

**Keynote Address:**  
**The Meaning of Practice in  
Shin Buddhism**

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I. THE FUNDAMENTAL STANDPOINT OF BUDDHISM

RELIGIONS GENERALLY SEEK to acknowledge the existence of some kind of transcendent being and bring about persons' reliance upon or obedience to that transcendent power. The structure of the Buddhist teaching is completely different, however. Buddhism encourages us to engage in profound reflection on the reality that we human beings lead lives of ignorance, emptiness, and falsity in our everyday, secular lives. Through a penetrating insight into ourselves, we are subjectively made to negate the present state of our being, which remains buried in the secular world. Buddhism, moreover, focuses on our attainment of true human growth as we search for a higher way of life by awakening supramundane wisdom. One who realizes the fulfillment of such wisdom is called a "buddha," and Buddhism reveals the path leading to the attainment of buddhahood.

Buddhism teaches that, as our minds become purified, we realize a profound awakening to ultimate truth that pervades the universe, just as Śākyamuni did. Hence, it proposes that we cast off the old shells of our ego-selves through the ongoing repetition and deepening of this experience of awakening, and that, as we do, we realize true growth and maturity as human beings. In this sense, Buddhism can be distinguished from religions in general. While constituting the teachings expounded by the Buddha, Buddhism is, at the same time, a teaching through which we are enabled to become buddhas.<sup>1</sup>

Buddhism clarifies the path by which human beings come to awaken supramundane wisdom. The original Buddhist scriptures explain that the most fundamental path of practice is "the middle path" (Skt. *madhyamā pratīpad*, Jpn. *chūdō*).<sup>2</sup> The middle path expresses our liberation from the extremes of sensual indulgence and ascetic practices. It also points to our engagement in a total self-negation of our own state of being. At the same time, it indicates that Buddhist life involves a whole-hearted aspiration for

the highest ideals of life, as well as our constant directing of ourselves to the supramundane world. It implies, therefore, our subjective engagement in superlative forms of praxis.

The middle path involves, moreover, relentless reflection upon our own self-centered and ego-attached manner of existence within the ordinary, secular world. As we transcend and radically overcome this existence, we come to see that the true state of our existence is in accord with the principle of interdependent origination (Skt. *pratitya-samutpāda*, Jpn. *engi*). That is, we come to control ourselves by living in accordance with the law of interdependent origination.

Many of the early Buddhist sutras describe this middle path in terms of the eightfold noble path (Skt. *ārya-astāngika mārga*, Jpn. *hasshōdō*).<sup>3</sup> The eightfold path noble comprises right view, right thought, right speech, right conduct, right living, right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right meditation. Right view means that, guided by the teachings, we become free of ego-attachment and come to see all existences, just as they are. In this sense, right view represents not only the initial stage of the path of practice, but also the ultimate goal toward which the path is directed. The starting point is the goal. Yet the path of practice is also a process along which we proceed from the starting point and direct ourselves toward the goal. In this way, right view constitutes the beginning and the end, the end and the beginning. The other seven aspects of the path function as stages in a process leading to the self-fulfillment of right view.

The second stage of right thought represents correct thinking. It is the first step that must be taken in order to realize the fulfillment of right view. Right thought is a mental act, which inevitably leads to the appearance of verbal and physical actions. The third stage of right speech refers to the correct use of language. It is a linguistic expression for right view. The fourth stage of right conduct refers to correct actions and behavior. It is the physical expression of right view. Right thought, right speech, and right conduct take place in close relationship with each other, as concrete and practical manifestations of right view.

The fifth stage of right living refers to the act of living correctly. The three acts of right thought, right speech, and right conduct are integrated and constantly performed in all spheres of everyday life. This stage, then, refers to the concrete practice in everyday life of right view. The sixth stage of right endeavor signifies correct effort. It refers to one's unceasing efforts to maintain a thoroughly correct life every day by living in accord with the principle of interdependent origination. The seventh state of right mindfulness signifies correct and exclusive thought. It refers to whole-hearted thought, in which one wishes to be able to live one's entire life based on right view, in accordance with the law of interdependent origination.

That is to say, right thought, right speech, and right conduct, which are the concrete and practical manifestations of right view, and right liv-

ing, which unifies them all, are sustained and fulfilled by right endeavor and right mindfulness. The final stage of right meditation refers to correct meditation. It signifies the mental state that is pure and synthesizes all of the previous seven stages of practices. In this way, right view as the starting point of the path becomes, through correct meditation, right view that is the ultimate attainment on the path.

In this way we can see on the eightfold noble path right view becomes subjectively fulfilled within ourselves, so that we come to see things exactly as they are in accordance with the principle of interdependent origination. Again, right view, which is the ultimate goal of the path of practice, is discussed at the outset as the gate of entry into that path. The path of practice in Buddhism begins with our encounter with the teachings and our selection of the truth elucidated therein as our ultimate refuge. Then, by being unceasingly mindful of that truth and directing ourselves to that truth, we relentlessly and critically negate our present state of being as empty and false. Thus, we open our eyes to right view—this new manner of seeing—as we follow the path that is pointed out by those teachings. This is starting point of the Buddhist path.

