

The Joy of Shinran: Rethinking Traditional Shinshū Views on the Concept of the Stage of the Truly Settled¹

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I.

FOR MANY YEARS, I HAVE been mulling over an unsettled question relating to the traditional manner of explaining Shinran's concept of attaining the truly settled stage in the present life (*genshō shōjōju*). In order to identify the problem clearly, let me present a few passages from some well known Shinshū exegetical works. First, let us examine a passage from the *Shinshū yōron* (The Essence of the Shinshū Teaching) discussing Jōdo Shinshū's theory of benefits (*riyakuron*), a passage which deals with the teaching of "dual benefits" in the present life and in the future life (*gentō ryōyaku*).

For Shinshū followers, one anticipates realizing ultimate nirvana in the Pure Land. In the present life, we are initiated into the truly settled stage (*shōjōju*), which is endowed with the hope of realizing ultimate nirvana. This hope eliminates all feelings of frustration about unsettledness in the future and is characterized as the hope springing from the great settled mind (*dai anjin*) of the settled anticipation (*ketsujō yōgo*) for the certain realization of future birth in the Pure Land. We become confident about the ultimate achievement of our lives to be realized in the Pure Land of the other shore (*higan*), and thus we are able to live our present lives with the settled mind of total confidence (*anjin ryūmyō*) and full of hope.²

The ultimate nirvana of enlightenment is the benefit realized in the Pure Land in the future. The truly settled stage is the benefit realized in the present life and makes one "filled with the hope of realizing nirvana in the Pure Land," which is "the hope springing from the great settled mind of the settled anticipation for the certain realization of future birth in the Pure Land."

This type of explanation of the attainment of the truly settled stage in the present life naturally leads to the following kinds of interpretations.

A: "To save" means to save someone from his/her dissatisfactions and deficiencies in the present life. Therefore, in terms of time, salvation is located in the future and the priority of salvation should be found in the future. In a sense, this is one of the natural characteristics of the concept of salvation itself. In soteriological religions, salvation must be perfect: as long as the physical body exists, we cannot accomplish this perfection in the present life Although it may not manifest consciously, hope for this future provides those who aspire to be born in the Pure Land with a great resource for living in the present. Therefore, as a soteriological religion, [Shinshū] affirms the position that the priority of salvation should be found in the future.³

B: We need to pay special attention to this concept [of attaining the stage of truly settled in the present life] because it teaches us that the brightness of the future and our hope for the future in fact sustain our present lives. Shinran teaches us how to live in the present life based on his affirmation of the superiority of salvation in the future. Brightness in one's present life comes not only from the present life itself. We also experience how much the bright hope for tomorrow brightens up our present lives.⁴

These interpretations of Shinran's teaching on the stage of the truly settled represent a future-centric logic in which present existence is governed by future hope. According to this understanding, one is to feel fulfilled and secure in the present life through the confidence that one will certainly be born in the Pure Land and attain nirvana in the future.

Yet, if Shinran's conception of attaining the truly settled stage in the present life is to be understood in this manner, how are we to respond to the following critiques?

A: There are some people who teach about salvation in Jōdo Shinshū in a future-centric manner without giving it much thought. But I disagree with them. For example, we often hear that "Shinshū followers' religious life is just like Saturday night. On Saturday night, we feel joyful because we know that tomorrow is Sunday. Likewise, the present life is joyful because we know that we are going to be born in the Pure Land when we die" However, in reality, "tomorrow" is not Sunday but more like Monday. In the afterlife in the Pure Land, there awaits more work that will make us busier than in this life. It is a grave mistake to believe that it will be an easy time in the Pure Land after death If it were Saturday night now, we might wish for Sunday to come sooner. However, in the case of birth in the Pure Land, if you wish "to go to the Pure

Land quickly, we might wonder if we weren't free of blind passions."⁵ That is very unrealistic.⁶

B: Since I am not sure whether the Pure Land really exists, I do not have any illusory yearning for birth in the Land of Utmost Bliss in the afterlife. If my life depended on such thoughts, my present life would certainly be filled with anxiety until I die, because my anxiety could not be eased until I actually got there and saw that the Pure Land existed.⁷

C: Shinran was a truly honest person and never discussed anything with confidence until he had experienced it. Therefore, he could not talk about the afterlife as if he had already seen it, because he had yet to experience it.⁸

Now I want to stress that I am not against the traditional Shinshū doctrine of the dual benefits in the present and future lives (*gentō ryōyaku setsu*). Shinran's view of the attainment of the truly settled stage in the present life and realization of nirvana in the afterlife (*tōrai metsudo*) is clearly delineated in several Shinshū scriptures.⁹ I am very well aware that Shinran himself explains that the meaning of the truly settled stage is "to have become one who will unfailingly attain Buddhahood" and "to become settled as one who will definitely be born in the Pure Land."¹⁰ The problem is whether it is true that Shinran's joy of becoming a person of the truly settled stage is based in anticipation for birth in the Pure Land in the future. If Shinran's concept of attaining the truly settled stage in the present life means to live in hope with anticipation for future birth in the Pure Land, the primary benefit of the Shinshū teaching in this life would be simply the *anticipation* for the attainment of Buddhahood through birth in the Pure Land in the afterlife. The attainment of the truly settled stage in this life, then, becomes merely a secondary by-product.¹¹ If this were true, no matter how greatly the significance of the present life is emphasized in Shinshū teaching, we must accept the criticism that Shinshū is a religion whose primary focus is in the afterlife. We must also face the related criticism that aspiration for birth in an uncertain Pure Land is nothing but a quest for a shadowy illusion. However, I would like to raise the question of whether Shinran's understanding of the joy of attaining the truly settled stage was really such a future-centric idea.

