Inferior (*shō-retsū*), and the other is Difficult vs. Easy (*nan-i*).<sup>30</sup>

Hōnen determines that the superiority of the recitation of the Name is rooted in the essence of Amida’s Name into which “flow all of Amida’s uncountable virtues.”<sup>31</sup> Hōnen emphasizes that the entire virtue of the Tathāgata is completely contained in the Name, *Namu-Amidabutsu*. He says that this may be likened to a house. The six characters of *Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu* represent the entire house. The other practices may represent the separate parts of the house, such as pillars, beams, rafters, etc.<sup>32</sup> We tend to think something is superior because it is more difficult to accomplish and the other is inferior because it is easier to accomplish. However, Hōnen explains that that is not the case of our birth in the Pure Land. He understands that a practice is inferior if it is difficult to accomplish. Nembutsu practice is superior because it is easy. Based on these criteria, Hōnen recommends that we discard (*sensha*), or cast away, practices which are difficult and inferior, and he selects to take up (*senshu*) the practice of nembutsu which is easy and superior.

Shinran, who follows the path Hōnen had selected, accepts his master’s teaching that the recitation of the Name is easy and superior. The “recitation of the Name” (*shōmyō*) is superior

because it is easy to say the Name (*myōgō*), which embodies all of Amida's virtue. In the Other Power nembutsu, sentient beings do not add any calculations of their own. Sentient beings are able to receive the entire virtue of Amida's Name by giving up their own self-centered calculation (*kiju musa*). In the Chapter on Shinjin of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran clarifies that the recitation of Amida's Name is easy because it is free from human calculation. He explains why sentient beings are able to receive the Name without their own calculation.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. Uniqueness of Shinran's Understanding of the Pure Land Teaching

As we have examined above, Shinran accepts the teaching of Shan-tao and Hōnen that sentient beings can be saved solely by the nembutsu. It is clear that Shinran further develops his masters' teaching by clarifying that shinjin is the true cause for sentient beings' birth in the Pure Land. Some of you may raise the question that Shinran's emphasis on the significance of "shinjin" as the true cause for birth may be a sign of his departure from his master Hōnen's Pure Land teaching focusing solely on the practice of recitations of nembutsu. Shinran, however, never considers that he himself is establishing a new school of Pure Land teaching.

For example, Shinran, in a Japanese hymn (*wasan*), clearly identifies that Hōnen is the master who revealed to him the teaching of Jōdo Shinshū.

Our teacher Genkū appeared  
Through the power of the Light of Wisdom,  
And revealing the true Pure Land way [Jōdo Shinshū],  
He taught the selected Primal Vow.<sup>34</sup>

Also in the second chapter of *A Record in Lament of Divergences* (*Tannishō*), Shinran says,

Each of you has come to see me, crossing the borders of more than ten provinces at the risk of your life, solely with the intent of asking about the path to birth in the land of bliss. But if you imagine in me some special knowledge of a path to birth other than the nembutsu or of scriptural writings that teach it, you are greatly mistaken. ...

As for me, I simply accept and entrust myself to what my revered teacher told me, "Just say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida"; nothing else is involved.

I have no idea whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for my being born in the Pure Land or whether it is the karmic act for which I must fall into hell. Should I have been deceived by Master Hōnen and, saying the nembutsu, were to fall into hell, even then I would have no regrets.<sup>35</sup>

In the *Tannishō*, Shinran calls Hōnen "my revered teacher." He even says, "Should I have been deceived by Master Hōnen and, saying the nembutsu, were to fall into hell, even then I would have no regrets."<sup>36</sup>

As Shinran maintains, we also agree that his understanding of the Pure Land teaching is the same as Hōnen's. It is, however, also true that there is a significant difference between Shinran's and Hōnen's approaches to the same Pure Land teaching. Hōnen's emphasis on "birth through the nembutsu (*nembutsu ōjō*)" is formulated within the framework of traditional Buddhist teaching; the teaching, practice, and realization (*kyō-gyō-shō*), or the three Dharma gates system (*sanbōmon*). According to the traditional formula of Buddhism, first, there is the teaching of the Buddha (*kyō*). Then, Buddhist practitioners are to practice (*gyō*) in accordance with the teaching. Through the practice, they are

able to reach the realization of enlightenment (*shō*). This is the traditional three Dharma gates system of Buddhism.

