



# GASSHO

## FEBRUARY

### 2010

Issue No: 02-10

"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



## SHOSHIN NEMBUTSU GE

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi  
[continued from last issue]

The *Shoshin Nembutsu Ge* (hereafter *Shoshin Ge*) can be translated as *Paens of True Faith In Nembutsu*. The ideograph *Ge* means *gatha* or hymns, therefore, religious verse in song. The *Shoshin Ge* was composed by Shinran Shonin (1173-1263) as a summation on what is *True Practice*, the second volume of his *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho*, a work in six fascicles (six volumes). The *Shoshin Ge* itself is comprised of 120 lines. Each stanza is made up of four lines. Each line has seven Chinese ideograms or *kanji*. So, there are sixty verses in all.

It was not until several decades after Shinran Shonin's demise that Rennyō Shonin, (1415 - 1499), was appointed to be the eighth Head Priest (Abbot) to revive and organize the Hongwanji. The Hongwanji up to Rennyō Shonin's time was a loosely organized group of believers. For Shinran himself never claimed to have disciples or to have founded a new sect of Buddhism. He did not believe in institutionalized religions controlled by a priesthood that catered to the aristocrats, nobles and the warrior elites who were in power. The common uneducated peasantry in his day were exploited by them as they struggled to eke out their daily livelihoods.

It was Rennyō Shonin who extracted the *Shoshin Ge* out of the *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho* [hereafter *KGSS*]. He then set them to a seven metered monotoned "sing-song" format of liturgical chants. These sixty verses were followed then by repetitive sets of intoned nembutsu recitations, each set of O-nembutsu recitations followed by a specific *Wasan* composed by Shinran Shonin. This sing song format of chanting *Shoshin Ge* with nembutsu and *Wasan* also became a way for Jodoshinshu faithful to express their daily gratitude to Amida before their *O-butsu-dan* (family Buddha shrine).

Each set of *O-nembutsu* recitative chantings with a select *Wasan* progresses into higher intoned sets of *Namoh-amida-butsu* recitations. These *O-nembutsu* recitations with a *Wasan* help a person to understand "why" and "how" Amida Buddha, as the very manifestation of the *Dharma's* Wisdom's Inconceivable

## MONTH'S THOUGHT



In the ocean of Amida's Wisdom, there is no discrimination between bombu and sages, evil-doers and good persons. They are equally taken in and never abandoned and become one with Amida just as various river-waters are turned into one taste upon reaching the ocean. [Hisao Inagaki. *The Way of Nembutsu-Faith: A Commentary on Shinran's Shoshinge*. p. 43-44]



Light full of unfathomable Unconditional Compassion for all sentient beings, has been, is now, and yet continues to shine to illuminate the "good person" and especially the "evil person" without prejudice and rejections. The reason why this is so is because the *Dharma's* Wisdom's Light, of its own accord and causal necessity, is impartial in its embracing all sentient beings everywhere without even being asked to do so. This Light, according to Buddhism, does not shine only on human beings or only on a special racial group of people, or only on a given geographic location, or in a special time in history.

This is why Rennyō Shonin appropriated six *Wasans* of the *Jodo Wasans* that speak of Amida as being the very Light of the *Dharma's* Wisdom that timelessly radiates a Light of Golden Splendor

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# REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## SERVICES FOR FEBRUARY 2010

### 1st SUN FEB 7th:

9 A.M. Eng. Service  
Dharma Talk  
*NIRVANA DAY*  
For Children and Adults  
Rev. Tatsuguchi

### 2nd SUN FEB 14th:

9 A.M. Eng. Service  
Dharma Talk  
For Children & Adults  
Rev. Tatsuguchi

### 3rd SUN FEB 21st:

9 A.M. Eng. Service  
Dharma Talk  
For Children & Adults  
Rev. Tatsuguchi

10.30 A.M  
General meeting &  
New Year party

### 4th SUN FEB 28th:

MONTHLY  
FAMILY WORSHIP  
Dharma Talk  
For Children & Adults  
Rev. Tatsuguchi

With Deepest Sympathy

Ms. Pearl C. Kano 77yr Dec. 6, 2009  
Mrs. Misue Koga 98yr Jan. 4, 2010  
Mrs. Ethel F. Omori 84yr Jan 10, 2010

## WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

**KARAOKE CLASS** Mon - 7 - 9 P.M.  
Mr. Nelson Yoshioka

**KARATE** Tues/Fri - 6 - 9 P.M.  
Shihan -Walter Nishioka

**FUJINKAI SEWING CLUB** Wed - 9 - 11 A.M.  
J. Kobuke/A. Murata

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throughout the universe as the twelve kinds of illuminative and transforming virtues. A person who sincerely believes, trusts and takes absolute refuge in Amida Buddha as the very Light and Life of the *Dharma* is instantly "grasped" and "embraced" by its liberating thoughts of "Selflessness" and sentiments of "Togetherness" that serve to mirror and expose a human being's undeniable self-centered agendas and lack of sincerity and compassion for him to see and reflect upon.

Those who are so illuminated and embraced by Amida's Inconceivable Light and Immeasurable Life, their irreverence, ingratitude and impertinence are instantly "transformed" into gratitude, reverence and penitence. Such a penitence characterizes a person who has become fully aware of how unworthy and undeserving he is to have been so grasped by Amida never to be rejected or abandoned by her until such time she or he reaches the Pure Land, whereupon she or he becomes a Buddha the very equal of Amida Buddha.

This is indicated by the second *Wasan* chanted in the Shoshin Ge which translates as follows:

Wisdom's Light  
is beyond measuring;  
Each measurable thing  
is full of attributes!  
There however, is not a thing  
not illuminated  
by this Light!  
Take refuge, therefore,  
in this Light that is  
True and Real!  
*Jodo Wasan No.4*  
rkt tran

In chanting this *Wasan*, one is led to "visualize" Amida's Wisdom to be like a "morning's dawning light" that begins to "transform" the long former night's "pitch-black darkness" in the full light of day. The darkness in being illuminated simultaneously turns into "full daylight." It is not an "illumination" that comes after the "darkness" has been completely eradicated to then to be replaced by as the "light of day." This light becomes a guiding inner beacon that leads us to and over the "Western horizon," and even yet beyond its visible skies to where the Pure Land lies. In other words, the Pure Land is the whole spherical universe itself that contains and

## WORDS OF SHINRAN

Reverently contemplating Amida's directing of virtue for our going forth, I find there is great shinjin (faith). Great shinjin (Amida's Great Heart) is the superlative means for attaining longevity and deathlessness. It is the wondrous way to awaken aspiration for the pure and rejections of the defiled. .... It is the quick path difficult for people to accept (due to their doubts). It is the true cause of attaining great nirvana. It is the white path by which all virtues are fulfilled instantly. It is the ocean of shinjin that is itself suchness or true reality. [SBT-Series. *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way*. Vol II pp. 204-205. ( ) mine.]

sustains all that is in it. It is where our "home of home" lies. Therefore, like the setting sun disappearing over the Western horizon, when we take our last breath of life on this earth of ours, we too are to return to the Land beyond the horizon into that Ultimate Dimension full of True Light and Real Life.

The *kanji* compound *Ko-myo* found in this *Wasan* indicates the Golden Splendor of what is the *Dharma* Worlds True Light that is the basis of all Real Life. *Ko-* is a pictograph of the helio-centric sun emitting constant rays of light in every possible conceivable direction to symbolically the ultimate source of Light and Life! These omni-directional rays of the *Dharma's* light are not to be taken in the sense of a sun whose rays are blistering, scorching, searing, or incinerating. These rays of the *Dharma* Sun are to be understood and experienced as a source of Truth that is like a "dawning sun's light" that gradually and gently begins to reveal the true and real nature of things that were hidden in the "the former night's darkness" as they come to be revealed in the "full light of day."

This is why the pictograph *myo* is made of the "sun" radical on the left and the radical for the "crescent moon" to its right. The compound *ko-myo*, therefore, connotes that the Dharma Light of Wisdom of a mellow "golden illumination" and not an "raging ball of fire" that reduces all evil things into embers and ashes. The Light of Dharma is to be understood more in terms as the warm, nurturing rays of the sun "transforming" things like "green persimmons" into "ripe persimmons" without incinerating them into embers and ashes.