Then, based on our performance of specific practices, this state of seeing things as they really are gradually becomes manifest subjectively and practically within our daily life. In other words, the path of practice is an engagement in which we constantly discard our old self and realize the growth of a new self, as we look toward becoming a person who can truly live within right view itself. In this way, it could be said that the path of practice leading to the attainment of enlightenment is the path on which we earnestly move from right view at the entry level to right view at the level of ultimacy. It is the path of self-fulfillment, of the culmination of seeing (and knowing) things as they really are. This is the way in which I understand the fundamental structure of the path of practice in Buddhism. I also believe that the same structure can be found in the path revealed by Shinran, which he called “the true essence of the Pure Land way (*Jōdo shinshū*).”

Since Shin Buddhism discusses the establishment of one buddha—Amida—along with our whole-hearted taking of refuge in that buddha, its teaching is often viewed as positing the existence of a transcendent being and urging our absolute reliance on it. However, this is a total misunderstanding of Shinran’s teaching. The Shin Buddhist path remains resolutely Buddhist. That is, the doctrine of Shin Buddhism clearly sets out a path on which human beings can transcend the secular world and attain supramundane wisdom as we cast off our old selves and realize growth toward buddhahood.

Shinran explains that this Pure Land path of practice, on which human beings attain buddhahood, is the path of saying the Name (*shōmyō no michi*). He also expresses it as the path of shinjin (*shinjin no michi*).<sup>4</sup>

## II. THE PATH OF HEARING THE NAME IN THE *MURYŌJUKYŌ*

In Shin Buddhism, Amida Buddha is understood to be a symbolic expression of ultimate truth, a symbol which seeks to reveal ultimate truth that pervades the universe to common people in a way that would be easy for them to understand. As both Amitābha (unlimited light) and Amitāyus (unlimited life), the symbol of Amida indicates that truth is revealed in a manner that reaches all people, at all places and times.

We will return to a fuller discussion of Amida Buddha as symbol later on; however, for the time being let us consider the following. When Amida, as symbolic expression, is revealed as form, it is discussed in terms of buddha-body or buddha image. When it is expressed as language or word, it is explicated as the Buddha's Name (*myōgō*). In other words, the path of contemplation, in which one engages in the practice of visualizing the Buddha, is explicated as the method that will bring one to the experience of encountering Amida's buddha-body, or Amida Buddha that is symbolized as form. On the other hand, the path of hearing the Name (*monmyō*) is set forth from the standpoint in which Amida Buddha is symbolized as word or Buddha-Name.

The Pure Land sutras that comprehend Amida Buddha as Name and expound the path of hearing the Name are the *Bussetsu Muryōjukyō* (Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life)<sup>5</sup> and the *Bussetsu Amidakyō* (Amida Sutra).<sup>6</sup> The sutra that comprehends Amida Buddha as buddha-body and teaches the path of contemplating the Buddha is the *Bussetsu Kanmuryōjukyō* (Sutra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life).<sup>7</sup> The teaching of Shin Buddhism is primarily based on the *Muryōjukyō*, and thus sets forth the path of hearing the Name. Hence, in Shin Buddhism the Name of the Buddha is considered to have particular significance because it indicates that Amida Buddha "names itself" and works toward us. Hence, in this path one is said to encounter Amida when one hears the Name or the "calling voice" of the Buddha.

The content of the path of practice set out in the *Muryōjukyō* is exceedingly complex. While it would be impossible to cover the whole of it in a simple manner, it might be condensed and summarized in the following way. In its most basic form, practitioners on this path hear the Name of the Buddha or raise the mind aspiring for enlightenment. They then think on Amida Buddha and give rise to an aspiration to be born in that buddha's Pure Land. Both householders and renunciant monks perform, in accordance with their respective standpoints, the practices of various kinds of roots of goodness. As a result, they constantly and unceasingly engage in the practice of the nembutsu and in their aspiration for birth. The deepening of those practices enable them to attain birth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land after their lives come to an end.<sup>8</sup>

In this way, the path of practice in the *Muryōjūkyō* provides a way for the attainment of birth in another realm called the Pure Land, based on the performance of the practices of various roots of goodness. Through the performance of various practices, the practitioner is able to continually deepen thoughts on the nembutsu, as well as the aspiration to be born. More fundamentally, this means that one casts away the mind of miscellaneous defilements and ignorance and perfects the mind of shinjin. It also means that one goes on to realize the realm of *samādhi* and visualization of the Buddha. From that perspective, the path of practice set out in the *Muryōjūkyō* is basically a path of the gradual awakening of the mind that sees things just as they are, through the performance of various practices, based on the hearing of the Name or the raising of the mind aspiring for enlightenment. That is, starting from the entry-level realization of right view and true knowing, it completes and deepens it and thus reaches the perfection of supramundane wisdom, or the mind that sees (and knows) things exactly as they are. One can also say that it is the path in which one earnestly discards one's old self and realizes self-growth toward becoming a person who lives within this mind of truly seeing.

