That I Should Dance On The Earth: Shinran's Revaluation of 'Karmic Afflictions'

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Shinran (1173-1263 CE), the founder of True Pure Land Buddhism (*Jōdo Shinshū)*, is widely appreciated for the depth of his psychological insight, especially his exploration of the inner dimensions of faith. Struggling with doubts and turbulent emotions, he came to the realization that in the Pure Land path, "nirvana is attained without severing karmic afflictions." This dissertation examines the soteriological basis for this striking claim by analyzing a passage from section 9 of the *Tannishō* [A Record Lamenting Divergences]. In that passage, he deviates from long-held Buddhist tradition to argue that the very presence of karmic afflictions, rather than their complete elimination, is assurance of one's salvation. In interpreting this well-known passage, the dissertation brings two new perspectives to Shinran studies: his relation to traditional Tendai Amidist practices and an often overlooked terminological distinction in his writings.

First, by examining his deployment and reframing of religious practice in light of his training at Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei, this dissertation uncovers striking continuities between Shinran's radical approach and traditional Japanese Tendai visualization and recitation practices. This discovery runs counter to the common assumption that Shinran's Pure Land Buddhism represents a sharp break from Tendai. Second, a careful tracking of Shinran's use and definition of two terms for "entrusting faith" (*shinjin* and

shingyō) reveals that although the two are often considered near synonyms, they actually refer to two distinct realms of experience. Namely, *shinjin* refers to that of the Shin Buddhist practitioner, that is, to the affective state of which ordinary beings are capable through faith. By contrast, *shingyō* refers to the enlightened heart-and-mind of Amida Buddha. In other words, his primary distinction between the realms of ignorance and enlightenment is made along affective lines. For Shinran, the experience of entrusting is an affective response that sentient beings make when they are touched by the compassionate activity of Amida Buddha. Further, this affectively "roiled up" experience of entrusting is itself a positive indicator of the (self-) illuminating activity of Amida Buddha in the Pure Land practitioner's life. As the karmic afflictions are the targets of Amida's compassionate activity, and simultaneously, the sign and assurance of that working, we see that for Shinran, one's very awareness of the presence of karmic afflictions is itself the verification of Amida's working.

To analyze further that affective dynamic between Amida and the Pure Land practitioner a comparison is made with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's non-dualistic notion of "flesh." In his exploration of the "tissue of things" between the seer and the seen, Merleau-Ponty shows an important way that human beings connect intimately with their perceptual world. Viewed from that perspective, the affects (however troubling), play a crucial role in Shinran's understanding of the Pure Land Path. They are the tissue connecting the Pure Land believer with Amida Buddha, and the ground upon which an affective community of believers are united through their inner awareness of themselves as struggling and flawed individuals.

Dedication

In memory of Cũcũ.

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Special thanks go to Tom Kasulis, for modeling the scholarly path; I hope one day to "attain the skin." I am also grateful for the help and support of Shelley Fenno Quinn and Daniel Reff; and that of all my fellow seminar students at Ohio State, aka., "the usual suspects" for all the encouragement, laughter, and tea. Lastly, my love and eternal gratitude to my family, who have always been there for me. *Shukrani*.

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INTRODUCTION

"Yet in my flesh, I shall see God." (Job 19:26, NIV)

This project comes out of my long-standing interest in our capacity to read, understand and feel another's emotional states, non-verbally. How is it that we can "feel" when a stranger, or an intimate is angry or sad, or "read"[1] the emotional temperature of a room? While there are a number of possible avenues to take towards understanding these questions, I have been drawn to the role that emotion or affect plays in Japanese religions, and in particular Japanese Buddhism. The particular attention that the Japanese tradition pays to embodiment and its active role in religious life as a source of knowledge, and as the locus and means of realizing enlightenment has brought me to appreciate the profound ways in which emotion and affectivity play themselves out in our everyday (religious) lives.

In the Western philosophical tradition, emotion and affectivity have long been of interest. Generally perceived as negative, (a view most often ascribed to Descartes),[2]

1 As in the delightful Japanese idiomatic expression for someone who *does not* possess this emotional intelligence: "She can't read the atmosphere!" (空気読めない)

2 Perhaps it is better to say that for Descartes, the body is only of "secondary importance" to the the mind and consciousness. See, Yuasa, Yasuo. *The Body : Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory.* Translated by Thomas P. Kasulis, Nagatomo Shigenori. Edited by Thomas P Kasulis. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987: 43-44; 192-193. However for many modern commentators, this distinction has had

emotion is usually theorized in order to more clearly distinguish and separate it from reasoned thought, with which it is believed to interfere. However, more recent explorations of the affects that follow, for instance, a phenomenological approach as with Merleau-Ponty, have shown that reason is not opposed to affect. On the contrary, affect, and thus the whole body, is fully implicated in the exercise of reason, and vice versa. Attention to these affects brings out the "felt reality of relation,"[3] and the affective is what opens up to the possibility of relationality. While emotion is "intensity owned and recognized,"[4] it at the same time is always escaping the confinement of "any one particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction it is."[5] It is in the continuity of "affective escape" that one's perception of life and freedom is experienced, meaning that affect opens up the human subject to experience and relationality, while at the same time forming the dynamically resonant "walls" of the human body.[6] In other words, affect defines the body in its intensity of sensory experience, while escaping its permeable boundaries as the possibility and background to new relationships and intensities: a constitutive, dynamic openness. Being attentive to affect as dynamism, relationality and intensity illuminates how bodies come to experience and perform subjectivities, how disciplinary techniques come to have their effects, and how language and discourse come to have material effects on the body.

It is with this awareness of affect that I first read, with great interest, of Shinran's encounter with Pure Land Buddhism, and his deeply existential and emotionally

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the effect of reifying a distinction between mind and body.

3 Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual : Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002: 16.

4 Massumi, *Parables,* 28.

5 Massumi, *Parables,* 35.

6 Massumi, *Parables,* 14.

complicated explication of entrusting (Jpn. *shinjin*). In particular, the story captured in the *Tannishō* (A Record in Lament of Divergences) was striking: in it, his follower Yuien recounts to Shinran that he has been having mixed emotions with regard to his salvation; he should be rejoicing at the prospect of rebirth in the Pure Land, but he finds those feelings are weak within him. While in Japanese Buddhism traditionally, this would be an occasion for some kind of religious intervention (usually an exhortation to redouble one's efforts), Shinran not only confesses that he has been experiencing the same thing, but reassures him that this is a sure sign that their salvation is secure. Understanding just how Shinran can make a case for this is the central question of this project, and is rooted in my own emotionally complicated encounter with this beguiling episode in Shinran's life. That is, I suspected that this was probably *existentially* and personally true for Shinran, but could not completely grasp how this could, at the same time, be *soteriologically* true.

Much has been written on Shinran's deep existential awareness of his own failings, and his palpable grief at not being able to rid himself of these flaws. As he laments:

> I know truly how grievous it is that I, Gutoku Shinran, am sinking in an immense ocean of desires and attachments and am lost in vast mountains of fame and advantage, so that I rejoice not at all at entering the stage of the truly settled, and feel no happiness at coming nearer the realization of true enlightenment. How ugly it is! How wretched![7]

It is from deeply confessional moments like this that, very rightly, Shinran has been acclaimed for the depth of his psychological insight, and the sensitivity with which he explores the inner dimensions of his struggle of faith. However, what has not been as well appreciated is the extent to which this struggle is framed and expressed within a

[7] Shinran. *The Collected Works of Shinran.* Translated by Dennis Hirota. Vol. 1, Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997: 125.

conceptual field that he inherits from the Tendai tradition. That is to say, the language, ideas, and imagery that he uses to such great effect in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* and his letters is profoundly informed by the religious tradition in which he was formed.

One source, perhaps, of this oversight might lie in the notion of "Old Buddhism" versus "Kamakura New Buddhism."[8] This idea posits that as Japanese Buddhism entered the Kamakura Period (1185-1333 CE), a wave of populist reaction against the corrupt traditionalist institutions arose from a new generation dissatisfied with the status quo. In line with sectarian concerns, the iconoclastic thought of Dōgen, Shinran and Nichiren, exemplified a kind of "Japanese Reformation" which inaugurated a decisive split from the moribund, elitist religion as practiced by the old Buddhist hierarchy.[9] This notion has been critiqued by Kuroda Toshio,[10] Robert Morrell,[11] Richard Payne,[12] James Foard,[13] and others, and continues to be complicated by, for example the work of Lori Meeks on female monasticism,[14] and George Tanabe on Myōe's reform efforts in the Shingon and Kegon schools.[15] The vibrancy of thought of these Kamakura figures has tended to obscure the continuities between these "renegades" and their host institutions, and occluded the attempts of individuals *within* these institutions to innovate and reform

8 For a good overview, see: Taira, Masayuki. "Kuroda Toshio and the Kenmitsu Taisei Theory." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 23.3-4 (1996): 427-48.

9 That is, the already established Nara Schools (Hossō, Jōjitsu, Kegon, Sanron, Kusha and Ritsu), as well as Shingon and Tendai Buddhism.

10 Kuroda Toshio's *kenmitsu taisei* scheme has been particularly influential since he first proposed it in 1975. In Japan, Ienaga Saburō, and Inoue Mitsusada are two major figures in this move to rethink the sources of Kamakura religiosity.

11 Morrell, Robert E. *Early Kamakura Buddhism : A Minority Report*. Berkeley, Calif: Asian Humanities Press, 1987.

12 Payne, Richard K. *Re-Visioning "Kamakura" Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998.

13 Foard, James H. "In Search of a Lost Reformation: A Reconsideration of Kamakura Buddhism." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 7, no. 4 (1980): 261-91.

14 Meeks, Lori Rachelle. *Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010.

15 Tanabe, George Joji. *Myōe the Dreamkeeper : Fantasy and Knowledge in Early Kamakura Buddhism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Buddhist practice.[16] Certainly, when Shinran writes in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* that he has abandoned the Path of Saintly Endeavor and has turned to follow the "easy path," it sounds very much, on the face of it, like he is completely rejecting the practices and assumptions of his Tendai training. However, by looking more closely at his career on Mt. Hiei, this picture becomes more complicated.

Biographical sketches of Shinran tend to just briefly mention his role as a hall monk (*dōsō* 堂僧) at the Tendai monastic complex of Enryakuji,[17] and to focus on the reasons for his decision to leave his position on the mountain and become a disciple of Hōnen. Popular Japanese biographies such as those by Yoshimoto Takaaki,[18]and Yamaori Tetsuo,[19] and the seminal psycho-historical work by Takahatake Takamichi,[20] focus on a psychological profile of Shinran, emphasizing the relevance of his insights to the concerns and worries of modern life. His worries about controlling his sexual desires, his inability to perform traditional Buddhist practice as he should, are all placed within the broader historical context of the Kamakura period — a time of great political, climactic, and geological instability for Japan. From this standpoint, the importance of Shinran lies in how we can learn from his inner sensitivity and awareness in constructing our own approach to the strains of modern life, and these works stress the continuities between the uncertainties of his time, and those of our present age. While it is indeed important to

16 For a great example of this, see: Ford, James L. "Jōkei and Hōnen: Debating Buddhist Liberation in Medieval Japan - Then and Now." *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3rd Series, No.3 (2001): 199-217. and Ford, James L. *Jōkei and Buddhist Devotion in Early Medieval Japan*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

17 Situated on Mt. Hiei, to the north-east of Kyoto.

18 吉本隆明.『最後の親鸞』. 筑摩書房, 2002.

19 山折哲雄.『親鸞をよむ』. 東京: 岩波新書, 2007.

20 Takahatake, Takamichi. *Young Man Shinran : A Reappraisal of Shinran's Life*. Waterloo, Ont., Canada: Published for the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987.

understand the conditions within which Shinran lived and practiced, it is also equally important to understand what kind of training and practice he would have had from the age of 9 when he took the precepts under Jien (慈円, 1155-1255 CE),[21] and how he continued to engage with this tradition and practice even after he left the monastic complex of Enryakuji.

As a hall monk, Shinran would have been intimately familiar with Tendai-style visualization and recitation practice of the name of Amida Buddha — at one of the halls dedicated to this practice. These rigorous practices involved a a range of detailed visualizations of the Pure Land, circumambulation of an image of Amida Buddha, and continual recitation of his name. Shinran, as a hall monk, would have been fully immersed in the vocabulary, practice, and framework of Tendai contemplative practice from a very early age. Knowing that for the Tendai tradition these practices collectively constituted *nenbutsu* (that is, the practice of "keeping the Buddha in mind"), it is possible that one of the motivating factors in Shinran's departure from Mt. Hiei was his inability to cultivate the *nenbutsu* as it was practiced and understood in the mountain complex. With this in mind, when we re-examine Shinran's description of the *nenbutsu* as he understands it, we find some interesting continuities with the Tendai tradition. For instance, his use of the image of "clouds and mists" in the "Hymn of True Shinjin and *Nenbutsu*," corresponds directly to Tendai visualization practice. Shinran writes:

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21 Jien was selected four times as Abbot of the Tendai school, and wrote the *Gukanshō* (愚管抄, c.1219 CE), which argued that the course of Japanese history was determined by the tension between constructive principles (*dōri*, 道理; from Buddhism and Shinto, for example) and destructive principles (such as *mappō,* the Age of Final Dharma). We shall discuss the idea of *mappō* at length in Chapter 2. For more on the *Gukanshō*, see: Brown, Delmer Myers, and Ichirō Ishida. *The Future and the Past : A Translation and Study of the Gukanshō, an Interpretative History of Japan Written in 1219*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.

But though the light of the sun is veiled by clouds and mists,
Beneath the clouds and mists there is brightness, not dark.[22]

This discussion of clouds obscuring the sun is an echo of the Pure Land master Shandao's commentary on the *Contemplation Sūtra* (*Kanmuryōjukyō*) where he details the method of contemplating the sun disk. So even as Shinran expounds on his view that Amida's salvation is everywhere available (or, "unobstructed," as he likes to put it), he plays against and reworks classical tropes and images.

Similarly, when we look at Shinran's terminology for the experience of entrusting (*shinjin*, 信心), we find a rather surprising lack of precision in tracking how Shinran uses, and switches between, a number of closely related but not interchangeable terms. The most egregious example of this appears in the *Collected Works of Shinran* translation, which renders true entrusting (*shingyō*, 信楽) as simply "entrusting:" the same translation used for *shinjin*. This is a striking choice, given that these are compounds of characters with distinct meanings, and, when we take a closer look at Shinran's deployment of them, ultimately a misleading equivocation. As we shall see in this work, Shinran is careful to use *shingyō* to denote a pure, "untainted" kind of entrusting that he identifies with the long and exemplary practice of Dharmākara Bodhisattva before he became the Buddha Amida. As such, it is also frequently coupled with the phrase *shishin* (至心) which has the sense of sincerity, or " a true mindful heart." *Shinjin*, on the other hand, as entrusting, is an affective and responsive movement that all sentient beings are capable of. As the "awakening mind,"[23] it is our response to the compassionate activity of Amida Buddha as he seeks to bring all of us to rebirth in the Pure Land. Given that Shinran is explicit about

22 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 70.
23 I am indebted to Prof. Yasutomi Shin'ya for this rendering.

how he himself (and possibly, by extension, like all other sentient beings living in this age) lacks any sincerity or purity of intention or practice, it is hard to see how these particular phrases can be understood as equivalent in meaning or usage.

Thus the work of this dissertation will be to explore and understand the framework within which Shinran expounds on his understanding of the experience of *shinjin*. Using the episode from *Tannishō* #9 as a guide, we shall explore the formulation, "Nirvana is attained without severing afflictions," paying close attention to the ways in which he deploys and reframes traditional understandings of practice and *nenbutsu*. In particular, we shall examine his view of the "karmic afflictions" (*bonnō*) and see how these affective hindrances come to have a role to play in the religious experience. To help draw out some of the implications of his approach to the affects, we shall draw comparisons to Western approaches to affect, specifically those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his notion of "flesh."

As a non-dualistic exploration of the intimate connection, or "tissue of things,"[24] between the seer and the seen, which constitutes the possibility of communicating or sharing an experience (a shared world), Merleau-Ponty's conception of flesh makes it clear how affective responses can meaningfully create an intimate connection among human beings and their perceptual world. The relationship between Amida Buddha and the Pure Land practitioner is, at least at first, one of perception — traditionally through visualization and for Shinran, through "hearing" the Name. This perceptual relation gives us a productive lens through which to understand how this affective dimension can have

24 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Trans. Alphoso Lingis. Ed. Claude Lefort, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968: 138.

positive spiritual effects. In addition, as a non-dualistic concept of relationality, "flesh" resonates with the larger Buddhist, and Japanese, assumptions about a non-dualistic relationship between the mind and the heart, and more broadly, person and world. Placing Merleau-Ponty in dialog with his Japanese contemporary, Soga Ryōjin, we shall find that this affective connection is stressed within the present-day Jōdo Shinshū[25] community. Indeed, Soga argues that any savior figure that is not "affected," and does not feel what we sentient beings feel, cannot be any kind of savior at all. For him, the call to salvation is a compassionate, impassioned call that comes out of a deeply shared affective connection, and as such, this compassion is "born" at the same instant that its objects (sentient beings) come into existence on this earth. That is to say, as compassion and salvation do not exist apart from, or before or after, the sentient beings it intends to save, this is *necessarily* an affective relationship.

In the end, we find the significance of the *Tannishō* #9 episode to lie in the fact that the affects, as troubling as they are, have a place in Shinran's understanding of the Pure Land path. These affects form the tissue connecting the Pure Land believer with Amida Buddha, and grounds a shared affective community of believers, united through their inner awareness of themselves as struggling and flawed individuals. This inner awareness is empowered by the compassionate activity of Amida, and forms the "practice" of the Pure Land path. As Shandao presents this, there are two aspects to this awareness, in what he calls “deep belief.”

> One is to believe deeply and decidedly that you are a foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death, ever sinking and ever wandering in transmigration from

[25] "The True Pure Land School," the community of Pure Land believers who hold Shinran as the "founder" of their faith tradition.

> innumerable kalpas in the past, with never a condition that would lead to emancipation. The second is to believe deeply and decidedly that Amida Buddha's Forty-eight Vows grasp sentient beings, and that allowing yourself to be carried by the power of the Vow without any doubt or apprehension, you will attain birth.[26]

The "work" of a religious practitioner is to deepen their awareness of their own limitations in light of the perfect, genuine and compassionate working directed towards them. That is, grounded in one's deepening self-knowledge, this affective awareness forms the basis of a shared community of affect: one based upon a realization that, like Shinran, they too have been experiencing the same difficulties, obstacles and hindrances. From this revelatory moment of "I, too!" unfolds an intimacy which continually reveals itself as the compassionate working of the Buddha in one's present life.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 details the traditional Buddhist understanding of affectivity, moving from the notion of karma and "karmic afflictions," to the Japanese understanding of affectivity in the medieval period. Those understandings are placed into dialog with Western theories of affectivity, in particular with Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh." Chapter 2 introduces the history of the Pure Land tradition as Shinran would have received it, and traces his personal transition from traditional Tendai religious practice, to the newly distinct Pure Land "movement." Chapter 3 is an in-depth analysis of the theoretical basis for Shinran's approach to entrusting, his understanding of karmic

[26] Yata, Ryōshō. "An Examination of the Historical Development of the Concept of Two Aspects of Deep Belief, Part 1." *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3rd Series, No.3 (2001): 158.

afflictions, and his particular use of metaphor and imagery to express his affective and emotional understanding of the experience of salvation. Chapter 4 shows that Shinran's understanding of affectivity within the Pure Land path opens a new dimension of religious experience in which emotion and affectivity play a positive role both as a ground of religious knowledge and as a way to build community through the sharing of emotional and affective states.

CHAPTER 1: AFFECTIVE FLOWS

The Afflictions, or, "Bonnō" 煩悩

The Buddhist tradition holds that human beings persistently misinterpret the conditions of their own experiences. Although our mental experience is always changing, we cling to the idea of an independent, unchanging observer of mental phenomena and the idea of an unchanging nature within the objects we perceive. Not recognizing these two ideas to be constructs aimed at suppressing the anxieties of living in a world of flux, we invest these fabrications[27] with "ultimate sanctity and significance." Anchored by these two constants, desire, or "the expression of a thirst that what now is should become otherwise at some future point," gains a baseline against which that struggle for "otherwise" can be measured.[28] However, since this desire is founded on a misperception, human action is grounded in the incoherency or incommensurability of the drive to become "otherwise" on the one hand, and the need to preserve a stable identity on the

27 Such as the idea of a "soul," or eternal "substance."

28 Lusthaus, Dan. *Buddhist Phenomenology : A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-Shih Lun*. London ; New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002:1.

other: “We want *difference* and *identity* to coincide.” This dilemma is not the product of objective circumstances, but the result of a flawed interpretive exercise on two counts: “To fail to cognize changes with acceptance due to our expectations and frustrations on the one hand, and to fail to see the uniqueness of each and every moment on the other.” As we continue to carry over these failures from situation to situation, we end up being “locked inside the narcissism of our own habits,” and fail to perceive the world in the way it is.[29]

> These habitual mental formations or *saṃskāra* can best be thought of as: 'Embodied conditioning'. These are the karmic latencies that predispose us to perceive or react in certain ways. They are karmic insofar as they are the product of previous...experience, now latent, and insofar as they condition how we re-act or will re-act to present or future....experience.[30]

While these conditionings operate for the most part outside of our awareness, they may be noticed during a volitional moment if one is paying attention properly. Since these volitions and intents are forms of desire, observation reveals not only these unconscious motivations, but also the latent tendencies that structure our habitual behavior. These latent tendencies include the “evolutionary inheritances” that each sensing being carries from their past, and are latent insofar as they are not given in experience, yet constitute the parameters of experience as such: “*as* volitions, as specific desires to do certain things under certain circumstances.” The root of these human actions or *karma* lies in the fourth of the Five Aggregates: the Aggregate of Mental Formations.[31]

Karma is, by this early definition, the volitional, willed acts of speech, thought or deed. Volition, in turn, is “mental construction, mental activity. Its function is to direct the

29 Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 3-4.
30 Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 48.
31 Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 49, 53.

mind in the sphere of good, bad or neutral activities."[32] Only volitional actions produce karmic effects, so, sensation and perception are not themselves considered volitional acts, although they can be influenced by them. Walpola Rahula writes that there are six kinds of volitional actions, each tied to one of the six internal faculties.[33] Some of the 52 mental activities which form the Fourth Aggregate, and can produce karmic effects include: attention, will, determination, confidence, concentration (*samādhi*), wisdom, energy, desire, repugnance or hate, ignorance, conceit, and idea of self.[34]

In this model, our cognitive presuppositions, affective motivations and our latent tendencies can be seen as merely alternate modes of the same type of karmic operations, that is, as *saṃskāra.* Therefore they are really "latent karma." This closed economy of action, driven by endless repetition is: "impelled by the desire to substantially embody as a permanent entity in spite of the variable, fluxational impermanence...that invariably characterizes all conditioned things."[35]

According to the Buddha's teaching, mental volition, "the will to love, to exist, to re-exist, to continue, to become more and more," creates the root of existence and continuity and as such, is the cause of the arising of suffering. More precisely, it is *one* of the causes of suffering, for as the Buddha says, "This cycle of continuity (*saṃsāra*) is without a visible end, and the first beginning of beings wandering and running round, enveloped in ignorance [*avidhya*][36] and bound down by the fetters of thirst (desire, [*tṛṣṇā*]

32 Rahula, Walpola. *What The Buddha Taught*. New York: Grove Press, 1959: 22.
33 "The sensations experienced through the contact of the eye with visible forms, ear with sounds, nose with odour, tongue with taste, body with tangible objects, and mind...with mind-objects or thoughts or ideas" (Rahula 21).
34 Rahula, *What The Buddha Taught*, 22 -23.
35 Rahula, *What The Buddha Taught*, 54, 58-59.
36 For the sake of consistency, all terms appearing in Pali will be changed to their Sanskrit equivalents.

is not to be perceived." So part of the horizon of human existence is this desire which produces "re-existence and re-becoming" manifesting as thirst for the pleasures of the senses, for existence or for self-annihilation, which in various ways gives rise to suffering. Though desire is not the main cause of suffering, it is the "principal thing" or the "all-pervading thing" in that it is "the most palpable and immediate cause," insofar as it is linked closely to the conditions necessary for the existence of human beings: food, sense perception of the external world, consciousness and mental volition or will.[37] In this view, desire is built in to the conditions for what we may consider everyday existence, and the continuation of human life. This desire is more than lust, want or craving, but as previous experiences sediment and coalesce as *saṃskāra*, they actualize as specific intentions, and:

> The movement by which tendencies and predispositions become teleologically focused — in other words, when intentions cathex on goals — is called 'desire.' Desire is a fixation on an object or idea...a fixation through which one orients oneself *towards* that object or idea.[38]

Since fundamentally this desire is a thirst for ideas that can "give us a sense of identity and define the values we impute to material things," the key issue is not desire *for* objects but the underlying structures that make it such that these material objects are desirable in the first place.[39]

In this way, we have to consider that there is a dual aspect to our everyday desirous existence: our affective establishment of goals and objectives, and the active grasping and clinging to the same (appropriation). Lusthaus argues that, "they are two aspects of a conational drive, with desire primarily a mental aspect and appropriation

37 Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 27-31.
38 Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 61.
39 Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 61.

primarily an enactment in action;" and since desire and appropriation are sensorial, cognitive and linguistic affects and actions they, "karmically share the same conative structure."[40] In addition, karma has a retroactive aspect insofar as it obtains its meaning from the consequences which follow from karmic action and so "transmits the past to the present" by influencing what happens in the now in light of the past, and is historically revisionist in the sense that the present will only obtain its meaning from future results and consequences. The present, then, becomes an "open field" where, "the determinative influences of the past and future collide; the karmic present merely signifies links of chains to before and after, chains for which karma constitutes the links." Karma is therefore "thoroughly temporal" as the link that marks a doubled flow of causality, with the future pushing through the present into the past, and the past towards the future.[41] That is, the present is where past volitional activities shape my non-volitional actions, and where the volitional actions I engage in will affect my future non-volitional actions. For Buddhists, then, karma is not just a causal theory but "a systematic criteriology by which actions receive their value, their 'karmic' meaning". Neither a purely determinative system, nor one of absolute free action by objective agents, one's lived experience is, "constituted through a dense, intricate economic karmic interchange, a 'circuit of intentionality'; and the diaphenous margin which arises *between* the lived-body and the lived-field."[42]

The goal of a Buddhist practitioner is to break through false ideas of self, the desire for continued existence, and to obtain freedom from all other defilements (Skt.