Shinran also follows the formula of this three Dharma gates system; he adopts it in the full title of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, which reads *A Collection of Passages Revealing the True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way* (*Ken Jōdo shinjitsu kyō gyō shō monrui*). However, in the opening passage of the Chapter on Teaching, Shinran says,

Reverently contemplating the true essence of the Pure Land way, I see that Amida's directing of virtue to sentient beings has two aspects: the aspect for our going forth to the Pure Land and the aspect for our return to this world. In the aspect for going forth, there is the true teaching, practice, shinjin, and realization. (*kyō gyō shin shō*).<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, we can say that Shinran, in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, has developed the unique formula of a four Dharma gates system (*shihōmon*).

The *Kyōgyōshinshō* has another feature that makes unique. It has three introductions (or two prefaces and one postscript). In the opening, there is an independent section called general preface (*sōjo*).<sup>38</sup> At the beginning of the Chapter on Shinjin, there is also a separate preface (*betsujo*).<sup>39</sup> At the end of the text, there is a postscript called *gojo* which literally means a "introduction at the end" (or "postscript") in Japanese.<sup>40</sup>

In the passages of the general introduction, Shinran says,

Ah, hard to encounter, even in many lifetimes, is the decisive cause of birth, Amida's universal Vow! Hard to realize, even in myriads of kalpas, is pure shinjin that is true and real! If you should come to realize this practice

and shinjin, rejoice at the conditions from the distant past that have brought it about.<sup>41</sup>

In the postscript (*gojo*), he inserts a record of his exile, saying,

The emperor and his ministers, acting against the dharma and violating human rectitude, became enraged and embittered. As a result, master Genkū—the eminent founder who had enabled the true essence of the Pure Land way to spread vigorously [in Japan]—and a number of his followers, without receiving any deliberation of their [alleged] crimes, were summarily sentenced to death ....<sup>42</sup>

As for the preface to the Chapter on Shinjin, traditionally scholars agree that Shinran added a preface to this chapter because it is the most significant chapter in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. It discusses the issues of our settlement of mind (*anjin*), or Shinran's understanding of the concept that, for birth in the Pure Land, shinjin is singularly most essential.

Hōnen promotes the teaching of birth through the nembutsu (*nembutsu ōjō*) in which nembutsu practice and realization of birth in the Pure Land are directly connected (*gyō shō jikishō*). Receiving the teaching of Hōnen, Shinran further develops a unique system of the Pure Land teaching in which awakening of shinjin and realization of birth in the Pure Land are directly connected (*shin shō jikishō*). Shinran's teaching of shinjin as the true cause for birth in the Pure Land, in a sense, extends Hōnen's understanding of Pure Land "practice" into "practice and shinjin," or "great practice" (*daigyō*) and "great shinjin" (*daishin*) of Amida Buddha's Other Power. In this extended understanding of nembutsu practice, or Amida's great practice, Shinran identifies the practice with Amida's Name (*myōgō*) rather than sen-

tient beings' recitations of the Name (*shōmyō*). Moreover, from the perspective of Amida's great shinjin (*daishin*), Shinran identifies shinjin with the threefold mind (*sanshin*) of the Eighteenth Vow.

In the Chapter on Practice, as mentioned above, Shinran defines great practice as follows: "The great practice (*daigyō*) is to say the Name of the Tathāgata of unhindered light." Here, he clearly identifies the practice with the Name (*myōgō*). Sentient beings' realization of shinjin is the most essential. Following the practice of recitations of the Name, or Namu-Amidabutsu, is Amida Buddha's working reaching us sentient beings as the Name, and appearing as acts of recitations of the Name (*shōmyō*) through our mouths.