In other words, according to the *Muryōjūkyō*, upon hearing the Name of Amida Buddha one is able without fail to awaken to truth and realize oneness with Amida Buddha. This experience of awakening is expressed as *citta-prasāda* (purification or clarification of the mind). This is also described as the experience of shinjin.<sup>9</sup> The sutra then goes on to say that upon realizing the experience of shinjin one is able to attain in this life the state of true settlement (*shōjōju*), which refers to the first level of enlightenment (*satori*). This realization brings about many kinds of benefits and happiness. And then, after death, one attains birth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha, thereby realizing true, complete enlightenment and buddhahood.<sup>10</sup>

### III. NĀGĀRJUNA'S PATH OF PRACTICE PERFORMED IN THE THREE MODES OF ACTION

The *Muryōjūkyō* repeatedly urges practitioners to hear the Name of Amida Buddha. However, it offers no concrete method that would enable them to hear the Name. That method would be later explicated by Nāgārjuna of India (ca. 150–250 CE) who prescribed a path of practices performed in the three modes of action, which was said to be a path of easy practice for householders.<sup>11</sup>

Although materials pertaining to it are limited, Nāgārjuna's text, *Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣā-śāstra* (Commentary on the Ten Bodhisattva Stages, Jpn. *Jūjūbībāsharon*), can be seen as representing his thoughts as to Pure Land Buddhism. In that text Nāgārjuna sets out a path of practice for laypersons

and bodhisattvas that leads to the attainment of the stage of non-retrogression (*futaitenchi*), calling it the path of “easy practice of entrusting as a means for attaining it” (*shin hōben igyō*). The content of that path of practice is presented in this manner. One hears, believes, and accepts the Name of the Buddha. Then, one performs practices involving the three modes of karmic actions. That is, one is constantly mindful of the Buddha (mental activity), recites the Buddha’s Name (verbal activity), and reverently worships the Buddha (physical activity). Through those practices, one seeks to reach the stage of being able to visualize the Buddha. This is the mind of pure shinjin.

We can see how the idea of hearing the Name that had originally been expounded in the *Muryōjūkyō* has been recast in Nāgārjuna’s path of “easy practice of entrusting as a means.” Indeed, the structure of the path of practice set out in the sutra (in which, through practice, one realizes purity of mind and is able to see things as they really are in the stage of visualizing the Buddha) has been clearly inherited and exhibited here.<sup>12</sup> Nāgārjuna explains that, through this threefold method of practice (physical worship of Amida, recitation of Amida’s Name, and thinking on Amida Buddha),<sup>13</sup> one will eventually and unfailingly be able to hear the Name or “calling voice” of Amida Buddha. He describes this method as a path of easy practice—the path to enlightenment for householders—which could be accomplished by anyone.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, the path offered by Nāgārjuna provides that, if in our everyday lives we establish the daily customs and lifestyles that include the performance of practices in the three modes of action—worship, recitation of the Name, and thinking on the Buddha—then any of us will be able to encounter Amida Buddha and awaken to ultimate truth.

Nāgārjuna’s teaching of the path of easy practice—the path of practice in the three modes of action—eventually was transmitted to China and flourished within Chinese Pure Land Buddhism. A text attributed to Vasubandhu, the *Muryōjūkyō ubadaisha ganshōge* (Treatise on the Pure Land) describes the path of practice leading to birth in the Pure Land as that of the “five gates of mindfulness” (*gonenmon*) or five kinds of practice pertaining to Amida Buddha and the Pure Land. That is, one worships the Buddha (*raihō*), praises the Buddha (*sandan*), aspires to be born in that land (*sagan*), contemplates the Buddha and land (*kanzatsu*), and transfers merit for birth (*ekō*). The primary axes for this path of the “five gates of mindfulness” are aspiration and contemplation of the manifestations of the adorned virtues of Amida Buddha and the Pure Land. In this way, we can see that Vasubandhu’s Pure Land thought inherited ideas that differed from those of the *Muryōjūkyō*, which was centered on the notion of “hearing the Name.”

Although Tanluan in China inherited Vasubandhu’s idea of the “five gates of mindfulness,” he revealed it to be a path of practice that accords with the capacities of ordinary beings. For him, the practice of the nembutsu

across ten thought-moments (*jūnen nembutsu*) is an expression of a person's mental state at the moment of death, which has been attained through the continuous practice of reciting the Buddha's Name or contemplating the Buddha's body. According to Tanluan, this practice extinguishes all of one's karmic sins, produces goodness, and fulfills the karmic activity necessary for birth. Despite his emphasis on the extinguishing of sins through the nembutsu, Tanluan's thought is a development of Nāgārjuna's and Vasubandhu's notions of the path of practice.<sup>15</sup>

The Pure Land thought of Daozhuo represents a transmission of Tanluan's path of practicing the nembutsu across ten thought-moments. One must fully take note of the fact, however, that Daozhuo explains that practice as the path of nembutsu-samādhi.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the path of practice found in Shandao's Pure Land thought clearly reflects a structure of thought similar to that seen in Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu. That is to say, Shandao's path of practice involves having a firm belief (*anjin*), undertaking practices (*kiḡyō*), and performing the karmic act leading to birth (*sagō*). On this path, one takes refuge in Amida Buddha and aspires to be born in the Pure Land. Based on those thoughts, one performs the "five right practices" of reciting the Pure Land sutras (*dokuju*), contemplating the Buddha (*kanzatsu*), worshipping the Buddha (*railhai*), saying the Buddha's Name (*shōmyō*), and praising and making offerings to the Buddha (*sandan kuyō*). Among the five, says Shandao, one should engage in saying the Name in particular. Through those practices, one attains the samādhi of visualizing the Buddha and all of one's karmic evil is extinguished. Then, after death one realizes birth in the Pure Land.