40 Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 66.
41 Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 179-180.
42 Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, 182.

kleśa, Japn. *bonnō*).[43] The "extinction of desire, the extinction of hatred, the extinction of illusion" and the abandoning of desire and craving is the cessation of suffering, which frees human beings from the cycle of birth and death. In this state of freedom, one "neither mentally creates nor wills continuity and becoming...or annihilation" and all experiences, whether painful or pleasurable, "he knows that it is impermanent, that it does not bind him, that it is not experienced with passion."[44] The path towards the realization of this freedom is encapsulated in the Eightfold Path and the practice of Correct Understanding, Correct Thought, Correct Speech, Correct Action, Correct Livelihood, Correct Effort, Correct Mindfulness, and Correct Concentration.[45] Through ethical conduct based on love and compassion, mental discipline based on awareness and concentration on the activities of the mind, sensations, ideas and conceptions, one's practice ideally culminates in the cultivation of wisdom that sees into reality or "the understanding of things are they are."[46] In general, this can be said to describe the core theory behind Buddhist practice, even as the specific forms that this practice takes vary quite widely. The Buddhist practitioner, through the practice of cultivation, takes it upon herself to perfect the Eightfold Path and achieve liberation (nirvana) through her own self-practice, patterning herself after the Buddha Shakyamuni.

This, then, is the core of the Buddhist tradition as would have been received by Shinran during his time on Mt. Hiei. However, in considering Shinran's own understanding of the afflictions, particularly with regards to their affects, we must consider the existing Japanese understanding and contextualization of affect — an

43 Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 32.
44 Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 39.
45 Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 45.
46 Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 45-49.

understanding inflected by, and standing apart from, the Buddhist doctrines outlined above.

Affectivity in the Japanese Context

For the Japanese in the Kamakura (1185-1333) - and earlier Heian periods (794-1185), at the core of affectivity, particularly that captured and expressed by the literary arts, was the notion of *kokoro* (心). *Kokoro* carries a number of meanings including "mind, wisdom, aspiration, essence, attention, sincerity and sensibility," and "signifies simultaneously the emotional capacity of the artists to respond to the natural world, which ideally catalyzes the act of creation; the parallel ability of an audience to respond to such a work of art and thus indirectly to the experience of the artist."[47] In the Japanese preface[48] to the imperial poetry anthology *Kokinwakashū* (The Anthology of Japanese Poetry Ancient and Modern, 古今和歌集) compiled in 905 CE, Ki no Tsurayuki links the origin of poetry to the notion that all living things respond to the world in "song."[49] For Ki no Tsurayuki, "[*Kokoro*] is that faculty within us which hearkens to the world outside and poetry is what results when we give utterance to the feelings and thoughts in our hearts in the form of words." However, as the preface intimates, the scope of *kokoro* is not limited to human beings, and its expression simply to words; *kokoro* becomes the "resonant capacity within all living [and perhaps, non-living] beings to feel and respond." While the Buddhist reading of *kokoro* "denotes mind, heart or inner nature, the site of

47 Viswanathan, Meera. "Kokoro." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 5 (1998): 291-93.
48 The *Kokinwakashū* has both a Japanese and classical Chinese preface.
49 The Japanese term *uta* (歌) can mean both "song" and "poem."

human sentience or delusion," we find that for the Japanese of this period, mind and heart are not to be separated with respect to one's responsiveness to the world.[50]

However, underpinning this warm picture of the world as a symphony of affective song, was an awareness of the fragility of one's life, and the precariousness of one's position in it: a feeling of impermanence[51] (*mujō*, 無常). While *mujō* as a Buddhist term indicates that all things are impermanent and, lacking a stable permanent self-substance, are subject to change and decay, Monte Hull argues that for the Japanese of the Heian period, this sense of impermanence was best captured by the term *hakanashi*, which carried many of the same meanings as *mujō*, but was viewed "as more purely or distinctively Japanese, and thus to have a more intimate, concrete, and emotive sense than *mujō*."[52] Because *hakanashi* was seen as a term that captured, "both objective attributes of the world and subjective emotive responses," writers of this period saw, "a kind of intimacy or immediate integration with the world such that one finds one's feelings reflected in the world, or one can use a description of the world (particularly the natural world) to express one's feelings." The felt experience and reality of transience was seen as deepening an appreciation of the world through a deepening of one's sensitivity to it; in other words, the capacity to affectively respond to the world is bolstered by an awareness of its fragility. Of course, the poet does not stand apart from the world of impermanence as a sympathetic observer: as poet and reader also participate in the changes of the natural world, so too its images are, in turn, available to express these same changes and in so

50 Viswanathan, "Kokoro," 291- 292.

51 In early Buddhist thought, impermanence was one of the three "marks" that characterized human existence, together with "no-self," that is, the lack of a permanent "own-nature" or substance, and suffering.

52 Hull, Monte S. "Mujō: The Japanese Understanding of and Engagement With Impermanence." Dissertation, University of Hawai'i, 1984: 100.

doing evoke a cognizing, affective (*kokoro*) response in the reader. Thus as Hull points out: “This standpoint of an integrative rapport or resonance between man's feelings and the natural world seems at this point to be simply assumed and not self-consciously formulated.”[53]

Indeed the picture that emerges from the *Kokinwakashū* preface is the importance of trust in the “validity of the affective response to things,” and this affective response in its naturalness and spontaneity, “is a way of truly grasping, appreciating, and valuing things.” Further, this affective responsivity builds “a felt sense of communion” with the sentient world, in the interplay of response and expression. Though one's life is seen “as transient, full of uncertainty, and threatened by insignificance and lack of accomplishment,” the principal way for writers of this period “of cognizing their world, their relations within the world, and their own selves was through their subtly developed affective sensibilities.” This affective sense finds its expression through such emotions as grief, sorrow and longing which discloses a world as “transient, fleeing and evanescent;” that is, as a “feeling of impermanence” (*mujōkan*, 無常感). While the traditional Buddhist view is that “one must recognize not only the transience of things but also the source of unsatisfactoriness and suffering as arising from attachments to transient things,” Hull argues that the Japanese of this period only accepted this view in part because of their continued reliance on the emotions even though they might lead to further suffering, for even though these emotions may be illusory, “these writers might respond that these delusions were the only “reality” that they knew.”[54]

53 Hull, "Mujō,"103-110.
54 Hull, "Mujō," 132- 133, 137, 144.

According to Karaki Junzō,[55] this instinctive reliance upon the emotions can be explained by the fact that the Japanese "were strongly inclined to respond first to the feeling of impermanence before formulating this into the view of impermanence [*mujōkan,* 無常観] as a view of the world expressed in Buddhist terms." Yet this feeling of impermanence, in his view, "lacked a critical awareness about the nature of the feelings and the condition of the mind or heart on which they depended," as well as "the critical awareness which realizes that the feelings of this lamentive response are dependent upon the condition of the mind or heart (*kokoro*, 心)."[56] While the early Japanese aesthetic engagement foregrounds the "affective response to things" within the frame of their presumed transience, and is, at its heart a "feeling together with," in depth, gradually this view shifts to an awareness "that this affective response is essentially other directed and not ego dependent. That is, the sympathetic affective response to things is outwardly directed and is grounded in a compassion for things." It seems quite possible that this movement is in part propelled by the insight that:

> With the realization of the emotive coloring of experience and the evanescence of experience, distinguishing between that which is only apparent and perhaps delusory and that which is real becomes problematic.[57]

This last point is of critical importance to Shinran, in part because of his realization that the quality of impermanence extends to the domain of moral and ethical judgement. In the following section, we shall see that this Japanese approach to affectivity as a "feeling together with," resonates quite strongly with the phenomenological insights of Merleau-Ponty.

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55 唐木順三. 無常. 東京: 筑摩書房, 1966.
56 Cited in Hull, "Mujō,"193-194.
57 Hull, "Mujō," 203-204, 207-208.

Merleau-Ponty's Flesh

In his late, unfinished work, *The Visible and the Invisible,*[58] Merleau-Ponty moves towards a notion of embodiment as "flesh." In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he could already be seen to be tracing an analysis of the intimate connection between the body, and thereby, embodied experience, and our experience of the world: "Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism."[59] Dorothea Olkowski argues that this is part of an attempt to understand the "body of consciousness, the body accompanying consciousness" which is in opposition to Freud's understanding of the conscious, characterized by a positing of the unconscious as a "first cause for all mental states which causally unfold out of it through the interaction of energies."[60] Merleau-Ponty contrasts the Freudian view of the relation between body and world with a "critical philosophy" which sees meaning as constituted in the objective world by the operation of consciousness. He argues that the Freudian model leaves us stuck between a "transcendentally oriented" view of the unconscious as the root of all our emotions and mental patterns, and a "pseudo-physical" view of consciousness as produced by a concatenation of physical and non-physical states. Still, Merleau-Ponty holds out that

58 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible.* Trans. Alphoso Lingis. Ed. Claude Lefort, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

59 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception.* Trans. Colin Smith. New York: Routledge Classics, 2002.

60 Olkowski, Dorothea. "Merleau-Ponty's Freudianism: From the Body of Consciousness to the Body of Flesh." Vol I: Psychology, Psychoanalysis & Child Development. *Merleau-Ponty: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*. Ed. Ted Toadvine. Routledge, 2006: 214.

phenomenology and psychoanalysis are not diametrically opposed, but rather inter-related insofar as psychoanalysis can transcend the "subject-act-object structure of pure consciousness" and thereby deepen our grasp of human existence, while at the same time, phenomenology can help psychoanalysis break free from its "mechanistic causal frame of reference."[61]

As Merleau-Ponty sees it, a phenomenological approach grounded in the intimacy between body and world dissolves any dichotomy between body and consciousness, or body and world:

> There is no reason to seek to construct in the objective body, as the physiology of the nervous system does, a whole mass of hidden nervous phenomena by which the stimuli defined objectively would be *elaborated* into the total perception...It is a thought that acts as if the world wholly positive were given, and as if the problem were to make the perception of the world first considered as non-existing arise therefrom. It is causal, positivist, negative thought.[62]

The flaw he seeks to correct here is the presumption that all the conditions for perception can be retroactively constructed by an analysis of its constituent structures. What Merleau-Ponty posits instead is a dynamic, emergent view of perception that recognizes the interaction of these psychological and physiological structures *within* perception itself:

> The ambiguity of the motivations must be understood by rediscovering our quasi-perceptual relationship with the human world through quite simple and nowise hidden existentials: only they are, like all structures, *between* our acts and aims and not behind them.[63]

As Stawarska argues, the Freudian model that maps the mind as a psychical apparatus divided into agencies and drives in mutual antagonism, makes it difficult to understand

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61 Stawarska, Beata. "Psychoanalysis." *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*. Rosalyn Diprose and Jack Reynolds, Ed. Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing Ltd., 2008: 57-58.

62 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 231.

63 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 232.

how these causal, yet hidden mechanisms could enter the life of consciousness and organize human behavior into meaningful patterns from within.[64] Merleau-Ponty is careful not to deny the existence of these psychic agencies, but only to question their role as the causes, and therefore, the creators of an *a priori* meaning for human behavior. As structures that lie *between* our actions, their meaning comes to be constituted *in* the act, rather than supplying that meaning beforehand. It is, therefore, ambiguous, in the sense that meaning and signification are not given in advance, but only come to be constituted in the moment.

This new approach has the benefit of eliminating the need to frame the relationship between soul and body as if between two positive, distinct substances and to formulate what takes place "in the body" separately from what takes place "in the soul" (with respect, that is, to perception), instead, "the soul is the hollow of the body, the body is the distention of the soul."[65] Soul and mind are intimately related, and so all perception must be understood as arising from within this intimacy rather than operating as a third term standing over and above body and soul. Similarly, the mind is:

> The *other side* of the body — We have no idea of a mind that would not be *doubled* with a body...The "other side" means that the body, inasmuch as it has this other side, is not describable in *objective* terms, in terms of the in itself — that this other side is really the other side *of the body, overflows* into it (*Ueberschreiten*), encroaches upon it, is hidden in it — and at the same time needs it, terminates in it, is *anchored* in it. There is a body of the mind, and a mind of the body and a chiasm between them.[66]

What this means, then, is that perception involves our whole being intimately, an intimacy that Merleau-Ponty calls "existence," which is characterized by movement "in

64 Stawarska, "Psychoanalysis," 58-60.
65 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 232-233.
66 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 259.

depth" between the body and personal acts.[67] In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty clarifies that perception is not *of* the world, in the objective sense, but is called out as a response, or "bodily recognition" directed towards a particular context. Perception therefore as responsiveness in intimacy involves us in particular styles of being, directed towards a field that supports and gives them meaning.[68]

In the chapter "Intertwining-The Chiasm" in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty makes his clearest argument for the notion of "flesh." Mauro Carbone notes that for Merleau-Ponty, "the notion of 'flesh' designates the common horizon where all beings belong," and is "neither matter nor mind nor substance, but a unitary texture where each body and each thing manifests itself only as difference from other bodies and other things."[69] It is through the flesh that we see "the things themselves, in their places, where they are, according to their being." It is the "thickness of the flesh" that is constitutive of the means of relationship or communication between the visible and the seer, and is the "sole means I have to go unto the heart of things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh."[70] This means that the body is not objectively separate from the world, but is that by which the world becomes sensible and relatable because it is intimately "caught up in the tissue of things," and it is that communication and entanglement between seer and seen that makes the world itself flesh.[71] Indeed, "Precisely such 'flesh of the sensible', to which we all belong and in which we belong to

67 Olkowski, "Merleau-Ponty's Freudianism," 216-217.
68 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, 90-91.
69 Carbone, Mauro. "Flesh: Towards the History of a Misunderstanding." *Merleau-Ponty: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*. Volume II: Perception and Expression. Ed. Ted Toadvine. New York: Routledge, 2006: 133.
70 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 135.
71 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 138.

each other makes *communicable* and in this sense, shareable every experience of ours."[72] Yet this flesh is not a "thing" per se, is neither mind, matter nor substance nor is it the product of the union or combination of disparate elements, but is "thinkable by itself" and a kind of "incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being."[73]

In fact, what Merleau-Ponty signifies here as "flesh" is not the human body, even though it alone can bring us to the things themselves, which goes out to the world *qua* object, but is "a being of two leaves" at once in the world and at the same time, that which sees and touches them. There is a doubling at work here, a "relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer...which forms me."[74] In other words, it is not an object, but a "synergic body," formed by relationships that exceed it and animate "other bodies" which for Merleau-Ponty must be understood as:

> A carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient. For, as overlapping and fission, identity and difference, it brings to birth a ray of natural light that illuminates all flesh and not only my own.[75]

Thus the body comes to us as that by which body and world, seeing and seen, come to be visible or sensed in carnal experience. This makes the body as flesh neither a thing nor an idea, but "the measurant of the things," which means we cannot but experience the world as/through/in our bodies; the visible, the sensible, is as intimate with us as "the sea and the strand, unapproachable to anyone who would "survey them from above, but as something constituted not by ourselves and visible to us, "in virtue of that primordial

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72 Carbone, "Flesh," 135.
73 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 139-140.
74 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 136, 137, 140.
75 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 142.

property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal."[76]

This approach has interesting consequences for the Freudian view of psychoanalysis because Merleau-Ponty shows that once we abandon the positivist view of the drives, they lose their deterministic character. Once the Id, unconscious and Ego are understood on the basis of flesh, he argues, then the entire framework of Freudian psychology is understood not to describe positive (or negative) entities but "*differentiations* of one sole and *massive* adhesion to Being which is the flesh," which does away with a hierarchy "of orders or layers or planes" to be replaced by a "dimensionality of every fact and facticity of every dimension."[77] This dimensionality forms the basis of an "ontological psychoanalysis," which recognizes that any entity can figure as emblematic of being (overdetermination) because of the intimacy of mind and body, person and world. An ontological psychoanalysis does not look for causes, but rather the conditions which make certain actions possible;

> One always talks of the problem of "the other," of 'intersubjectivity," etc... In fact what has to be understood is, beyond the "persons," the existentials according to which we comprehend them, and which are the sedimented meaning of all our voluntary and involuntary experiences. This unconscious is to be sought not at the bottom of ourselves, behind the back of our "consciousness," but in front of us, as articulations of our field. It is "unconscious" by the fact that it is not an *object*, but it is that through which objects are possible, it is the constellation wherein our future is read.[78]

This is, in fact, a pretty good description of karma and *saṃskāra* as we outlined in the previous section. That is, insofar as we understand that our past actions come to constitute the field in which we engage in "unconscious" actions and reactions in the

76 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 130, 136, 142, 152.
77 Merleay-Ponty, *The Visible*, 270.
78 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 180.

present, and our present the future, then karma and *saṃskāra* must be understood as constituting the very basis upon which all our actions are possible. Which is to say it is not that karma is "behind" our actions, so much as it shapes the very possibilities of action (and reaction) to events in our present.

Intriguingly, the Freudian model that Paul Redding articulates in *The Logic of Affect* is more consonant with both the Buddhist and Merleau-Pontean view of the mind than the one that Stawarska critiques. In Redding's view, Freud argued that the unconscious was a "region" of the mind that operates without consciousness but according to its own distinctive logic, and which overlapped with what Freud would later call "*das Es*, the 'it' or 'id,' a cauldron of highly affectively charged instincts and drives."[79] Unlike preconscious contents, the unconscious is subject to certain processes that blocked them from reaching consciousness, but crucially, that did not mean that they were not expressed "in reasoning, action or speech," merely that they were expressed in odd and unexpected ways. This very oddness of their expression in Freud's view was testament to the fact that "they were subject to distinctive types of mental process belonging to 'the unconscious' understood as a system, the 'topographical' unconscious." This sounds very much like the "latent tendencies" and embodied cognitions that are the hallmark of saṃskāras.

However, it is Merleau-Ponty's articulation of flesh that has the most resonance with the aims of this project. The "synergic" body brings to mind the Japanese understanding of *kokoro*, in that perception is not a subject-object relationship but rather an intimate, carnal relationship of sensibles. Moreover, it also illumines an interesting

79 Redding, Paul. *The Logic of Affect*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999: 46.

facet of Shinran's thought with respect to Amida Buddha. That is, insofar as our karmic afflictions form the basis upon which "ordinary beings" are grasped by the Vow, an intimate, sensed relationship forms between believer and Amida. This compassionate connection entangles savior and saved in "the tissue of things;" a "felt horizon," that is accessible as an intimate and affective immediacy. It is suggestive that Shinran grasps the phrase, "attaining nirvana without severing karmic afflictions" (*fudan bonnō toku nehan*) as capturing the dynamic of the relationship of believer to Amida. That is, there is a necessary affective continuity and sensibility at work that is not severed even as ordinary beings are brought to rebirth in the Pure Land. This is also why Shinran says, towards the end of that passage from *Tannishō* #9 that it would be suspicious if the awareness of our karmic afflictions were missing in the experience of *shinjin*: it is precisely on the basis of these afflictions that the connective tissue of believer-Amida depends, for these afflictions to be missing would mean that the relationship no longer depends. Given that this relationship is irrevocable (*futaiten*, 不退転), this would indeed be something suspicious. Further, Shinran's view of the karmic afflictions means that the sensible, or the affective, is not just an experience of depth with respect to one's own lived experience, but is a source of religious knowledge, and a touchstone by which one can be reassured of the working of Amida's Vow.

In the following chapter we shall briefly the history and doctrinal background to Pure Land religiosity, and pose the question of why Shinran's understanding of the phrase "attaining nirvana without severing karmic afflictions," represents such a new approach to the karmic afflictions.

CHAPTER 2: SEEKING THE PURE LAND

A Brief Overview of Pure Land Buddhism

Pure Land[80]Buddhism is predicated upon the three Pure Land sūtras preached by the Buddha Śākyamuni in India, which reveal the existence of the Buddha Amitābha (Jpn. Amida, 阿弥陀*),*[81] and the promise of salvation in his Pure Land, billions of miles to the west. Whereas in traditional Buddhism nirvana is achieved through the disciplines of ethical precepts, meditation and the cultivation of wisdom, Pure Land Buddhism offers a simpler path. The goal, here, is not nirvana in the present life, but rebirth in Amida's Pure Land through the practices laid out in the Pure Land sūtras.[82] Once reborn there, the

80 "Pure Land" is used to translate the Sanskrit term "Sukhāvatī" meaning "land" or "realm" of "ultimate bliss." As an epithet it refers specifically to the buddha-land of Amitabha (Jpn. *Amida*), which is characterized by its blissful and paradise-like qualities. Essentially, each buddha takes a number of vows that detail the locale and conditions within which it will function, and the resultant buddha-land is effected by the fulfillment of those vows. Amida's vows specify the establishment of a paradise-like buddha-land in which sentient beings can quickly practice and attain nirvana.

81 As the bodhisattva Dharmākara, he took 48 vows to establish a Pure Land and now, as a Buddha, is identified as the Buddha of Infinite Light (Skt. *Amitāyus*) and Life (Skt. *Amitābha*). He, along with the Buddhas Bhaiṣjyaguru and Akṣobhya, was one of the earliest foci for devotion in the early Mahāyana movement. Nattier argues that since these devotional practices were aimed towards rebirth in these Buddhas' respective Pure Lands, we should properly expand the scope of Pure Land Buddhism to include rebirth in any Pure Land whatsoever. However, for the purposes of this work, Pure Land Buddhism is focused on rebirth in Amida's Pure Land. See Nattier, Jan. "The Realm of Akṣobhya: A Missing Piece in the History of Pure Land Buddhism." *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 23, no. 1 (2000): 71-102.

82 Dobbins, James C. *Jōdo Shinshū : Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i

believer can quickly attain enlightenment through the direct instruction of Amida and the resident bodhisattvas, in a world perfectly suited to uninterrupted spiritual practice.[83]

These three sūtras are: the *Sūtra of Infinite Life* (Jpn. *Muryōjukyō*, 無量寿経), the *Amida Sūtra* (Jpn. *Amidakyō* 阿弥陀経), and the *Contemplation Sūtra* (Jpn. *Kanmuryōjukyō* 観無量寿経). The *Infinite Life* and *Amida Sūtras* were composed perhaps as early as 100CE in northwest India, while the *Contemplation Sūtra* appeared later in Central Asia or perhaps China.[84] Amstutz argues that these sūtras are indicative of a general "field of Pure Land imagination" that was quite well integrated into the general Mahāyāna stream of texts and practices by 200 CE.Though these sūtras promote the idea of a paradisiacal Land into which believers can be reborn, Amstutz emphasizes that the ultimate goal of the Pure Land imagination was eventual nirvana, and not just transient rebirth no matter the attractiveness of that distant locale. Indeed, he sees Pure Land thought as emerging organically from a few key assumptions of Indian Mahāyāna thought: first was the development of the idea that there were other buddhas in the past, before the appearance of Śākyamuni, which in turn led to the premise of other buddhas appearing in the future — this had the effect of "universalizing" the idea of enlightenment. That is, that the possibility of enlightenment was not limited to just the era of the historical buddha, but stretched back into the limitless past, and forward in time almost to infinity. Second, as Buddhist cosmology expanded to include an infinite

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Press, 2002: 3.

83 For instance the *Amida Sūtra* (阿弥陀経) promises that in that Pure Land birds continuously sing the Dharma in melodious tones, heavenly flowers rain from the skies, and believers can travel to other, distant Pure Lands and make offerings to the resident Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and be back before their morning meal. See, *The Three Pure Land Sutras*. eds. Hisao Inagaki, and Harold. Stewart, Berkeley, Calif.: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2003: 103-108.

84 Amstutz, Galen. "The Politics of Pure Land Buddhism in India." *Numen* 45, no. 1 (1998): 70.

number of buddhas and the universes in which they operated, the particular “karmic power” of these buddhas and bodhisattvas became the focus of devotion for some, with attention being focused on the accumulation and transference of merit from these transcendent figures. Finally, the Pure Land imaginary coalesced around a range of teachings and practices that varied from advanced visualization and meditative techniques fit only for highly skilled practitioners, to simpler rituals, like recitation, which were suited to everyone.[85]

The Pure Land imaginary set up a distinction between the human realm and the field of functioning, or "Pure Land" (Skt. *Buddha-kṣetra*, Jpn. *butsudo* 佛土), of the Buddha Amida. With this distinction, the locus of transformative spiritual practice shifts from attaining nirvana in this realm (as the historical buddha did), to the Pure Land, where that transformation can occur without the hindrances and distractions in the present. Thus it is important to point out that, “the Pure Land did not have the substantial epistemological character of any heaven...and did not 'exist' any more than any other region of reality characterized by the Buddha's consciousness.” What was particularly attractive about this particular Pure Land was the “vagueness and openness” of the preconditions for rebirth there: “Almost any degree of attention to the Buddha would enable rebirth in Sukhâvatî. Beings needed only to set their minds on Amitabha, cultivate 'roots of good,' and plan for achieving enlightenment there.”[86] The *Sūtra of Infinite Life* details the forty-eight vows that Amida Buddha took, as a bodhisattva, to establish the aforementioned preconditions. For the Pure Land imaginary, the eighteenth vow (or the

85 Amstutz, "Politics of Pure Land," 70-71.
86 Amstutz, "Politics of Pure Land," 72.

"principal vow" Jpn. *hongan* 本願) is perhaps the most important. In its first, or "causal form" (Jpn. *ingan* 因願), the buddha makes his enlightenment contingent upon the salvation of all sentient beings:

> Were I to attain Buddhahood, and yet if sentient beings of the ten directions were not to be born [in Pure Land] even though they were sincere in heart, had faith and joy, and desired to be born in my Pure Land with even ten *nen,* then I would not accept true enlightenment. Only those who commit the five damning offenses[87]or slander the true teachings will be excluded.

The second iteration of the vow, the "fulfilled principal vow" (Jpn. *hongan jōju no mon* 本願成就文), recounts the same promise *after* Amida's Buddhahood:

> If sentient beings hear [Amida's] name and have faith and joy, with even a single *nen*, and if they extend their own religious merit to others with a sincere heart, and if they desire to be born in that Pure Land, then they will attain birth there and will reside in the stage of nonretrogression. Only those who commit the five damning offenses or slander the true teachings will be excluded.

In both versions, all that is required for birth in the Pure Land is "sincerity of heart, hearing Amida's name, faith and joy, [a] desire to be born in Pure Land, extending religious merit to others, and *nen.*"[88]

The other Pure Land sūtras are viewed through the lens of the vows detailed in the *Sūtra of Infinite Life*, thus from the *Amida Sūtra* is drawn the idea that "sentient beings can be born in the Pure Land merely by hearing Amida's name (*myōgō*) and meditating on it with singleness of heart (*isshin*) for even one day," and from the *Contemplation Sūtra* that, "even evil persons, if they utter the *nembutsu*[89] on their deathbed with a

87 The five damning offenses are: killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an *arhat*, shedding the blood of a Buddha, and destroying the harmony of the *sangha*. Dobbins, James C. *Jōdo Shinshū : Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002: 175.