Conclusion: At the Moment Shinjin is Settled,  
the Birth of a Sentient Being is Settled

The final question to be discussed in this lecture is "Why does shinjin become the true cause (*shōin*) for birth?" The traditional explanation is that it is because the virtues of wisdom and compassion are embraced within the mind of entrusting (*shingyō*). In order to understand this meaning, however, we have to understand the significance of the interpretation of the threefold mind (*sanshin shaku*).

The *Larger Sutra*: sincere mind (*shishin*), entrusting (*shingyō*), and aspiration for birth (*yokushō*)

The *Contemplation Sutra*: sincere mind (*shijōshin*), deep mind (*jinshin*), and mind of aspiration for birth and directing of virtues (*ekō hotsugan shin*)

Traditionally, the sincere mind (*shishin*), entrusting (*shingyō*), and aspiration for birth (*yokushō*) in the passage of the Eighteenth Vow are called the threefold mind of the Primal Vow (*hongan no sanshin*). Although the threefold mind of the Primal Vow includes only one occurrence of the word "mind" (*shin* 心), it is identified as threefold by relating each aspect with each of the three minds (*sanjin*) revealed in the *Contemplation Sutra*.<sup>43</sup>

In the passage on the interpretation of the threefold mind (*sanshin shaku*), Shan-tao's analysis of the two aspects (*sō*) of deep mind / faith (*nishu jinshin*) is fundamental to Jōdo Shinshū's shinjin. Shinran cites this passage in the Chapter on Shinjin.

One is to believe deeply and decidedly that you are a foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death, ever sinking and ever wandering in transmigration from innumerable kalpas in the past, with never a condition that would lead to emancipation. The second is to believe deeply and decidedly that Amida Buddha's Forty-eight Vows grasp sentient beings, and that allowing yourself to be carried by the power of the Vow without any doubt or apprehension, you will attain birth.<sup>44</sup>

The two aspects of deep mind (*jinshin*) are Shan-tao's interpretation of the deep mind of the *Contemplation Sutra*. Shan-tao says, "Deep mind is the deeply entrusting mind."<sup>45</sup> He analyzes the deep mind (*jinshin*) in the *Contemplation Sutra* based on his understanding of entrusting (*shingyō*) of the *Larger Sutra*. Shan-tao understands that entrusting (*shingyō*) in the *Larger Sutra* and deep mind (*jinshin*) in the *Contemplation Sutra* are one and the same.

Interpreting the sincere mind (*shijōshin*) of the *Contemplation Sutra*, Shan-tao also says, "The first is sincere (*shijō*) mind. *Shi* means truth (*shin*) and *jō* means real (*jitsu*)."<sup>46</sup>



Entrusting (*shingyō*)

–sincere mind (*shishin*)–true and real mind (*shinjitsu shin*)

–wisdom–practice

–aspiration for birth (*yokushō*)

–Buddha’s aspiration for sentient beings to attain birth

–compassion–vow

Within entrusting (*shingyō*), the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha are both embodied. That is why we can say that the realization of shinjin means to hear the calling of the Buddha saying, “I do not need your vows or practices, just come right away as you are.” This is because, as the virtues of shinjin, both vows and practices are embodied within it. Therefore, we can say that, as the cause of birth in the Pure Land, shinjin is singularly most essential (*shinjin hitotsu*).<sup>47</sup>

As I have discussed above, in the passage of the fulfillment of the Eighteenth Vow, Shinran discovered that Śākyamuni taught us that shinjin is the cause for birth. In the passage of the fulfillment of the Primal vow (*honganjōjumon*) Śākyamuni says,

All sentient beings, as they hear the Name, realize even one thought-moment of shinjin and joy, which is directed to them from Amida’s sincere mind, and aspiring to be born in that land, they attain birth and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.<sup>48</sup>

On hearing the Name, shinjin and joy arise (*shinjin kangī*). This also implies that Shinshū’s shinjin always comes with joy.