To indicate that these nurturing "transformative powers" of Wisdom is why the ideograph *myo* itself is a combination of the "sun" radical with a "crescent moon radical". This ideograph tells of the "moon" in the night's total darkness, upon being illuminated by sunlight begins turning first into a crescent moon to

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finally become a luminous "full moon" by power and virtues of the sun constantly radiating light everywhere that never fails to illuminate everything in the Dharma World. We, like the moon in the night's total darkness, are lost in the darkness of our "moral confusions" and "spiritual ignorance." As the Light of Wisdom begins to shine upon us, we first become like a crescent moon, then a quarter moon, a half moon, a three-quarter moon, and finally a round full moon completely illuminated by the sun in the night's darkness.

This does not mean that the moon that was in the total darkness and the moon in the full light of day are two different moons. The moon in total darkness and the fully illuminated moon are still the same moon. The moon in total darkness is the self full of presumptions, arrogance and impertinence. The moon fully illuminated is the self full of gratitude, humility and penitence. Shinran Shonin, therefore, realized that it was solely and only in believing, trusting and taking absolute refuge in Amida as the *Dharma's* Inconceivable Wisdom and Unconditional Compassion does a person's ingratitude, irreverence and impertinence begin "turning" into gratitude, reverence and penitence. To live in the O-nembutsu is to live a life full of Joy, Gladness, Serenity and Peace of mind a life free of doubts and fears. Shinran Shonin called this state of living each day in gratitude and penitence the life of "unobstructed freedom."

When the moon in the night's darkness becomes fully illuminated, the holes, jagged ridges, treacherous crevices and gaping craters become fully exposed. We too, by power of Wisdom's Light, come to see the hidden nooks and blind spots in our deepest selves when we become so illuminated by Wisdom's Clear Light. Like the illuminated full moon, we too, when fully illuminated by the *Dharma's* Wisdom Sun, are enabled then to "see" the gaping craters, hidden crevices and jagged ridges that were formerly hidden in the darkness of our moral confusions and spiritual ignorance. This "seeing" enables us then to take refuge in Amida's Sacred Name with a penitence full of Joy and Peace of Mind in the knowledge that Amida never rejects, forsakes, or abandons anyone. For to be so illuminated is to have been grasped, never to be rejected by Amida. Therefore, until we come to acknowledge our evils and transgressions and stop rationalizing and denying them, we can never experience the liberating virtues of *Amida's* Wisdom and Compassion for us!

Once a month there is a day when the "full moon" in full daylight hangs in the Eastern sky directly opposite the "dazzling sun" in the Western sky as it is about to set over the western horizon. The fully illuminated moon in full daylight, however, still has a shadow back side that remains completely hidden. So the two pictographs for the "sun" and a "crescent moon" as radicals opposite each other in the kanji

character *myo* has, then, also this deeper meaning concerning ourselves. The sun and moon radicals facing each other all the more become, therefore, inspirational when one "visualizes" and "en-visualizes" the significance of the Buddhist cosmos and all that is in it to be of a SELFLESSNESS and a TOGETHERNESS in which all things are inseparable and one. This pictograph for the "sun" with the "crescent moon" opposite each other indicates more profoundly the fact that the "world of darkness" and the "World of Light," in actuality, are of one Truth and of one Reality. They are not two separate truths or two disconnected realities, one for those destined for "heavenly bliss" and the other for those destined for "hellish torments." This is the reason for Shinran's exclamation: "...even the good person attains birth, how much more so the evil person." [T. Unno. Tarusho III p. 8]

The *Dharma*, therefore, is a unitary Truth that is of a singular Reality characterized by sacred Selflessness and divine Togetherness. Light and darkness are not two separate actualities. Buddhism, therefore, is not a religion based on destroying or obliterating "darkness" and its "shadows" to then introduce what is "light" and "brightness." Such then is the significance of the metaphor of the fully illuminated moon that yet has a hidden shadow backside hanging in the Eastern sky opposite the crimson sun in the Western sky that is a dazzling sphere of light in every conceivable direction. Both are in the self same sky of a singular universe.

This inseparable relationship of opposites in the same universe can also be seen in the "waves" that keep rising from and subsiding back into the same "boundless ocean." The waves and the ocean are two and yet one. Though one, they are distinctly two and constantly in an inseparable relationship governed by the orderly and uniform laws of causality and conditionality. The metaphor of "waves" to an "ocean" especially depicts this Truth and Reality of Amida's Wisdom as being of a Pure Selflessness and her Compassion as being to be of an All-embracing Togetherness. This is why the *Dharma's* Timeless Benevolence and its Steadfast Beneficence has never or will ever abandon to forsake any sentient being.