88 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 3-4. "*Nen*" (念) here meaning to bring the Buddha to mind. In the Chinese and Japanese traditions, this encompasses a number of possible practices, including visualization and vocal recitation of the name of a Buddha.

89 Literally, "Keeping the Buddha in mind"; originally referred to practices of remembrance of a particular Buddha by through practices of visualization or recitation. In the Pure Land tradition, the practice of recitation became paramount, and for all intents and purposes *nen* (Jpn. *nenbutsu*) became synonymous

sincere heart, will be received into Amida's Pure Land."[90] Thus with the teachings detailed in these sūtras, the stage is set for the Pure Land path to be accepted as a path of practice that is open to a variety of individuals, and suited to a wide range of religious capabilities. These teachings were further elaborated upon by a number of Indian and Chinese commentators who were later recognized, particularly by Shinran, as the "patriarchs" of a Pure Land buddhist "school;" that is, as a separate and distinct lineage within the broader Mahāyāna family.

First is Nāgārjuna (c. 150-250 CE), who in the *Shastra on the Ten Bodhisattva Stages*, is credited with describing two ways of achieving the stage of "non-retrogression" (Jpn. *futaiten* 不退転); the way of difficult practice (*nangyō,* 難行), which is likened to making one's way across land by foot, and the way of easy practice (*igyō,* 易行); "simply by faith in the Buddha one aspires to be born in the Pure Land, and by riding on the Buddha's vow-power one attains birth in that Pure Land."[91] Vasubandhu (c. 4th century CE) on the other hand, emphasized the singleness of heart (*isshin*) in relying on Amida Buddha and detailed five forms of devotion or "practice gates" (念門): bowing, praise, resolution, visualization and turning-towards.[92] For Vasubandhu the practice of "turning-towards" means;

> "Turning over"...merit to beings while one is still in samsara, [but also] "turning and [re-]entering"...samsara after one has attained birth in Sukhāvatī, "teaching

with the vocalization/recitation of the name of Amida Buddha; that is, *namu Amida butsu*, "I take refuge in Amida Buddha". For more see; Jones, Charles B. "Towards a Typology of 'Nien-Fo': A Study in Methods of Buddha-Invocation in Chinese Pure Land Buddhism." *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3rd Series, No.3 (2001): 219-39.

90 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 4.

91 Andrews, Allan A. "Lay and Monastic Forms of Pure Land Devotionalism:Typology and History." *Numen* 40, no. 1 (1993): 22-23.

92 Corless, Roger. "The Theoretical Foundations of Pure Land Buddhist Practice According to Tanluan." *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3rd Series, No.8 (2006): 125.

> and transforming all beings so that they all go together towards...the way...of the Buddha.[93]

Tanluan (476-542? CE), the first of the Chinese patriarchs, was the first to characterize the Pure Land path as based upon the "other-power" (*tariki* 他力) of Amida Buddha, as opposed to the "self-power" (*jiriki* 自力) of the way of "difficult practice." Unlike later teachers who advocate reliance on other power because they are unable to rely on their own strength, Tanluan argues that is "foolish" to rely on one's own power when there is an easier, more advantageous way:

> It is like a lowly person who, instead of riding on a donkey, joins the procession of a world emperor (*cakravartin*) and rides through the air, playing in the four corners of the world without hindrance. Such is called other-power. How fortunate! Future students will hear of other-power and they can ride upon it and produce the mind of faith! Do not rely on yourselves![94]

Because other-power is rooted in the vows that Amida took when he was a bodhisattva, resolutions taken as a bodhisattva of the eighth level (also known as the "Stage of Perfection, of Birth, of Finality");

> The present lordly divine power of Amitābha Tathāgata originates from the forty-eight resolutions of Dharmākara Bodhisattva. His resolution was completed (成, cheng) by his power, and his power is perfected (就, jiu) by his resolution. The resolution was not vain and the power is not empty. His power and his resolution go together, in the final analysis they are not different, and therefore they are called perfection (成就, chengjiu).[95]

Thus the potency of other power surpasses any that can be mustered by sentient beings who are nowhere near achieving this level of perfection, and from this standpoint, it makes no sense to continue to labor on under one's own steam when a vastly superior way is open and available to all.

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93 Corless, "Theoretical Foundations," 126.
94 Corless, "Theoretical Foundations," 134-135.
95 Corless, "Theoretical Foundations," 135.

Daochuo (562-645 CE) recognized as the second Chinese patriarch drew a distinction between the "Path of Saintly Endeavor" (*shōdō* 聖道) characterized by the "difficult practices" (*nangyō*, 難行) and reliance upon one's own efforts, and the Pure Land path of "easy practice" (*igyō*, 易行), and reliance upon the other-power of Amida Buddha. For Daochuo, the "time has now passed when a saintly life leading to enlightenment can be lived, [and] in this age people are no longer capable of undertaking rigorous religious practice."[96] For the first time, the issue of timeliness is introduced into the Pure Land imaginary, and from this point forward, the characterization of the Pure Land path as best suited to the times, understood as the "Final Age" (*masse* 末世) is firmly established.[97] Thus the question of easy versus difficult practice becomes inextricably linked to the idea that only the Pure Land path remains as a viable path to enlightenment.

Shandao (613-681 CE), more so than his predecessors, emphasizes the idea that the Pure Land sūtras were preached particularly for beings living in the "Final Age," and especially for those of "little or no virtue, learning or self-discipline" — in effect, everyone, both lay and clerical. For him, Pure Land practice should be grounded in "reflection" upon Amida Buddha, though he is seemingly ambivalent whether that reflection should be of a meditative or recitative (*nenbutsu*) type. He does however stress that Pure Land practitioners should reflect upon Amida to the best of their ability, whether that be for their entire lifetime, or, at the very least, for ten invocations.[98] Crucially, Shandao is the first to identify the ten reflections on the Buddha from the *Sūtra*

96 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 5.
97 We will address the idea of the "Final Age" in detail in Part 4 of this chapter.
98 Andrews, "Lay and Monastic Forms," 26-27.

of Infinite Life as the "minimal condition for rebirth" and to connect them to the ten invocations of the Buddha's name from the *Contemplation Sūtra*. That is, Shandao identifies the practice that even the least capable "destitute common beings" could manage, was precisely the practice the Buddha had set out for those living in the Final Age.[99] This emphasis on the *nenbutsu* became a key element in the Japanese understanding of the Pure Land path.

Genshin (942-1017 CE), the first Japanese patriarch, saw the *nenbutsu* as the "most beneficial practice for those weary of this tainted world," and he saw it in its highest form as a "meditative practice in which one visualizes Amida and his Pure Land while chanting his name."[100] Even for those incapable of practicing meditation, Genshin advocating *nenbutsu* recitation as a means of concentrating the mind to focus on Amida Buddha. This was particularly important at the end of one's life, when in the "deathbed *nembutsu* ceremony" the dying practitioner was encouraged to visualize Amida and his retinue coming to whisk the believer away into the Pure Land.[101] In fact this visualization was of such importance to Genshin that he introduced a new genre of Pure Land Buddhist painting known as "Painting of Amida's welcoming descent with his celestial assembly" (*Amida shōju raigōzu*, 阿弥陀聖衆来迎図) which depicted this deathbed event.[102] Since Genshin saw these depictions as aids towards rebirth in the Pure Land, they became sought after among Pure Land devotees, and emblematic of Genshin's approach to the Pure Land teachings.[103]

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99 Andrews, "Lay and Monastic Forms," 27.
100 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 5-6.
101 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 6.
102 Kanda, Fusae C. "Hōnen's *Senchaku* Doctrine and His Artistic Agenda." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 31, no.1 (2004): 4.
103 Kanda, "Hōnen's *Senchaku* Doctrine," 5.

Hōnen (1133-1212 CE), also saw the *nenbutsu* as the quintessential Pure Land practice, but for him, *nenbutsu* was solely a recitative, rather than meditative practice. Inspired to this position by Shandao's commentary on the *Contemplation Sūtra*, Hōnen abandoned the traditional emphasis on contemplative *nenbutsu* that he was taught as a Tendai monk. As he details in his *Passages on the Original Vow's Selection of Nenbutsu,* (*Senchaku hongan nenbutsu shū,* 選擇本願念仏集) composed in 1198 CE, he designates all practices other than the *nenbutsu* (that is, reading and reciting sūtras, contemplation, prostration, and giving praise and offerings) as "auxiliary acts" (*jogō,* 助業) which must be set aside, because: "The rightly established act is uttering the name of Amida Buddha. Those who utter the name will unfailingly attain birth, because it is based on Amida's original vow."[104]

It necessarily follows that for Hōnen *nenbutsu* was the *sine qua non* for birth in the Pure Land, and so he gave it the term "exclusive" or *senju nenbutsu* (専修念仏), proclaiming it to be superior to all other Buddhist practices.[105] Hōnen also classified the *nenbutsu* as the "easy path" because in his view, it "reflects Amida Buddha's universal compassion to save all sentient beings regardless of their conditions, spiritual, social, or material."[106] Shinran, his student, absorbed the ideas and teachings of all seven patriarchs, even as he formulated his own distinctive approach to the Pure Land, based upon his own personal experience and interpretation of what it means to have faith in, and rely upon, the other-power of Amida Buddha. As we shall see in the next section, Shinran

104 Kanda, "Hōnen's *Senchaku* Doctrine," 7.
105 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 6.
106 Keel, Hee-Sung. *Understanding Shinran : A Dialogical Approach*. Fremont, Calif: Asian Humanities Press, 1995: 24.

unwittingly instantiated his own stream of Pure Land thought, though he himself insisted all his life that he was only following the teachings of his master Hōnen.

Shinran (1173-1263 CE)

Shinran, the putative founder of the Japanese True Pure Land School (*Jōdō Shinshū* 浄土真宗), lived and trained from an early age at the Tendai complex on Mt. Hiei. Eventually Shinran was attached to one of the "Halls of Constant Practice" (*jōgyōdō,* 常行堂) where monks performed a variety of *nenbutsu* (念仏) practices including the Continual *Samādhi* (*jōgyō zanmai* 常行三昧)[107] and continuous *nenbutsu* practice (*fudan nenbutsu* 不断念仏)[108] [109]. Though Dobbins reports that this was a relatively minor position in the Tendai hierarchy, it would have afforded Shinran ample time to formulate his personal take on the *nenbutsu* and the Pure Land teachings.[110] After a series of dreams and visions in 1201 CE, Shinran left Mt. Hiei to begin a hundred day retreat at the Rokkakudō in Kyoto. He did not complete the hundred days as, at dawn on the ninety-fifth day, he had a vision of Prince Shōtoku who told him to go and seek out Hōnen, who would show him "the way of salvation in the afterlife."[111]

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107 This "*Samādhi* of Constant Walking" was brought to Japan by Ennin when he returned from China in 847 CE. It is one of the four *samādhis* established by Zhiyi, and promotes constant circumambulation of the Buddha's statue for a period of ninety days, accompanied by constant repetition of the Buddha's name, with the goal of receiving a vision of that Buddha "before one's eyes" (Keel, *Understanding Shinran*, 34).

108 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 23.

109 The continuous *nenbutsu* program involved constant repetition of the Buddha's name, but was much shorter in length: lasting from three to seven days (Keel, *Understanding Shinran*, 34). See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion.

110 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 23.

111 *The Essential Shinran : A Buddhist Path of True Entrusting*. ed. Alfred Bloom, Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom, 2007: 9.

We do not know precisely what led Shinran to leave Mt. Hiei after all the years he spent studying and practicing Tendai Buddhism there. What is clear is that he reached some sort of impasse, related to "salvation in the afterlife" as his wife Eshin-ni records it, and perhaps was "tormented by sexual impulses."[112] The tension between these two crises eventually pushed him to leave the priesthood, convert to Hōnen's Pure Land teachings and take a spouse.[113] Hōnen at this time argued that the most important thing in one's life was to practice *nenbutsu,* and that nothing should stand in the way of this vital activity saying;

> When you live the present life, spend your life reciting nenbutsu; if anything impedes your nenbutsu, throw it away, whatever it may be. If you cannot say the nenbutsu as a wandering monk (*hijiri* 聖), say it taking a wife; if you cannot do it with a wife, do it as a wandering monk.[114]

Compared to the urgency of "single-mindedly" practicing the *nenbutsu*, all other concerns fall by the wayside, including the issue of whether or not to keep to the precepts. This message must have been of great comfort to Shinran, who was at this point clearly grappling with the problem of remaining an upright Tendai monk.

1201 CE marked the decisive point at which Shinran rejected the path towards salvation as laid out in the Tendai school for the Pure Land path advocated by Hōnen in his *Senchakushū*, which advocated the "exclusive *nenbutsu*"; that is, recitation of the name of Amida Buddha as the sole means of rebirth in the Pure Land. While Shinran may

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112 The "Record of Shinran's Dreams" states that the vision he received in the Rokkakudō was as follows;
The Great World-Saving Bodhisattva [Kannon] of the Rokkakudō was revealed in the form of a monk of upright appearance. Dressed in simple white clerical robes and seated on a giant white lotus, he made this pronouncement to Shinran:
> If the believer, because of the fruition of karma, is driven by sexual desire,
> Then I shall take on the body of a beautiful woman to be ravished by him.
> Throughout his entire life I shall adorn him well,
> And at death I shall lead him to birth in the Pure Land (cit. in Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 24).

113 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 24.

114 cit. in Keel, *Understanding Shinran*, 38.

not have been one of Hōnen's first-rank disciples,[115] Shinran's devotion to his teacher was deep and lifelong, and that whatever difficulties, questions and doubts that he may have been experiencing on Mt. Hiei were soon left behind: "I am one who believes that I would even go [with him], since from realm to realm and from rebirth to rebirth I am lost already."[116] In 1205, Shinran received permission to marry and was granted the name Zenshin (善信), which was the same name that was revealed to him in his vision at the Rokkakudō.[117]

His time together with Hōnen lasted just six years, as in 1207 Hōnen's exclusive *nenbutsu* movement fell afoul of the authorities in the Anrakubō and Jūren incidents, and many of his followers were banished to remote parts of the country — Shinran included. Though up to about 1204 CE Shinran continued to identify himself as a monk (*sō* 僧) after this persecution in 1207, he begins to call himself "neither monk nor layman" (*sō ni arazu, zoku ni arazu* 非僧非俗) and adopting the pejoratives "foolish" (*gu* 愚) and "stubble-headed" (*toku* 禿) to describe himself. As Keel points out, these were terms used at the time to describe monks who had renounced secular life and were living lives of "moral laxity:" monks who had "broken the precepts without any sense of remorse (*hakai muzan* 破戒無慚)". Shinran seems to have adopted these terms without any sense of shame, perhaps because his adoption of an openly married life was born out of his deep conviction that marriage and the religious life were not opposed. In Shinran's time it was not uncommon for monks to take a wife, albeit in secret, but by the latter stages of

115 For instance, Shinran is not mentioned in the writings of his contemporaries, and his name appears as 87th out of 190 names on Hōnen's "Seven Article Pledge" of 1204. On the other hand, he was part of a select few allowed to make a copy of the *Senchakushū*, so Hōnen must have seen him as a trustworthy student. See Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 26.

116 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 25-26.

117 Keel, *Understanding Shinran*, 40.

his life, many of these monks lived openly married lives. Shinran's openness about his "lawbreaker" status signaled a decisive break with the Path of Sages and with self-power, as he dedicated himself solely to the *nenbutsu*.[118]

During the first few years of his exile, it seems that Shinran was concerned more with quiet study than with active proselytization, and it is only with his move to the Kantō area,[119] in 1214 or thereabouts, that he begins to attract disciples from his local community.[120] It is sometime during this period of exile that Shinran arrives at a new perspective on the Pure Land teachings on faith; traditionally called the "conversion through the three vows" or *sangan tennyū* (三願転入) which correspond to Amida's nineteenth, twentieth, and eighteenth vows.[121] In the *Kyōgyōshinshō*,[122] Shinran describes this process:

> Therefore, reverencing the expositions of the treatise masters and relying on the exhortations of the religious teachers, I , the [Stubble-] headed Fool Shinran, abandoned forever the provisional path of manifold practices and good works, and separated myself once and for all from birth in the forest of twin [teak][123]trees.I turned to the true path, the basis of virtue and good, and gave rise to the aspiration for birth that is difficult to comprehend. But now I have utterly abandoned the expediency of the true path, and have converted to the ocean-like vow singled out [by Amida]. I have separated myself straightway from the aspiration for birth that is difficult to comprehend, and I long to attain birth that is difficult to fathom. The "vow for attainment" is truly the reason for this.[124]

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118 Keel, *Understanding Shinran*,26, 40-42.

119 The eastern provinces of Japan; a region that now includes the modern Tokyo area.

120 Keel, *Understanding Shinran*, 27.

121 Keel, *Understanding Shinran*, 28.

122 Shinran's magnum opus, *A Collection of Passages Revealing the True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way* (教行信証), which as the title suggests, presents his understanding of the doctrinal roots of the Pure Land path, and presents a rationale for the selection of the *nenbutsu* as the singular practice for "ordinary beings." Hereafter, *KGSS*.

123 *Śāla* (Jpn. *shara* 娑羅).This is a reference to the trees under which Shakyamuni lay as he was dying. It is therefore a metaphor for passing into nirvana through the practices of the Path of Saintly Endeavor.

124 Quot. in Keel, *Understanding Shinran*, 29.

What this rather dense passage intimates is that Shinran first sought out rebirth in the Pure Land through the traditional means (that is, of strict practice and cultivation of good works), but since they constitute only a provisional path, he turned to the *nenbutsu* and to the true path leading to the true Pure Land. However, without a deep understanding of Amida's eighteenth vow, even this path leads to rebirth in the expedient Pure Land[125], but once "awakened to the oceanlike vastness of the eighteenth vow, expansive enough to embrace even the most unworthy believer," one's rebirth in the true Pure Land is assured.[126] His wife Eshin-ni records in one of her letters one instance in Shinran's life that is illustrative of this turn from personal effort to faith. She writes that one day Shinran fell ill, and retired to bed with a high fever, and suddenly recalled an episode that had occurred seventeen or eighteen years earlier. At that time he took it upon himself to recite the three Pure Land sūtras a thousand times "for the benefit of sentient beings," when he suddenly realized that he was making a grave mistake because "the repayment of the Buddha's blessing is to believe the teaching for oneself and then teach others to believe." Reciting the sūtras as if that act would supplement the *nenbutsu* in some way was a mistake and the product of "self-generated faith."[127]

For Shinran, faith , or better, entrusting (*shinjin*, 信心) means an utter reliance on what Tanluan identified as "other power" (*tariki* 他力) which is encapsulated in Amida's vows to save sentient beings, and not on "self power" (*jiriki* 自力) which relies on one's own efforts to effect salvation. In his view, the *nenbutsu*, "does not originate with the believer but with Amida, who established the principle vow...Since it emerges from the

125 Or the *hōben kedo* (方便化土), located on the fringes of the true, fulfilled Pure Land (*shinjitsu hōdo*, 真実報土)
126 Keel, *Understanding Shinran*, 29.
127 Bloom, *Living in Amida's Universal Vow*, 14-15.

wisdom, compassion, and power of Amida, it is an unfailing practice assuring birth in the Pure Land."[128] However, this does not mean that all utterances of the *nenbutsu* are an indication of true faith, as Shinran clarifies: "True faith necessarily entails Amida's name, but Amida's name does not necessarily entail faith [which is derived] from the power of [Amida's] vow." Only when the believer gives up their reliance on self power, and their own calculative thinking (*hakarai*) does *shinjin* arise spontaneously. Once this decisive moment of true *shinjin* has arisen in the believer then "even sentient beings filled with evil inclinations (*bonnō jōju no bonbu*) are included in the ranks of those truly assured of enlightenment," and "they will proceed without fail to Nirvāṇa," for Amida has vowed to "'embrace all and forsake none' (*sesshu fusha*)," and "there is no retrogression (*futaiten*)...for faith is an indestructible state of mind (*kongōshin*)."

Shinran left the Kantō area in around 1235, perhaps in response to an edict from the Kamakura *bakufu* (military government) that banned "radical *nenbutsu* priests" in Kamakura city and returned to Kyoto, where he spent the last 30 years of his life. All the while he remained in contact with his followers back east, exchanging letters, and in return receiving gifts, some of which were quite generous. These years were very productive ones, as the bulk of his writings (written in Japanese, rather than classical Chinese) including letters, hymns and verses, commentaries, and excerpts of other religious works date from this period.[129]

Shinran died on November 28th 1262, leaving behind a burgeoning community of believers numbering in the thousands. During this period, the *dōjō*, or meeting place was

128 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 34.
129 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 34-42.

the "basic unit" of the religious community; each local group of believer or companions (*monto*) met once a month, usually on the day of Shinran's death. The actual ceremony varied from *dōjō* to *dōjō*, but was centered on a "large inscription of Amida's name (*myōgō honzon*) hung over a simple altar," which was one of Shinran's innovations. Rather than commissioning and erecting an expensive statue of Amida, the scroll represented a more modest means for believers of all classes to have a focus for worship. In addition the simple service consisting of *nenbutsu* chanting, sermons, recitation of sacred texts, and the singing of Shinran's hymns, gave the Shinshū believers a greater degree of participation in religious life than had been afforded them before.[130] Significantly, the *dōjō* functioned as a collective, with decisions affecting the community taken through a system of consensus; decisions including finances, *dōjō* maintenance and upkeep, all while maintaining a "distinctly lay air." Zonkaku, Shinran's great-great grandson writes of the *dōjō* members:

> Today most adherents of the exclusive practice live the life of a lay person. Hence, some have a wife and children and are attached to the pleasures of the senses, while others serve overlords and bear weapons. Some till the soil, wielding plows and hoes, while others make their living as merchants, supporting themselves morning and evening.[131]

Inevitably, some measure of institutionalization began to creep into the Shinshū community, centered around the Ōtani memorial established at Shinran's grave site, which naturally became a pilgrimage spot for members of the community. Guardianship of this memorial site eventually came to Kakunyo, Shinran's great-grandson, who set about elevating the prestige of Ōtani, and transforming the site into a formal Buddhist

130 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 65-66.
131 Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 68.

temple, first under the name Senjuji (Temple of the Exclusive Practice) and then finally, under great pressure from Mt. Hiei, settled on the name Honganji (Temple of the Principal Vow) sometime around 1321.[132] Through the efforts of Kakunyo and his successors, culminating in Rennyo (1415-1499), political and doctrinal control over the Shinshū community was gradually consolidated in the Honganji institution with Shinran's direct descendants at the head. From this point on, what had begun as a somewhat *ad hoc* community of Shinran's disciples was consolidated into one of the largest and most powerful Buddhist denominations in Japan; one which has endured to the present day.

[132] Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 79-84.

I Do Not Rejoice As I Should

As we have seen from the previous section, the question of entrusting (*shinjin*) was of paramount concern for Shinran. Perhaps most intriguingly, it was not just the *concept* of *shinjin* that was of interest to him, but also the *experience* of *shinjin*. On this question of the experience of *shinjin*, one passage from the *Tannishō* (Notes Lamenting Deviations), contains a provocative exchange between Shinran and his disciple Yuien-bō (the putative author this text). Compiled with the intent "to preserve Shinran's ideas from distortion and to rectify a number of misconceptions circulating among his followers," it was proscribed for those "lacking karmic preparation for it" and so remained obscure for many years undoubtedly because of what later figures like Rennyo considered to be its "radical contents." The first ten passages present Shinran's teachings, in his own words, in a very succinct fashion, followed by a further eight passages in which the author details and critiques a number of ideas that have begun to be absorbed into the Shinshū community from other Buddhist denominations.[133] The passage of concern to us appears in the first half of the text:

> "Even though I (humbly) recite the nenbutsu, the *kokoro* of dancing and leaping with joy is roiled up within me, further, the *kokoro* of swiftly going to the Pure Land is lacking, I wonder how one should consider such a thing as this." "I, Shinran, have the same difficulty in understanding, and Yuien-bo too shares this same *kokoro*!" Having carefully looked into this matter and considered it, that I

[133] Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*, 69-77.

> do not rejoice, as I should, to the extent of dancing on the earth, and dancing in the air, this means all the more that we should come to know that our rebirth in the Pure Land is settled. That which holds back the *kokoro* that should rejoice, that does not cause it to rejoice, is the activity of our afflictions. The Buddha [Amida] knowing this to be so from the beginning, calling us "foolish beings burdened with afflictions," thus let it be known that the Vow of compassion is for the sake of those just like us. So all the more should we entrust in it. Further, there is no *kokoro* of wanting to quickly go to the Pure Land: even with the slightest of illnesses and pain, we think fearfully, "Am I going to die?" This too is the activity of our afflictions. It is difficult to separate ourselves from the suffering and affliction of this our old home, in which from ages long past till the present moment we have been reborn again and again. Surely our not yet having been drawn to rebirth in the Pure Land of rest and comfort, is in truth because of the abundance our afflictions. Even though we feel tossed about like the spume of a wave, when the karmic ties to this world of pain are exhausted, when the end comes and our strength is gone, [we] will go to that Land. Not having the *kokoro* of wanting to go quickly [to the Pure Land] is something the Buddha particularly pities. Fixing upon just this, the Great Vow of Compassion is all the more to be relied upon, and our rebirth is decisively settled. The possibility of having a *kokoro* of also rejoicing and dancing upon the earth and in the air, and wanting to quickly go the Pure Land should make us suspicious: "Could there really be no afflictions?" said Shinran. (*A Record in Lament of Divergences* #9)[134]

However, in the Buddhist tradition, these passions, or better, karmic afflictions, are precisely what must be eliminated for the practitioner to attain enlightenment. For example, the *Sūtra of Infinite Life* says that one of the virtues of those bodhisattvas who are born in the Pure Land is that, "Having extinguished all [karmic afflictions], they are free of those tendencies that cause one to fall into evil realms."[135] This level of perfection is also called the stage of non-retrogression, as these bodhisattvas have only one more rebirth before achieving perfect enlightenment (except for those who have vowed to be reborn in the six realms to save sentient beings). Since for Pure Land commentators like Shinran, the moment of *shinjin* (that is, as a decisive transformative moment of faith) makes a believer "equal to Maitreya" — the bodhisattva who will be reborn as the future

134 Shinran. "A Record in Lament of Divergences." Translation mine.

135 *The Three Pure Land Sutras*. eds. Hisao Inagaki, and Harold. Stewart, Berkeley, Calif.: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2003: 43.

Buddha in our world system — one would be forgiven for thinking that rebirth in the Pure Land marks a definitive and decisive break with the afflictions and hindrances of this world.