In the Vow of the cause (*ingan*) for birth, Dharmākara Bodhisattva says, “saying my Name perhaps even ten times (*naishi jūnen*).”

... the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment.<sup>49</sup>

In the passage of the fulfillment (*jōjumon*), however, there is no direct mention about recitations of the Name (*shōmyō*).

This implies that recitations of the Name (*shōmyō*) is not the true cause (*shōin*) for birth. Shinran realized that *shinjin* is singularly most essential (*shinjin hitotsu*) through the passage of fulfillment (*jōjumon*). In the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran collected passages from the scriptures to clarify this point. Shinran says, "For birth, *shinjin* is singularly most essential (*shinjin hitotsu*)." This is the most crucial point to understand in Shinran's teaching of Jōdo Shinshū.<sup>50</sup>

Hōnen taught us that there is no difference between the virtue of a single recitation of nembutsu and lifelong practice of nembutsu. Shinran, in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, further explains to us why a single recitation of nembutsu and lifelong practice of nembutsu are equally virtuous. He points out that both nembutsu practices are equally virtuous because of the wonderful Name (*omyōgō*). Your recitations of the Name are virtuous neither because of the amount of effort you put in, nor your mental calculation to recite nembutsu. The recitations of the Name are virtuous because of the virtue of the wonderful Name (*omyōgō*) itself.

The wonderful Name first reaches the minds (*kokoro*) of sentient beings. When it has reached the mind, that is called "shinjin." At the "single thought moment" (*ichinen*) that it reaches our minds, a sentient being's birth in the Pure Land is settled. Therefore, Shinran does not say that the birth of a sentient being is settled at the time the Name appears on his/her mouth. At the

moment shinjin is settled, the birth of a sentient being is settled. What is the most important teaching of Shinran? That can be summarized into the phrase “Shinjin is the true cause (*shinjin shōin*).”

Translated by Eisho Nasu

NOTES

1. *The Collected Works of Shinran* (hereafter, *CWS*) (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), p. 80.
2. Shinran cites the Seventeenth Vow in the Chapter on Practice in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* as follows:  
If, when I attain Buddhahood, the countless Buddhas throughout the worlds in the ten quarters do not all praise and say my Name, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. (*CWS*, p. 13)
3. *CWS*, p. 80. For Shinran's unique reading of the passage, see *CWS*, vol. 2, pp. 258–9.
4. *CWS*, p. 112.
5. Therefore, traditionally, "shinjin" (faith-mind) and "recitations of the Name" (*shōmyō*)" are explained as the objects of the Eighteenth Vow.
6. *CWS*, p. 13. Traditionally, this sentence is called the passage revealing the essence/substance (*shuttai jaku*).
7. See *CWS*, p. 79. The Chapter on Shinjin begins with the passage "Great shinjin is ...." What follows this passage is a list of the twelve virtues of "great shinjin" (*daishin*).
  1. The superlative means for attaining longevity and deathlessness.
  2. The wondrous way to awaken aspiration for the pure and rejection of the defiled.
  3. The straightforward mind directed to us through the selected Vow.
  4. Shinjin (*shingyō*) that actualizes Amida's profound and vast benefiting of others.
  5. True mind that is diamondlike and indestructible.
  6. Pure shinjin by which a person easily reaches the Pure Land where no one goes.
  7. The mind that is single, realized by the person who is grasped and protected by the compassionate light.
  8. Great shinjin, rare and unsurpassed.
  9. The quick path difficult for people to accept.
  10. The true cause of attaining great nirvana.
  11. The white path by which all virtues are fulfilled instantly.
  12. The ocean of shinjin that is itself suchness or true reality.

We also need to know that “great shinjin” (*daishin*) does not mean “big/large.” When we talk about “great practice” (*daigyō*) or “great shinjin” (*daishin*), the character “great” (*dai*) implies that it is “auspicious.”