In conclusion, practices in the three modes of action are said to constitute the path to enlightenment for householders. In contrast to the path to enlightenment for renunciants, which required the performance of practices at specified places and times, the acts of worship, recitation, and thinking on the Buddha can be performed at any location or time. Thus, it is important that one establishes such practices as everyday customs and works them into one's lifestyle. The significant point here is that, of the practices in the three modes of action, recitation of the Buddha's Name is the one that could most easily be made into an everyday custom. Hence, in Chinese Pure Land Buddhism, the practice of saying the Name came to be considered as the central practice.<sup>17</sup>

#### IV. SHINRAN'S PATH OF PRACTICE

It is said that the Pure Land Buddhist thought of Hōnen in Japan relied solely upon the teachings of Shandao. In fact, however, Hōnen's path of practice represented a further development of Shandao's notion of the path

of practice. According to the latter, a person performs the single practice of saying the Name, attains samādhi during ordinary life, and abides in right-mindedness as Amida Buddha comes to welcome him at the moment of death. All karmic sins and hindrances are then extinguished and one attains birth in the Pure Land.

Hōnen emphasized the importance of having right-mindedness as the Buddha comes to welcome one at the moment of death over the idea of realizing the samādhi of visualizing the Buddha during ordinary life. However, since both paths are directed to the attainment of shinjin, which is seeing things exactly as they really are, they can be considered to be identical.<sup>18</sup> In Hōnen's nembutsu movement there was a focus on the number of recitations that a practitioner was to perform. This resulted in a division of opinion between those who advocated many callings of the nembutsu and those who maintained that just a few would be sufficient. This led to much confusion and controversy.<sup>19</sup>

Shinran responded to this situation by reemphasizing the path of practice expounded in the *Muryōjūkyō* and in Nāgārjuna's teaching. His position was that the acts of worship, recitation, and thinking are all grounded in the act of "hearing the Name." According to him, our actions of physical worship of Amida Buddha, saying the Buddha's Name, and thinking on Amida are—in and of themselves—Amida Buddha's act of calling out to us; they are none other than Amida Buddha's calling voice itself. When we deeply come to realize or awaken to this, we are able to "hear" that voice.

For Shinran, the true nembutsu practice of saying the Name is based in the Eighteenth Vow, which he calls the "Vow of birth through the nembutsu" and the "Vow of shinjin, which is Amida's directing of virtue for our going forth."<sup>20</sup> Selected by Amida Buddha's Universal Vow of great compassion, this nembutsu is the path of easy practice and easy attainment of birth that is most appropriate for ordinary, lay householders. As he states,

Nothing surpasses saying the Name of the Tathagata as the essential in attaining birth.<sup>21</sup>

Saying the Name, one will attain birth in the Pure Land of bliss without fail; this is because birth through the nembutsu is brought about by the Buddha's Primal Vow.<sup>22</sup>

Shinran offers the following explanation of the true and real practice of the nembutsu:

The great practice is to say the Name of the Tathagata of unhindered light. This practice, embodying all good acts and possessing all roots of virtue, is perfect and most rapid in bringing them to fullness. It is the treasure ocean of virtues that is suchness or true reality. For this reason, it is called great practice.<sup>23</sup>



The meaning of this passage is that our everyday practice of the *nembutsu*—our voicing of the Name of Amida Buddha—is our practice, and yet it is also true practice, which embodies all good acts and virtues, and brings to perfect fulfillment all that is valuable for our attainment of birth and enlightenment. Our saying of the Name is at the same time the calling of the Name by all of the buddhas, which we hear and receive. In other words, “saying the Name” refers not just to the act of saying the Name, but to the identity of saying the Name and hearing the Name. For that reason, this practice of saying the Name is “great practice.” Even as it remains our practice, it is called the Buddha’s practice as well—the true and real practice that is bestowed by the Buddha.

For Shinran, moreover, the act of “saying” bears within it a sense of “knowing.” He states,

*Saying* (*shō*) means to utter the Name. *Shō* also means to weigh, to determine the measure of something. This means that when a person says the Name even ten times or but once, hearing it and being born without even the slightest doubt, he or she will be born in the true fulfilled land.<sup>24</sup>

“Saying” means to “weigh” or to “determine the measure of something.” Shinran applies this definition of the word “saying” as he quotes the following passage from Tanluan’s *Commentary* in his “Chapter on Practice.”