Further, the Pure Land sutras, such as the *Sūtra of Infinite Life* clearly link the experience of "hearing the Name" of Amida Buddha with a particular affective state: joy. This joy is not merely a sensual delight, but is connected to wisdom, religious fulfillment, and the genuine practice "of all religious and moral virtues." This would suggest that at least part of Yuien-bō and Shinran's shared difficulty is that their affective experience seems to be at odds with the experience recounted in such passages from the sūtras such as this one from Amida's Vows:

> When I attain Buddhahood, I will cause my Name to be heard throughout the countless Buddha-lands of the eight quarters, the zenith, and the nadir. All of the Buddhas will extol my virtues and the goodness of my land among followers in their own lands. Those devas and human beings, and even the species of crawling things, who dance and leap [with joy] when they hear my Name, will all be en abled to come and be born in my land ("The Chapter on Teaching").[136]

And;

> The Buddha said to Maitreya, "If there are people who hear the Name of that Buddha, rejoice so greatly as to dance, and remember him even once, then you should know that they have gained great benefit by receiving the unsurpassed virtue. For this reason, Maitreya, even if a great fire were to fill the universe of a thousand million worlds, you should pass through it to hear this sutra, to arouse joyful faith, to uphold and chant it, and to practice in accordance with its teachings. This is because there are many bodhisattvas who wish to hear this teaching but are still unable to do so. If there are sentient beings who have heard it, they will attain the Stage of Non-retrogression for realizing the highest Enlightenment. This is why you should single-heartedly accept in faith, uphold and chant this sutra, and practice in accordance with its teaching."[137]

And again;

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136 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 10.
137 *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, 36.

> 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 non retrogression ("A Collection of Passages on the Types of Birth in the Pure Land Sutras").[138]

This linkage with affect is enhanced when we consider the fact that a different set of characters are used to denote the state of entrusting linked to hearing the name of Amida Buddha, or hearing the Vow, in the list of the 48 Vows. While *shinjin*, or entrusting is usually denoted by the characters 信心, in several cases such as the quotes above, it actually appears as 信楽 (J. *shingyō*) . While the character 楽 usually refers to a state of comfort, pleasure, bliss, or delight, its coupling here with the bare character for entrusting seems to suggest a particular state of entrusting that is distinct, perhaps qualitatively and affectively so, from what may be considered the "bare" experience of *shinjin*. Further, *shingyō* can itself be modified by a number of other affective couplets like "leaping in the air, dancing on the earth" (踊躍, J. *yūyaku*) and "delight and joy" (歓喜 J. *kangi*).

We will address the variety of these expressions concerning entrusting in Chapter 3, but it will suffice to say that even a brief glance at these passages highlight that for Shinran, the question of why he and Yuien-bō do not experience joy, or at the very least, why they continue to be plagued by their afflictions strikes at the very core of what salvation means, and how it is experienced. In brief, Shinran appears to maintain that in *shinjin,* Pure Land believers "dwell in the stage of nonretrogression," but without the experience of one's passions and afflictions having been extinguished. What this means, then, is that even though the experience of the "one thought-moment" is meant to be accompanied by joy, the diminution of that joy in the everyday experience of the believer

138 Shinran, *Collected Works,* 640.

does not cast doubts upon their rebirth in the Pure Land. Indeed, Shinran firmly avows that one's rebirth is all the more assured *because* of, not in spite of, their affliction-plagued experience.This leads us to believe that the relationship between the afflictions and the *nenbutsu* is not one of mutual exclusivity, and that in his experience, the affective state of entrusting and saying the *nenbutsu* is affectively and temporally layered in a complex fashion.[139]

Taking a closer look at the passage from the *Tannishō*, we can distinguish at least three facets to the affective experience he shares with Yuien: time, space, and conditions. The facet of time relates both to the "one thought moment" of entrusting (and saying the *nenbutsu*) that decisively settles rebirth in the Pure Land, but also to the immediate moment of reflection on his (and Yuien's) affective state.[140] The facet of space relates to the hearts and minds (*kokoro*) of Shinran, Yuien, and all "foolish beings," in/through which the transformation through entrusting occurs but also to the *kokoro* of Amida Buddha who in his wisdom and compassion selected the Vow for those burdened with afflictions: that is, the affective dimension. Finally, the facet of conditions belongs to the mechanism which activates the transformation; an energy which in Pure Land parlance is termed Other Power, to which one entrusts oneself, and is "carried along" by its transformative effects. Further, we can see a double-sided relationship at work in this

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139 By this I mean, the dilemma posed by Yuien-bō here is brought about by the assumption that since rebirth in the Pure Land is assured in the next life, one should rejoice now in anticipation of what shall be achieved later. Or perhaps that one should rejoice now, because attaining *shinjin* means one has gotten rid of their afflictions.

140 Looking again at "Notes on Once Calling, Many Calling," there seems to be a split in terms of temporality: 「歓喜踊躍乃至一念」というは、「歓喜」は、うべきことをえてんずと、さきだちて、かねてよろこぶこころなり。」This first joy comes prior to attainment, if I am reading 「えてんず」correctly, whereas in the following phrase, joy comes after: 「慶楽するありさまをあらわすなり。「慶」は、うべきことをえて、のちによろこぶこころなり。」The first seems to have an implication of intentionality, whereas the second arises in response to an event that has come into actuality. 『真宗聖典』. ed. 真宗聖典編纂委員会, 京都: 東本願寺出版部, 1978: (539).

affective experience between what would ordinarily be considered polar opposites: joy and afflictions, the Pure Land and this world, aspiration for rebirth and attachment to this world. "Double-sided" in this instance because Shinran is explicit that the positive pole of this relationship (Pure Land, joy, rebirth) is made all the more sure by the simultaneous experience of the negative pole of afflictions and attachments. In other words, both sides participate simultaneously, or better, reciprocally, in the lived experience of entrusting. Taking this thought further, one could read this relationship as also suggesting that for Shinran, psychological insight into one's own experience can be a means to connect and share in the experience of others, insofar as there is a commonality of affective experience among Pure Land believers.

That being said, there still remains the pertinent question of why Shinran maintains that a double-sided relationship holds even with respect to the passions. While he is very explicit in the *KGSS* that "Nirvana is attained without severing afflictions" (*fudan bonnō toku nehan* 不断煩悩得涅槃) his reasoning behind this claim has not yet been clearly elucidated. One possible reason for this has to do with the phrasing of Dharmākara's Vows:[141] unless salvation for all sentient beings is accomplished, Dharmākara vows that he will not become a Buddha; since he is now Amida Buddha, that means that the salvation of all sentient beings was accomplished ages ago, and yet people continue to be born and die in this world. So we have one dimension in which salvation belongs to the distant past, yet in the immediate moment of entrusting, comes to be realized in the here and now. Or, perhaps, since the Vow has as its object those burdened

[141] As Shinran says in the "Hymns of the Pure Land:" "Because of the Vow, "If they should not be born...," When the moment of genuine entrusting [*shingyō*] has come, And people attain the one thought-moment of joy, Their birth becomes completely settled." Shinran, *Collected Works*, 331.

with afflictions, they must persist in the lived experience of "foolish beings" even as they are being transformed out of the scope of the Vow. This aspect is expressed through Shinran's use of metaphors like for example the sun being hidden by clouds,[142]waters entering an ocean and becoming one taste with it,[143] or emerging and sinking;[144] as expressions of what the lived experience of salvation is like.

In the next chapter we shall examine the role that the concept of *mappō*, the age of "Final Dharma," plays in Shinran's thought and approach to practice.

142 "The light of compassion that grasps us illumines and protects us always;/ The darkness of our ignorance is already broken through;/ Still the clouds and mists of greed and desire, anger and hatred,/ Cover as always the sky of true and real shinjin." Shinran, "Hymn of True Shinjin and the *Nenbutsu*," *Collected Works*, 70.

143 "When the waters of the mind entrusting to Other Power enter/ The ocean waters of Amida's Vow of wisdom,/ Then in accord with the nature of the true and real fulfilled land,/ Blind passions and enlightenment come to be of one taste." Shinran, "Hymns of the Dharma-Ages," *Collected Works*, 404.

144 "There are people who, although they practice in the dark ocean of birth-and-death/ And attain emancipation, still have blind passions;/ Such people receive again the recompense of evil./ This is called briefly emerging, and sinking again." Shinran, "The Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands That are Provisional Means of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 236.

Mappō: The Age of 'Final Dharma'

For Shinran, the framework of practice and liberation remained as a desirable goal of Buddhist practice, although this was tempered by a sense of doubt as to the efficacy of individual efforts towards achieving liberation. This doubt was engendered by the teaching that Japan, and the world at large, had entered the period of Final Dharma (*mappō,* 末法), in which two of the the three pillars of the Dharma, practice and enlightenment, had been lost, and the teaching so corrupted that no-one could understand it, much less practice it.[145] Jan Nattier points out that intimations of the eventual extinction of the Dharma can be found in some of the earliest Buddhist texts, appearing first perhaps, as distinctions between the "golden period" when the Buddha Śākyamuni was still alive, and the "less-than-ideal" period after his death. Soon, though, there appeared the idea that "the Dharma would endure only for a fixed period of time, after which the Buddhist teachings would disappear from the face of the earth. The timetables associated with this tradition have varied widely, ranging from a minimum of five hundred years to a maximum of more than 10,000.[146] The wide fluctuation between these timetables is the product, she argues, of the normative quality of the earliest time

145 Asano, Kyōshin. "The Idea of the Last Dharma-Age in Shinran's Thought, Part 1."Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies 3rd Series, No.3 (2001): 53.

146 Nattier, Jan. *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1992: 28.

schemes. To wit, once an established deadline had elapsed, each Buddhist community had to redraw their time frames or else face the impending collapse of their own legitimacy.[147]

Eventually East Asian Buddhists formulated a three-tier system which was expected to run from:

> A period of the "True Dharma" (Ch. *cheng-fa* / Jpn. *shōbō* 正法, corresponding to Skt. *saddharma*) immediately following the death of the Buddha, during which it is possible to attain enlightenment by practicing the Buddha's teachings; A period of the "Semblance Dharma" (Ch. *hsiang-fa* / Jpn. *zōbō* 像法, a term patterned on but not identical to Skt. *saddharma-pratirūpaka*), during which a few may still be able to reach the goal of enlightenment, but most Buddhists simply carry out the external forms of the religion; and "A period of the "Final Dharma" (Ch. *mo-fa* / Jpn. *mappō* 末法, a term for which no proper Sanskrit equivalent exists), during which traditional religious practice loses its effectiveness and the spiritual capacity of human beings reaches an all-time low.[148]

The first appearance of this tripartite schema is attributed to Nanyue Huisi (515-577), the teacher of Tiantai Zhiyi, in a work[149] completed in 558 CE. Asano argues that the idea of mappō, "connoted a break-down in the ability of the Buddhist path itself to overcome impermanence and bring about the attainment of enlightenment" and that this perceived failure forced those Japanese Buddhists, like Shinran, who were grappling with the very idea of a loss of effective spiritual practice to find new means to achieve liberation.[150] On the other hand, Nattier argues that unlike *masse* (final age, 末世), which often described as the "latter five hundred years," its counterpart term *mappō*, had no such temporal restrictions, because by assigning the duration of 10,000 years, "these Chinese

147 Nattier, *Once Upon A Future Time*, 28, 63-64.
148 Nattier, *Once Upon A Future Time*, 65-66.
149 Michele Marra identifies this as the *"Li shih yüan wen* 立誓願分 (T. 46, 786-792) by the T'ien-t'ai monk Hui-ssu 慧思 (515-577) of Northern Chou, and in the works of monk Chi-tsang) 吉蔵 (459-623) of the San-lun school" (Marra, Michele. "The Development of Mappō Thought in Japan (I)." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 15.1 (1988): 29).
150 Asano, "The Idea of the Last Dharma-Age," 53.

commentators expressed the hope that Śākyamuni's teachings would last forever, albeit in a reduced and less accessible form.[151]

In tandem with the teaching of the three periods of the Dharma was the theory of the five defilements (*kaśāya*). According to Michele Marra they are the impurities of: kalpa (*kōjoku* 劫濁), views (*kenjoku* 見濁), evil passions (*bonnōjoku* 煩悩濁), the mind and body of sentient beings (*shujōjoku* 衆生濁), and the human lifespan (*myōjoku* 命濁). These five defilements pointed towards an increase in war and disaster, the spread of false teachings, the strengthening of afflictions and desires, an increase in physical and mental frailty and the shortening of the human lifespan.[152] In a similar vein, the *Gachizōbun* (月蔵分) roll of the *Daihōdōdaijikkyō* (大方等大集経, *Great Collection Sūtra*), warns that after the 500 year period of True Dharma monks will,

> [Pursue] fame and profit, do not hesitate to abandon good practices and throw away the Buddhist teachings, adorn their robes, and live by trade or agriculture like laymen. These monks like to quarrel, feel jealous towards those monks who follow the precepts, and indulge in negligence, thus accumulating vast evil karma which finally brings several calamities to a world already destined to dry up like a desert. Floods, typhoons, and famines bring people to exhaustion and to war in countries destroyed by earthquakes, pestilences, and fire.[153]

The persecution of Buddhists in China (such as that of 574 CE) only served to heighten the sense that the world had entered the age of Final Dharma. Daochuo's (道綽, 562-645 CE) *Anle ji* (安楽集, Collection of Essays on the Western Paradise) saw in the Pure Land the only escape available to ignorant people during the degenerate age of the Buddhist Doctrine. This work argues that the Dharma is meaningless if it is not adapted to the

151 Nattier, *Once Upon A Future Time*, 118.
152 Marra, Michele. “The Development of Mappō Thought in Japan (I).” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 15.1 (1988): 26.
153 Quoted in Marra, "Development of Mappō Thought," 27.

times in which its hearers live, and advocates that one recitation of the name of Amida Buddha eradicates the sins accumulated in 800,000 kalpas.[154]

The appearance of *mappō* thought in Japan can be traced to the *Sangyōgisho* (三教義疏, *A Commentary on Three Sūtras*), attributed to Shōtoku Taishi (聖徳太子, 573-621 CE) which speaks of the age of Semblance Dharma lasting a thousand years. Saichō (最澄, 767-822 CE), the founder of Tendai Buddhism in Japan, did not claim that he was presently living in *mappō*, but, in the *Kenkairon* (顕戒論, A Manifestation of the Discipline, 820 CE), and the *Shugo kokkaishō* (守護国界章, Defense of the country, 818 CE), he emphasized that the age of Final Dharma was soon to come. Marra argues that the uncertainty as to the precise entry date to the period of Final Dharma suggests that for 9th century CE Japanese Buddhists, *mappō* was viewed as a time yet to come, a belief bolstered by the relative stability of the Buddhist order under the *ritsuryō* (律令) system.[155] However by the time Genshin (源信, 942-1017 CE) compiles the *Ōjōyōshū* (往生要集, Essentials for Birth in the Pure Land) in 985 CE, the awareness of already living in the age of *mappō* is evident, even though the text does not mention any specific dates. *Ōjōyōshū*'s preface clearly shows that Genshin wrote his book with the idea of *mappō* in mind:

> Teachings and practices in order to be born in the Pure Land are the most important things in this Final Age of defilements (*jokuse matsudai,* 濁世末代). Who, either among monks or laymen, noblemen or commoners, is not going to follow this way?[156]

The practice advocated by Genshin is encapsulated in the phrase “Longing for the Pure Land” (*gongu jōdo,* 欣求浄土) entailing:

154 Marra, "Development of Mappō Thought," 29-30.
155 Marra, "Development of Mappō Thought," 39-40.
156 Marra, "Development of Mappō Thought," 40-41.

> The fivefold practice of nenbutsu, including worship (*raihai* 礼拝) of Amida and of his land, praise (*sandan* 讃歎) meant as the practice of meditation on Amida's virtues and oral praise of them, vow (*sagan* 作願) to cut off all sorts of cravings, to master the Buddhist teachings, to obtain enlightenment, and to bring others to the same goal, thus showing perfect faith in Amida, meditation (*kanzatsu* 観察) on Buddha's marks and features, and merit dedication (*ekō* 廻向) conceived as the believer's effort to turn all karmic merits to bring himself and others to the Pure Land.[157]

Though Genshin himself believed in the superiority of the contemplative nembutsu, he emphasized that for "ordinary beings"[158] (*bonbu* 凡夫), the recitative nembutsu is an effective practice. For support he cites Shan-tao's (善導, 613-681CE) interpretation of the *Mañjuśrī Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*Monjuhannyakyō,*文殊般若経) which says; "The obstacle of evil in ordinary beings makes difficult the accomplishment of meditational *nenbutsu*. Therefore the Buddha, moved to pity, advised them to simply intone the syllables of his name."[159] The sense of *mappō* as a deepening existential crisis, albeit mirrored in the increasingly unstable social, political and physical environment, was strengthened in the Kamakura period by the appearance of a text called *Mappō Tōmyōki* 末法燈明記 (The Candle of the Latter Dharma). Traditionally attributed to Saichō, the text argues:

> Since in the Last Age only verbal teachings survive, while practices are non-existent and enlightenment unreachable, precepts also have disappeared and, therefore, to maintain that monks are breaking precepts is meaningless. How can something which is non-existent be broken?[160]

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157 Marra, "Development of Mappō Thought,"45.

158 The "ordinary person" is one who is burdened with karmic entanglements (*bonnō*, 煩悩) accumulated over countless past lives. *Bonbū* cannot, by themselves, be free from these bonds and attain enlightenment. For Shinran, this is descriptive first and foremost of himself as an individual, but also more broadly as the given state of all sentient beings, particularly in the age of *mappō*.

159 Marra,"Development of Mappō Thought," 47.

160 Marra, Michele. "The Development of "Mappō" Thought in Japan (II)." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 15, no. 4 (1988): 287. Hereafter Marra[1].

In pointing out that monks cannot be held to the standards of discipline and practice that would hold in the period of True Dharma, the text argues that the Buddhist teachings must be adapted to the time of the Final Age. In its claim that even the nominal monks of the Final Age are the "True Treasure" of this world, and as rare as a "tiger in the marketplace," the *Mappō tōmyōki* formed the foundation upon which Shinran could build his case for being "neither monk nor layman" (*hisō hizoku*, 非僧非俗).[161]

As Marra points out this work was influential on Shinran in three main areas: 1) Its consciousness of the foolish nature of human beings (*oroka*, *gu* 愚) living in the Final Age and the attendant need for deep self-reflection and repentance; 2) Its concern for the salvation of all in a time when evil is prevalent, and the understanding that even formal Buddhist practice may not be a "good practice;" and 3) In its claim that in the Final Age all things must be judged according to "time (*ji* 時), teachings (*kyō* 教), and human capabilities (*ki* 機)."[162] Mark Blum argues that the *Mappō Tōmyōki* in fact lays out a new model for Japan as a Buddhist nation that does not need a clergy that adheres to the monastic precepts, and as a text appeared during the ascendancy of the Pure Land school (1150-1250 CE), it strongly questions whether a response to *mappō* can be formulated from within the contemporary religious structures.[163]

In fact we see Hōnen write in his *Senchakushū* (Passages on the Nembutsu Selected in the Primal Vow) that,

> In the present time, it is difficult to attain enlightenment through the Path of Sages. One reason is that the Great Sage departed from this world in the far

161 Marra[1], "Development of Mappō Thought," 287.
162 Marra[1], "Development of Mappō Thought," 290.
163 Blum, Mark L. "The Sangoku-Mappō Construct: Buddhism, Nationalism, and History in Medieval Japan." Payne, Richard Karl., and Taigen Daniel Leighton Eds. *Discourse and Ideology in Medieval Japanese Buddhism*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2005: 40.

> distant past. A second reason is that, while the truth is profound, [human] understanding of it is slight. For that reason the "Moon-Matrix" section of the Ta-chi ching (Great Collection Sutra) states, "Out of billions of sentient beings who seek to perform practices and cultivate the way in the last dharma- age, not one will gain realization. This is now the last dharma-age; it is the evil world of the five defilements. This one gate—the Pure Land way—is the only path that affords passage."[164]

Shinran goes a step further to argue that the Pure Land path represents a teaching suited for all three Dharma ages, and that therefore it is the only path possible for beings mired in the last Dharma age. As he says in the *KGSS*:

> The Great Collection Sutra states, 'Out of billions of sentient beings who seek to perform practices and cultivate the way in the last dharma-age, not one will gain realization. This is now the last dharma-age; it is the evil world of the five defilements. This one gate—the Pure Land way—is the only path that affords passage.'[165]

Only through entrusting in Amida's Vow to save those who call upon his Name can those stuck in the last Dharma age even hope to achieve liberation. Asano argues that for Shinran the concept of *mappō* is not just a hermeneutical lens and, "an excellent external system that reveals the internal, true form of "foolish beings of the present," but also on the phenomenological level is, "a clear recognition of the nature of karmic evil, which has existed from the beginningless past" which completely describes the situation of "the ocean of all beings."[166] [167]

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164 Asano, "The Idea of the Last Dharma-Age," 54.
165 Asano, "The Idea of the Last Dharma-Age," 59.
166 Asano, "The Idea of the Last Dharma-Age," 67.
167 For an in-depth exploration of Shinran's use of ocean metaphors, see: 安冨信哉. 信の構造. 京都: 法藏館, 2004. Especially Chapter 4, "The Logic of Ocean"「海の論理」(89-109).

Karma and the Age of Mappō

As we have noted above, there are certain characteristics to the present condition of *mappō* that make the achievement of liberation difficult, if not impossible. In Shinran's view the following three features hold: 1) Only the verbal teachings of Shakyamuni remains, but no-one is able to practice them, and no-one will attain liberation through them; 2) The ideal of individual practice and attainment that is the Path of Sages (that is, following the example of Shakyamuni) is out of step with the times and the capabilities of human beings in the time of *mappō* and cannot effectively show the way to achieve liberation; and 3) The world is mired in conflict and dispute, mired in the "five defilements" and "brewing up only the karmic causes for transmigration."[168] In a hymn, Shinran writes:

> Ignorance and [karmic afflictions] abound, pervading everywhere like innumerable particles of dust. Desire and hatred arising out of conflict and accord are like high peaks and mountain ridges.[169]

Ignorance, desire and hatred are recognized as the "three poisons" and as we saw in our previous discussion of karma, are at the root of the production/continuation of karmic production, and the karmic afflictions or *kleśa*, are hindrances to liberation.

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168 Asano, Kyōshin. "The Idea of the Last Dharma-Age in Shinran's Thought, Part 2."*Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3rd Series, No.4 (2002): 203, 205.

169 Cit. in Asano, "The Idea of the Last Dharma-Age, Part 2," 208.

In brief, sentient beings living in *mappō* are everywhere impeded and burdened by the bad karma and mental defilements endemic to the times, such as that of *bonnōjoku* (煩悩濁, the defilement of mental hindrances). While karma is usually understood as a neutral force, the results of a karmic act (its "fruit" or "result"), can be judged as good or bad. In delineating the negative category of "bad karma," Shinran can be seen to arguing that from the viewpoint of *mappō*, the balance of all karmic results has been tipped towards the negative end of the scale.

There are a number of different kinds of bad karma for Shinran; for instance the ten arising from the aforementioned "three poisons," known as *akugō* (悪業); or those known as *zaigō* (罪業) which have the sense of negative actions that are known to lead to bad/evil results. That is, he distinguishes between the bad deeds which arise from ignorance (in one's past), and those that are created in the present, with bad consequences to follow in the future. Shinran seems to prefer the term *akugō* to *zaigō*, and to characterize ordinary beings as "bearing" *akugō* (along with afflictions (*bonnō* 煩悩), which suggests that it is the historical burden of bad karma and the influence that bears upon our present actions and inclinations or "karmic tendencies," that most concerns him.

The effects of these karmic burdens are quite palpable for Shinran. He reflects in the *KGSS*, "We are filled with all manner of greed, anger, perversity, deceit, wickedness, and cunning, and it is difficult to put an end to our evil nature."[170] And of his own state he laments:

> I know truly how grievous it is that I, Gutoku Shinran, am sinking in an immense ocean of desires and attachments and am lost in vast mountains of fame and advantage, so that I rejoice not at all at entering the stage of the truly settled,

170 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 84.

> and feel no happiness at coming nearer the realization of true enlightenment. How ugly it is! How wretched![171]

And it appears that Shinran felt that karma impacted one's behavior in the present because he is recorded as saying in the *Tannishō* that,

> "Good thoughts arise in us through the prompting of good karma from the past, and evil comes to be thought and performed through the working of evil karma. The late Master [Hōnen, that is] said, "Knowing that every evil act done- even as slight as a particle on the tip of a strand of rabbit's fur or sheep's wool- has its cause in past karma."[172]

And he goes on to say in the "Hymns of the Dharma Ages" that these burdens extend to the realm of ethical reasoning; "I am such that I do not know right and wrong and cannot distinguish false and true."[173]

> For if I could know thoroughly, as Amida Tathāgata knows, that an act was good, then I would know good. If I could know thoroughly, as the Tathāgata knows, that an act was evil, then I would know evil. 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."[174]

There is no way for a person living in this age of *mappō* to know thoroughly and absolutely, what acts are good, and what acts are evil. In our foolish and deluded existence, everything that we do will turn out to be empty and false because we are not living in the clear light of wisdom. In spite of all this, karma and the afflictions are no barrier to salvation. Indeed one could argue that for Shinran, it is precisely because we have so many burdens that we are the object of Amida's Vows and are thus assured of salvation. In the *KGSS* he says:

> When the [*kokoro*] of the one thought moment of joy and compassion arises, nirvana is attained without severing afflictions. When the foolish and saintly,

171 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 125.
172 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 670.
173 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 429.
174 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 679.

> those who slander the dharma or commit the five grave offenses, alike turn about and enter [this *kokoro*], they, just like water that enters the ocean, become one in taste with it (Hymn of True Shinjin and the Nembutsu).[175]

Again,

> Further, foolish beings who are replete with afflictions, when they attain birth in that Pure Land, the karmic ties to the three worlds no longer drag upon them. That is, how can attaining nirvana without severing afflictions be something that can be envisaged ? (Passages from the Masters)[176]

Further;

> That, those "foolish beings replete with afflictions," attain nirvana without severing their afflictions, is the virtue of the "of itself"-ness of the land of Peace and Bliss (Hymn of the Two Gateways of Entrance and Emergence).[177]

These are illustrative of what Shinran summed up as "attaining nirvana without severing karmic afflictions" (J. *fudan bonnō toku nehan* 不断煩悩得涅槃 or *bonnō wo dansezushite nehan wo eru* 煩悩を断せずして涅槃を得る), which expresses his conviction that the Pure Land path, as that best suited to *mappō*, and energized by the wondrous working of Amida's Vow, is not hindered by afflictions or karma, and thus brings all believers to be reborn in the Pure Land. In contrast to the traditional path in which the practitioner takes it upon themselves to purify and sever their attachments and afflictions, the Pure Land path is distinguished by the fact that Amida vowed to take that effort beforehand.[178]

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175 よく一念喜愛の心を発すれば、煩悩を断ぜずして涅槃を得るなり。凡聖、逆謗、ひとしく回入すれば、衆水、海に入りて一味なるがごとし。「行」(『真宗聖典, 204』). Unless otherwise noted, all the following translations are mine.