The fundamental teaching of Jodoshinshu faith also makes no distinction between the priesthood and laity or between "good persons" and "evil persons." Other monastic Buddhist sects set demanding requirements of celibacy, morality and vegetarianism that are to be strictly upheld. This then sets those living the lay life to be outsiders to the monastic system. However, Buddhist monasticism in making this distinction does not condemn the ways of sensuality and self-indulgence as "transgressions" that are "abominations" to be punished by some omniscient, omnipotent Supreme Deity.

This is why the first two lines of Shinran Shonin begin with the words: *I take refuge in the Tathagata of Immeasurable Life! I believe and trust in the power of his Inconceivable Light!* These initial utterances are none other than Shinran's heartfelt expressions of gratitude to Sakyamuni Buddha for having revealed the actuality of Amida Buddha, who, as the aspiring *Bodhisattva Dharma-kara*, set forth his forty-eight Vows, to then fulfill and consummate each and every one of them. In doing so, he especially vowed to save those caught in the various hopeless states of torment and affliction. These Vows are documented in *The Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life (Bussetsu Dai Muryōu Kyo)*.

After praising Sakyamuni Buddha for revealing Amida Buddha's accomplishments, Shinran then begins to praise the seven Pure Land Master-sages for having explained and elaborated on Sakyamuni Buddha's revelations concerning Amida Buddha, his Sacred Name and the significance of reciting his Sacred Name.

This significance of Amida's Name is mentioned in Shinran Shonin's *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho*. In the preface to the *Chapter on the True Teaching*, he wrote as follows:

To reveal the true teaching: It is the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life*. The central purport of this sutra is that Amida, by establishing his incomparable Vows, has opened wide the dharma-storehouse, and full of compassion for small, foolish beings, he selects and bestows his treasures of virtues. ... [*The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way*. (SBT-Series. Vol I p. 63).]

For this very reason, the first six *Wasans* selected by Rennyō were selected from Shinran's *Jodo Wasans* (No. 4 – 8). The reason for this is because these *Wasans* explain Amida to be the very Light of the *Dharma's* Wisdom.

The most fundamental point in *Jodoshinshu* is that Amida Buddha as True Light and Real Life never forsakes a person, especially the person hopelessly riddled by evil *karma* destined for hell. This becomes quite clear as one chants the sixty-two verses of the *Shoshin Ge*. This significance is seen in the following stanzas:

When one receives Faith,  
 he sees and reveres the Vow  
 and greatly rejoices,  
 All common men,  
**whether they be  
 good or evil,**  
 If they hear and believe  
 the Tathāgata's Universal Vow,  
 The Buddha praises them

## SHINRAN'S WASAN

Nagarjuna, a Great Being,  
 appeared in this world!  
 Clarify did he between  
 "difficult practice"  
 and the "easy practice,"  
 Whereby beings drowning  
 in transmigration  
 can board the Ship  
 called the Universal Vow!  
*Koso Wasan* No. 4'  
 rkt trans.

as 'men of great and  
 superior understanding',  
 They are also called 'Pundarikas'.  
 [SHINSHŪ SEITEN. BCA publication.  
 (n.d.) r Bold for emphasis. p. 152]

That even an "evil person" is saved by the Selfless Virtues and Unconditional Compassion of *Amida*, this point is further indicated by Shinran Shonin as follows: "Even a good person attains birth in the Pure Land, **how much more so the evil person.**" [Taitetsu Unno. *Tannishō* III. p. 8. Bold for emphasis].

Therefore, the first person to be lauded by Shinran in his *Shoshin Ge* is the Pure Land Sage Nagarjuna (c. 2nd-3rd cent. A.D.). He was born in India. He was a profound thinker and a persuasive debater who defended the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha against the six kinds of non-Buddhist teachings. One such heretical doctrine was the belief that there is no such thing as consequences or *karma*. This would mean that there are no outcomes to what a person thinks, feels, craves, much less to what he has said or done.