How does one “praise”? One says the Name of the Tathagata in accord with the Tathagata’s light, which is the embodiment of wisdom, wishing, by practicing in accord with reality, to be in correspondence with the significance of the Name.<sup>25</sup>

As a note regarding the word “says,” Shinran inserts the following comment into the passage: “‘To say’ (*shō*) means to ascertain weight.”<sup>26</sup> From these examples, it can be observed that for Shinran the word “say” (*shō*) in “saying the Name” means to “weigh,” to “determine,” and to “know.”

It could thus be said that in Shinran’s thought saying the Name means that, through the unceasing continuation of the practice in its essence, one gradually comes to “ascertain,” “determine,” and “know” truth itself. The medium for this realization is the Name of the Buddha, as the symbolic expression of truth. The significance of our continuation of the practice of saying the name in everyday life is that, through it, we come to “know” the true within ourselves. In other words, while saying the Name means that we call out the Name of the Tathāgata with our mouths, it also means that, through it, we come to know the teachings all the more. In this way, it could be said that true saying of the Name exists where our “saying”

means to “say and know” (*shōchi*).

In regard to this point, two writers have offered their thoughts:

My reciting of the Name is nothing more than an imitation. For there to be true recitation of the Name, it is necessary that all the Buddhas say the Name.<sup>27</sup>

Praising the Name of Amida Buddha flows into the content of the “Vow that all the Buddhas extol the Name” and the “Vow that all the Buddhas praise the Name” within the great flow of the saying of the Name. The meaning of this practice is not simply the act of an individual person. The act itself really possesses a deep, symbolic foundation.<sup>28</sup>

The *myōkōnin* Asahara Saichi (1851–1933) expressed his understanding in this way:

When I say the nembutsu, as recited by me, it has no taste to it. But when I say the nembutsu, as is recited to me, then the nembutsu is rich in flavor.<sup>29</sup>

I do not say the Name. *Namo Amida Butsu* echoes toward me.<sup>30</sup>

I have discussed elsewhere<sup>31</sup> that the Name of Amida Buddha is, in the final analysis, none other than a religious symbol or expedient means by which ultimate, supramundane truth makes itself known in this secular world. What I refer to here as a “religious symbol” involves a variety of meanings and thus cannot be simply explained.<sup>32</sup> However, it can basically be understood in the following manner.

“Religious symbolism” indicates a means of expression used by one who has had an immediate experience of awakening to ultimate truth. When one seeks to talk about or explain the content of that experience in this world of falsity, the means of expression must, unavoidably, take the form of religious symbols. It follows that symbols have a paradoxical structure in which they affirm the secular world, even as they negate the nature of that world. That is to say, one speaks about one’s experience in a conventional manner. And yet, at the same time, since one is seeking to express the ultimate, supramundane content of that experience, the conventional manner of one’s expression must be negated from its very roots.

The point is that a religious symbol always transcends symbolic expression itself by pointing to ultimate truth and reality. That is, a symbol is in itself not the ultimate truth or reality itself. It simply points to that ultimate truth and reality. At the same time, however, nothing can take the place of that symbol, since it always participates profoundly in that ultimate truth and reality. In a sense, this means that, as one who has had a direct expe-

rience with ultimate truth seeks to give expression to it, ultimate truth is coming to manifest itself in that symbol.

Shinran's selection of a passage from the *Daichidoron* (Commentary on the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*) in his *Kyōgyōshō monrui* can be understood in this context.

Consider, for example, a person instructing us by pointing to the moon with his finger. (To take words to be the meaning) is like looking at the finger and not at the moon. The person would say, "I am pointing to the moon with my finger in order to show it to you. Why do you look at my finger and not the moon?" Similarly, words are the finger pointing to the meaning; they are not the meaning itself. Hence, do not rely upon words.<sup>33</sup>

Here, if we understand the Name to be a word that is like a "finger pointing to the moon," the Name as "finger" is a symbolic word that can only point to the "moon" or meaning of ultimate truth and reality. It is not in any way truth or reality itself. As the passage states, "words ... are not the meaning itself." Thus, the Name "Amida Buddha" signifies the act of the affixing of or declaration of a name, an act that takes place in the direction from the other shore (*higan*) to this shore. However, considering this further, this "finger that points to the moon" takes on significance as a "finger" only in the light of that "moon." The "moon" is, in a sense, "pointed to" by the "finger." At the same time, however, it is only within the light of the "moon" that the "finger" can truly constitute a "finger pointing to the moon."

In exactly the same way, the Name, as "finger pointing to the moon," is a word whose name has been declared; it is not the "moon." It simply points to ultimate truth. Yet, without the Name there would be no path through which we could encounter that ultimate truth. Thus, in a sense, in the Name ultimate truth is manifesting or "declaring" itself in the world of falsity and emptiness. In other words, the Name "Amida Buddha" is the activity of ultimate truth and reality "declaring itself," or "naming itself" from the other shore to this shore. In this way, as religious symbol, the Name signifies the self-manifestation of truth in the secular world.