176 凡夫人の煩悩成就せるありて、またかの浄土に生まるることを得れば、三界の繋業畢竟じて牽かず。すなわちこれ煩悩を断ぜずして涅槃分を得、いずくんぞ思議すべきや。「証」(『真宗聖典, 282』).

177 煩悩成就せる凡夫人、煩悩を断ぜずして涅槃を得しむ。すなわちこれ安楽自然の徳なり。「入出二門偈」(『真宗聖典, 464』).

178 As he argues in the Tannishō,「しかるに仏かねてしろしめして、煩悩具足の凡夫とおおせられたることなれば、他力の悲願は、かくのごときのわれらがためなりけりとしられて、いよいよたのもしくおぼゆるなり。」 Thus, the Buddha knowing this beforehand called us, 'Foolish beings burdened with afflictions', and so knowing that the compassionate Vow of Other Power is for the sake of us who are just like this, all the more should one consider this [Vow] to be reliable." (#9, Translation mine)

This forms the linchpin of Shinran's conviction that the afflictions have a larger role to play in the life of a Pure Land believer than simply a marker of their messed up condition. If Amida's Vows are for people who are stuck in these conditions, then one of the links between Amida and practitioner must lie in their karmic state. Indeed, one can see Shinran as straddling the gap between the traditional Buddhist view of the karmic afflictions as hindrances and the Japanese estheticized view of the emotions as a source of truth, the basis of an affective connection to the natural world. In his view, the karmic afflictions form the basis for Amida's compassionate response to our suffering in saṃsāra: ordinary beings with their karmic afflictions are the specific object of Amida's Vow. In turn, the karmic afflictions that so deeply characterize the nature of ordinary beings are not displaced or eliminated in this working, but rather are transformed into the assurance of rebirth in the Pure Land. That is, they form the basis of a shared *kokoro* between ordinary beings and Amida Buddha. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the connection between Amida and practitioner is established not only in terms of the "conditions" of *mappō*, but also affectively in terms of the felt experience of *shinjin* and the working of Amida's Vow in the life of the practitioner. The following chapter details the kinds of Pure Land practices that Shinran would have learned on Mt. Hiei, and details Shinran's use of imagery and metaphor to explore and explain the felt experience of *shinjin*.

CHAPTER 3. ATTAINING NIRVANA WITHOUT SEVERING BLIND PASSIONS

Samādhi of Continual Recitation

While at Enryakuji, Shinran spent many of his years as a *dōsō* (hall priest, 堂僧) at the *Jōgyō Zanmai-dō* (Continual *Samādhi* Hall). Continual *Samādhi* practice was introduced to Enryakuji by Ennin (圓仁, 794-864 CE), as part of the Five Mountain *Nenbutsu* (五台山念仏), a form of *nenbutsu* recitation involving five tone chanting that he learned while in China. The first hall dedicated for monks devoted to this practice was completed soon after his death in 865 CE at the Eastern Pagoda site, with an additional hall built at the Western Pagoda in 893 CE, and at Yokawa in 967 CE.[179] This *nenbutsu* practice was based on Zhiyi's (智顗, 538-597 CE) classification of the four kinds of *samādhi* practice (四種三昧), in the *Makashikan* (*Great Calming and Contemplation*, 摩訶止観). Also known as the "*Samādhi* of Presencing and Direct Encounter With the Buddhas,"[180] achieving this *samādhi* required the continual recitation of a Buddha's name,

179 佐藤哲英「「堂僧」の解釈に対する疑義」『真宗運合学会研究紀要』（第一）1955、95。

180 See in particular, Harrison, Paul. *The Samādhi of Direct Encounter With the Buddhas of the Present: An Annotated English Translation of the Tibetan Version of the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra With Several Appendices Relating to the History of the Text*. Studia Philologica

visualizations of the Buddha, and circumambulation of an image for 90 days in the hope of receiving a clear and unmistakable vision of the Buddha (the Buddha in question here being Amida in particular) or his Pure Land.

Adept monks in the T'ien-t'ai community who showed particular promise were encouraged to seclude themselves from the main meditation hall for a period of time to practice one of the four *samādhi*s.[181] For Zhiyi, the four *samādhi*s did not refer to four different modes, or kinds of *samādhi*, but rather to four different modalities of their cultivation.[182] The practitioner, accompanied by an instructor, an outer attendant, and "companion in the practice," vows "never to entertain worldly thoughts or desires, never to lie down or leave the hall, and...never arbitrarily to sit down or stop to rest until the three months are completed." The visualization practice centered on contemplating the thirty-two major marks and eighty qualities of Amida Buddha (in sequence from the soles of his feet, to the crown of his head and thence in reverse order), concurrently with recitation of the Buddha's name and slow walking around the practice hall.[183]

As the practitioner becomes more skilled at the visualization of the Buddha, "the orientation of the visualization begins to shift radically...[and] becomes the basis for a simple dialectical investigation into the nature of mind and the noetic act itself." In this regard Zhiyi notes;

> Where does the Buddha that I am contemplating come from? [He does not come from somewhere else, and] I do not go off to reach him. Whatever [feature] I turn my attention to thereupon appears. This Buddha is simply mind perceiving mind. Mind is the [visualized] Buddha [that is the object, and likewise] mind is the

Buddhica Monograph Series, Vol. V Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1990.

181 Stevenson, Daniel B. "The Four Kinds of Samādhi in Early T'ien-t'ai Buddhism." *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*. ed. Peter N. Gregory, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986:48.

182 Stevenson, "Four Kinds of Samādhi," 49.

183 Stevenson, "Four Kinds of Samādhi," 59.

> [subjective] “I” [that sees the Buddha].When it perceives the Buddha, mind is not itself aware of mind, nor does it itself perceive mind. When the mind gives rise to thoughts, then there is delusion. When it is free of thoughts, it is nirvāna.[184]

In this manner the devotional aspects of the continual *samādhi* practice (making offerings of fruit, incense and flowers) work to support the meditative insight into the role of the mind in “the generation of all forms of deluded existence,” and its role as the locus of realization.

This continual *samādhi* practice is characterized as allowing the practitioner to discard their fleshy body, be born before Amida of Bliss, to hear and listen to the right dharma, and to unfailingly awaken to the non-arising of phenomena by karma.[185] Thus continual *samādhi* practice was thought to have two effects: that of envisioning Amida[186] (or indeed, any other Buddha) and the various bodhisattvas in his Pure Land in this life, or, after one's death, to be reborn in the Pure Land and receive the Buddhist teachings face-to-face. In the *Samādhi Sūtra,* it is put thus;

> In the same way, Bhadrapāla, *bodhisattvas*, whether they be householders or renunciants, go alone to a secluded spot and sit down, and in accordance with what they have learned they concentrate their thoughts on the *Tathāgata*, *Arhat* and Perfectly Awakened One Amitāyus; flawless in the constituent of morality and unwavering in mindfulness they should concentrate their thoughts on him for one day and one night, or for two, or three, or four, or five, or six, or seven days

184 Stevenson, "Four Kinds of Samādhi," 59-60. Brackets in the original.

185 島地大等. “初期の禅と念仏.” 天台教学史. 現代仏教名著全集. 東京: 隆文館, 1986: 385. Though as Harrison points out, the sūtra has broader implications extending to the production of Mahāyāna texts: “One of the main aims of the samadhi that gives our sutra its title is to provide practitioners with the means to translate themselves into the presence of this or that particular manifestation of the Buddha-principle for the purpose of hearing the Dharma, which they subsequently remember and propagate to others. This can be seen not only as a legitimation device justifying the continuing production of Mahayana sutras (or 'dharmas hitherto unheard', in the words of the text)--and a bold one at that, insofar as it removes the necessity for strictly historical claims to authenticity-but also as an indication of the means by which at least some Mahāyāna *sūtras* were composed, i.e. as a result of meditational inspiration” (Harrison, *Samādhi of Direct Encounter*, xx).

186 There is some slippage here depending on the text or degree of attainment of the practitioner: one can “see” a vision of the Buddha and the Pure Land as though through ordinary, everyday vision; actively work to envision (construct a visual imaginary) of the Buddha, etc.; or a vision can be projected to the practitioner (perhaps, like a dream?)

> and nights. If they concentrate their thoughts with undistracted minds on the *Tathāgata* Amitāyus for seven days and nights, then, when a full seven days and nights have elapsed, they see the Lord and *Tathāgata* Amitāyus. Should they not see that Lord during the daytime, then the Lord and *Tathāgata* Amitāyus will show his face to them in a dream while they are sleeping.[187]

Once possessed of this *samādhi*;

> Having simply heard of that *Tathāgata's* name, appearance, and qualities, with undistracted thoughts they called to mind the Lord, the *Tathāgata*, *Arhat* and Perfectly Awakened One Amitāyus. By repeatedly concentrating on him they saw that *Tathāgata.*[188]

Furthermore, the practitioner does not need cultivate any extraordinary powers or abilities to attain this *samādhi*:

> Those *bodhisattvas* do not see the *Tathāgata* through obtaining divine vision, do not hear the True Dharma through obtaining the divine faculty of hearing, and do not travel instantaneously to that world-system through obtaining magic power, but while remaining in this very world-system, Bhadrapāla, those *bodhisattvas* see that Lord and *Tathāgata* Amitāyus, perceive themselves as being in that world-system, and also hear the Dharma. And they retain, master, and preserve those dharmas after hearing them expounded. They honour, revere, venerate and worship that Lord, the *Tathāgata*, *Arhat* and Perfectly Awakened One Amitāyus. And on emerging from that *samādhi* the bodhisattvas expound at length to others those dharmas, just as they have heard, retained, and mastered them.[189]

For these reasons, the *Samādhi Sūtra* became an important source text in China and Japan for the growing stream of Pure Land thought concerned with a religious path for "ordinary" human beings. For instance, Shandao's (613-681 CE) commentary on the *Kanmuryōjukyō* (観無量寿経, *Contemplation of [the Buddha of] Infinite Life Sūtra*) cites the Buddha's instructions on this *samādhi* to Bhadrapāla with respect to the unhindered nature of this vision;

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187 Harrison, *Samādhi of Direct Encounter*, 32.
188 Harrison, *Samādhi of Direct Encounter*, 36.
189 Harrison, *Samādhi of Direct Encounter*, 32-33.

> According to the teaching received, you should remember: a hundred thousand *koṭis* of Buddha-lands away from here, there is a land called Sukhāvatī. Contemplate this Land with singleness of mind, for a day and night up to seven days and nights. The seventh day having passed, you will see it. It is as though you see things in a dream without discerning day and night or inside and out; you see them even though they are in the dark and there are many obstacles in between.[190]

During this seven-day period, practitioners eat one simple meal a day, and focus their thoughts on Amida with "uninterrupted, exclusive mind," and with every thought "think of seeing the Buddha." Shandao urges them to confess and repent "three or six times each day and night," and especially so if the vision they receive is "adverse." Having "repented honestly" they are to return to their contemplation practice, but are cautioned against speaking about the visions they have received.[191] Since the Buddha recommended this practice to Queen Vaidehi (*Idaike* 韋提希), a layperson, in Shandao's view it is:

> Suitable for those who in later generations would be unable to meet a Buddha in person, this sutra was suitable for everyone, laymen as well as monks, as providing a means of attaining a sight of the Pure Land and gaining an assurance of their own posthumous rebirth in it.[192]

Yet Shandao's elaboration of this universal meditation is overshadowed by his brief recommendation of recitation of the *nenbutsu* for the "incorrigibly wicked," as a last-gasp, deathbed method of attaining rebirth. While Shandao urges contemplation practice as a means of receiving a vision of the Buddha and his Pure Land as a confirmation/means of securing a favorable rebirth there, with his (albeit cursory) recommendation of recitation of the *nenbutsu* on one's deathbed, he opened up the possibility of attaining rebirth without engaging in difficult visualization practice, albeit

190 Inagaki, Hisao. "Shan-Tao's 'Exposition of the Method of Contemplation on Amida Buddha,' Part 1." *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3rd Series, No.1 (1999): 84.
191 Inagaki, "Shan-Tao's Exposition," 85-86.
192 Cit. in King, Winston L. "Hōnen's Visualizations of the Pure Land." *Pure Land* 4 (1987): 127.

in the so-called borderlands of the Pure Land.[193] So even as Shandao qualified the *nenbutsu* as a practice for those with no other option, he valued its role as a practice performed in tandem with visualization and contemplation. Nonetheless, this last-gasp method, this small tributary in the great stream of Pure Land thought, came to singular prominence in Hōnen's and later Shinran's formulation of Pure Land thought, through the influence of Genshin (942-1017 CE).

Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū* (“Essentials on Rebirth in the Pure Land”, 往生要集) of 985CE, is significant in that it is the first systematic treatment and justification for Pure Land practice in Japan, that, as Andrews argues, integrates the Chinese Pure Land teachings of Shandao, Tanluan and Daochuo into the existing Tendai Pure Land framework based, as we have seen above, on Zhiyi's contemplative practice.[194] Rhodes notes that the practices outlined in the *Ōjōyōshū* are based upon the notion of an “easy practice” for the latter days of *mappō*. As such the text is structured to present the reader with a detailed rationale for the Pure Land path, and the merits of seeking rebirth in Amida's Pure Land in particular. The *Ōjōyōshū* recommends both visualization practices (though simplified and adapted from those in the *Contemplation Sūtra*), praise and devotional practices, as well as (vocally) “bringing the Buddha to mind”(*shōnen* 称念).[195] Here, Genshin argues for the *nenbutsu* as *the* practice for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land, and it is particularly for those who cannot practice even simple visualizations, or close to death, that the vocal *nenbutsu* is recommended.[196]

193 King, "Hōnen's Visualizations," 128.
194 Andrews, Allan A. *The Teachings Essential for Rebirth; a Study of Genshin's Ōjōyōshū*. Tokyo: Sophia University, 1973: 34.
195 Bowring, Richard. “Preparing for the Pure Land in Late Tenth-Century Japan.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25.3/4 (1998): 251.
196 Rhodes, Robert F. “*Ōjōyōshū, Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-Ki*, and the Construction of Pure Land Discourse in

Genshin's prominent role as member of the "*Samādhi* Society of Twenty-five" (*Nijūgozanmaie,* 二十五三昧会) and other religious confraternities,[197] particularly emphasized the role of *nenbutsu* as the vital practice at the moment of one's death: that Amida Buddha and a retinue of bodhisattvas would come to welcome (*raigō*, 来迎) the practitioner into the Pure Land. That is, by carefully concentrating their thoughts on Amida and the Pure Land, and by continuous recitation of the *nenbutsu* at one's deathbed, even one who has committed evil in their life can be assured of rebirth.[198]

Following the *Contemplation Sūtra*, which recounts that if one at the moment of death encounters a "good friend" (*zenchishiki*, 善知識), and is able to "bring the Buddha to mind" for even "ten moments," one's karmic burdens will be wiped out, Genshin, "held that, under the liminal influence of approaching death, the chanted *nenbutsu* becomes vastly more powerful than it is at ordinary times."[199] So, even though one may not have recited the *nenbutsu* at all over the course of one's life, the *nenbutsu* has the power, especially at the end of one's life, to eradicate the karmic burden of one's previous deeds and assure one's welcome and rebirth in the Pure Land. We can see in this emphasis on the deathbed welcome a movement from *nenbutsu* as a ritualized meditative and contemplative practice, to *nenbutsu* as a self-contained practice, effective even (or especially) *in extremis* (*rinjū nenbutsu*, 臨終念仏).

Heian Japan." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34.2 (2007): 254-256.

197 Sarah Horton argues that this, more than his compilation of the *Ōjōyōshū*, is responsible for the contemporary surge in popularity of Pure Land practice. However, the frequency with which *Ōjōyōshū* is cited in texts of the Kamakura period show that the text came to singular (critical and popular) prominence in the 150 or so years after its production.

198 See especially, Horton, Sarah J. "Mukaekō: Practice for the Deathbed." *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism*. Jacqueline I. Stone, and Mariko Namba Walter, Eds. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008: 27-60.

199 Stone, Jacqueline I. "With the Help of 'Good Friends': Deathbed Ritual Practices in Early Medieval Japan." *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism*. Jacqueline I. Stone, and Mariko Namba Walter, Eds. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008: 64.

Genshin's treatise also marks the opening up of religious texts towards lay individuals, both in terms of content and of practice. In addition, his embrace of the notion of *nenbutsu* as suited to ordinary beings (*bonbu* 凡夫) is significant:

> That we now urge nembutsu does not hinder cultivation of the other various excellent practices. It is just that anyone, man or woman, noble or commoner, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying, and regardless of time, place, or any other circumstances, can practice it without difficulty.[200]

Not only did Genshin argue rebirth in the Pure Land as the proper goal of one's religious life,[201] but he also promoted the nembutsu as the singular practice best suited to the conditions of the world he lived in — that is, as an easy, available practice for the age of *mappō*. Furthermore, he argued that even ordinary beings could be reborn in Amida's superior Pure Land,[202] and that the recitation of *nenbutsu* would eliminate all of one's karmic hindrances to rebirth.

It is against this backdrop of popularization of the vocal *nenbutsu* that continual *samādhi* practice took root in the Tendai School in Japan, and some key elements were changed. According to Minamoto no Tamenori's *Sanbōe Kotoba* (三宝絵詞) dated 984 CE, the practice was adapted from a 90 day to a 7 day event held in the "cool breeze in the middle of autumn,"[203] from dawn of the 11th day (when the moon is half full) till the evening of the 17th.[204] Now known generally as *fudan nenbutsu* (continuous *nenbutsu*, 不断念仏), the goal of the practice was the elimination of karmic hindrances and rebirth in the Pure Land, unlike the practice presented in Zhiyi's *Makashikan*, which was concerned

200 Quot. in Andrews, *Teachings Essential for Rebirth*, 87-88.
201 In contrast to achieving enlightenment "in this very body" (*sokushin jōbutsu,* 即身成仏), which was the goal of Tendai praxis.
202 Rebirth in a Pure Land of "fulfillment" or "reward" (*hōdo*, 報土) such as Amida's was traditionally viewed as accessible only to advanced bodhisattvas.
203 仲秋, or the 8th month of the lunar calendar, most likely late August to mid-September.
204 佐藤哲英."「堂僧」の解釈に対する疑義."真宗運合学会研究紀要 1 (1955): 96.

with the "realization of three views in an instant.[205] Groner shows that these changes from a 90 day to a 7 day practice were due to the influence of Fazhao's (d.c. 800 CE) "five mode" *nenbutsu* recitation practice (五会念仏) that Ennin brought back from China.[206] In fact the continuous *nenbutsu* practice became so popular on Mt Hiei that Ryōgen (912-985 CE), the 18th Tendai abbot lamented:

> Monks...should practice the four types of [Tendai] meditation. However, now only the constant-walking meditation is performed. The other meditations have virtually ceased to be practiced.[207]

Satō presents epistolary evidence from 1107 and 1135 CE[208] that records the appearance of twelve *yama dōsō* (山堂僧, lit. "mountain" hall priests) at the Amida Hall of Sonshōji (尊勝寺) to perform the continuous *nenbutsu*; a sign that this new form of practice was not limited to the precincts of the temple complex, or dedicated Amida Halls.[209] He also notes that most, if not all, of the larger temples in Kyoto and the surrounding area, such as Onjōji (園城寺) and Iwashimizu (石清水), and even temples in the Nara region such as Tōnomine (多武峯) had Amida Halls dedicated to continuous *nenbutsu* practice.[210] In Taira no Nobunori's (平 信範, 1112-1187 CE) *Hyōhanki* (兵範記) are entries dated to 1167 CE which mention *dōsō* from Mt. Hiei performing continuous *nenbutsu* at neighboring Hosshōji (法勝寺). Even though these entries occur 6 years before Shinran's birth, from the technical terminology used we can be reasonably certain

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205 Groner, Paul. *Ryōgen and Mount Hiei : Japanese Tendai in the Tenth Century*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002: 179.
206 Groner, *Ryōgen and Mount Hiei*, 177-179.
207 Quot. in Groner, *Ryōgen and Mount Hiei*, 179.
208 Takagaki writes that Retired Emperor Horikawa (堀河院) founded the temple, which was completed in 1102 CE. (Takagaki, Cary Shinji. "The Rokushō-Ji: The Six "Superiority" Temples of Heian Japan." University of Toronto, 1999: 112).
209 佐藤, "「堂僧」の解釈に対する疑義," 95.
210 佐藤, "「堂僧」の解釈に対する疑義," 96.

that *dōsō* in his time would have participated in similar ceremonies in the Kyoto area[211] in their capacity as specialists in Tendai-style *nenbutsu* recitation.[212]

This suggests that Shinran's time on Mt. Hiei would have been spent supporting individuals doing continuous *nenbutsu* practice in the Amida Hall, performing the practice himself, or traveling as part of a team to perform continuous *nenbutsu* in Kyoto and its environs. Thus he was deeply immersed in an orthodox Pure Land contemplative practice, and so we must consider that when Shinran speaks of the "Path of Saintly Endeavor," he must have meant the kinds of Pure Land oriented practices he was most familiar with on Mt Hiei, and not necessarily Tendai *mikkyō*.[213] Abandoning rebirth "between the two teak trees," (that is, the pursuit of nirvana through saintly endeavor), means Shinran was leaving one modality of Pure Land practice for another[214] — not necessarily that he was leaving a generalized Path of Saintly Endeavor for the Pure Land path considered in the abstract:

> Thus I, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Sakyamuni, through reverently accepting the exposition of [Vasubandhu,] author of the Treatise, and depending on the guidance of Master [Shan-tao], departed everlastingly from the temporary gate of the myriad practices and various good acts and left forever the birth attained beneath the twin [teak] trees. Turning about, I entered the "true" gate of the root of good and the root of virtue, and wholeheartedly awakened the mind leading to the birth that is noncomprehensible. Nevertheless, I have now decisively departed from the "true" gate of provisional means and, [my self-power] overturned, have entered the ocean of the selected Vow. Having swiftly become free of the mind leading to the birth that is noncomprehensible, I am assured of attaining the birth

211 佐藤,"「堂僧」の解釈に対する疑義," 98.

212 "天台聲明の専門家として叡山から招待されている" (佐藤,"「堂僧」の解釈に対する疑義,"100).

213 Given that the Tendai curriculum was broadly divided between the Exoteric stream, which included practice of the four kinds of meditation from the *Makashikan,* including continuous *nenbutsu* and the Lotus repentance practice, and the Esoteric stream, it is entirely possible that Shinran's career on Mt. Hiei was spent within a Pure Land-focused stream of readings, rituals and practices.

214 There are two possibilities here; that Shinran chose the Pure Land path out a range of compossible Tendai practices, or he was so immersed in the Tendai Pure Land path, that he chose a distinct Pure Land approach/interpretation from within a range of Pure Land practices. This study leans towards the latter interpretation.

> that is inconceivable. How truly profound in intent is the Vow that beings ultimately attain birth![215]

While this passage gives the impression that Shinran is abandoning the practices of the Path of Saints, he may be referring to a different kind of distinction altogether:

> In Hymns of the Nembutsu Liturgy, there are three kinds of birth:
> Birth that is inconceivable; this is the intent of the Larger Sutra.
> Birth attained beneath twin [teak] trees; this is the intent of the Contemplation Sutra.
> Birth that is noncomprehensible; this is the intent of the Amida Sutra.[216]

"Birth attained beneath twin [teak] trees," then, refers not to the kinds of provisional birth attained through non-Pure Land, Path of Saintly Endeavor practices, but to the kinds of practices contained in, and derived from, the *Contemplation Sūtra*. As it happens, those were precisely the kind of practices Shinran would have been engaged in as a *dōsō* on Mt Hiei: continual recitation and visualization with the aim of receiving a vision of Amida and the Pure Land. Given that without Hōnen's intervention, the *nenbutsu* would not have been available as a "selectable," singular practice, for Shinran, Hōnen's words must have been a great comfort:

> Let devotees of the present day give up their so-called meditations as if they were required by the Law...Even though he tries to meditate upon the things which beautify the Land of Bliss, he finds it hard even to picture to his mind the beauties of the flowers and fruit of the cherry, plum and peach of this world with which he is familiar.[217]

What Hōnen offered Shinran was a new modality of Pure Land practice, focused solely on the *nenbutsu*, but with an emphasis on reliance of Other Power to bring about birth that is "inconceivable" (*nanshigi ōjō*, 難思議往生). Thus Shinran describes his own

215 Shinran, "The Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Lands That are Provisional Means of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 240.
216 Shinran,"Gutoku's Notes," *Collected Works*, 590.
217 Cit. in Keel, *Understanding Shinran*, 14.

process of religious realization (*sangan tennyū*, 三願転入) as one contained wholly within the circuit of Pure Land practice.[218] This also goes some way to explaining why Shinran sought out Hōnen in the first place — it is intriguing (and somewhat ironic) to consider that the vision pointed him towards Hōnen because he was having difficulty reconciling his passions and desires with the Tendai Pure Land practice which emphasized confession and repentance and the elimination of the same.

As we have seen, the purpose of *nenbutsu* practice as taught on Mt. Hiei was to receive a vision of the Pure Land and thereby be assured of one's rebirth there. It could be argued that the vision is either a confirmation that one has acquired the karmic merit necessary to be reborn in the Pure Land, or, perhaps that the vision itself carries the karmic potency necessary to assure one's rebirth in the Pure Land. The former interpretation seems to jibe most closely with a traditionalist interpretation of (for example) the *Contemplation Sūtra*. Indeed, Shandao's admonition that one should repeatedly confess (*zange,*懺悔) as they practice their visualizations, especially if they are adverse, bears this reading out. However the mechanism by which the latter understanding of the power of Pure Land visions requires further elucidation. How is it that the vision can in itself be the assurance of rebirth?[219] In a sense this question is linked to that of the efficacy of *nenbutsu* recitation — why should any invocation/remembrance of Amida Buddha be spiritually efficacious?

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218 ここをもって、愚禿釈の鸞、論主の解義を仰ぎ、宗師の勧化に依って、久しく万行・諸善の仮門を出でて、永く双樹林下の往生を離る、善本・徳本の真門に回入して、ひとえに難思往生の心を発しき。しかるにいま特に方便の真門を出でて、選択の願海に転入せり、速やかに難思往生の心を離れて、難思議往生を遂げんと欲う。果遂の誓い、良に由あるかな。「化身土・本」(『真宗聖典』, 356).

