THE BUDDHIST WORLD OF AWAKENING

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CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS SHIN?

I am a Shin Buddhist.

Zen, which arose in Japan in the same thirteenth century period of religious reform as did Shin Buddhism, became popular in America and Europe through the writings of D.T. Suzuki and others. Suzuki's writings on Shin never attained wide readership. Yet, for we ordinary men and women everywhere, Shin Buddhism's *nembutsu* path opens the Buddhist world of awakening through the process of our everyday lives. It is to explore Shin Buddhism in as clear and concise a manner as possible that I write this book, which evolved from my lecture series at the Buddhist Study Center's 1979 Summer Session in Honolulu, Hawaii.

I shall approach the teachings of Shinran, founder of Shin Buddhism, from the broad perspective of my own experience. I was born in Hiroshima, and raised the second son in a country temple. Because of this background, I received a somewhat strict religious training. For example, as a youngster I liked to go fishing, but my father did not permit this. I had to sneak out to go fishing. When my father caught me, he would really give it to me!

In my early life, the process of death was a condition leading to my religious sensitivity. When I was eight years old, my sister died. When I was thirteen, my mother died. When I was fifteen, my brother died. After my mother's death, my father remarried. A stepmother came into my family, and this too became one of the painful experiences of my youth.

As the surviving son, I was expected to stay and take over the temple as is the custom in temple families in Japan. This I did not

want to do. Instead, I planned after high school to leave and become a teacher. In the Larger Pure Land Sutra, one of the five deadly sins is the slandering of one's mother and father. Now, as I look back on the early days of my stepmother, I realize that my urge to leave home was from my wanting to slander this new mother who had come into my family.

When I was in school, the war was going on and at age nineteen, I joined the army. One month after I joined, Japan lost the war. It was a time of confusion. Many were truly lost, spiritually, and of these many I was one. I abandoned my idea of going to college to become a teacher. In this period of post war confusion, I decided to seek out anew the meaning of Shinran in my life.

For those who are not familiar with Shinran, I should like to provide a brief background. He lived from 1173 - 1262 during the Kamakura period, a time of intense political and religious upheaval in Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan. The Emperor was then merely a figurehead, with affairs of the nation in the powerful hands of a succession of noble families and considerable power wielded by the Buddhist hierarchy of Mt. Hiei, a Tendai complex of temples and monasteries just northeast of Kyoto. Women and police were both forbidden on that monastic mountain—the result of the latter prohibition being that among the monks were refugees who had been thieves, criminals of all kinds, who formed the most powerful army of the day.

A great many of the monks on Hiei were, however, serious and sincere seekers after enlightenment. Such a one was Shinran, who had taken his vows at the age of nine. For twenty years he immersed himself in strenuous study, following the most difficult monastic practices. At the age of twenty-nine he felt himself a total failure in all this, and with despair left Hiei knowing himself incapable of honestly going forward on what he called the self-power "path of sages." The former Hiei monk, Honen, a brilliant teacher then nearing seventy had begun a "*nembutsu* only"

movement to which Shinran was drawn. For the next six years he remained with Honen devoting himself to the single practice of his teacher: *nembutsu*.

The "*nembutsu* only" practice was that of reliance or salvation (enlightenment) through "other power" acknowledged by the recitation of *Namu Amida Butsu*, a homage to the name of Amida, signifying trust in the Buddha whose Vow was to save all beings everywhere at all times. This was a practice available to even the lowliest, uneducated person, a way in sharp contrast to the scholasticism and noble family onnections of the Buddhist hierarchy on Mt. Hiei and that other, more ancient Buddhist center, Nara.

Before long, the leaders of Nara and Hiei joined forces to persuade the Emperor to ban the increasingly popular competition of this "*nembutsu* only" movement. Two of Honen's followers were executed. The others, including Honen himself and thirty-five year old Shinran, were banished to different remote provinces. Shinran was exiled to Echigo, now the modern area of Naoetsu. He was stripped of his name, reduced to the status of a common criminal, and forbidden to practice *nembutsu*. It was a prohibition he chose to ignore. Instead, during his exile he himself became a religious teacher.