On the Shin Buddhist path of practice we come to encounter Amida Buddha as ultimate truth in the Name-as-symbol and in the nembutsu practice of saying that Name. It is also on that path we can come to awaken to ultimate truth and reality. The meaning of saying the Name or reciting the nembutsu is revealed in this passage from the *Tannishō* (A Record in Lament of Divergences):

But with a foolish being full of blind passions, in this fleeting world—this burning house—all matters without exception are

empty and false, totally without truth and sincerity. The nembutsu alone is true and real.<sup>34</sup>

As we say the Name we come to truly know that all secular and ordinary values in this world and in our lives are without exception “empty and false, totally without truth and sincerity.” We then choose to cast away all of this into the nembutsu. At the same moment, we choose to accept the nembutsu alone—solely and exclusively—as ultimate value and as our place of final refuge. This is the path of the nembutsu of the Primal Vow, which Shinran revealed as

Attaining Buddhahood through the nembutsu is the true essence of the Pure Land way (*nembutsu jōbutsu kore shinshū*).<sup>35</sup>

The problem, of course, is whether this nembutsu of “choice,” in which we choose to abandon and choose to take up value and action, will arise within us—for it is not just a function of simply reciting the Name. What is essential is that we deeply hear, with our entire beings, the Name declaring or naming itself within this nembutsu of “selection” or “choice.”

Here, we see again the significance of the true practice of saying the Name of the Primal Vow in Shinran’s thought. Superficially, the single practice of saying the Name has features in common with the nembutsu of the Twentieth Vow. However, such nembutsu practitioners “make the auspicious Name of the Primal Vow their own root of good.”<sup>36</sup> They engage exclusively in designs to embellish or adorn themselves with the merits obtaining through the act of recitation.

The nembutsu of the Primal Vow, however, differs radically from this. It signifies the world of our ultimate refuge, in which at the risk of our very lives we choose to take up the nembutsu that “alone is true and real.” As an inevitable consequence of that choice the true state of our very selves becomes critically exposed, and declared, within the saying of the Name. In this way, our choice of the nembutsu that “alone is true and real” becomes, conversely, a harsh illumination of our own selves. Thus, as a “declaration” of our deluded passions and falsity, the true practice of saying the Name completely tears down our existence to its foundations. The more we aspire for the truth and the closer we draw toward it, the more we find that the falsity of our own selves is relentlessly called into question and destroyed within the illumination of truth.

It is just as when we seek the light. As we get closer and closer to the light our own shadows become all the more starkly revealed. When the true and real state of our selves becomes all the more deeply brought into question and we come to awaken to our own deluded passions and falsity, then inevitably the Tathāgata’s declaration and “naming of itself” comes to

be heard. The Tathāgata's declaration that is present in the act of saying the Name can be heard and reflected upon (*monshi*) and truly known (*shinchi*) within this radical negation of our selves.

With the Name as our "finger pointing to the moon," we can choose to take up ultimate truth and reality—our ultimate place of refuge—as we wholeheartedly say the Name. At the same time, the Name is also the self-declaration or "calling voice" (*yobigoe*) of truth. That is to say, truth names itself so that we may be able to know ourselves. Its importance lies in each voicing of the Name, where we can hear and reflect on the Name declared by the Buddha, come into contact with its truth, and encounter its reality. This is the meaning of the true practice of saying the Name of the Primal Vow.

Thus, for Shinran, the practice of saying of the Name, which arises in the direction from ourselves to the Buddha, is identical with the practice of hearing of the Name (*monmyō*), which arises from the direction of the Buddha toward us. In other words, our act of saying the Name, in which we voice the words "I take refuge" (*namo* or *kimyō*) in the Buddha, is in itself identical with the Buddha's "command of the Primal Vow calling to and summoning us" (*hongan shōkan no chokumei*).<sup>37</sup>

The path of "birth through the nembutsu" of the Eighteenth Vow is elucidated as the "path of hearing the Name" (*monmyō no michi*), which is based in the passage on the fulfillment of that Vow in the *Muryōjūkyō*.

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.<sup>38</sup>

This clearly reveals that the path of practice of the Primal Vow is none other than the path of wholeheartedly hearing the Name (*sono myōgō o kiku*). The meaning of "the Name" here refers, as we have seen above, to our own saying of the Name, which is at the same time identical to the buddhas' saying of the Name. The path of practice of the Primal Vow exists when we engage in this practice of saying the Name, for this path is also that of hearing the Name, in which our calling the Name in the direction of the Buddha is at the same time our hearing of the Name that is being declared by the buddhas to us.

For Shinran, hearing the Name is none other than shinjin itself. Shinran presents this explanation of the meaning of "hearing" the Name,

The word *hear* in the passage from the (Larger) Sutra means that sentient beings, having heard how the Buddha's vow arose—its origin and fulfillment—are altogether free of doubt. This is *to hear*.<sup>39</sup>

He also states,

“Hear” further indicates shinjin.<sup>40</sup>

*Hearing* is to entrust oneself to the Name that embodies the Tathagata’s Vow.<sup>41</sup>

To “hear” indicates our own subjective comprehension (our true knowing) of two aspects of the real state of our existence: we realize subjectively that we are falling into hell (why “the Buddha’s Vow arose”) and also realize the constancy of great compassion (the “origin and fulfillment of the Buddha’s Vow”) that has been established for our sake. “Hearing” means that we truly know the identity of two aspects with one another.