219 The *Samādhi Sūtra* answers: "*Bodhisattvas* who are established in this *samādhi* see the *Tathāgatas*, and they appear to them, through the combination and concurrence of these three things: the might (Skt. *anubhāva*) of the Buddha, the application of the force of their own wholesome potentialities, and the power [which is the result] of attaining *samādhi*" (Harrison, *Samādhi of Direct Encounter*, 41).

From Samādhi To Nenbutsu

For Hōnen and his followers, the pressing issue of obtaining *samādhi* was displaced by their understanding of the virtues and benefits of the vocal *nenbutsu*. In their view, the vocal *nenbutsu* offered the possibility of rebirth in the Pure Land without recourse to meditative and visualization practices. That is, the virtues encapsulated in reciting "*namu Amida butsu*" are such that they supersede any other kind of practice that ordinary people (*bonbu*, 凡夫) can enact on their own. There are two different sources from which the received tradition of *nenbutsu* derived. The first is from the *Samādhi Sūtra*, translated into Chinese in perhaps 179 CE by Lokakṣema. This text not only urges reflection of Amida "in pursuit of the perfection of wisdom," but also in one instance, "recommends reflecting upon the *name* of Amitabha."[220] For early Pure Land devotees such as Lushan Huiyuan (334-416 CE), this sūtra offered the possibility of enlightenment in this lifetime through the pursuit of the perfection of wisdom (*prajñā pāramitā*) through *samādhi*, but also rebirth in the Pure Land after death through the practice of devotion; that is, recitation of the Buddha's name.[221] [222] For him, *samādhi* involves;

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220 Andrews, Allan A. "Lay and Monastic Forms of Pure Land Devotionalism:Typology and History." *Numen* 40.1 (1993): 21

221 Andrews, "Lay and Monastic Forms," 21-22.

222 Tanaka, Kenneth Kenichi. *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine : Ching-Ying Hui-Yüan's Commentary on the Visualization Sutra*. Vol. SUNY series in Buddhist studies Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990: 69.

> Developing one-pointedness of mind so that it is not dispersed in various kinds of thoughts...If the mind is one-pointed and thoughts are stilled, one's *ch'i* becomes empty and his spirit (*shen*) becomes clear and bright. A wisdom that clearly reflects all things will automatically be generated, and one will be able to penetrate into profound and minute things. However, there are various different kinds of *samādhi*, the most meritorious and the easiest to progress in being the *nien-fo san-mei* [the *samādhi* of "bringing the Buddha to mind"]. The reason for this is that the Tathāgata has penetrated the mysterious and has exhausted all stillness; his spirit is totally at one with change and so conforms to all beings in accord with what is fitting for them. When one has entered this *samādhi*, all obscure knowledge is forgotten, and one is able to clearly reflect the external spheres of sense perception which normally condition the mind.[223]

While the *Samādhi Sūtra* describes the Buddha, bodhisattvas and Pure Land perceived in this *samādhi* as seen as though in a dream, that vision is not ultimately unreal as it would be ordinarily in the world of sentient beings. In his correspondence with Hui-yüan, Kumārajīva argues that the sūtra;

> Uses the simile of a dream,[224] for by the power of a dream one is able to travel to distant places and see distant things. In a similar manner, if one enters into the the *pratyutpanna-samādhi*, it is by the power of the *samādhi* that one is able to see the Buddhas in other distant places...the Buddha seen in the *samādhi* comes basically from one's own cognitive discriminative thoughts, but the sphere that does the seeing is neither empty nor false.[225]

So even though the vision of Amida's Pure Land may be dream-like, the power of the *samādhi* is such that any revelations received in that state of absorption are in accord with reality. By virtue of being able to perceive Amida in the present and to receive the dharma directly, the practitioner can easily resolve all their doubts.

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223 Mochizuki, Shinkō. "Pure Land Buddhism in China: A Doctrinal History (Chapter Two: The Earliest Period, Chapter Three: Hui-Yuan of Mt. Lu, and, Chapter Four: The Translation of Texts; Spurious Figures." *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3rd Series, No.3 (2001): 253.

224 It is important to note here that dreams and visions in the Japanese (and Chinese) imaginary were perfectly acceptable as modes of religious knowledge and instruction. Indeed, they appear so frequently and unproblematically in religious texts and diaries, that they must be considered to be a significant feature of Japanese religiosity in general. See for instance, *Psycho-Sinology: The Universe of Dreams in Chinese Culture*. ed. Carolyn T Brown, Washington, D.C: University Press of America, 1988, and 江口孝夫. 夢と日本古典文学. 東京：笠間書院, 1974.

225 Mochizuki, "Pure Land Buddhism in China," 254-255.

For Jingying Huiyuan (523-592 CE),[226] the visualization practice recommended in the *Contemplation Sūtra* included visualizations of the particular features of the Pure Land and the bodhisattvas who reside there. For him "Buddha-visualization" (觀佛, Jpn. *kanbutsu*) was of two kinds: of the "truth embodiment" (法身) and the "responsive embodiment"(應身).[227] The visualization of the responsive embodiment, which Hui-yüan felt was the subject of the *Contemplation Sūtra* was further subdivided into a "vision of unrefined pure-faith," and the "vision of true reality." In the former vision, the practitioner learns that there are infinite Buddhas and Buddha-lands in the cosmos and learns to restrain their thoughts and examine the object of contemplation and so clears their mind. In the latter vision, "the practitioner either has through supernatural powers direct audience or is reborn in a Buddha-land where he is personally able to make offerings to the Buddha."[228] Thus, the "vision of unrefined pure-faith" leads to the kind of calming and contemplation (止觀) practice advocated by Zhiyi, with its attendant emphasis on the cultivation of wisdom. Even though Huiyuan considers the visualizations as described in the *Contemplation Sūtra* to be the effective causes for rebirth in the Pure

226 Jingying Huiyuan wrote an influential Commentary on the *Contemplation Sūtra* which, as Tanaka argues, not only gave this sūtra legitimacy within the larger Mahāyāna corpus, but also laid down the theoretical framework within which later Pure Land commentators such as Shandao operated (Tanaka, *Dawn of Chinese Pure Land*, 52, 94).

227 Hui-yüan defines it thus: "To visualize the Buddha as the body of the impartial Dharma gate is the "[truth embodiment] visualization." In contrast, to visualize the Buddha as the body of the Tathāgata...with a worldly body is called the "[responsive embodiment] visualization" (Tanaka, *Dawn of Chinese Pure Land*, 73).

228 Tanaka, *Dawn of Chinese Pure Land*, 73-74.

Land, he does enumerate the cultivation of acts[229], the cultivation of mind[230], and devotion[231] as the three other causes for rebirth detailed in the sūtra.

Shandao drew upon his distinction between meditative and non-meditative "good acts" to argue for the coequality of recitation of the Buddha's name with the meditative good acts of visualization practice, as in his view, the non-meditative acts were taught by the Buddha "without being requested by anyone."[232] Menache suggests that the purpose of the first thirteen visualizations might be for the practitioner to realize the identity of their own mind with the Buddha: "This can be can be seen as "birth in the Pure Land" interpreted symbolically, or it can just be seen as a different goal, or perhaps a step along the way to the attainment of birth."[233]Thus for Shandao the non-meditative acts, and by extension the recitation of the name of the Buddha are the best practice for rebirth in the Pure Land, for beings with the least capacity to cultivate visualization. The *Contemplation Sūtra's* recommendation of ten recitations of the name of the Buddha, particularly at the moment of death, are soteriologically effective because "it is not like other names, a mere designation, but rather is identical with the reality to which it refers, the limitless light...of the Buddha's wisdom."[234] As we saw earlier, Shandao is

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229 Also known as the three "meritorious" or "good" acts: "to filially support [one's parents] and respectfully serve teachers and elders," "to observe the three refuges," and the "cultivation of benefitting oneself...[and] the cultivation of benefitting others" (Tanaka, *Dawn of Chinese Pure Land*, 148-149).

230 The sincere mind, the deep mind, and the mind aspiring for rebirth (Tanaka, *Dawn of Chinese Pure Land*, 68).

231 "Bringing the Buddha to mind," worship, praise, and recitation of the Buddha's name (Tanaka, *Dawn of Chinese Pure Land*, 68.)

232 Tanaka, *Dawn of Chinese Pure Land*, 98.

233 Menache, David. "Some Comments on the Composition of the Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life." *Pure Land* 6 (1989): 255.

234 Andrews, "Lay and Monastic Forms," 23. This is because the name "Amida" is the result of the fulfillment of the 48 Vows that the bodhisattva Dharmākara undertook, and so the name itself is the potent accomplishment of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion.

traditionally credited within the Pure Land tradition as the first to recognize the importance of a "bringing to mind" (Ch. *nien-fo*, Jpn. *nenbutsu*, 念仏) of Amida Buddha, whether over the course of a lifetime, or for just "ten moments" (Jpn. *jūnen*, 十念) as the sufficient condition for rebirth. As Andrews points out, he was the first thinker to systematically connect the exhortation to enact "ten buddha-reflections" in the *Larger Sūtra* with the *Contemplation Sūtra's* recommendation of ten recitations of the Buddha's name.[235] While Shandao urged Pure Land practitioners to bring the Buddha to mind as much as they were able, he was also firmly convinced that he was an "ordinary being" in the age of Final Dharma, and as such, could only rely upon the last-gasp method of recitation of Amida's name to achieve rebirth. According to him, this was precisely the practice which the Buddha had prepared for those living in such desperate times. What this meant was that the emphasis for Pure Land practitioners shifted from a self-directed, rigorous, meditative practice aimed at eliciting a vision of the Pure Land, to a practice of reliance upon the powers and virtues of Amida Buddha and the Pure Land as encapsulated in the moment of faith and recitation of the *nenbutsu*. What is crucial to note here is that in both instances the *nenbutsu* figures as a key element of practice, although its valence shifts from being one of an array of practices aimed at evoking a vision of Amida Buddha to a stand-alone practice that in and of itself is sufficient for rebirth.

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235 Andrews, "Lay and Monastic Forms," 26. While Shandao draws on the sūtras to argue for ten recitations of the Buddha's name as a "minimum" of practice, he does also argue for the significance of the single moment or recitation as decisive for rebirth. Shinran presents this interpretation in "The Clarification of Once-Calling and Many-Calling": 善導和尚も『経』のこころによりて、「歓喜至一念　皆当得生彼」(礼讃)とも、「十声一声一念等　定得往生」(礼讃意)とも、さだめさせたまいたるを、もちいざらんにすぎたる浄土の教のあたやはそうろうべき。(『真宗聖典』, 938).

In his Commentary to the *Contemplation Sūtra*, Shandao discusses the two aspects of "deep belief:"

> There are two aspects. One is to believe deeply and decidedly that you are a foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death, ever sinking and ever wandering in transmigration from innumerable kalpas in the past, with never a condition that would lead to emancipation. The second is to believe deeply and decidedly that Amida Buddha's Forty-eight Vows grasp sentient beings, and that allowing yourself to be carried by the power of the Vow without any doubt or apprehension, you will attain birth.[236]

The two aspects are thus a deep conviction regarding the karmically burdened nature of human beings,[237] together with the conviction that Amida Buddha's Vows have been established to effect the rebirth of beings in this very predicament. Why is this reliance effective? As Ducor outlines, this is because when Amida took the 48 vows as the bodhisattva Dharmākara, he did so as an advanced bodhisattva of the 8th stage (*bhūmi*) called "immovable" (Jpn. *fudō*, 不動);

> This stage is also well known as the moment where the bodhisattva...discovers through his perfect wisdom that nothing is produced in absolute truth, so that eventually everything and everybody are void (*śūnya, kū* 空).[238]

As such, the acts of a bodhisattva of this stage are "purified," which in the words of Tanluan (曇鸞, 476-542 CE) means that, "Because the cause [i.e. the vow] is pure, the fruit [i.e. the land] is pure," and that rebirth in this Pure Land is birth into the "non-karmically produced" (*mushō no shō* 無生の生).[239] Unlike any of the acts of "ordinary beings," the bodhisattva's acts are untainted by karmic hindrances and passions, and so once the Pure Land practitioner abandons their self-directed efforts towards rebirth and

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236 Yata, Ryōshō. "An Examination of the Historical Development of the Concept of Two Aspects of Deep Belief, Part 1." *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3rd Series, No.3 (2001): 158.

237 Hence the importance of confession and repentance (*zange*, 懺悔) for Shandao, and, later, for Shinran as well.

238 Ducor, Jérôme. "Pure Land's Contemplation in Shinshū." *Pure Land* 7 (1990): 58.

239 Ducor, "Pure Land's Contemplation," 59.

relies solely upon Amida's Vows in deep belief; “he will exactly answer the intent of the Buddha and share accordingly his realization of the supreme enlightenment by going to be born in his Pure Land.”[240] Furthermore, the Pure Land is called such (*sukhāvatī*) because it is “extra-samsaric” and removed from the impurities of this world. So by “mixing” the practitioner's impure mind with the purity of that Land, that impurity is naturally transformed, “like the sea whose salty nature overwhelms the freshness of the waters of the rivers that empty into it.”[241]

Recitation of the Buddha's name, for Tanluan, is closely related to visualization, because “Amitābha” is a manifestation of the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha, because it is a “name that [is] the same as things;”

> [The name of Amitābha] is like a clean cintāmaṇi that, when placed in muddy water, cleanses it. If, although muddied by the transgressions of immeasurable births and deaths, one hears of Amitābha Tathāgata, one attains non-arising, for the CLEAN JEWEL of the name is cast into one’s muddied mind. By its constant repetition, one’s transgressions disappear, one’s mind is cleansed, and one goes to birth [in Sukhāvatī].[242]

However this transformation happens only in response to the practitioner's open and responsive entrusting (*shinjin*, 信心) in Amida Buddha. When that moment of open and responsive entrusting occurs, in what Shinran will call *ichinen* (一念), the practitioner's rebirth in the Pure Land is assured.

As Blum points out, the term *ichinen* appears in numerous Pure Land sūtras, denoting a single moment of thought, but most commonly as a moment of realization, and as such we have phrases such as this from the *Infinite Life Sūtra*; “anyone who, in

240 Ducor, "Pure Land's Contemplation," 61.
241 Corless, Roger. “The Theoretical Foundations of Pure Land Buddhist Practice According to Tanluan.” *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3rd Series, No.8 (2006): 127-128.
242 Corless, "Theoretical Foundations of Pure Land," 132.

hearing the name of the Buddha, feels their heart leap with joy in so much as one thought-moment (*ichinen*), obtains the great benefit."[243] Hōnen frequently returns to this passage to argue in a polyvalent fashion for the importance of even a single recitation of *nenbutsu*, and that one's faith is settled, in a single moment:[244]

> The highest grade of the lowest class of sentient beings are those people who have committed [one of the] ten evil acts. If, in their final moments of life they put forth a single nenbutsu (*ichinen*), their sins will be dissolved and they attain Birth.[245]

So while the *Infinite Life Sūtra* also contains the promise that sentient beings who joyfully entrust themselves to Amida, aspire for rebirth, and recite the Buddha's name "even up to ten times," will be born in the Pure Land, for both Hōnen and Shinran, the critical aspect is the instant of entrusting. Shinran puts it thus in his "Hymns of the Pure Land,"

> Because of the Vow, "If they should not be born...,"
> When the moment of genuine entrusting has come
> And people attain the one thought-moment of joy,
> Their birth becomes completely settled. [246]

Since the Pure Land practitioner is relying upon the power of the Buddha (Other Power, *tariki*, 他力) and not on their own capabilities or powers, the core of Pure Land practice shifts from identifying and cultivating a particular set of practices (visualization, for instance) towards deepening an understanding of entrusting, and the affective states thus entailed. This means, at least rhetorically, a shift from the accumulation and transfer of

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243 Quoted in Blum, Mark L. "Kōsai and the Paradox of Ichinengi: Be Careful of What You Preach." *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3rd series, No.6 (2004): 65.

244 The phrase 一念 carries both meanings, and so, Hōnen and Shinran both deployed this slippage in meaning to good effect.

245 Quoted in Blum, "Kōsai and the Paradox of Ichinengi," 67.

246 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 331.

the merit generated by spiritual practice (self-powered practice or *jiriki*, 自力), towards a reliance on the transformative power granted by Amida Buddha.

For Hōnen, and for the Tendai Pure Land tradition, the importance of *nenbutsu* as a form of praxis was not clearly theorized in relation to the parallel contextualizations and elaborations of the potency of *ichinen*. That is, even though the benefits of the *nenbutsu* are bestowed upon the practitioner instantaneously, the value of continued *nenbutsu* recitation (in what we may call a traditional mode), was presumed to remain undiminished. This ambivalence finds its clearest expression in Hōnen's own life: even though he emphasized that a single *nenbutsu* can assure rebirth, in his personal life he recited the *nenbutsu* thousands of times a day, and kept detailed records of his meditative visions.[247]Indeed, when we closely examine Hōnen's own comments about the superiority of *nenbutsu*, we see that it is related to the *samādhi* that results from this practice:

> One can see that the intent of the Buddha's Original Vow is for sentient beings to solely devote themselves to invoking Amida Buddha's Name; it is because all other fine practices both meditative and non-meditative are not of the Original Vow that they were not the subject of [Śākyamuni's] entrustment. Moreover, while the practice of buddha-contemplation *samādhi* [in the ninth visualization practice] may be the most superlative among these other practices, it is still not of the Buddha's Original Vow and hence it was not entrusted. *Nenbutsu samādhi* is the Original Vow, that is why it was entrusted.[248]

What is clear from this passage is that even though the sūtra and commentarial evidence points towards the superiority of *nenbutsu* as a standalone practice, the value of *samādhi* (at least in the abstract), as a form of assurance of the fulfillment of a practitioner's earnest desire for rebirth remained — if only in the background. So, even as *nenbutsu* was reinterpreted as equally including recitative and visualization practice, the precise

247 Blum, "Kōsai and the Paradox of Ichinengi," 71.
248 Blum, "Kōsai and the Paradox of Ichinengi," 72.

meaning and value of *samādhi* was slippery. The *nenbutsu qua* mental event comes to be glossed in terms very reminiscent of contemplation *samādhi*. See for instance this passage from Shinran's contemporary Benchō (1162-1238 CE):

> Putting forth the single *nen* refers to the *ichinen* of perceiving the Buddha [in *samādhi*]. Practice means the single practice of reciting the Name, in which the various thoughts are removed. Everything outside of this single *nen* [should be] considered "other thoughts" (*yonen*).

Or Gyōnen's (1240-1321 CE) explanation of *ichinen*;

> When the believing thoughts (*shinnen*) of someone engaged in practice correspond to the mind of the Buddha, the mind [of that person] becomes congruent with an [associated] single thought-moment (*ichinen*) expressed in the force of the Vows issuing from the Buddha's wisdom. Subject (the buddha-mind) and object (the sentient being) are not two. Faith and wisdom are one and the same. As these continue, thought after thought (*nennen*), one's Birth is assured.[249]

What emerges from these passages is a kind of uncertainty about whether the *nenbutsu* should be considered a kind of contiguous practice with contemplation and visualization, with its attendant emphasis on confirmatory visions, or whether *nenbutsu* demarcates an entirely different modality of praxis with its own internal mechanism of verification.[250] This *nenbutsu samādhi* inherits the conceptual schema of the contemplation *samādhi*, but with a sole focus upon rebirth in Amida's Pure Land. In addition, *nenbutsu samādhi*, at least in an unspoken fashion, retains its motive force from the practitioner's contact with Amida, though there remains some ambivalence as to whether this contact occurs in a vision, or through some other mechanism.

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249 Blum, "Kōsai and the Paradox of Ichinengi," 77.

250 One can also see this ambivalence already in Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū*, where he presents evidence for both the efficacy of *nenbutsu qua* visualization and recitation, without clearly staking a position on either.

Shinran, Nenbutsu, Samādhi

While Shinran does not take an unequivocal stance on the polyvocality of *nenbutsu samādhi*, the term "*samādhi*" appears with some frequency in the *KGSS*.[251] The references can be grouped into a few categories. The first group of references detail the *samādhi* states of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, and the qualities, purity and virtues thereof:

> *Today, the Great Hero abides where all Buddhas abide:* Abiding in the samadhi of universal sameness, he subdues all maras, even the powerful demon-king of the sixth heaven.[252]
>
> *Power of the Primal Vow*: the great bodhisattva, having realized the dharma-body, always dwells in samadhi and thus manifests various bodies, various transcendent powers, and various ways of teaching the dharma. All of this arises from the power of the Primal Vow.[253]
>
> When the Tathagata, in profound compassion for the ocean of all sentient beings in pain and affliction, performed bodhisattva practices for inconceivable millions of measureless kalpas, there was not a moment, not an instant, when his practice in the three modes of action was not pure, or lacked this true mind. With this pure, true mind, the Tathagata brought to fulfillment the perfect, unhindered, inconceivable, indescribably and inexplicable supreme virtues. The Tathagata gives this sincere mind to all living things, an ocean of beings possessed of blind passions, karmic evil , and false wisdom.[254]
>
> [Bodhisattvas] with the transcendent powers of this samadhi, they are able, while remaining in one place, to be everywhere throughout the worlds of the ten quarters in one instant, at the same time, and to make offerings in various ways to

251 岡亮二. "親鸞の念仏三昧儀." 仏教における三昧思想. Ed. 日本仏教学会. 京都: 平楽寺書店, 1976: 259.
252 Shinran, "The True Teaching of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 9.
253 Shinran, "The True Practice of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 57.
254 Shinran, "The True Shinjin of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 95.

> all the Buddhas and the ocean of beings in the Buddha's great assemblies. They can, in places throughout the innumerable worlds where there is no Buddha, no dharma, and no sangha, manifest themselves in various forms to teach, guide, and bring all sentient beings to emancipation.[255]

The *samādhi* states of these worthies mean that advanced bodhisattvas and Buddhas reside in *samādhi* and from this state do not give rise to the karmic entanglements of ordinary beings, but instead bring forth the power to save and transform all sentient beings. Their unity of purpose, intention and action, "not for an instant being impure," comes to define for Shinran the excellent qualities of *samādhi*. Oka will argue that for Shinran the virtues of *nenbutsu samādhi* are compared (likened?) to the golden standard of this nirvanic *samādhi*.[256]

The second grouping speaks to the characteristics and working of the *nenbutsu samādhi* specifically:

> The inconceivable working of nembutsu-samadhi may be clarified by quoting from various Mahayana scriptures. The *Garland Sutra* states:...When a person practices nembutsu-samadhi in the aspiration for enlightenment, all blind passions and hindrances are sundered and destroyed...But if one constantly practices nembutsu-samadhi, one eliminates all the obstructions of past, present, and future without distinction.[257]

> For the person who seeks to realize true non-origination, who else can give the teaching? Indeed, nembutsu-samadhi is the true supreme and profound gate. With the Name fulfilled through the Forty-eight Vows of Amida, the Dharma-king, the Buddha saves sentient beings, taking the power of the Vow as central.[258]

> With the nembutsu-samadhi that we are practicing, we rely on the power of the Buddha. If persons are close to the king, no one will dare assault them; so it is with us...Amida Buddha has all these powers of inconceivable virtue. Why then should Amida not be able to protect persons of the nembutsu and keep them from

255 Shinran, "The True Realization of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 159.
256 岡, "親鸞の念仏三昧儀,"259.
257 Shinran, "The True Practice of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works,* 30-31.
258 Shinran, "The True Practice of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 39.

> hindrances up until death? If Amida were to fail to protect the practicer, what would it mean for the Buddha to have the power of compassion?[259]
>
> Fei-hsi of the Ch'an school states: The virtue of nenbutsu-samadhi is supreme. Because it is chief of all practices, it is called the king of samadhis.[260]
>
> The passage...clearly reveals that the virtue of nembutsu-samadhi is completely transcendent; truly it allows no comparison with sundry good practices.[261]
>
> But the attachments of affection were extremely hard to sever,
> And birth-and-death was extremely difficult to exhaust.
> Only by practicing the nembutsu-samadhi
> Could we eliminate the obstructions of karmic evil and gain liberation.[262]

Here we see Shinran argue that the *nenbutsu samādhi* arising from within *bodhicitta*, has the power to sever all obstructions and karmic entanglements: past, present or future. Arising, again, from the wondrous/mysterious working of the Vow. The *nenbutsu samādhi* is the unsurpassed wondrous gate, and through the name established in the 48 Vows, Amida transfers/passes over that vow power to sentient beings. Since this relies upon/depends upon "Buddha power" (仏力) which no evil can withstand, the *nenbutsu* practitioner who is embraced and protected by Amida receives the full benefit of the wondrous benefits and compassionate power at his disposal, and the dispersal of all impediments even up to the last moment of their life. Indeed the superior efficacy of the *nenbutsu samādhi* is such that none of the various good acts one can perform/undertake can come close to matching it.

The third category of *nenbutsu samādhi* quotes make it clear that for Shinran, even though the canonical sources, on the face of it, indicate that the practitioner should accomplish this *samādhi*, this is really granted to ordinary beings by Amida Buddha.

259 Shinran, "The True Practice of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 46-47.
260 Shinran, "The True Practice of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 51.
261 Shinran, "The True Shinjin of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 121.
262 Shinran, "Hymns of the Pure Land Masters," *Collected Works*, 363.

> *Question*: How is it possible for nembutsu-samadhi to eradicate so much karmic evil? *Answer:* Amida Buddha possesses immeasurable virtues. One's immeasurable karmic evil is eradicated because one thinks on the Buddha's immeasurable virtues.[263]

As Amida Buddha has boundless virtues, when one brings those virtues to mind, one receives/is granted the elimination of innumerable bad acts. Or as in the following passage, Shinran warns against "self-power" practice of the kinds of *samādhi* promoted in the *Shikanron*, and other sūtras and commentaries:

> According to the *Sutra of the Samadhi of Heroic Advance*, when one performs samadhi, maras of the five skandhas may appear. According to the *Treatise on the Mahayana*, when one performs samadhi, exterior maras (heavenly maras) may appear. According to the *Treatise on Samatha and Vipasyana*, when one performs samadhi, time spirits may appear. All of these occur because people who practice meditation avail themselves of self-power, and the seeds of maras' work are unfailingly made active at that time.[264]

Shinran's references to Shandao, especially his Commentary to the *Contemplation Sūtra* are quite numerous — with respect to why the *nenbutsu* is efficacious. Shandao's focus in the Commentary is identifying and establishing which kinds of religious practices are effective for rebirth in the Pure Land, and he sees the *nenbutsu* as a non-meditative good practice alongside the meditative goods. By contrast, Shinran uses Shandao's arguments with respect to the *nenbutsu* to argue that it is effective because it subsumes the virtues and powers of (*nenbutsu*) *samādhi* within it. Shinran's innovation is in arguing that *nenbutsu* is effective not by deprecating *samādhi* itself, but by arguing for a different understanding of what it means to contemplate/ keep a Buddha in mind. The traditional (self-power) view of *samādhi* as receiving a vision of a Buddha or Pure Land, is not, in

263 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 51.
264 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 46.