II.

To examine Shinran's understanding of the joy of attaining the truly settled stage, I will review how he describes this joyfulness in his major work, the *True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way*

(*Ken Jōdo shinjitsu kyō gyō shō monrui*, hereafter *Kyōgyōshinshō*). Shinran's first reference to joy is found in the preface (*sōjo*) to the text.

How joyous I am, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Śākyamuni! Rare it is to come upon the sacred scriptures from the westward land of India and the commentaries of the masters of China and Japan, but now [*ima*] I have been able to encounter them. Rare is it to hear them, but already [*sude ni*] I have been able to hear. Reverently entrusting myself to the teaching, practice, and realization that are the true essence of the Pure Land way, I am especially aware of the profundity of the Tathagata's benevolence. Here I rejoice in what I have heard and extol what I have attained.¹²

In the separate preface (*betsujo*) to the Chapter on Shinjin, Shinran explains the source of his joyfulness.

As I reflect, I find that our attainment of shinjin [*shingyō*] arises from the heart and mind with which Amida Tathagata selected the Vow, and that the clarification of true mind has been taught for us through the skillful works of compassion of the Great Sage, Śākyamuni. . . . Here I, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Śākyamuni, reverently embrace the true teaching of the Buddhas and Tathagatas and look to the essential meaning of the treatises and commentaries of the masters. Fully guided by the beneficent light of the three sutras, I seek in particular to clarify the luminous passage on the "mind that is single." . . . Mindful solely of the depth and vastness of the Buddha's benevolence, I am unconcerned about being personally abused.¹³

In the section known as the Turning and Entering through the Three Vows (*sangan tennyū*), Shinran explains the tenor and expression of that joy.

Nevertheless, I have now [*ima*] decisively departed from the "true" gate of provisional means and, [my self-power] overturned, have entered the ocean of the selected Vow. . . . Having entered forever the ocean of the vow, I now realize deeply the Buddha's benevolence. To respond with gratitude for the supreme virtues, I collect the crucial passages expressing the true essence of the Pure Land way, constantly saying, out of mindfulness [the Name that is] the inconceivable ocean of virtues. Ever more greatly rejoicing, I humbly receive it.¹⁴

And in the postscript (*gojo*) of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, he tries to convey the depth of his feeling.

How joyous I am, my heart and mind being rooted in the Buddhaground of the universal Vow, and my thoughts and feelings flowing within the dharma-ocean, which is beyond comprehension! I am deeply aware of the Tathagata's immense compassion, and I sincerely revere the benevolent care behind the masters' teaching activity. My joy grows ever fuller, my gratitude and indebtedness ever more compelling.¹⁵

The joyfulness Shinran expresses in these passages is based on his realization that "now" (*ima*) he has "already" (*sude ni*) encountered the teaching of Amida's Primal Vow. It is the joy of taking refuge in the Ocean of Amida's Vow (*gankai*), not an expression arising from anticipation for his future birth in the Pure Land.

On the other hand, there are also passages in which Shinran seems to express joy for his anticipated birth in the Pure Land, as in the conclusive exaltation (*kettan*) in the section discussing the significance of the Great Practice (*daigyō shaku*).

Thus, when one has boarded the ship of the Vow of great compassion and sailed out on the vast ocean of light, the winds of perfect virtue blow softly and the waves of evil are transformed. The darkness of ignorance is immediately broken through, and quickly reaching the land of immeasurable light, one realizes great nirvana.¹⁶

However, it should be recognized that the main point of this passage is becoming a being who has "boarded the ship of the Vow of great compassion."¹⁷

In a similar vein, Shinran seems to discuss the joyful anticipation of the moment of death (*rinjū no ichinen*) in the section "On Being the Same as Maitreya" (*bendō Miroku shaku*) in the Chapter on Shinjin.

Because sentient beings of the nembutsu have perfectly realized the diamondlike mind of crosswise transcendence, they transcend and realize great, complete nirvana on the eve of the moment of death.¹⁸

Yet when we consider the sentence preceding this passage—"Because Mahāsattva Maitreya has perfectly realized the diamondlike mind of the stage equal to enlightenment, he will without fail attain the stage of supreme enlightenment beneath a dragon-flower tree at the dawn of the three assemblies"¹⁹—we see that Shinran wrote the passage to demonstrate the superiority of the nembutsu practice and not to express joy for the anticipation of birth in the Pure Land at the moment of death. Shinran's intention becomes even clearer when we read the next sentence of the passage.

Moreover, the people who have realized the diamondlike mind are the equals of Vaidehī and have been able to realize the insights of joy, awakening, and confidence. This is because they have thoroughly attained the true mind directed to them for their going forth, and because this accords with [the working of] the Primal Vow, which surpasses conceptual understanding.²⁰

Shinran's focus is thus on the attainment of the three insights of joy, awakening, and confidence in the present life just as Vaidehī attained them.

In fact, Shinran admits in a number of his writings that he feels not joy but reluctance when anticipating the death that will lead to birth in the Pure Land. In the same chapter of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran laments that he feels "no happiness at coming nearer the realization of true enlightenment."²¹ In Chapter Nine of *A Record in Lament of Divergences (Tannishō)*, Shinran is remembered as saying:

It is hard for us to abandon this old home of pain, where we have been transmigrating for innumerable kalpas down to the present, and we feel no longing for the Pure Land of peace, where we have yet to be born. Truly, how powerful our blind passions are! But though we feel reluctant to part from this world, at the moment our karmic bonds to this Sahā world run out and helplessly we die, we shall go to that land.²²

Instead of intimating any hope for the anticipated birth in the Pure Land, Shinran honestly discloses to us that such hopefulness never arises in his heart.