Learning of the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha and hearing the Buddha’s Name is not simply a matter of thinking about or understanding the Buddha’s Vow or Name in some objectified way. Rather, it means that we exhaustively examine our own state of existence through hearing and reflecting on the teachings, and we awaken profoundly to our own falsity, emptiness, and karmic evil. As we awaken to the reality of our own existence and bring ourselves in accord with it, we are able to comprehend the Buddha’s Primal Vow of great compassion. As we come into contact with the truth and reality of the Buddha, conversely, we are able to awaken to our own delusion and ignorance.

## V. THE SHIN BUDDHIST PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT IS TO HEAR THE CALLING VOICE OF THE BUDDHA

When we are able to see our own form clearly, the mirror that reflects our form also becomes clear; and when the mirror becomes clear, our form comes to be seen clearly as well. When the state of our own existence is radically negated as false and empty, at that very moment the truth and reality of the Buddha comes to be clearly comprehended. As long as we are not sure of the falsity of our own existence and we do not realize that our current lives are “false and empty,” it will not be clear to us at all that Amida Buddha is true and real. As long as we believe in the certainty of this *sahā* world and continue to dwell peacefully within it, the Pure Land will lie hazily in the distance, never to be clearly seen. Truly knowing the falsity of our selves and the truth of the Buddha—awakening to the uncertainty of the *sahā* world and the certainty of the Pure Land—these realizations arise simultaneously and in identity with each other.

Thus, in the Shin Buddhist practice of reciting the Buddha’s Name, saying the Name is identical to hearing the Name. As we properly perform practices every day in the three modes of action (worship, recitation, and

thinking)—in particular if we continuously perform the practice of saying the Name—then our act of calling out the Name (from us to the Buddha) will inevitably undergo a complete reversal of direction and we will come to realize (and awaken to the truth that) it is none other than the Buddha's calling of the Name—the Buddha's calling voice (from Buddha to us). Stated in another way, as we perform practices in the three modes of action, particularly the practice of reciting the Buddha's Name, our ego-centric way of life, which we had led up until that point, will gradually crumble, and Amida Buddha, which dwells within us, will become manifest within us. What we experience is the destruction of our ego-centric selves and the manifestation of the Tathāgata—the realization of the oneness of the self and Buddha.

In Shin Buddhism, this religious experience of awakening to the identity of our selves and the Buddha is referred to as "shinjin." This experience of shinjin reoccurs and deepens throughout the many different conditions of our human lives, and as it does, true human growth takes place. As I mentioned earlier, the Shin Buddhist path to enlightenment is that of continuously performing practices in the three modes of action (that is, worship, recitation, and thinking on the Buddha) every day, and, as we do so, to hear the calling voice of Amida Buddha. It is on this path that we are enabled to realize a true human life.

I would like to conclude my talk by reflecting on two more poems by Asahara Saichi.

Saichi! Who is now reciting the nembutsu? Hmm... It is Saichi. No, that's not it! It is the direct teaching of Amida (*oyasama*). It is the oneness of this self and Buddha.<sup>42</sup>

Where is the Tathagata? The Tathagata is right here. He fills Saichi's heart and mind as he recites, "Namu Amida Butsu."<sup>43</sup>

As we can see, Saichi was able to hear the calling voice of the Buddha as he recited the Name every day. Clearly he lived everyday with this profound sense of shinjin.

Practice in Shin Buddhism refers to the performance of practices in the three modes of action, that is, worship of the Buddha, recitation of the Buddha's Name, and thinking on the Buddha, and especially the practice of saying the Name every day. In today's American Shin Buddhist sangha the practice of worship, recitation, and thinking on the Buddha during Sunday temple services is quite important. But, to the extent that this practice represents the path to enlightenment for Buddhist householders, what is even more vital is that they become part of the daily customs and lifestyles of Shin followers so that they can be practiced every day. And it is also important that affirmative techniques and guidance be provided to them in the future.

Through the daily performance of these practices in the three modes of action we will be able to realize shinjin, which is the experience of encountering Amida Buddha. And, through the repetition and deepening of that experience, we will be able to generate new and dynamic human lives. This represents the entirety of practice on the path to enlightenment in Jōdo Shinshū.