Shinran's view, the archetype of what (ultimately) *samādhi* is. By characterizing the kind of *samādhi* advocated in traditional meditative texts as "self-power" practices, Shinran is not denying that they can lead to visions of Buddhas and Pure Lands, but he is implying that they are ultimately limited both in terms of the capacity of the practitioner to successfully enact the practice, and in terms of their final result. As they do not rely fully upon the limitless power of the Buddha, and upon the wondrous virtues (不可思議功徳) of the Vow/Pure Land they are in the ultimate sense not *true nenbutsu samādhi*.[265]

This then begs the question, what is *nenbutsu samādhi* for Shinran? I believe this passage, excerpted from the *Larger Sūtra*, and placed right at the beginning of the *KGSS* is illustrative:

> [Ananda asked,] "Today, World-honored one, your sense organs are filled with gladness and serenity. Your complexion is pure. Your radiant countenance is majestic, like a luminous mirror in which clear reflections pass unobstructed. Your lofty features are resplendent, surpassing all words or measure. Never before have I beheld your lineaments as sublime as they are now. Indeed, Great Sage, I have thought to myself: Today, the World-honored one abides in the dharma most rare and wondrous. Today, the Great Hero abides where all Buddhas abide. Today, the World's Eye abides in the activity of guide and teacher. Today, the Preeminent one of the world abides in the supreme enlightenment. Today, the Heaven-honored one puts into practice the virtue of all Tathagatas. The Buddhas of the past, future and present all think on one another. Do not you, the present Buddha, also think on all the other Buddhas now? Why does your commanding radiance shine forth with such brilliance?... The Buddha said, "Well spoken, Ananda! Your question is excellent. You ask this insightful question having summoned up deep wisdom and true and subtle powers of expression, and having turned tender thoughts to all sentient beings. In his boundless compassion, the Tathagata is filled with commiseration for the beings of the three realms. I have appeared in the world and expounded the teachings of the way to enlightenment, seeking to save the multitudes of living beings by blessing them with the benefit that is true and real.[266]

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265 Again, this is only in comparison to the wondrous working, and fulsome efficacy of the *samādhi* of the Buddha.

266 Shinran, "The True Teaching of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 7-8.

The key phrase here being, “The Buddhas of the past, future and present all think on one another,”[267] which I feel forms the core of Shinran's understanding of *samādhi*. If *nenbutsu* is the contemplation/ bringing to mind of a Buddha, then the archetype is the *samādhi* of the Buddha Shakyamuni. This *samādhi*, which is equated with enlightenment, forms the basis from which the soteriological Pure Land path is laid out. What is clear then, is that this primal *samādhi* is of an entirely different class to those accessible to ordinary beings, in its purity and its potency. To wit, since this *samādhi* is a *samādhi* of the Buddhas, it is predicated on the powers of a Buddha (*butsuriki,* 仏力) and never on the self-power (*jiriki,* 自力) of ordinary beings. This is why Shinran so insistent on the superlative nature of the *nenbutsu samādhi*: in his formulation, it is the *samādhi* of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. So, even as ordinary beings are brought to participate/share in this *samādhi* through the one moment of true entrusting and recitation of the Name, the soteriological effect is powered entirely by Other Power — that is, Buddha Power.

Soga Ryōjin in his article, “On the Backdrop to the Five Kalpas of Profound Thought” takes up this question of the *samādhi* of Shakyamuni Buddha:

> Dharmākara's[268] opening up of the Pure Land of “Arousing the Vow, Practice, and Enlightenment” in the Larger Pure Land sūtra is utterly at its basis, found in the phrase “Buddhas contemplating Buddhas”... Śākyamuni, in an instant of contemplation, retraces his past and in this fashion proceeds into an eternal past. There, in his encountering the greatest, oldest Buddha [as responsive embodiment], in that radiance, was distinguished to him his own eternal aspect of return[269]: he discovered Dharmākara Bodhisattva.[270]

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267 今日、天尊、如来の徳を行じたまえり。去・来・現の仏、仏と仏と相念じたまえり。今の仏も諸仏を念じたまうことなきことを得んや。何がゆえぞ威神光光たること乃し爾る」と。「仏説無量寿経巻上」(『真宗聖典』, 7).

268 That is Dharmākara bodhisattva, who took the 48 Vows and is now the Buddha Amitabha (Jpn. Amida).

269 The aspect of returning from the Pure Land to the world of samsara in order to save sentient beings; (*gensō*, 還相).

270 曽我, 量深.「五劫の思惟を背景として」. 曽我量深全集, 第三、東京: 彌生書房, 1987: 309 -310 (Translation mine).

So in a sense, the light radiating from Śākyamuni that awoke Ananda and prompted him to ask the question leading to Śākyamuni's preaching the sutra was the reflected light of Amida shining from the depths of his own contemplation. However, this is not a passive kind of relationship, in which light bounces off static objects:

> And, at the time when Śākyamuni was speaking of his own aspect of return, Ananda (representing us sentient beings) in his *kokoro* held the image of the presently revealed Śākyamuni, or perhaps, the single Eternal Buddha, who qua Response Buddha, appears to us in intimacy and makes clear to us our own aspect of return.[271]

Soga emphasizes that it is Ananda's attentive activity (could we say contemplation, perhaps?) directed towards Śākyamuni that makes possible his compassionate appearance, and subsequent preaching of the sutra. Interestingly, the original wording of "makes clear to us our own aspect of return," that is, our aspect of returning from the Pure Land, could mean the "return" for us (in this case, Śākyamuni's appearance in the world), or, our own "return"(our own activity in returning to samsara). In a way I think Soga is deliberately playing with these possible readings in order to undermine our sense of the directionality of the Pure Land path. That is, we may understand that there is movement to (*ōsō*, 往相) and from (*gensō*, 還相) the Pure Land, but we may not understand that they happen simultaneously. Or, better, that coming and going thoroughly interpenetrate one another.

As Dharmākara takes sentient beings as the "backdrop" to his eons of long practice, an interesting consequence unfolds:

> The practice of that bodhisattva from ages past is truly the history of the accomplished three minds of sincerity, entrusting and desire for birth. This in truth is the process of accomplishing the imperial command summoning sentient beings

[271] 曽我, "五劫の思惟を背景として," 311.

> across the universe… That which summons sentient beings is truly the working of the Dharma of that place that establishes and accomplishes sentient beings. There are no sentient beings [that exist] before this calling of the Tathāgata. The summons of the Tathāgata's commanding root Vow is precisely the substance of sentient beings. We were born in accordance with the Tathāgata's summons. Not one real sentient being could exist in a place that lacks that summons of the Tathāgata… The space of the accomplishing of the Tathāgata's summoning voice, is at the same time, instantly that of the birth of sentient being's subjective basis. Thus for this reason, the summoning command of the Tathāgata's root Vow must truly be the subjectivity of sentient beings everywhere.[272]

Here we have the radical claim that the accomplishing of the Vow is the same process of the subjective realization (in the sense of becoming-real) of sentient beings as sentient beings. In other words, we are only born as sentient beings through being summoned by the calling voice of the Buddha, which means that our "reality," our subjectivity as sentient beings, is only tangibly felt or experienced insofar as that voice is calling out to us (are we the echoes of that calling voice?) So we can argue that for Shinran, the saving message encapsulated in the Pure Land sūtras is not just based upon the profound *samādhi* of the Buddha, but also expresses a profound intimacy between sentient beings and the realm of enlightenment. As we shall see in the next section, this intimacy also plays out with respect to the experience of *shinjin* in a non-dual way.

[272] 曽我, "五劫の思惟を背景として," 315-316.

Clouds and Mists

While the *nenbutsu samādhi* is pure and powerful, its mode of action, while dramatic in effect, is subtle in its working. Shinran, in the "Hymn of True Shinjin and Nembutsu" says:

> When the one thought-moment of joy arises,
> Nirvana is attained without severing [karmic afflictions];
> When ignorant and wise, even grave offenders and slanders of the dharma, all alike turn and enter shinjin,
> They are like waters that, on entering the ocean, become one in taste with it.
>
> The light of compassion that grasps us illumines and protects us always;
> The darkness of our ignorance is already broken through;
> Still the clouds and mists of greed and desire, anger and hatred,
> Cover as always the sky of true and real shinjin.
>
> But though the light of the sun is veiled by clouds and mists,
> Beneath the clouds and mists there is brightness, not dark.
> When one realizes shinjin, seeing and revering and attaining great joy,
> One immediately leaps crosswise, closing off the five evil courses.[273]

So even though the *nenbutsu* practitioner has experienced the decisive moment of *shinjin* or "the one thought-moment" and is thus assured of rebirth in the Pure Land, Shinran insists that this is achieved without the "severing" of karmic afflictions. Why is this the case, when he expends so much effort to demonstrate that Amida's virtues include the elimination of all karmic hindrances and afflictions?

[273] Shinran, *Collected Works*, 70.

The phrase, “nirvana is attained without severing blind passions” (不断煩悩得涅槃) appears in Tan-luan's *Annotations to the Treatise on Birth in the Pure Land*,[274] [275], and Shinran quotes from it quite extensively in delineating “Amida's directing of virtue for our going forth to the Pure Land” or *ōsō ekō* (往相回向):

> Further, the *Treatise* states: Concerning “the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of purity,” the gatha states:
>
> > Contemplating the features of that world,
> > I see that it transcends the three realms.
>
> Why is this inconceivable? When foolish beings possessed of blind passions attain birth in the Pure Land, they are not bound by the karmic fetters of the three realms. That is, without severing blind passions, they realize nirvana itself. How can this be conceived? We see [expressed in the above passages] the selected Primal Vow that embodies Amida Tathagata's directing of virtue for our going forth. [The birth in accord with the working of] this Vow is called “birth that is inconceivable.”[276]

Tan-luan here makes the case that the Pure Land is beyond “the three realms,” a term that means the Pure Land is beyond the worlds of desire, form and formlessness and so utterly distinct from our own world of *saṃsāra*.[277] Rebirth in the Pure Land is equated with realizing nirvana: not through the severing of karmic afflictions, but as the phrase, “they are not bound by the karmic fetters of the three realms,” suggests, by nullification of their karmic inertia.

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274 Locus classicus appears to be Vasubandhu's *Gāthā on the Resolve to Be Born [in the Pure Land] and the Upadeśa on the Sūtras of Limitless Life* (無量壽經優波提舍願生偈) translated by Bodhiruci. However, a search of the SAT database shows that the shorter phrase, 不断煩悩, appears in a large number of texts.

275 The full title is: *Annotations to the Gāthā on the Resolve to Be Born [in the Pure Land] and the Upadeśa on the Sūtras of Limitless Life* (無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈註). For more, see: Corless, Roger. “The Theoretical Foundations of Pure Land Buddhist Practice According to Tanluan.” *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3rd Series, No.8 (2006): 125-38.

276 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 643.

277 Indeed one of the objections raised by Hōnen's and Shinran's contemporaries against their proposal for a distinct “Pure Land school,” was that rebirth in such a pure realm was only possible for advanced bodhisattvas. The best that ordinary beings could hope for was rebirth in a Pure Land located *within* one of the sense realms.

Firm in his conviction that traditional practices are ineffective, Shinran elaborates that this "work" of bringing about rebirth comes from Amida, but in a manner that is "inconceivable" (*fukashigi,* 不可思議). In other words, a traditional understanding of how one would achieve rebirth would involve the gradual elimination of karmic hindrances and obstacles through the painstaking accumulation of merit and perfection of religious practices. Here, however, Shinran signals a break with that traditionalist view by claiming that rebirth happens *without* the elimination of all the usual obstacles to rebirth, and thereby enlightenment. Drawing upon the sūtra evidence that posits that nothing is an obstacle to the working of Amida's Vow, Shinran pushes this claims to its logical limits by arguing that rather than the Vow working to sever ordinary beings from their entanglements and afflictions, the Vow is so powerful that it can entirely ignore those obstacles and *still* bring about an assured rebirth. This is what he means by "inconceivable:" a transformation that defies all the existing categories of practice leading towards enlightenment.

Again, Shinran uses the *Treatise* to argue that this working happens "of itself" (*jinen*, 自然), even though this working cannot be conceived:

> The sutra declares, "Those who, simply hearing of the purity and happiness of that land, earnestly desire to be born there, and those who attain birth, immediately enter the stage of the truly settled." This shows that the land's very name performs the Buddha's work [of saving others]. How can this be conceived?[278]

This *jinen* working of the Pure Land's "very name" is also characterized as being the working of the adornments (*shōgon*, 荘厳) and virtues (*kudoku*, 功徳) of the Pure Land established by Amida (*qua* the "true cause"). In Tan-luan's *Treatise*, these virtues and

278 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 642.

adornments are contemplative objects/qualities (觀察門) in Vasubandhu's five-fold schema of practices for rebirth in the Pure Land. In Shinran's view, these formerly passive qualities (as objects of contemplation) take on a dynamic aspect — to wit, "nirvana without severing blind passions," itself comes about because of the workings of these adornments and virtues. It is part of the qualities/aspects of the Pure Land that all who are reborn there do so in their current state.

It is this experience/state of being transformed (from ordinary being, to one assured of rebirth) that I believe Shinran is exploring through the "Hymn of True Shinjin and *Nenbutsu*." While the actual workings of these adornments and virtues, and the attainment of nirvana escape conceptualization, the *experience* of this transformation is accessible to ordinary beings. To do so, Shinran reaches for metaphors, images and categories that are familiar to him from his many years of meditation practice on Mt. Hiei — namely those of *samādhi*. As we have seen, for Shinran, the root of the Pure Land path arises from the Buddha's *samādhi*, and as such, the workings/effects of that path unspool/unfold from that plenipotent state. In using these images and metaphors, Shinran is signaling that while these workings may not be accessible to conceptual thought, they can be comprehended affectively. For instance, in this passage from the Hymn:

> The light of compassion that grasps us illumines and protects us always;
> The darkness of our ignorance is already broken through;
> Still the clouds and mists of greed and desire, anger and hatred,
> Cover as always the sky of true and real shinjin.

These root metaphors of clouds and mist, and light and dark, appear in classical meditation texts. Comparing the passage above, with this section from Shandao's *Commentary* detailing the preliminary meditation on the sun disk:

> If he has "sharp roots," then as soon as he sits down, he will see appear before him the bright features [of the sun]... According to the brightness [of the object] he will perceive the degree of gravity of his own karma-hindrances: either as a black screen, as if a dark cloud were screening the sun; or as a yellow screen, as if a yellow cloud were screening the sun; or as a white screen, as if a white cloud were screening the sun. In the way various clouds may obstruct the sun, so that it cannot manifest its brightness, so the karma-hindrances of sentient beings conceal in a similar way the object of the pure mind, so that they do not allow the mind to reflect brightly.[279]

We can see that the image of clouds as karmic afflictions, obscuring the sun or light of wisdom is an established metaphor within the Pure Land meditative tradition. However, it is important that Shinran tweaks the relationship between sun/light and clouds. Where Shandao's text argues that the clouds "obstruct" the "pure mind," Shinran argues that the "light" continues to illuminate and protect even though the clouds persist in obscuring the sky. In other words, Shinran emphasizes the unhindered nature of Amida's light. While for Shandao, the appearance of clouds signals a continuing hindrance/defect in the practitioner, Shinran sees this both inevitable, "*still* the clouds and mists...*cover as always*" (emphasis added) and of no ultimate consequence to the person who has realized *shinjin*: "But though light of the sun is veiled by clouds and mists, Beneath the clouds and mists there is brightness, not dark."[280]

> In *The Virtue of the Name of Amida Tathagata*, Shinran writes:
>
> Concerning "unhindered light," with the light of the sun or moon, when something has come between, the light does not reach us. Amida's light, however, being unobstructed by things, shines on all sentient beings; hence the expression, "Buddha of unhindered light." Amida's light is unhindered by sentient beings' minds of blind passions and karmic evil; hence the expression; "Buddha of unhindered light." Were it not for the virtue of unhindered light, how would it be for us?[281]

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279 Pas, Julian F. "Shan-Tao's Interpretation of the Meditative Vision of Buddha Amitāyus." *History of Religions* 14.2 (1974): 108.

280 Shinran, "The True Practice of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 70.

281 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 655.

So grasped by this unhindered light, the person of *shinjin*, while still possessed of karmic afflictions and hindrances is "decidedly brought to attain the equal of perfect enlightenment...the stage of the truly settled,"[282] as the "Hymn of True Shinjin and the Nenbutsu" says, by "immediately leap[ing] crosswise, closing off the five evil courses."[283]

As a characteristic of the path one may take towards rebirth in the pure land, Shinran contrasts "leaping crosswise" or "crosswise transcendence" (横超) to "transcending lengthwise" (竪超). "Transcending lengthwise" is what is taught in the "expedient and accommodated" Mahāyāna teachings, and is a "roundabout," traditional path towards rebirth in the Pure Land, through the accumulation of merit, and practice of meditative and non-meditative good. Against that, "crosswise transcendence" is, Shinran argues, the "perfectly consummate true reality" and "true essence," of the Pure Land teaching, as it is based on the fulfillment of the Vow.[284] As Amida vowed not to attain enlightenment unless the various workings of his Vow should not resound everywhere in the universe (unhindered light, the Name being everywhere heard, etc.,) transcendence crosswise means an immediate decisive transformation: a "leap." However, this is not a transformation brought about by an irruptive, interventionist kind[285] of salvific power, but instead, "never at variance with that land, one is drawn there by its spontaneous working;"[286] that is, by *jinen hōni*: "of itself, coming to be so" (自然法爾). That is, since

282 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 634.
283 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 70.
284 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 114.
285 It is intriguing to note the distinction between the abruptness of "cutting" or "severing," of traditional practices and the gentler, "drawing," "leaping," "embracing," images that Shinran equates with the Pure Land path.
286 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 115.

the Pure Land was established by the fulfillment of Amida's Vow, one's being drawn there happens as part of the natural, unfolding of the adornments (*shōgon*) and virtues (*kudoku*) of that space. That is, "of itself" signals that the Pure Land practitioner does not exert any effort[287] on their part, and that all the necessary powers/virtues have already been furnished. Dennis Hirota suggests that if we understand Amida Buddha as manifesting the light and wisdom necessary to bring all sentient beings to enlightenment, then we can understand *jinen* as "the Pure Land that is infinite light and life, and the dynamic activity that leads us to take refuge in the Vow, transforms our evil into good, and unfailingly brings us to enlightenment."[288] In the *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, Shinran glosses "never at variance with that land, one is drawn there by its spontaneous working" thus:

> 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...One is drawn there naturally by the cause of birth, the entrusting with sincere mind that is Other Power... *Jinen* means that there is no calculating on the part of the practicer.[289]

So what role is there for these karmic afflictions? If we recall Shandao's twofold aspect of belief, one of which is "to believe deeply and decidedly that you are a foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death, ever sinking and ever wandering in transmigration,"[290] then we can surmise that if these karmic afflictions are not to be removed/eliminated in *shinjin*, then the *awareness* of them becomes significant. Indeed Shinran suggests that a deep and decided belief as to ordinary beings' "karmic evil" is

287 Or, as Shinran would characterize it, any "calculation" (*hakarai*).
288 Hirota, Dennis. "Religious Transformation in Shinran and Shōkū." *Pure Land* 4 (1987): 60-61.
289 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 496-497.
290 Yata, "Two Aspects of Deep Belief," 158.

also granted to them by Amida Buddha. He laments in a hymn that, "I am such that I do not know right and wrong and cannot distinguish false and true,"[291] and in the postscript to the *Tannishō*:

> For if I could know thoroughly, as Amida Tathāgata knows, that an act was good, then I would know good. If I could know thoroughly, as the Tathāgata knows, that an act was evil, then I would know evil. But with a foolish being full of [karmic afflictions], in this fleeting world — this burning house — all matters without exception are empty and false, totally without truth and sincerity.[292]

The deep awareness of one's karmically entangled nature which Shandao advocates as an aspect of deep and decided belief must necessarily flow from Amida as the source. As the *Larger Sūtra* states: "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" (emphasis added).[293] This breaking inwards of sincerity and truth, is what enables ordinary, foolish beings to experience that one decisive moment of *shinjin* and come to reborn in the Pure Land. Again, Shinran emphasizes: "It is through the Tathagata's supportive power, and through the vast power of great compassion and all-embracing wisdom, that a person realizes pure, true, and real shinjin."[294]

This "supportive power," that brings ordinary beings to the experience of *shinjin*, the full entrusting (*shingyō*, 信楽) mind of Amida Buddha. Not to be confused with the kind of faith or entrusting that ordinary beings have in Amida, or the Primal Vow, *shingyō* is qualitatively distinct:

> In "entrusting" (*shingyō* 信楽), *shin* 信 means truth, reality, sincerity, fullness, ultimacy, accomplishment, reliance, reverence, discernment, distinctness, clarity, faithfulness; *gyō* 楽 means aspiration, wish, desire, exultation, delight, joy,

291 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 429.
292 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 679.
293 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 111.
294 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 299.

> gladness, happiness... Entrusting is the mind full of truth, reality, and sincerity; the mind of ultimacy, accomplishment, reliance, and reverence; the mind of discernment, distinctness, clarity, and faithfulness; the mind of aspiration, wish, desire, and exultation; the mind of delight, joy, gladness, and happiness; hence, it is completely untainted by the hindrance of doubt.[295]

From this definition we can see that for Shinran, full entrusting as true, real, sincere, and joyful must be distinct from the muddled, karmically entangled heart and mind of ordinary beings. This is to say that there are two kinds of entrusting: that afforded to ordinary beings reaching out towards salvation from their karmically entangled state, and the full entrusting which arises from true, sincere, and accomplished roots, which is not accessible by ordinary beings stuck in *mappō*.

Again, Shinran makes this distinction clear:

> Next, concerning entrusting [*shingyō*], it is the ocean of shinjin, perfect and unhindered, that is the Tathagata's consummately fulfilled great compassion. Hence, there is no mixture of doubt. It is therefore called "entrusting." The essence of entrusting is the sincere mind of benefiting others and directing virtues. However, since the beginningless past, the multitudes of beings have been transmigrating in the ocean of ignorance, sinking aimlessly in the cycle of all forms of existence and bound to the cycle of all forms of pain; accordingly, they lack the entrusting that is pure. In the manner of their existence, they have no entrusting that is true and real. Hence, it is difficult for them to encounter the unexcelled virtues, difficult to realize the supreme, pure shinjin...When the Tathagata was performing bodhisattva practices, there was not a moment — not an instant — when his practice in the three modes of action was tainted by the hindrance of doubt. Because this mind is the Tathagata's mind of great compassion, it necessarily becomes the truly decisive cause of attaining the fulfilled land. [296]

Here he explains that full entrusting, "perfect and unhindered," comes out of Amida's compassion, and has never, "even for a moment," been tainted by doubt.[297] Since the cause of rebirth in the Pure Land is a single instant of full entrusting,[298] it is particularly

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295 Shinran, "The True Shinjin of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 94.
296 Shinran, "The True Shinjin of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 97-98.
297 For more on this see, 玉木興慈. "親鸞における疑蓋の意味." 日本文化と浄土教 9 (2005): 289-305.
298 See in particular the 18th Vow which says, "たとい我、仏を得んに、十方衆生、心を至し信楽して我が

difficult for ordinary beings to accomplish.[299] Thus it is only by means of this pure, constant mind of entrusting which Amida directs towards all sentient beings that rebirth is possible.

> Thus this full entrusting is the mind that powers "leaping crosswise":
>
> That characterized by transcending crosswise is [*shingyō* 信楽] that is directed to beings through the power of the Vow. It is the mind that aspires to attain Buddhahood. The mind that aspires to attain Buddhahood is the mind aspiring for great enlightenment of crosswise orientation. It is called "the diamondlike mind of crosswise transcendence.[300]

And when this mind is transferred to ordinary beings:

> Contemplating true and real [*shingyō*] I find there is the one thought-moment. One thought-moment expresses the ultimate brevity of the instant of the realization of [*shingyō*] and manifests the vast, inconceivable mind of joyfulness.[301]

And, further:

> The mind that seeks to save all sentient beings
> Is directed to us through Amida's Vow of wisdom.
> Those who realize this true entrusting [*shingyō*] that is directed to us
> Attain great, complete nirvana.[302]

This kind of untainted, full entrusting is the *sine qua non* of Pure Land faith for Shinran, and thus must be given/directed/transferred to us from Amida Buddha. Ordinary beings stuck in *mappō* cannot enact the kind of practice necessary to realize it. So in much the same way that the Buddha's *samādhi* is the model *nenbutsu samādhi*, for Shinran, the model of entrusting is *shingyō*: full, complete, untainted, and inconceivable.

国に生まれんと欲うて、乃至十念せん (『真宗聖典』, 18).

299 In fact, the Buddha says to Miroku bodhisattva, that realizing and upholding this full entrusting is the "most difficult of difficulties":「もしこの経を聞きて信楽受持すること、難きが中に難し、これに過ぎて難きことなし。」「仏説無量寿経巻下」(『真宗聖典』, 87).

300 Shinran, ""The True Shinjin of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 108.

301 Shinran, "The True Shinjin of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 110-111.

302 Shinran, "Hymns of the Dharma Ages," *Collected Works*, 404.

Hearing the Name involves more than just the auditory reception of the word "Amida;" hearing involves a "new, transformative paradigm of apprehension of self, world, and true reality" which begins to break down the duality between the practitioner who hears, and Amida who is calling.[303] The practitioner realizes that Amida's taking of the Vow reaches out to them in their passion-blinded state, as Shinran puts it, "When I consider deeply the Vow of Amida… I realize that it was entirely for the sake of myself alone!"[304] In that transformative moment of realization, the practitioner deeply realizes that the compassionate working of Amida reaches out to grasp them in their deluded, passion-filled state, and in that moment, they utter the *nenbutsu* in spontaneous gratitude. This one utterance, which comes "without seeking it," and without calculation, is the spontaneous working of the Vow in *jinen*.