What, then, is the source of joy for Shinran? In the same chapter of the *Tannishō* Shinran goes on to describe just what the wellspring of joy is.

What suppresses the heart that should rejoice and keeps one from rejoicing is the action of blind passions. Nevertheless, the Buddha, knowing this beforehand, called us "foolish beings possessed of blind passions"; thus, becoming aware that the compassionate Vow of Other Power is indeed for the sake of ourselves, who are such beings, we find it all the more trustworthy. . . . Amida pities especially the person who has no thought of wanting to go to the Pure Land quickly. Reflecting on this, we feel the great Vow of great compassion to be all the more trustworthy and realize that our birth is settled.²³

Shinran's joy derives from nothing other than his immediate experience, "now" (*ima*), encountering "the great Vow of great compassion" (*daihi*

daigan) of Amida who “pities especially the person who has no thought of wanting to go to the Pure Land quickly.” Therefore, in the first chapter of the *Tannishō*, Shinran places greater emphasis on “being brought to share in the benefit of being grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned” (*sesshu fusha*)²⁴ than on the realization of birth in the Pure Land.

At the risk of sounding repetitious, let me remind the reader that I am not suggesting that Shinran rejects the concept of birth in the Pure Land. My purpose here is to pinpoint where in the texts Shinran discusses joyfulness and what he says the source of joy is. Traditional Shinshū scholarship circumscribes the stage of the truly settled as no more than a causal stage for the attainment of Buddhahood, despite Shinran’s strong emphasis on its presentness. Certainly there is no doubt that it is one stage of a bodhisattva; and, of course, the practitioner’s realization of ultimate nirvana is to be achieved after birth in the Pure Land. However, it does not necessarily follow that anticipation for birth in the Pure Land is the concrete content of joy experienced by Shinran. As clearly shown in the above citations, Shinran’s joy is founded in the one thought-moment of realization of shinjin (*gyakushin no ichinen*)—the moment when Shinran realized that he was “brought to share in the benefit of being grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned.” This interpretation of Shinran’s conception of joy is further strengthened and clarified by reference to the following passage.

Thus, when one attains the true and real practice and shinjin, one greatly rejoices in one’s heart. This attainment is therefore called the stage of joy. . . . Even more decisively will the ocean of beings of the ten quarters be grasped and never abandoned when they have taken refuge in this practice and shinjin. Therefore the Buddha is called “Amida Buddha.” This is Other Power.²⁵

Although Shinran has yet to attain buddhahood, his salvation has already been accomplished at the moment of attaining the true and real practice and shinjin. If we imagine that Shinran still yearns for the future Pure Land at this point, we would have to do so based on the assumption that Shinran still had feelings of emptiness and that his life was yet to be truly fulfilled. This is clearly not the case.

Although Shinran has attained shinjin, he was still an ordinary being filled with blind passions. On this point, Shinran states:

Concerning the term [to] *cut off* [blind passions]: because we have awakened the mind that is single, which is directed to us for our going forth, there is no further state of existence into which we must be born, no further realm into which we must pass. Already the causes leading to the six courses and the four modes of birth

have died away and their results become null. Therefore we immediately and swiftly cut off birth-and-death in the three realms of existence.²⁶

For Shinran, the existence or non-existence of blind passions is no longer of any concern. Shinran even says that “If we had the feeling of dancing with joy and wished to go to the Pure Land quickly, we might wonder if we weren’t free of blind passions.”²⁷ The life of an ordinary being filled with blind passions is not to be considered empty. Any feelings of emptiness Shinran had were satisfied by Amida’s great Vow of great compassion which is completely trustworthy—not by a longing for the future attainment of Buddhahood through birth in the Pure Land. Shinran does not say that, because Amida promises birth in the Pure Land in the *future*, his attainment of the truly settled stage makes him joyful *now*. Rather, he says that, because he has attained the truly settled stage *now*, his attainment of birth in the Pure Land in the *future* becomes necessary. Shinran makes this point in the Chapter on Realization.

When foolish beings possessed of blind passions, the multitudes caught in birth-and-death and defiled by evil karma, realize the mind and practice that Amida directs to them for their going forth, they immediately join the truly settled of Mahayana. Because they dwell among the truly settled, they necessarily attain nirvana.²⁸

This is similarly stated in the *Hymn of the Pure Land* (*Jōdo wasan*).

Those who attain true and real shinjin
Immediately join the truly settled;
Thus having entered the stage of nonretrogression,
They necessarily attain nirvana.²⁹

And, in the *Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone’* (*Yuishinshō mon’i*), we find, “To return is to attain the supreme nirvana without fail because one has already entered the ocean of the Vow.”³⁰ It is clear that Shinran’s priority is on encountering the teaching of the Primal Vow and not on the future attainment of nirvana. In fact, for Shinran, “It is not attainment of the unexcelled, incomparable fruit of enlightenment that is difficult; the genuine difficulty is realizing true and real shinjin [*shingyō*].”³¹ The most significant issue for Shinran is realizing shinjin. Once one realizes shinjin, one’s attainment of the fruit of enlightenment becomes a necessary event.³²

There are many other examples similar to these passages in Shinran’s writings. For example, in the *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls* (*Songō shinzō meimon*), Shinran describes the easiness of attaining nirvana.