Shinran, one of the first Buddhist priests to openly marry and live an ordinary life, called himself "neither priest nor layman." He fathered a large family and shared the harsh lives of the people among whom he chose to remain after word of his pardon came from Kyoto. With his wife Eshinni, he moved to Mito-Kanto, which like Echigo was then a remote rural area. He stayed in that region, spreading "*nembutsu* only" and beginning his major work, *Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho* (Teaching-Living-True Mind-Awakening), until he was sixty years old. He then left his wife and family behind to return to Kyoto where he devoted the remaining thirty years of his life to writings and study that he hoped would settle the place of Honen's teachings in the mainstream of Mahayana Buddhism. He lived in

quiet obscurity, without a temple of his own, working at tracing "*nembutsu* only" in a spiritual lineage back to Sakyamuni Buddha, a scholarly project that was disparaged by many of the *nembutsu* teachers of his period. He continuously revised *Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho*, and composed many poems, hymns and a large body of other writings before his death at the age of eighty-nine.

Throughout his long life, Shinran considered himself only a follower of his teacher Honen. He had no idea that he himself had founded a new tradition in Buddhism. However, the religious insights he developed took Shinran far beyond Honen, who is the founder of the Jodo tradition in Japanese Buddhism. Despite the passage of eight centuries between his time and ours, Shinran's writings and his approach to religion and life remain fresh and compelling. His is the freeing path that has been described as so simple—yet the most difficult of all difficulties for he encourages each one of us to make a choice in terms of our own life, to look honestly at our real self and the reality of our life. For himself, Shinran, *nembutsu* was the only way, but for others—"whether you choose to accept it or not, that is up to you."

There is no distinction, no discrimination, no judgmentalism, in Shinran's teachings. He exposes the sham and deception of ordinary life, and pioneers into the humbling realm of "beyond good and evil." For his followers, and for those of us today who follow the *nembutsu* path, he opens a way of life that leads to boundless spiritual freedom through the totally honest exploration of oneself and the real world that is so difficult for our ego-limited vision to perceive.

In the past century. Shinran's teachings traveled with emigrants from Japan to Hawaii, the mainland United States and to Canada. Emigrants also carried Shin Buddhism to South America. Translation of such Shin Buddhist classics as *Tannisho* into German, English, and French, stimulated an interest in Shinran's teachings in England and Europe where Shin Buddhist societies have formed in a number

of cities.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS SHINJIN?

Like countless millions over the past 800 years, I feel that my life has been enriched and transformed by Shinran's teachings. It is, as I stated earlier, from the broad perspective of my own experience that I write these chapters, but of ne-cessity a number of technical terms must be dealt with. In several areas, I have thought it essential to trace linguistic trails from Sanskrit to Chinese to Japanese, in order to clarify meanings in English. Too often, a simple translation presents a distorted and misleading view of the original. Such has been the case with *shinjin*, the term that expresses the essence of Shin Buddhism. *Shinjin* has on occasion been translated as "faith" but to use that English word without considerable further explanation is inadequate as well as potentially misleading. I propose that, like *nirvana* and *nembutsu*, *shinjin* become one of those Buddhist terms adopted without translation, as is, into the English vocabulary.

Buddhism cannot be grasped by the analytical logic of the west. Therefore, I wish to tackle the essential question what is *shinjin*? —by first explaining what *shinjin* is not. Here is where the linguistic trail-tracing must begin. In Japanese, there are three expressions which can all be approximately translated by the English word "faith." These three—*shinrai*, *shinko*, and *shinjin*—share the common root of shin, "to believe."

Shinrai, the first of the three possible Japanese translations of "faith," means to "depend on", or "to use." It expresses a belief that does not have a religious context but is used rather in the area of secular relationships such as, for example, my assuming something is going to be the way it is even when I don't really know—like my assumption today that I will be alive tomorrow. This kind of belief is based on my condition now, at this moment. Based on my wellness

today, there is a high probability that I will continue to live on tomorrow. However, if I am ill, that probability is not so high after all. The "knowing" factor is minimal in this kind of believing. Rather, we believe in terms of what we think we can project. So, in many of our human relationships we experience difficulty in believing that these really are what they seem to be, especially at first encounter. With frequency, and familiarity, some kind of understanding is established and it is then that we believe in terms of what we feel more certain about.