What happens to the practitioner at the moment of *shinjin?* It would appear that *shinjin* transforms our former mental and emotional state, in what Shinran calls *eshin* (廻心), or the change of heart that comes from overturning or discarding the mind of self-power. Once we have overturned our old mental habits of reliance upon our own self-power, and begin to break down the ego, the threefold mind opens up within us: the sincere mind, entrusting, and the aspiration for birth. From the standpoint of the old mind, that is, the mind before the experience of *shinjin*, being assured of salvation from this world would be cause for great rejoicing, but from the standpoint of the person of *shinjin*, in sincere mind, this joy is tempered by the knowledge that: "We are filled with all manner of greed, anger, perversity, deceit, wickedness, and cunning, and it is difficult to

303 Hirota, Dennis. "Religious Transformation and Language in Shinran." *Living in Amida's Universal Vow.* Ed., Alfred Bloom. Bloomington: World Wisdom Inc., 2004: 88.
304 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 679.

put an end to our evil nature."[305] This deeply reflective knowledge is accompanied by a deep and decided belief that one is a "foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death" with no hope of ever escaping from the world of samsara on their own, a deep reliance on Amida's Vows and in that reliance, Amida's working comes to be so of itself (*jinen hōni*). It is important to note that this reflective knowledge of the true state of our beings cannot be based just on self-consciousness; for a person as thoroughly corrupt as Shinran believed himself to be, this clarity can only come from the pure light of Amida's wisdom that is already shining upon a clouded mind.[306] In other words, becoming deeply convinced of one's own desperate situation already means that one has been grasped by the working of Amida's Vow, for we cannot come to such clear knowledge ourselves.

Returning to the image of clouds and mist, light and dark, we see then that these are not only images for the working of Amida's Vow, but perhaps, descriptive of the lived experience of being grasped by that very working. The dynamism of sun, sky and clouds must mirror the dynamic inner life of one aware/alive to their karmically afflicted state. That is, the contact between Amida's pure mind (*shingyō*) and the karmically burdened mind of ordinary beings forms a complex, paradoxical boundary state which is perhaps best captured in the image of river water entering an ocean:

> When the waters of the mind entrusting to Other Power enter
> The ocean waters of Amida's Vow of wisdom,
> Then in accord with the nature of the true and real fulfilled land,
> [Karmic afflictions] and enlightenment come to be of one taste.[307]

In the same way that one can clearly discern the boundary between an inrushing river, and the ocean it empties into, one can distinguish between Amida's light and purity, and

305 Shinran, "The True Shinjin of the Pure Land Way," *Collected Works*, 84.
306 Keel, *Understanding Shinran*, 90.
307 Shinran, "Hymns of the Dharma Ages," *Collected Works*, 404.

the darkness and clouds that characterize the experience of ordinary beings, but just as the river water (naturally) turns into ocean water, entrusting in Amida's Vow will turn karmic afflictions into “one taste” with enlightenment.

In the following chapter we shall explore Shinran's view of *shinjin* with respect to the Tendai teaching of "original enlightenment" (*hongaku*, 本覚). As we shall see, the metaphors and imagery that we have detailed in this chapter are intimately connected with the illuminating activity of Amida's Vow. In the end, this affective dimension is shown to be the sign and assurance of salvation (rebirth in the Pure Land).

CHAPTER 4: TO DANCE ON THE EARTH, TO LEAP IN THE AIR

Shinran, Amida, and Original Enlightenment

In the Tendai school, there is a teaching known as *hongaku* (本覚). It holds that all sentient (and non-sentient beings) are "originally" enlightened. This concept appears quite early in the Mahāyāna,[308] in its earliest Chinese manifestations, it synthesized two streams of thought addressing two key questions: what is the nature of enlightenment, and what is the source of delusion? The answer to the first question was found in the *tathāgatagarbha*, "an originally pure, enlightened mind intrinsic to all sentient beings, conceptualized as the 'womb' or 'embryo' of buddhahood."[309] [310] The origin of delusion

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308 One very important early text being *The Awakening of Mahāyana Faith* in which we find statements like: "Because the quintessence of the Mahâyâna as suchness exists in all things, remains unchanged in the pure as well as the defiled, is always one and the same...neither increases nor decreases, and is void of distinction" (53-54). See, Asvaghosa. *The Awakening of Faith : The Classic Exposition of Mahayana Buddhism*. ed. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2003.

309 Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 5.

310 For more on this see: Guang, Xing. *The Concept of the Buddha: Its Evolution From Early Buddhism to the Trikaya Theory.* London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005; Zimmerman, Michael. *A Buddha Within: The Tathāgatagarbhasūtra; the Earliest Exposition of the Buddha-Nature Teaching in India.* ed. Hiroshi Kanno, Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 2002; Lai, Whalen. "Sinitic Speculations on Buddha-Nature: The Nirvāṇa School." *Philosophy East and West* 32, no. 2 (1982): 420-589; Kiyota, Minoru. "Tathagatagarbha Thought: A Basis of Buddhist Devotionalism in East Asia." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 12, no. 2-3 (1985): 207-31; King, Sallie B. "Buddha Nature and the Concept of Person." *Philosophy East and West* 39, no. 2 (1989): 151-

was explained in terms of "seeds" of past deeds and experiences that get stored in the "store consciousness" level of mind, and delusion arises from accumulated "defiled seeds."[311] What these concepts have in common is the idea that if all things are empty of a "self-nature" or an enduring identity; that is, in themselves, they are "suchness" (*tathatā*), and so are at their "origin" fundamentally enlightened. The work of religious practice, then, is not to cause or instantiate an awakening, but rather to return to, or to uncover an originally enlightened nature at the basis of all phenomena. Zhiyi in particular took the position that:

> One may say neither that one mind is prior and all dharmas posterior. . . All one can say is that mind is all dharmas and all dharmas are the mind. Therefore the relationship is neither vertical nor horizontal, neither the same nor different.[312]

Zhiyi developed various theories of "dependent origination" to explain how the cosmos, and all the things within it, come to interpenetrate and depend on one another, and how this original mind comes to be manifest as the variegated cosmos. Through meditative practice one contemplates phenomena through the three aspects: emptiness (*kū* 空), conventional existence, (*ke* 假) and the middle (*chū* 中). From the aspect of conventional existence, one finds that phenomena are "empty of self-nature:" through a return to conventional existence from emptiness, "one is freed from attachment to reified notions of emptiness and is able to reengage the myriad phenomena of the world in a soteriologically effective way;" and through the contemplation of the middle, one obtains both perspectives at once.[313]

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311 Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 5

312 Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 8.

313 Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 8.

Zhiyi asserts that insofar as mind gives rise to dharma, there is no hierarchical relation whatsoever, or judgement regarding truth or ignorance. What entails, rather, is a mutually inclusive relation that does not rank mind above dharma or vice versa. Dharma and mind retain their particularity and specific expression, within a relation of mutual support and imbrication, which means that when one speaks of mind they necessarily speak of dharma as well, and so on. Thus, for Zhiyi and the Tiantai school thereafter; "Of every form and fragrance, there is none that is not the Middle Way."[314]

Liberation is not to be found by discerning the original, essential purity of the world of phenomena in original mind, rather "all dharmas manifest the true aspect of reality" and so questions of before and after, purity and impurity fall away, because of the mutuality, and interpenetration of the "pure and impure." By the time of the Sixth Patriarch of Tiantai, Zhanran (711-782 CE), this understanding came to be formulated in the doctrine that all insentient beings have the Buddha nature, for if all phenomena are suchness, then there can be no distinction between sentient and insentient beings vis-à-vis Buddha nature.[315] Saichō continued in this tradition by holding that all beings could ultimately attain Buddhahood. He based this teaching on the *Lotus Sūtra*, which subsumes the various "vehicles" of the Buddha's teachings within the one vehicle of supreme enlightenment. All other vehicles or teachings were just manifestations of his "skill in means" to adapt to the varying capacities of his followers with the goal of bringing them all to enlightenment. Saichō therefore upheld the superiority of the *Lotus*

314 Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 9.
315 Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 9.

Sūtra over all other teachings, and believed that a superior practitioner could "realize Buddhahood with this very body (*sokushin jōbutsu*, 即身成仏)."[316]

In the *Lotus Sūtra*, and in particular the chapter titled "Fathoming the Tathagata" (*Nyorai juryō-hon*) the historical Buddha reveals that he attained Buddhahood "countless myriads of kalpas" ago, and that he has spent the time since preaching the Dharma in various guises. That is, Śākyamuni Buddha came to be viewed not as an individual person who once cultivated bodhisattva practice and achieved Buddhahood but as:

> The one Buddha who is all Buddhas, who preaches continuously throughout all space and time. And, since the Dharma body is originally inherent in all phenomena, ordinary worldlings are. . .Buddhas, too; between the enlightened and the unenlightened, no ontological distinction whatever can be made.[317]

The potential for Buddhahood then becomes more and more possible for practitioners in their lifetime, and the length and effort required to achieve enlightenment was gradually reduced with each re-evaluation of texts.

We can see some echoes of this original enlightenment thought in Shinran's view of Amida; especially in his exploration of Amida *qua* enlightenment as the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. As for instance, in this verse of praise he quotes from Tanluan:

> The light, at all times, shines everywhere;
> Hence, the Buddha is called "inconceivable light."
> Because beings hear this light-power, their thoughts uninterrupted,
> They all attain birth; thus, I bow in homage.[318]

That is, Amida as the all pervading light that illumines ordinary beings everywhere, will unfailingly bring all beings to be reborn in the Pure Land, which for Shinran is certain assurance of enlightenment.

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316 Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 15-16.
317 Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 26.
318 Shinran, *Collected Works*, 195.

Or as in the *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,'* Shinran comments that:

> To return is to attain the supreme nirvana without fail because one has already entered the ocean of the Vow; this is called "returning to the city of dharma-nature." The city of dharma-nature is none other than the enlightenment of Tathagata, called dharma-body, unfolded naturally...It is also called realizing true reality or suchness, realizing the uncreated or dharma-body, attaining emancipation, realizing the eternal bliss of dharma-nature, and attaining the supreme enlightenment. When persons attain this enlightenment, with great love and great compassion immediately reaching their fullness in them, they return to the ocean of birth-and-death to save all sentient beings.[319]

Viewed from this aspect, it would seem that Shinran views "return," that is, birth in the Pure Land, with the realization of suchness — the insight of emptiness (*kū* 空). Further, we can see the aspect of "return," in that persons of *shinjin* return to this world of suffering out of compassion — the insight of conventional existence (*ke* 假). However, while Tendai *hongaku* thought has a tendency to resolve the tension between this world and nirvana by, as it were, spiraling downwards to rest upon a substrate of "already enlightened," Shinran preserves that polarity in his thought. This is not to say that he absolutizes a distinction between these two realms, but, especially for Shinran, the existential conviction of one's separation from the realm of enlightenment is a critical part of the experience of *shinjin*. So while from the perspective of enlightenment (Amida), all beings will necessarily attain nirvana, from the perspective of delusion (ordinary beings), saṃsāra and nirvana are absolutely distinct.

What is critical in Shinran's thought is the dynamic of movement between the realms of enlightenment and delusion, which takes the form of the aspects of going forth (*ōsō* 往相) and coming back (*gensō* 還相) from the Pure Land as we discussed earlier. This is the foundation of that relationship of "double-sidedness" that we explored in

[319] Shinran, *Collected Works*, 454.

Chapter 1. This is, I believe, Shinran's own working out the problem of our relationship to this already existing enlightenment. Namely, if the realms of delusion and enlightenment maintain their dialectical tension, then the experience of salvation must also retain its "double-sidedness, " finding its expression in this "roiled up" feeling of *shinjin*.

"I, Shinran, Have the Same Difficulty..."

Having seen in Chapter 3 that for Shinran the experience of *shinjin* means that one is necessarily deeply aware of their karmically burdened nature, we can return to the puzzling dialogue from the *Tannishō* in which Shinran and Yuien discuss the felt experience of *shinjin*. In it, they are both puzzled/troubled by the fact that they do not experience the joy that they should, and are still plagued by karmic afflictions and doubts that they should not. Which is to say that even though they are intellectually/conceptually convinced that their rebirth in the Pure Land is assured, they are not experiencing the kind of *affective* certainty/transformation that they expect.

Indeed, their confusion is warranted when we examine what the Pure Land sūtras say about the experience of *shinjin*, again and again, hearing the name of Amida is linked with joy, as here from the *Infinite Life Sūtra*:

> When they hear the profound Dharma they joyfully accept it and do not entertain any doubt; and so, thinking of the Buddha [*nen*] even once, they sincerely aspire to be born in that land.[320]

Or here, as the Buddha says to Maitreya:

> If there are people who hear the Name of that Buddha, rejoice so greatly as to dance, and think of him [*nen*] even once, then you should know that they have gained great benefit by receiving unsurpassed virtue.[321]

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320 *The Three Pure Land Sutras*. eds. Hisao Inagaki, and Harold. Stewart, Berkeley, Calif.: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2003: 36.

321 *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, 69.

What we find is a consistent linkage between the Buddha's proclamation of salvation, and the experience, "even once" (*naishi ichinen*, 乃至一念) of *shingyō*,[322] and joy or rejoicing (*kangi*, 歓喜 also *kyōki,* 慶喜) and even in some cases leaping and dancing (*yūyaku* 踊躍). That is another way of saying that for ordinary beings stuck in mappō, without any hope of extricating themselves from the endless cycle of rebirth, the singular experience of the mind of entrusting directed to them through the Buddha's grace is imagined to be affectively uplifting — so much so that one should be moved in both body and mind. The implications of this are quite clear — if one does not, or has not experienced this "dancing with joy" then perhaps their own status vis-à-vis *shinjin* is not settled.

The dialogue begins with Yuien saying:

> "Even though I (humbly) recite the nenbutsu, the *kokoro* of dancing and leaping with joy is roiled up within me, further, the *kokoro* of swiftly going to the Pure Land is lacking, I wonder how one should consider such a thing as this." "I, Shinran, have the same difficulty in understanding, and Yuien-bo too shares this same *kokoro*!" Having carefully looked into this matter and considered it, that I do not rejoice, as I should, to the extent of dancing on the earth, and dancing in the air, this means all the more that we should come to know that our rebirth in the Pure Land is settled.[323]

Yuien here is worried that his experience does not accord with what the sūtras say should accompany the experience of *shinjin*: namely, the aspiration for birth (*yokushō* 欲生) and dancing with joy (*kangiyūyaku,* 歓喜踊躍). Shinran reassures Yuien, however, by saying that he too has been having the same experience. Yet, rather than being troubled by this, he says that he is all the more certain that he will be reborn in the Pure Land. How can this be the case?

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322 It is important to note here that all these passages consistently use *shingyō*, and not any of the other two compounds typically translated as "faith" or rendered as "*shinjin*." This is a clear marker that the kind of entrusting advocated here does not come from the side of ordinary beings - certainly this is the case for Shinran's understanding.

323 Translation mine.

Here Shinran again signals the importance of attention to one's inward affective state as evidence or as a touchstone for understanding one's faith. As we saw in the previous chapter with respect to his use of metaphors, Shinran is always careful to distinguish between the exemplary mode of belief and practice, and the actually experienced; that is, between the experiences and practices possible for those of great ability (Path of Sages) and those of ordinary beings. So he is not surprised to find that even though he should be "rejoicing beforehand"[324] at what shall be attained, he finds those feelings lacking in him. This is not because the Amida's salvation is uncertain, but because that salvation is directed particularly towards those entangled in karmic afflictions, and, crucially, brings them to enlightenment without severing the same. It is for this reason he goes on to say to Yuien:

> That which holds back the *kokoro* that should rejoice, that does not cause it to rejoice, is the activity of our afflictions. The Buddha (Amida) knowing this to be so from the beginning, calling us "foolish beings burdened with afflictions," thus let it be known that the Vow of compassion is for the sake of those just like us. So all the more should we entrust in it.[325]

While Shinran does not deny that one should rejoice (neither does he foreclose the possibility that *some* may rejoice), he argues that Amida had foreseen this state of affairs:

> Not having the *kokoro* of wanting to go quickly [to the Pure Land] is something the Buddha particularly pities. Fixing upon just this, the Great Vow of Compassion is all the more to be relied upon, and our rebirth is decisively settled. The possibility of having a *kokoro* of also rejoicing and dancing upon the earth and in the air, and wanting to quickly go the Pure Land should make us suspicious: "Could there really be no afflictions?" said Shinran.[326]

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324 「慶」は、うべきことをえて、のちによろこぶこころなり。「楽」は、たのしむこころなり。これは、正定聚のくらいをうるかたちをあらわすなり。「一念多念文意」(『真宗聖典』, 539).

325 Translation mine.

326 Translation mine.

Karmic afflictions, then, are both the chains that bind us to the world of rebirth, but also the target/receptors (immunologically speaking) of Amida's compassionate activity, and simultaneously, the sign/assurance of that working. Shinran is here arguing that one's very awareness of the presence of karmic afflictions is itself the verification of Amida's working, and thus while still lamentable,[327] is in a strange sense, comforting as well. Yet, since this is a comfort derived from a deep awareness of how flawed and irredeemably one is entangled in samsara, it is a very strange comfort indeed.

Furthermore, it is also a very strange kind of working as well, targeting, as it were, the least desirable aspects of our lived experience and making them unavoidably present to our consciousness. Coming to us, or being perceptible through these images (light, dark, sun, clouds, etc.,) and sensations and inner percepts, the visible/graspable aspect of the Buddha's inconceivable working is along the affective plane. Given that affects impinge/pass through/are afforded of capture through fleshly bodies human beings, this is the mechanism by which an abstract, absolute Buddha *qua* dharma-body of suchness that transcends the triple realms can affect ordinary beings in mappō. Which is to say, that Pure Land as metaphor has as much impact on the lived experience of persons of *shinjin* (in Shinran's view), as a Pure Land that is ontologically *really* existent. What the Pure Land tradition identifies as the adornments of the Pure Land (*shōgon*, 荘厳) have an affective force all of their own. Since Shinran is not operating in an exclusively poetic, impermanence-based (*mujō*) creative modality, the kinds of images and metaphors that he uses must be read from a dynamic, affective angle.[328]

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327 Even though Shinran may see a place for these afflictions, this does not necessarily turn them into positives/things to be valorized. Our awareness of them is preferable to the usual state of blind ignorance, but that does not change their intrinsically negative nature.

328 For instance, *mujō* appears only infrequently in the *KGSS*. The key terms that displace this concept are,

Returning to Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh, we can begin to delineate a frame through which to understand Shinran and Yuien's experience of muted joy. As we noted in Chapter 1, if the relationship between ordinary beings and Amida Buddha is one of perception,[329] then we can argue that Shinran proposes a common horizon, a "felt" horizon, or thickness of flesh between ordinary beings and Amida Buddha.This notion of a non-discontinuous relationship between the realms of enlightenment and ignorance has a long history in Mahāyāna Buddhism, bound up with the philosophical and ideological commitment to non-dualism. Merleau-Ponty's description of this relationship or character of flesh resonates quite strongly with Pure Land symbology:

> A carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient. For, as overlapping and fission, identity and difference, it brings to birth a ray of natural light that illuminates all flesh and not only my own.[330]

In a similar fashion, examining what seem to be concrete distinctions between the subject of salvation (sentient beings) and the objective activity that reaches out to them (Amida), Soga Ryōjin reminds us that as good Mahayana Buddhists, we must not imagine that these distinctions are real — at least, not "real" in the sense of having a separate, ontological difference from one another:

> Indeed, the two *kokoros*; that is, of the sincere mind of the eternal, deeply hidden, uninterrupted interiority of "keeping in mind," and the *kokoro* of "desire for birth," that unceasingly transfer merit to the ever-present reality of the world of sentient beings are, from a planar perspective completely in opposition. What stands against this oppositional view of the two *kokoro*, and instead makes them intimate — the logic of the space of unobstructed, free interpenetration — is the

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of course *mappō* and *bonnō*.

329 Indeed one *must* see it as a case of perception, given the nature of Pure Land visualization practice, the cosmic distances separating this world of samsara and the Pure Land, and the great gulfs of time between mappō, and the age in which Dharmakara bodhisattva fulfilled his Vows and became Amida Buddha. Perception of the Buddha, his Pure Land, and the working of his Vows is at the core of what is at stake for Shinran and the Pure Land tradition in general.

330 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 142.

> entrusting untainted by doubt…This is also what Shinran calls "When one enters the mystery of other power, no-working is working – know and believe this."[331]

Taking this logic of interpenetration even further, Soga goes on;

> ["Desire to be born in my land"] is truly the pained and grieving voice of the Tathāgata who deigns to turn about [in birth and death]in the triple worlds of birth and death. To call to the multitudes "turning about" means that the Tathāgata himself turns about in birth and death, and beyond the multitudes in birth and death, discovers himself. It is the cause of taking unto himself a flesh and blood body of the three worlds and six paths. To take on the karmic fruit of the three worlds and six paths means to take unto himself our affects [in empathy]. Truly, this empathy is itself self-awakening. Or again, true self-awakening is to take unto oneself the recompense of karma . "Empathy" is not simply the appearance of a psychological awareness, or a physical stance, but is in truth an actual physiological state. To feel, as the Buddhist texts have used it for thousands of years is through the power of past karma [literally, karmic momentum,] to sense the direct rewards of that karma [in the mind and body in which one is reborn] and the indirect rewards of that karma [in the material, societal, geographical circumstances in which one is reborn]; that is, of the body of flesh and of the land.[332]

This is a theme that Soga has struck elsewhere, but which here takes on a deeply existential dimension.[333] Not only does Soga Ryōjin see the Buddha as empathizing with sentient beings, but, he argues, the Buddha's calling voice comes out of his experiencing of our pain and suffering in samsara. The Buddha's cry echoes our own crying voice:

> Now, when Dharmākara Bodhisattva in accordance with the 18th Vow calls to "sentient beings everywhere," it is not as though there are sentient beings existing before him, separate from him, or set against him… [Like the expedient characterization of the "sentient beings everywhere" that are the subjects of the 19th, and 20th Vows who do not exist in actuality]. The true and real sentient beings to whom the calling of the 18th Vow is directed, are thus, the figure that Dharmākara Bodhisattva himself feels as his truly existing own-self. The call goes out to "sentient beings everywhere," right at the time that he himself is actually

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331 曽我, 量深. 五劫の思惟を背景として. 曽我量深全集, Vol. 3 東京: 彌生書房, 1987: 319. Soga, Ryojin. "On the Backdrop to the Five Kalpas of Profound Thought." Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

332 Soga, "Backdrop to the Five Kalpas," 320.

333 Soga Ryōjin. "The Significance of Dharmakara Bodhisattva as Earthly Savior." *Living in Amida's Universal Vow: Essays in Shin Buddhism*. ed. Alfred. Bloom, Vol. The Perennial philosophy series Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004: 13-18.

> subjected to his own painfully turning over in birth and death. He is, thus, "sentient beings"…Apart from this, in truth, there are no other sentient beings: not even a single person. Again, though it may seem that Dharmākara is calling to us from afar, in actuality, the call goes out in the very moment(s) that the bodhisattva feels the pain of *samsara*. Our subjectivity as sentient beings is born at this very moment. In this sense, there cannot be sentient beings (as the subject of the calling) who exist before this moment of deep empathy and compassion.

Therefore:

> The Tathāgata's "salvation of sentient beings" is, to put it in ideal terms, the establishment-creation of sentient beings' minds and spirits in the midst of his Dharma-world. However, putting it pragmatically, the Tathāgata reveals himself within the world of sentient beings. This is thus, qua karmic recompense, to affectively feel the fleshy body and land. The subjectivity of self-awakening that is to be intimately affected by the karmic fruit of turning about in birth and death, is thus Dharmākara Bodhisattva as the true and real Savior… The real Bodhisattva intimately, and affectively, senses the fleshy body and land. Only the Bodhisattva's great subjectivity can encompass the intimate sensing of the reality of karmic recompense.[334]

Not only is this "felt horizon" a shared perceptual field, but it is also a intimate affective relationship that takes on the characteristic of an interpersonal, affective relationship, even to the extent of personifying what is an abstract, imaginative connection between the subject and active principle of salvation. This felt horizon does not discriminate between sentient and non-sentient, that is, between living and non-living things (including imaginative constructs and percepts) with respect to their ability to affect and be affected. Indeed Shinran makes a very strong case that the imaginative efflorescence that is the Pure Land (and its adornments) is powerful precisely because it has affective force; whether this force is activated through the practice of visualization, or through the inward transformation that is the "one moment" of *shinjin*. It is this affective force that is, in itself, the verification of the working of Amida's Vow in the life and experience of the person of *shinjin*.

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[334] Soga Ryōjin. "Backdrop to the Five Kalpas," 321.

Conclusion

This project has shown that Shinran's particular approach to the karmic afflictions, as exemplified in the episode from *Tannishō* #9, is highly innovative, while remaining contiguous to his Tendai training. The notion of "attaining enlightenment without severing karmic afflictions" captures his conviction that the "roiled up" affective experience of *shinjin* is itself a positive indicator of the (self-) illuminating activity of Amida Buddha in the Pure Land practitioner's life. Further, Shinran sees this affective state as a commonality amongst believers, and thus the basis for moments of connection, assurance and community building. When he says to his disciple Yuien that he too has been having the same feelings and doubts, he not only dispels any notion of himself as a religious authority, but he also models a religious knowledge that rests upon an affective communion.

This understanding of karmic afflictions follows from Shinran's clear distinction between the heart-and-mind of sentient beings and that of Amida Buddha. As foolish, ordinary beings (*bonbu*), we cannot muster the purity and intensity of practice and intention required to effect our own salvation. Since for Shinran, true, genuine nembutsu *qua* "keeping the Buddha in mind," is typified by the *samādhi* state from which the Buddha Śākyamuni preached the Pure Land sūtras, it is well beyond the capabilities of anyone living in *mappō*. The moment of genuine entrusting from which erupts the single

moment (*ichinen*) of *nenbutsu* is given to us by Amida Buddha. That is, because this single moment is decisive for rebirth, its power must be linked to Amida's saving activity, and not to any kind of merit, power or effort that ordinary beings can muster. This single moment is the contact between the realm of pure, untainted salvific activity (Amida) and the bottomless realm of karmic afflictions (ordinary beings).

For the ordinary person, the affective "roiled up" experience of *shinjin*, is the one sure sign of the working of Amida; as the "phase boundary" between the pure and impure, one can only rely upon the deepening awareness of sinfulness as a sign that one's depths are being illuminated by Amida's light. Hence, Shinran's use of dynamic metaphors such as the sun being hidden by clouds, rising and sinking, and rivers entering an ocean, are expressive of the affective *experience* of "attaining enlightenment without severing karmic afflictions." Since these very afflictions are the target of Amida's Vow, they remain present even as ordinary beings are transformed and brought to rebirth in the Pure Land. This continuity of feeling is well captured by Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh," and poetically expounded in Soga Ryōjin's musings on the carnality of a savior. What both thinkers stress is that the experience of connection to another — whether in perception or as the object of salvation — is necessarily an affective one, as intimate as if one was connected through the "tissue of things."

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