To go is easy: When persons allow themselves to be carried by the power of the Primal Vow, they are certain to be born in the land that has been fulfilled through it; hence, it is easy to go there. . . . Through the karmic power of the great vow, the person who has realized true and real shinjin naturally is in accord with the cause of birth in the Pure Land and is drawn by the Buddha's karmic power; hence the going is easy, and ascending to and attaining the supreme great nirvana is without limit. Thus the words, *one is drawn there by its spontaneous working (jinen)*. One is drawn there naturally by the cause of birth, the entrusting with sincere mind that is Other Power.³³

The important issue is to be carried by the power of the Primal Vow—to attain true and real shinjin. Birth in the true fulfilled land (*jippōdo*) is simply a natural result of the karmic power of the great Vow. Those famous words of the *Tannishō*—"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"³⁴—reveal Shinran's firm conviction of his birth through total entrusting in the Primal Vow, so much so that his birth in the Pure Land in the future is not even an issue. If his joy arose from his hope for future birth in the Pure Land, shinjin and nembutsu would be merely instruments or methods for birth and not unconditionally free from human value judgements. Shinran goes so far as to state, "I am incapable of any other practice, so hell is decidedly my abode whatever I do,"³⁵ revealing that for him birth in the Pure Land in the afterlife was simply an inconceivable event. Utter joy stems instead from encountering the inconceivable Vow "now."

Shinran's joy of encountering the teaching of the Primal Vow is most clearly reflected in his notes "On Jinen Hōni" which is composed toward the end of his life.

Amida's Vow is, from the very beginning, designed to bring each of us to entrust ourselves to it—saying "Namu-amida-butsu"—and to receive us into the Pure Land; none of this is through our calculation. Thus, there is no room for the practitioner to be concerned about being good or bad. This is the meaning of *jinen* as I have been taught."³⁶

III.

This problem concerning Shinran's conception of joy is closely related to doctrinal discussions on the relationship between shinjin and aspiration for birth in the Pure Land (*yokushō*). In traditional Shinshū studies,

scholars have taken up this problem under the rubric of such topics for discussion as truth and expediency in the three vows (*sangan shinke*), aspiration for birth in the Pure Land in the three vows (*sangan yokushō*), and the relationship between shinjin and aspiration (*shingan kōzai*).

In the *Larger Sutra*, shinjin, practice, and its benefits appear in all three vows for the cause of birth in the Pure Land, namely the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Vows of Dharmākara Bodhisattva.³⁷ Shinran understands that each of these is independently vowed to establish the cause for sentient beings' birth in the Pure Land. The differences among the three form the basis for Shinran's exegesis of self power and Other Power. The first significant difference is that, in the Eighteenth Vow, shinjin precedes practice (*shinzen gyōgo*); while in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Vows, practice precedes shinjin (*gyōzen shingo*). Based on this difference, Shinran understands that shinjin in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Vows is established through sentient beings' practice and identifies this as the shinjin of self power (*jiriki no shin*) in which practitioners aspire to attain birth in the Pure Land through the virtues created by their practices. On the other hand, the shinjin of the Eighteenth Vow, which precedes practice, is the shinjin of Other Power (*tariki no shin*) responding to Amida's commands (*chokumei*) without doubt and in joyful entrustment (*mugi aigyō*). The practice that follows shinjin is defined as the easy practice of enduring shinjin (*shin sōzoku no igyō*). The second difference among the three vows concerns the listing of the three minds. Two of the three minds—sincere mind (*shishin*) and mind of aspiration for birth (*yokushō*)—appear in all three vows. However, the middle of the three minds is different in each vow: in the Eighteenth Vow entrusting (*shingyō*) is listed as the second of the three minds; in the Nineteenth Vow it is aspiration (*hotsugan*); and in the Twentieth Vow it is directing virtues (*ekō*). Shinran's interpretation of this difference is that, although the three vows all mention the mind aspiring for birth, in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth it is the self power mind of aspiration for birth. In the Eighteenth Vow, however, the mind aspiring for birth is to be taken as a synonym for shinjin or entrusting mind (*shingyō*). Therefore, it is interpreted as the mind of settled anticipation (*ketsujō yōgo*) for birth in the Pure Land.³⁸

In other words, the mind of aspiring for birth in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Vows identifies the mind of practitioners who abhor their lives in this world of defilement and aspire for the land of purity. It is the mind of practitioners who desire to abandon this world and seek to fill up their feelings of emptiness in the present life with the hope for future birth in the Pure Land. They recognize the defilement of the world they live in yet are unable to recognize their own falsity and insincerity. Shinran realizes that those practitioners misapprehend both the nature of practice and their own motives to believe that they can attain birth in the Pure Land by relying on the root of goodness produced by their own self power practice. No matter

how strongly they aspire for birth in the Pure Land, and no matter how much they accumulate roots of goodness, their self power efforts can never free them from anxiety in the present life or provide the strength for living in the present world.

The mind of aspiration for birth in the Eighteenth Vow is traditionally defined as the mind of settled anticipation for birth in the Pure Land. However, if we discuss it without reference to the reality of the present, it simply becomes a future goal. The stronger we wish for the realization of the ideal future, the emptier our present lives become—no matter how firmly settled is our mind for anticipating the realization of future birth in the Pure Land. Even though future birth in the Pure Land is guaranteed, it does not save us from suffering in the present life. Such convictions about future birth are, after all, not so different from the shinjin of self-power in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Vows.

When Shinran realized that Amida's light of wisdom crushed the faults of his incomplete understanding of the Buddha's wisdom (*furyō bucchi*) created out of his reliance on his self power mind of aspiration for birth (*jiriki yokushō shin*), he had the religious experience of "being overturned and entering into the realization of shinjin through the three vows" (*sangan tennyū*). It was then that, for the first time, he realized the mind of entrusting (*shingyō*) without any hindrance of doubts (*gigai muzō*). At that point, his own falsity and insincerity were crushed, and he realized that he was a man "incapable of any other practice."³⁹

In the Eighteenth Vow, entrusting (*shingyō*) is to be established as the negation of the self-power mind of aspiration for birth, or the self-power mind hoping for future birth. From the standpoint of the Eighteenth Vow, the present life is not abhorrent simply because one exists in a defiled world; rather, shinjin makes us realize our own insincerity in negating the present reality as abhorrent. When the mind that is attached to self power has been crushed by the light of the Buddha's wisdom, then the present reality which we find difficult to accept is transformed into a positive one in which we can recognize its significance as it is. The mind of aspiration described in the Eighteenth Vow, which is the mind of settled anticipation for birth, is only possible at the moment of shinjin, when the mind is brightened by the Buddha's wisdom and entrusts Amida Buddha's command (*chokumei*).