Translated by David Matsumoto



## NOTES

1. Ui Hakuju, *Bukkyō shisō kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1943), p. 341; Ueda Gibun, *Bukkyō wo dō rikai suruka* (Kyoto: Hongwanji Shuppan Kyōkai, 1963).
2. Miyamoto Shōson, *Konpon kū to chū* (Tokyo: Daiichi Shobō, 1943), p. 147 et seq.; *Chūdō shisō oyobi sono hattasu* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1944), p. 656 et seq.
3. Ui Hakuju, *Indo tetsugaku kenkyū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1965), p. 25 et seq.; Miyamoto Shōson, previous two cited works.
4. For a more comprehensive treatment of the path of practice in Pure Land Buddhism, see Shigaraki Takamaro, *Jōdokyō ni okeru shin no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1975). For a more detailed examination of the path of practice in Shinran's thought, see Shigaraki Takamaro, *Shinran ni okeru shin no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1990).
5. *Bussetsu Muryōjūkyō* (Ch. *Wu-liang-shou ching*; The Larger Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life), *Taishō*, vol. 12, p. 265c; Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho Hensansho, *Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho*, vol. 1 (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1982) (hereafter SSZ 1), p. 1.
6. *Bussetsu Amidakyō* (Ch. *A-mi-to ching*; Amida Sutra), *Taishō*, vol. 12, p. 346b; SSZ 1, p. 67.
7. *Bussetsu Kanmuryōjūkyō* (*Kuan wu-liang-shou ching*; Contemplation Sutra), *Taishō*, vol. 12, p. 340c; SSZ 1, p. 48.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 56 et seq.
9. See Shigaraki, *Shinran ni okeru shin no kenkyū*, p. 256.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 765.
11. Nāgārjuna, *Jūjūbibasharon, Igyōbon* (Commentary on the Ten Bodhisattva Stages, Chapter on Easy Practice; Skt. *Daśabhūmika-vibāsa-śāstra*; Ch. *Shih-ti-ching-lun*), *Taishō*, vol. 26, p. 25.
12. See Shigaraki, "Ryūju Jōdokyō ni okeru gyōdō shisō," in *Jōdokyō ni okeru shin no kenkyū*, p. 153 et seq.
13. It is thought that the linguistic origins of "thinking on" (*okunen*) might have been *smṛti* or *anusmṛti* in Sanskrit. According to the dictionary, they mean to recollect, remember, mindfully recollect, think on. Both words refer to the "nen" of *nembutsu*. Might they, in a broader sense, also be translated as "meditation"?
14. *Ibid.*
15. Shigaraki, "Donran ni okeru gyōdō shisō," in *Jōdokyō ni okeru shin no kenkyū*, p. 250 et seq.

16. Shigaraki Takamaro, "Dōshaku Jōdokyō ni okeru gyōdō shisō," in *Ryūkoku daigaku ronshū* 389–390 (1969): pp. 57–71.
17. See Shigaraki, *Jōdokyō ni okeru shin no kenkyū*, p. 341.
18. Shigaraki, "Hōnen ni okeru gyōdō shisō," in *Jōdokyō ni okeru shin no kenkyū*, p. 388 et seq.
19. Ibid.
20. "Chapter on Shinjin," *Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho Hensansho, Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. 2 (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1983) (hereafter SSZ 2), p. 48; *The Shin Buddhism Translation Series, The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1 (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997) (hereafter CWS 1), p. 79.
21. *Songō shinzō meimon* (Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls), SSZ 2, p. 594; CWS 1, p. 511.
22. SSZ 2, p. 572; CWS 1, p. 513.
23. "Chapter on Practice," SSZ 2, p. 5; CWS 1, p. 13.
24. *Ichinen Tanen Mon'i* (Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling), SSZ 2, p. 619; CWS 1, p. 489.
25. SSZ 2, p. 15; CWS 1, p. 27.
26. Ibid.
27. Soga Ryōjin, "Monpō seikatsu," in *Soga Ryōjin senshū*, chap. 10 (Tokyo: Yayoi Shobō, 1970), p. 59.
28. Takeuchi Gihan, *Shinran to gendai* (Tokyo: Chūo Kōronsha, 1974), p. 63.
29. See Suzuki Daisetsu, *Myōkōnin Asahara Saichi shū* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1967), p. 144.
30. Ibid., p. 172.
31. See Shigaraki Takamaro, "Amidabutsuron," in *Ryūkoku daigaku Bukkyō bunka kenkyōjo kiyō* 20 (1982): pp. 98–127.
32. In regard to religious symbols, an interesting interpretation can be found in Paul Tillich's *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957). The current discussion is largely guided by this work.
33. "Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands," SSZ 2, p. 166; CWS 1, p. 241.
34. SSZ 2, pp. 792–793; CWS 1, p. 679.
35. *Jōdo wasan* (Hymns on the Pure Land), SSZ 2, p. 494; CWS 1, p. 344.
36. "Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands," SSZ 2, p. 165; CWS 1, p. 240.
37. "Chapter on Practice," SSZ 2, p. 22; CWS 1, p. 38.

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38. This version of the passage is from the “Chapter on Shinjin,” SSZ 2, p. 49; CWS 1, p. 80, and reflects significant changes to the content of the original sutra passage. See CWS 2, p. 259 for a detailed explanation of the manner and reason for Shinran’s unique reading of this and other passages.
39. “Chapter on Shinjin,” SSZ 2, p. 72; CWS 1, p. 112.
40. *Ichinen tanen mon’i*, SSZ 2, p. 605; CWS 1, p. 474.
41. *Songō shinzō meimon*, SSZ 2, p. 578; CWS 1, p. 495.
42. See Suzuki Daisetsu, *Myōkōnin Asahara Saichi shū*, p. 28.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 324.