Shinran Shonin also praised Nagarjuna for having clarified how "trusting in Amida Buddha" was like getting on board a Great Ship that unfailingly ferries a person who is incapable of swimming across "the turbulent sea of life and death" over to the safety of the "Other Shore." He called the "reciting of O-nembutsu" the "Path of Ease." This "ease" does not mean that one, then, just by simply saying *Namoh-Amida-Butsu* can take it "easy" and become indolent, complacent and irresponsible. Nor does it mean that one can do as he pleases.

The other path, said Nagarjuna, was the "Path of Hardships" because it entails a life of strict compliance to moral codes and ethical standards based on clearing one's mind of all falsehoods and all impurities in one's heart. He found that in times of "Extinct *Dharma*," when both the Buddha and his teachings had become obscured, no one could uphold such strict codes of

mental, emotional, verbal or physical standards of self integrity and purity. For people in times of Extinct *Dharma* are incapable of living a perfect, pure life due to the corruption and decadence of the times. To walk the "Path of Difficulties," said Nagarjuna, is for people who can climb the steep vertical cliffs of a mountain up to its topmost peak (heaven). They, then, can only look down on others at the base of the mountain (hell) who are unable to climb the steep slopes to the very top where they are.

Such a path of hardships also can be likened to someone who is lost and dying of thirst and hunger on an endless expanse of desert vainly chasing a "mirage" on its ever shifting burning sands (endless births and deaths). The mirage of a non-existent oasis (samsara) is relentlessly pursued in the hopes of finding life sustaining water, food and cool shade.

The second Pure Land Sage was also from India. His name was Vasubandhu. Like Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu was also a great thinker but more of a psychologist. He analyzed and explained how the human mind works and how it is inseparably connected to its body with its sensory organs responding to the stimuli in his surroundings that comes in "contact", such things as sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactility. Especially does the complex brain as a thinking organ take in these various sensations to then form personal "impressions," images," "ideas" and especially baseless "notions" that have no basis or validity. He founded, therefore, the "Consciousness Only School" or the "Mind-only School." By this, he meant that human consciousness (or personal self-awareness) is full of logical thoughts affected by personal sentiments, feelings and assumptions based on what a person has seen, heard, smelled, tasted and has been physically touched by. These sensations in turn trigger what he or she then selectively talks about and acts on in order to gratify his or her desires and aims in life.

What "Mind only" basically means is that if there is no "self consciousness," there can be no "ideas about self" or any personal "reactions and responses" to what is actually going on in one's surroundings. This means that a person would be unable to choose, decide and react to what is actually happening to him and around him. Therefore, to be "conscious" and "aware" of what is constantly impinging on one's sense organs, bodily appendages, thoughts and emotions, one needs to be aware of the reasons for his decisions in how he chooses to speak and react. This fact is easily understood in terms of a person who is "brain dead" and still very much alive with all his five sensory systems functional, except his brain, or conscious mind. More simply, this fact can be understood also when one projects his frustration and anger on a "tire" as though the tire was a person who can be blamed for having become a "flat tire."

Vasubandhu's importance to Pure Land Buddhism, especially for Jodoshinshu (Shin Buddhism), is found in his *Jodo Ron (Pure Land Paens With Commentary)*. In this work Vasubandhu, after declaring: "I take refuge in the Tathagata (Amida) whose Light illuminates the 'ten quarters of the cosmos'" (*Kimyo Jin'jip'po Muge-ko Nyorai*), subsequently begins to explain how a person should "trust" and "take refuge" in Amida Buddha. They are to enter the "five gateways" (*gonen-mon*), or the five ways of "thinking of," "worshipping," "paying homage" and "taking refuge" in Amida Buddha. They are: (1) by bowing and prostrating one's whole person bodily before Amida Buddha in reverence; (2) by praising Amida by uttering his Sacred Name: *Namoh-amida-butsu*; (3) by aspiring for birth in the Pure Land; (4) by contemplating the virtues of Amida and his Pure Land; and finally, (5) by sharing the virtues of Amida's Wisdom and Compassion with all other sentient beings.