In the Nineteenth and Twentieth Vows, the mind of aspiration for birth is the aspiration of the "self" (*ware*) toward "tathāgata" (i.e., the Pure Land). When one realizes that this "self" is an ordinary sentient being destined to fall into avici hell (*hitsuda muken*), the direction of aspiration toward the Pure Land is overturned, and one realizes the proper perspective, which is instead that "tathāgata" is directed toward "self." This is the mind of aspiration in the Eighteenth Vow.⁴⁰

Finally, “aspire for birth” is the command of the Tathagata calling to and summoning the multitude of all beings. . . . [H]e took the mind of directing virtues as foremost, and thus realized the mind of great compassion. Accordingly, the Buddha directs this other-benefiting, true and real mind of aspiration for birth to the ocean of all beings. Aspiration for birth is this mind of directing virtues. It is none other than the mind of great compassion; therefore, it is untainted by the hindrance of doubt.⁴¹

In this realization of shinjin, tathāgata and the Pure Land do not exist in the future but have already come to exist in this present life. They have existed since the time of the absolute past and will exist into the absolute future as an uninterrupted force working in this present reality. The Pure Land realized in shinjin is not a Pure Land waiting in the afterlife. As T’an-luan says, “the name of the land performs the work of the Buddha. How can we conceive of this?”⁴² Since one becomes aware of this Pure Land through shinjin in the present—in the “now” (*ima*)—one’s salvation is accomplished here, and one receives the benefit of Amida’s light once grasped never to be abandoned (*sesshu fusha*).⁴³ At the moment shinjin is realized, there is no other future life to wish for any longer. For the person of shinjin, there is no need for the welcoming at the moment of death (*rinjū raigō*) in the future time. Therefore, Shinran in one of his letters teaches:

The practitioner of true shinjin, however, abides in the stage of the truly settled, for he or she has already been grasped, never to be abandoned. There is no need to wait in anticipation for the moment of death, no need to rely on Amida’s coming. At the time shinjin becomes settled, birth too becomes settled.⁴⁴

Although the term “aspiration for birth” (*yokushō*) is used in the context of birth in the Pure Land, it is “now” when we entrust (*shingyō*), and the aspiration is nothing other than the mind of entrusting. Therefore, the term “aspiration for birth” needs to be understood as a synonym for entrusting mind (*shingyō*) in the context of the “now.”

In doctrinal discussions on the relationship between shinjin and aspiration (*shingan kōzai*), the term aspiration as used in the Eighteenth Vow has traditionally been interpreted as a synonym for entrusting mind. The term “entrusting mind” is used to signify Amida’s command at present, and the term “aspiration for birth” implies the land that is included in Amida’s command but is yet to be presented. However, although it is called “the land yet to be presented,” it should not be understood in terms of a conviction or wish to be born in a Pure Land existing in an imaginative future time. If we interpret the phrase “the land yet to be presented” as the

Pure Land in the temporal future, the joy of shinjin would be equivalent to the mind of settled anticipation (*ketsujō yōgo*). If that were the meaning of the truly settled stage (*shōjōju*), we should rather say that the entrusting mind is a synonym for the mind of aspiration for birth and not vice versa. Since we say that the mind of aspiration is a synonym for the entrusting mind, the joy of shinjin should not be understood as the mind of settled anticipation for future birth. The mind of settled anticipation is established at the moment of realization of the entrusting mind. Shinran's experience of salvation and joy should be understood as realized at the one thought-moment of shinjin (*shin no ichinen*), when he was awakened to be embraced by the benefit of "once grasped never to be abandoned."

IV.

According to the presuppositions underlying traditional doctrinal discussions on the meaning of the truly settled stage (*shōjōju*), the concept of birth in the Pure Land (*ōjō*) is understood strictly as to "leave here and be born [in the Pure Land] on the pedestal of the lotus flower,"⁴⁵ following Hōnen's teaching. If we are bound by this definition, then interpreting the concept of birth in the context of the present life becomes a radical exercise that some see as distorting the fundamental paradigm of the Pure Land teaching. However, as Ueda Yoshifumi has suggested many times, we must recognize that Shinran employs the concept of birth in the Pure Land with a broader vision beyond the traditional definition of birth as simply a matter of the afterlife.⁴⁶ This is evident in Shinran's teaching, such as "becom[ing] established in the stage of the truly settled . . . is the meaning of *attaining birth*,"⁴⁷ and "when a person realizes shinjin, he or she is born immediately."⁴⁸ Although I employ the concept of birth in the context of the present life, I am not saying that ordinary beings become extraordinary or change their nature in any way. Nor does this shift in viewpoint imply that sentient beings will attain enlightenment in the present life. Thus there is no need to fear that it might be confused with the teaching of the Path of Sages. I am well aware of the dangers of suggesting that enlightenment is attained in the present body and of Shinran's criticism of such a position in chapter fifteen of the *Tannishō*.

On the assertion that one attains enlightenment even while maintaining this bodily existence full of blind passions. This statement is completely absurd.⁴⁹

If we understand the concept of birth in the Pure Land as leaving here and being born in the Pure Land, the land is reduced to a place existing in the future as a kind of continuation of our present lives in this world.