8. See *Hōnen’s Senchakushū* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), p. 81.

9. *CWS*, pp. 93–114.

10. *CWS*, p. 98.

11. There are many things we need to be careful of when reading Jōdo Shinshū scriptures. In particular, we should pay special attention to the text when we encounter passages written in question and answer form. Such passages indicate that the author has especially made the effort to explain the teachings in detail so that readers will be able to understand the real intention of that text. Authors also use a question and answer form, such as “Question: ... Answer: ...,” when they want to strongly emphasize their thoughts to readers.

12. *CWS*, pp. 93–94.

13. *CWS*, pp. 225–227.

14. A simple answer to this question is because the contents of these sutras are different. Traditionally, we understand that the *Larger Sutra* mainly expounds the truth of the Dharma (*hō no shinjitsu*), the *Contemplation Sutra* applies the truth in the context of sentient beings (*ki no shinjitsu*), and the *Smaller Sutra* discusses both the Dharma and sentient beings together (*kihō gassetsu*).

15. *CWS*, pp. 225–227.

16. *CWS*, p. 227.

17. *Rennyō’s Letter V-20*, in Minor and Ann Rogers, *Rennyō: The Second Founder of Shin Buddhism* (Berkeley, California: Asian Humanity Press, 1991), p. 249.

18. *CWS*, pp. 95–107.

19. *CWS*, p. 78.

20. *CWS*, p. 69.

21. *Hōnen’s Senchakushū*, p. 81.

22. *CWS*, p. 56.

23. *CWS*, p. 56.

24. *CWS*, p. 112.

25. *CWS*, p. 298.

26. *CWS*, p. 662.

27. *Hōnen's Senchakushū*, p. 73.
28. *Hōnen's Senchakushū*, pp. 73–75.
29. *Hōnen's Senchakushū*, p. 76.
30. *Hōnen's Senchakushū*, pp. 76–78.
31. *Hōnen's Senchakushū*, p. 76.
32. *Hōnen's Senchakushū*, p. 76.
33. *CWS*, pp. 93–107.
34. *CWS*, p. 387.
35. *CWS*, p. 662.
36. *CWS*, p. 662.
37. *CWS*, p. 7.
38. *CWS*, pp. 1–2.
39. *CWS*, p. 77.
40. These names are coined by Zonkaku (1290–1373) in the *Essentials of the Six Chapters (Rokuyōshō)*, a commentary on the *Kyōgyōshinshō*.
41. *CWS*, p. 4.
42. *CWS*, p. 289.
43. As for the pronunciation of threefold mind/three minds, we pronounce the three minds of the *Larger Sutra* as “sanshin” and the three minds of the *Contemplation Sutra* as “sanjin” in order to distinguish them. This is one of the rules to remember when you conduct your research according to traditional Jōdo Shinshū studies.
44. *CWS*, p. 85.
45. *CWS*, p. 85.
46. *CWS*, p. 84.
47. Traditionally, in Jōdo Shinshū studies, there are different perspectives to interpret the threefold mind (*sanshinshaku*). When we read the interpretation of the threefold mind from the Buddha's perspective, it is called “the threefold mind from the perspective of the Buddha” (*yakubutsu no sanshin*). When we read it from the sentient beings' perspective, it is called “the threefold mind from the perspective of sentient beings” (*yakushō no sanshin*).  
When we understand the sincere mind (*shishin*) and aspiration for birth (*yokushō*) from the Buddha's side and see shinjin (*shingyō*) inform the sentient beings' side, it is called “two for the Buddha and one for sentient beings” (*butsunī shōichi*). The notion that shinjin is the true cause (*shinjin shōin*) is based on the perspective of “two for the Buddha and one for sentient beings” (*butsunī shōichi*).

48. *CWS*, p. 80.

49. *CWS*, p. 80.

50. Zonkaku reminds us that Shinran added another preface at the beginning of the Chapter on Shinjin to emphasize the significance of shinjin.