Lines 61 through 64 of the *Shoshin Ge* contain, therefore, the lines in which Shinran Shonin praises the Pure Land Master Vasubandhu for having established the "five gateways," or what it is to recite the *O-nembutsu* through one's awareness of Amida Buddha as being the *Dharma's* very manifestation of the Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness. These lines on Vasubandhu translate as follows:

- [61] The Bodhittava Vasubhandu composed a treatise
- [62] And said: "I trust and take refuge in the Unhindered Light of the Tathagata!"
- [63] He said further: "I base my faith on the sutras that reveal what is True and Real!"
- [64] He, therefore, also revealed the Great Vow (of Amida) that enables us all to "leap out crosswise"(from the six realms of suffering)! [rkt trans. ( ) mine]

The 62nd line, *Kimyo Muge-ko Nyorai* is an abbreviation of Vasubandhu's declaration of faith: *Kimyo jip'po Muge-kō Nyorai*. This line translates as: "I take refuge in the Tathagata whose Light pervades throughout the ten endless directions and unfathomable regions of the universe!" That the first two lines of the *Shoshin Ge* were based on this declaration of faith by Vasubandhu, this is clearly indicated in line 1) *Ki-myo mu-ryo-ju Nyorai* (I take refuge in the Tathagata of Immeasurable Life); and line 2) *Na-moh Fu-ka-shi-gi Ko* (... by entrusting myself to its Inconceivable Light).

Line 63 refers to the three Pure Land sutras: *Bussetsu Daimuryoju Kyo (The Greater Sutra on the Buddha's Expounding on Immeasurable Life)*, and *Bussetsu Kan' Muryoju Kyo (The Sutra on Buddha's Expounding on Meditations on Immeasurable Life)*, *Bussetsu Amida Kyo (The Sutra on Buddha's Expounding on Amida Buddha)*. Line 64 involves difficult

doctrinal principles that concern one's "leaping out crosswise" out of the six realms of transmigration by power and virtue of Amida's Sacred Name.

In this issue, I would, therefore, like to especially discuss line 62, for Amida, as manifestation of Dharma as Light and Life, is the underlying basis for lines 1 and 2 through which Shinran Shonin affirms his faith in the powers and virtues of Amida's Sacred Name as being the *Dharma's* Clear Light and Pure Life. This very line affirms the virtues and powers of Inconceivable Light (*Fukashigi Ko*) and, therefore, acknowledges Amida as being the Buddha of Immeasurable Life (*Muryoju Nyora*). For these reasons Amida is also known as **Amitabha** (Infinite Light) and **Amitayus** (Immeasurable life). *Amitabha* appears as an extension of Amida Buddha to his right as the Bodhisattva *Mahasthamaprapta* as an extension of Wisdom's Light tirelessly illuminating all sentient beings. As an identical twin, the Bodhisattva *Avalokitesvara* appears also to the left as an extension of Amida constantly embracing each and every sentient being with Unconditional Compassion, a Compassion that never ever condemns or rejects an "evil person."

Shinran, therefore, in his *Shoshin Ge* praises and lauds the ways in which Amida embraces all sentient beings, both "good people" and "bad people," with Unconditional Acceptance in order to "transform" their ingratitude into gratitude, their irreverence into reverence, their arrogance into penitence, and their selfishness into unselfishness. This significance of "transformation" by power of Wisdom and virtues of Compassion can be compared to a person who has drunk the "three poisons" of greed, hatred and pride being offered their antidotes. There is not a sentient being who is not affected by the three deadly venoms of selfishness, resentments and impertinence. If this triple deadly nature in our persons are to be neutralized, we need to accept the antidotes that are the Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness in all haste, earnestness and sincerity on our part.

What Shinran Shonin further expresses in his *Shoshin Ge* is his gratitude and indebtedness to Sakyamuni Buddha and the seven Pure Land Master Sages for having made him aware that he himself in actuality, is an "upside down cup full of fissures and holes" [the five deadly transgressions and desecrations of the Right *Dharma*]. We human beings, in reality, are like "upside down ceramic cups" made of the clay of blind passions and foolish vanities. It was Shinran Shonin who came to realize that he was not only an "upside down cup," but, more importantly, an "upside down cup full of holes and cracks," a person unable to retain the generous waters of the *Dharma's* Goodness and Benevolence in the cup of his deepest conscience-ness.

People who think they have no moral cracks in their minds, or spiritual holes in their hearts, they, according to a Zen parable, are like people trying to scoop out the waters of the boundless ocean with their own two hands that are like sieves unable to hold its waters.