Furthermore, if we continue in this line of thinking, we must necessarily make a split between life in this world and life in the coming world, taking this world as a defiled land and the other world as pure. In this context, salvation occurs only after birth into the Pure Land in the afterlife. Attaining the truly settled stage in the present life, too, simply becomes a reflection in the present world of our future salvation in the afterlife. But we must remember that Amida's salvation has been proffered since the time of innumerable kalpas past and extends into the infinite future. The Pure Land of Bliss is the land of eternal existence. The Tathagata, however, does not quietly preside in that eternal land and wait for us to attain birth. According to T'an-luan's explanation of the significance of Amida's accomplishment of the Primal Vow:

His Vow gave rise to the Power; the Power fulfils the Vow. The Vows have not been in vain; the Power is not empty. The Power and Vows work in complete harmony, and are not in the least discordant with each other; hence "accomplishment."⁵⁰

Due to Amida's Primal Vow, the Tathagata never stops working. Shinran understands that, according to his pledge, the Tathagata has made Śākyamuni expound the *Larger Sutra* and causes sentient beings to practice, entrust and realize. Teaching, practice, entrusting, and realization are all the contents of Amida's directing his virtues in the aspect of going forth (*ōsō*). Therefore, in the Chapter on Teaching, Shinran says, "in the aspect of going forth, there is the true teaching, practice, shinjin, and realization."⁵¹

The Pure Land is the land of eternity. However, simply because we are going to the Pure Land in the afterlife we should not assume that the Pure Land exists only in the future and has nothing to do with our present lives. Our salvation in the Pure Land does not start in the future. In the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Chapter on the True Buddha and the Land, Shinran prefers the word "infinite light" to "infinite life" in describing the nature of the Pure Land,⁵² which implies that Shinran understands the unhindered working of Amida as destroying the blind passions of sentient beings without interruption.⁵³ Traditional scholarship also agrees that the True Buddha and the Land are "the peaceful and spontaneous wonderful fruition" and "the root of embracing and awakening all beings in the ten directions." The Tathagata "exists and expounds the Dharma right now." The Pure Land is also the Pure Land in which "the name of the land performs the work of the Buddha."

In Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land (Jōdoron)*, this eternal Tathagata and the Pure Land are explained as "the manifestation of true merit." T'an-luan interprets the meaning of "true" here as "neither inverted nor false" (*futendō fukogi*). He explains that it is not false because

“it leads sentient beings to ultimate Purity.”⁵⁴ The Tathagata and the Pure Land have always existed and transformed sentient beings living in the three realms of impurity by assimilating them into the pure nature of the Tathagata and the Pure Land.

According to Shinran, the “manifestation of true merit” is “the sacred Name that embodies the Vow,”⁵⁵ and “directing of virtue” is “Amida’s giving the Name that embodies the Primal Vow to sentient beings throughout the ten quarters.”⁵⁶ The virtues of the Tathagata and the Pure Land are directed to sentient beings in the concrete form of the single Name. Therefore, a contact point between, on the one hand, the eternal and true Tathagata and the Pure Land, which are beyond the paradigm of time, and, on the other hand, us, who live in the paradigm of temporality, is only possible in the “present” when we hear the Name and entrust in it. At the one thought-moment of shinjin, we take refuge in the eternal ocean of the Primal Vow. Shinran teaches that this is the only chance for our salvation to become complete—not before or after. The benefit given at the moment of shinjin is the truly settled stage. Shinran places the benefit of the truly settled stage into the ten benefits given in this life (*genshō jūyaku*).⁵⁷ However, within these ten there is no benefit of the *hope* of settled anticipation of future birth. Once we realize shinjin, our attainment of birth in the Pure Land happens naturally. Therefore, Shinran says in the *Hymns of the Pure Land Masters* (*Kōsō wasan*):

Since shinjin arises from the Vow,
We Attain Buddhahood though the nembutsu by the [Vow’s]
spontaneous working.
The spontaneous working is itself the fulfilled land;
Our realization of supreme nirvana is beyond doubt.⁵⁸

And in the *Hymns of the Dharma-Ages* (*Shōzōmatsu wasan*):

The directing virtue embodied in Namu-amida-butsu
Is, in its benevolent working, vast and inconceivable;
Through the benefit of the directing of virtue for going forth,
We have already entered (*enyū seri*) the aspect of directing of
virtue for returning to this world.⁵⁹

If we simply believe that directing virtue for returning to this world begins only in the afterlife by following a strict dichotomy that this world is for the present life and the Pure Land is for afterlife, then we cannot understand the significance of Shinran’s hymn that tells us “we have already entered the aspect of the directing of virtue for returning to this world.” We can understand the hymn only when we realize that at the moment of shinjin we have already taken refuge in the Pure Land of eternity.

Taking another tack, one may attempt to associate the relationship between the attainment of nirvana in the Pure Land and the attainment of the truly settled stage in the present life with the idea that “hope for the future sustains our present lives.” However, a bit of rhetorical magic lies hiding in this idea. Behind the statement that future hope sustains present life there is an assumption that time flows as an uninterrupted continuum like a river running without interruption. In respect to the concept of birth in the Pure Land, this statement also assumes two separate realms—this world and the coming world (the afterlife). While perhaps the future world is arguably in the process of becoming this world, the future world cannot immediately become this world. Even though we may have “hope of settled anticipation (*ketsujō yōgo*) for birth in the Pure Land, which is the hope of the great settled mind (*dai anjin*) for the truth certainly to be realized,” within such a dichotomous interpretation the present world is reduced to nothing but empty human life. To the contrary, we must realize that, when this world is truly fulfilled, we naturally know that the coming life is fulfilled.⁶⁰

Finally, I would like to point out that there is a problem with the analogy comparing time in this world to a Saturday spent anticipating Sunday. The joy of Saturday is based on experiences of actually having enjoyed Sundays in the past. On the other hand, birth in the Pure Land is something we have never experienced. The only person who can truthfully use such an analogy is one who has received in the present life the benefit of having been embraced and never forsaken. An experience of the eternal, an experience of “attaining *shinjin*,” must have occurred first. Only when one attains *shinjin* does the path of birth in the Pure Land at last become clear. From this standpoint, as Rennyō says, “as for nirvana, we are grateful knowing that Amida will save us.”⁶¹ Feelings of gratitude for Amida’s salvation naturally inspire us into the anticipation of that salvation, causing us to say, “we are grateful knowing that Amida will save us” and not vice versa (i.e., it is not that anticipation leads to gratitude). It is in this sense that aspiration for birth becomes a synonym for entrusting mind. Therefore, the proposition “hope for the future sustains our present lives” is to be rejected as a viable interpretation of Shinran’s concept of attaining the truly settled stage in the present life. We must remember that, for the majority of modern people (with very special exceptions), this kind of interpretation brings no hope for salvation at all.⁶²

Translated by Eisho Nasu

NOTES

1. Translator's note: This is a translation of "Shinran no yorokobi," in *Zoku Shinran kyōgi no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1989), pp. 91–109, by the late Prof. Murakami Sokusui, Ryukoku University, Kyoto, Japan. This essay originally appeared in *Ryūkoku daigaku ronshū* 400/401 (1973). Unless otherwise noted, all of the quoted passages have been translated into English by the translator. Minor editorial changes and revisions are made in the texts and notes according to the journal's editorial guidelines and conventions of academic publication in English. Additional notes are inserted occasionally to help readers identify the original texts and their English translations if available. Any errors are solely the responsibility of the translator.
2. Ryukoku University, ed., *Shinshū yōron* (Kyoto: Hyakkaen, 1953), pp. 143–144.
3. Kiritani Junnin, *Shinran wa nani wo toita ka* (Tokyo: Kyōiku Shinchōsha, 1964), pp. 50–52.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
5. *Tannishō*, in *The Collected Works of Shinran* (hereafter, *CWS*), (Kyōto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), p. 666.
6. Katō Kyōjun, *Wakaki sedai no Tannishō* (Kyoto: Hyakkaen, 1958), pp. 83–89.
7. Honda Kenshō, *Tannishō nyūmon: Kono ranse wo ikinuku tame no chie* (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 1964), p. 69.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 112. I would like to remind the reader that my citing of the *Tannishō nyūmon* does not mean that I necessarily agree with all of the author's views in the text.
9. The concept of dual benefits appears, for example, in the *Rokuyōshō* by Zonkaku:

Question: As for the benefits of attaining the truly settled stage and of attaining of enlightenment, are they dual benefits or a single benefit? Answer: They are dual benefits. The truly settled stage is the attainment of the stage of non-retrogression [in the present life]. Enlightenment is the attainment of nirvana [in the afterlife]. (*Shinshū shōgyō zensho* [hereafter, *SSZ*], vol. 2, [Kyoto: Oyagi Kōbundō, 1941], p. 321)

In Rennyo's *Letters* (1-4), we also find the following.

Question: Should we understand [the state of] being truly settled and [that of] nirvana as one benefit, or as two? Answer: The

dimension of “the awakening of the one thought-moment” is that of “[joining] the company of those truly settled.” This is the benefit [we gain] in the defiled world. Next, it should be understood that nirvana is the benefit to be gained in the Pure Land. Hence we should think of them as two benefits. (Minor Lee Rogers and Ann T. Rogers, *Rennyō: The Second Founder of Shin Buddhism* [Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991], p. 152)

10. *Notes on Once Calling and Many Calling*, in *CWS*, p. 475, notes 4 and 7. For the original Japanese text, see *Ichinen tanen mon’i*, in *SSZ*, vol. 2, pp. 605–606.

11. By using the word “primary” (*daiichigi*), I mean that it is “central” (*chūshin*) but not “ultimate” (*kyūkyoku*). Therefore, here “secondary” (*fukujiteki*) means “subordinate” (*jūzokuteki*).

12. *CWS*, p. 4; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 1.

13. *CWS*, p. 77; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 47.

14. *CWS*, p. 240; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 166.

15. *CWS*, p. 291; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 203.

16. *CWS*, p. 56; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 35.

17. In a hymn praising Shan-tao (87), however, Shinran says:

Casting off long kalpas of painful existence in this world of Sahā,
We live in expectation of the Pure Land, the uncreated;
This is the power of our teacher, Śākyamuni;
Let us respond always in gratitude for his
compassion and benevolence.

(*Hymns of the Pure Land Masters*, in *CWS*, p. 383; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 511)

In this hymn, Shinran seems to express hope for the anticipated birth in the Pure Land. However, this hymn is based on passages in Shan-tao’s *Panchou-tsan* (*Hanjusan*).

Attainment of deliverance from the
Suffering of many kalpas in the Sahā World
Is especially due to the benevolence of the
Great master Śākyamuni.

(*Hanjusan*, translated by Hisao Inagaki, in *Ryūkoku daigaku ronshū* 434/435 [1999]: pp. 108–109)

How can you expect to reach the Treasure Land now?

It is indeed due to the power of the
Great Master of the Sahā World [Śākyamuni].
(*Ibid.*, p. 98)

Also, we need to pay attention to the hymn, that precedes the above hymn.

Had we not received the power of the universal Vow,
 When could we part from this Sahā world?
 Reflecting deeply on the Buddha's benevolence,
 Let us think on Amida always.