Therefore, what Shinran Shonin is saying in his *Shoshin Ge* is that we human beings are all "persons of *karmic* evils and transgressions," or "upside down cups full of holes and cracks." Therefore, we are left only with one thing we only can do to save ourselves. That is to take that "absolute leap of faith" into the waiting arms of Amida Buddha who will instantly receive to embrace us. Once so embraced, she will never ever reject, abandon or let us slip out of her firm but gentle grasp. Thus, Shinran realized that he must abandon all thoughts of presumptuousness that he was a cup without any cracks or holes. He realized instead, that his mind, body and conscience were full of fissures and holes. Therefore, the only way left for him was to take that "ultimate crosswise leap of faith" by plunging into the *Dharma* Ocean itself to enjoy its healing waters of Selfless Wisdom and All-embracing Compassion.

We can see that Shinran Shonin did take that "leap of faith" in the following two *Wasans*:

In this "me" that I am  
without a bit of pity  
or trace of compassion,  
How is it possible for me  
to even assume that  
I can truly help others?  
If it were not for the Ship  
the Tathagata's  
Primordial Vow,  
How could I ever hope  
to cross this  
Sea of Suffering?  
For my heart is full  
of asps and scorpions,  
Unable to do good  
on my own merits  
and virtues,  
Unless I trust and accept  
the Tathagata's virtues  
given to us,  
Forever would I be without  
remorse and penitence!  
*Shozomatsu Wasan* No. 98, 99.  
rkt trans.

To believe, trust and take refuge in Amida Buddha, then, is to say Amida's Sacred Name by uttering *Namoh-amida-butsu* in gratitude, reverence and penitence, a heartfelt penitence that brings one true Joy and Peace of Mind (*anjin*).

As I have often mentioned, this "sudden transformation" by power and virtue of Amida's Primordial Vow is as instantaneous as when a "raindrop" or a huge "hailstone" falls into the ocean. The raindrop instantly becomes the very waters and free flowing currents of the ocean. The hailstone, on the other hand, takes a little longer to melt and become ocean water. But whether it be a raindrop or a hailstone, both, in melting, become ocean water. They are not obliterated or turned into something else other than the very free-flowing waters of the boundless ocean. This analogy implies that we, whether we be white as snowflakes or jagged as an iceberg, in taking that "leap of faith" into the *Dharma* Ocean's Selflessness and Togetherness, whether we be a "good person," or an "evil person" we become the very free flowing waters and currents of "unobstructed freedom" in the *Dharma* Ocean by power of its Wisdom and virtue of Compassion!

The ideograms *Sho-* and *-shin* in *Shoshin Ge*, therefore, both point to a faith that has gone full circle that is the "realization" that one's self is undeniably an "evil person," a person who is like a huge iceberg slowly and surely melting in the ocean to become its very waters and currents. Such a person is already, like the iceberg, in the full embrace of the *Dharma* Ocean never to be rejected until he or she becomes the very waters of "unobstructed freedom" or a Buddha.

Thus, it must be remembered that although Shinran Shonin speaks of Amida Buddha as emitting rays of Golden Splendor and the Pure Land being in a Westerly direction dazzling with all colors of the rainbow, Wisdom's Light is more than the metaphor of sunlight and the Pure Land is not a specific geographical place in the universe, but is the entire, unfathomable cosmos itself and, therefore, everywhere. The Pure Land in the "Westerly Direction," therefore, is a metaphor that leads one to the "awakening" that actually is the realization of a boundless sphere that is of infinite proportions beyond conceivability and measurability, therefore, endless, timeless, and eternal.

[To be continued]

## **BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES**

"Sâriputra, why do you think that the Buddha is called Amida? Sâriputra, his light is immeasurable and illuminates the lands of the ten directions (of the universe) without any hindrances. Therefore, he is called Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light (Amitâbha).

"Also, Sâriputra, the lifespan of that Buddha and the people are countless and last for boundless *asamkhya kalpas* (meaning timeless cosmic time). Therefore, he is called Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Life (Amitâyus). ... [Rev. Kejo S urakami. *Amida Buddha and*

*His Pure Land: Three Sutras and One Treatise.* p. 18. ( ) mine.]

## **QUESTION AND ANSWER KORNER**

QUESTION: What are the "five deadly transgressions?"

ANSWER: They are: 1) to kill one's one and only father, 2) to kill one's one and only mother; 3) to kill a person on a religious quest (*arhat*); 4) to bodily injure a spiritual person, a Buddha; and, 5) to cause disruption and divisiveness in a Buddhist community.

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