(CWS, p. 383; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 511).

In this hymn, Shinran is emphasizing that “receiving the power of the universal Vow” is the most important factor for birth.

18. CWS, p. 123; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 79.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. CWS, p. 125; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 80.

22. CWS, p. 666; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 778.

23. CWS, p. 665–666; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 777.

24. CWS, p. 661; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 773.

25. *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Chapter on Practice, in CWS, p. 54; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 33.

26. *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Chapter on Shinjin, in CWS, p. 115; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 74.

27. *Tannishō*, in CWS, 666; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 778.

28. CWS, p. 153; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 103.

29. CWS, p. 341; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 493.

30. CWS, p. 454; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 624.

31. *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Chapter on Shinjin, in CWS, p. 79; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 48.

32. Also in the *Passages on the Pure Land Way (Jōdomon ruiju shō)*, Shinran says that “it is impossible to realize pure shinjin, impossible to attain the highest end. This is because we do not depend on Amida's directing of virtue for our going forth and because we are entangled in a net of doubt.” (CWS, p. 299; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 445)

33. CWS, p. 496–497; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 563.

34. CWS, p. 662; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 774.

35. CWS, p. 662; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 774.

36. CWS, p. 427–428; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 530.

37. Shinran cites the three vows in the Chapter on Shinjin (18th Vow) and the Chapter on Transformed Buddhas and Lands (19th and 20th Vows) in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* 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 the Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlighten-

ment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offences and those who slander the right dharma. (18th Vow, in *CWS*, p. 80; *SSZ*, vol. 2. p.48–49)

If, when I attain buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters—awakening the mind of enlightenment and performing meritorious acts—should aspire with sincere mind and desire to be born in my land, and yet I should not appear before them at the moment of death surrounded by a host of sages, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. (19th Vow, in *CWS*, p. 208; *SSZ*, vol. 2. p. 144)

If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, on hearing my Name, should place their thoughts on my land, cultivate the root of all virtues, and direct merits with sincere mind desiring to be born in my land, and yet not ultimately attain it, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. (20th Vow, in *CWS*, p. 229; *SSZ*, vol. 2. p. 158)

38. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Murakami Sokusui, *Shinran kyōgi no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1968), pp. 301–310.
39. *Tannishō*, in *CWS*, 662; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 774.
40. Murakami, *Shinran kyōgi no kenkyū*, p. 12.
41. Chapter on Shinjin, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, in *CWS*, p. 103–104; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 65.
42. Hisao Inagaki, trans., *T'an-luan's Commentary on Vasubandhu's Discourse on the Pure Land* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1998), p. 233; *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 324.
43. Shinran provides a note explaining this phrase: “*setsu* [to grasp] means to pursue and grasp the one who seeks to run away” (*CWS*, p. 347).
44. *Lamp for the Latter Ages* (Mattōshō), in *CWS*, p. 523; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 656.
45. *Kango tōroku*, vol. 6, in the *SSZ*, vol. 4, p. 393.
46. See Ueda Yoshifumi, “Shinran no ōjō shisō,” Parts 1 and 2, *Shinran kyōgaku* 13 (1968): pp. 97–117; 14 (1969): pp. 105–128.
47. *Ichinen tanen mon'i*, in *CWS*, p. 475; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 605.
48. *Yuishinshō mon'i*, in *CWS*, p. 455; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 625.
49. *CWS*, p. 674; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 786.
50. Inagaki, *T'an-luan's Commentary*, p. 251; *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 331.
51. *CWS*, p. 7; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 2.
52. *CWS*, p. 177; *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 120.
53. In the *Lamp for the Latter Ages*, Shinran comments:

The statement, “they attain nirvana,” means that when the heart of the persons of true and real shinjin attain the fulfilled land at the end of his or her present life, that person becomes one with the light that is the heart of Tathagata, for his reality is immeasurable life and his activity is inseparable from immeasurable light. (CWS, p. 541; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 675)

See also Ōe Junjō, *Kyōgyōshinshō kōjutsu* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1964), p. 274.

54. Inagaki, *T’an-luan’s Commentary*, p. 135; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 285.

55. *Songō shinzō meimon*, in CWS, p. 501; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 583.

56. *Ichinen tanen mon’i*, in CWS, p. 474; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 605.

57. *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Chapter on Shinjin, in CWS, p. 112; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 72.

58. CWS, p. 382; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 510.

59. Modified, CWS, p. 411; SSZ, vol. 2, p. 522.

60. A similar critique can also be applied to Kiritani Junnin’s interpretation in *Gendai ni wasurarete iru mono* (Sapporo: Kyōiku Shinchōsha, 1961), pp. 26–31.

61. See *Rennyō Shōnin goichidai kikigaki*, Chapter 19, in SSZ, vol. 3, p. 537.

62. In addition to the works referred in the notes, this paper has also been generally informed by the following works:

Ueda Yoshifumi, “Kako genzai mirai ga towareru toki,” in *Jōdo Shinshū wo rikai suru tameni*, edited by Dendōin Kenkyūbu (Kyoto: Hongwanji Shuppan Kyōkai, 1972).

Fugen Daien, *Saikin no ōjō shisō wo megurite* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1972).

Kiritani Junnin, “Genjitsu kyūsai no rikai,” in *Ōhara sensei kokikinen: Jōdokyōshisō kenkyū*, edited by Ōhara Sensei Kokikinen Ronbunshū Kankōkai (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1967).

Shigaraki Takamaro, “Shinran shōnin ni okeru genshō shōjōju no igi,” *Ryūkoku daigaku ronshū* 365/366 (1960): pp 150–164.

Sasaki Tetsujō, *Shūgi yōron* (Kyoto: Hyakkaen, 1960).