Shinko, the second expression translatable as "faith" is more of a religious term. During Shinran's time, many of his contemporaries—his teacher Honen, Dogen who was the founder of Soto Zen, and Nichiren, another Kamakura religious reformer, all used *shinko*. However, Shinran himself always used *shinjin*. In dissecting *shinko* linguistically to trace its meanings, we find that to the root of *shin*, "to believe," is added a character "*ko* " which in this instance is also read *aogu*—"to look up to." For example, in Shinto, the god you believe in is looked up to. In Japanese, the words for 'god' and 'above' are hominyms, expressed in the Chinese character read "*kami*"—god, but a character that often was read "above"or "on top of, and thus the implication that what is "on top" or "above" is "looked up to." The believer neither knows nor questions whether the god which he "looks up to" exists or not. This is not a belief in which intellectual, rational, or scientific evidence is important. In *shinko*, it is because we do *not* know that we believe. When Christianity began to establish itself in Japan one hundred years ago, the word "faith" in the Bible was translated as *shinko*. This aptly translates the Christian belief that God is in heaven and therefore spatially "above" or "on top of" the believer.

Shinjin is totally different from either *shinko* or *shinrai* in that it has no intimation whatsoever of "looking up to" but expresses a condition of trust in Amida Buddha and his Vow to save all beings everywhere at all times. In this entrusting there is no subject, no object, no "I believe in something." It is an entrusting relating to the

Sanskrit word prasada, which describes a condition that is very calm, still, pure. *Cittaprasada* is "the mind and heart which is clear and pure," translated in the Chinese text as *joshin*, "clear or pure mind."

Shinran chose *shinjin* as the word more adequately carrying his intended meaning of "the truth of one's heart and mind in a clear and pure way." Here "pure" is to be carefully understood not as moral purity in the puritanical sense, but as the purity that is the result of non-calculation and non-ego. It is at the point where the pure, clear mind (*cittaprasada*) becomes my condition that the *shinjin* of Shinran's teachings becomes manifest. Thus *shinjin* is neither "faith" in a secular nor in the commonly held religious sense of the English word.

My interpretations of *shinjin* as it was used by Shinran is that its meaning has two aspects: that of "realizing" or "knowing" as well as the implicit aspect of truth or reality. It is "to know the heart and mind" as well as "the heart and mind that is true and real." This "knowing" is a special implication, the "knowing" that in Sanskrit is expressed by the word *prajna*, the Buddhist wisdom that is the dynamic of *shinjin*. To know one's heart and mind refers to the working of *prajna*, the wisdom that brings about "the true mind and heart." This is not a dualism but a whole in which *prajna* and "true mind and heart" (*cittaprasada*) are descriptions, one of the function and the other of the essence of *shinjin*.

Cittaprasada was, in the Sanskrit texts, used synonomousy with *samadhi*, the state where the heart and mind being calm, truth or reality, can be penetrated. In other words, *cittaprasada* refers to the ability to "see the Buddha," to *satori*—to be awakened and to be born in the home of Tathagata, the home of the Buddha.

As we interpret *shinjin* in this light, we begin to comprehend its breadth and depth. *Shinjin* embodies the wisdom which *cittaprasada* expresses: the mind which is clear and pure, the ability

to "see the Buddha," and to be born into the home of the Buddha.

At this point, we come to the necessity of understanding the nature of Buddhist wisdom.

CHAPTER THREE

BUDDHIST WISDOM

Once again, as with *shinjin* in the preceding chapter, to understand what Buddhist wisdom *is* can best be approached by explaining what it is *not*. At this point, it is fruitful to examine in terms of human experience the three kinds of "knowing" which the English word "wisdom" can represent.

The first of these, "knowledge," is based on what is usually called objectivity, the "knowing" of an object which stands outside of oneself and which, upon analyzing, we can understand. This is the scientific approach, in which we are all trained to view objects standing in relation to ourselves. In scientific knowledge, the subject—which is myself— is not the focus of attention. Even in psychology the mind is viewed as an *object* to be analyzed quite apart from the whole mind-heart-body of which the mind is but one aspect. Indeed, scientific knowledge so objectifies the world around us, *including ourselves*, that in this kind of "knowing," we become an "it."

The other two kinds of "knowing" are quite different. One is a common-sense "knowing" that emerges from our daily experience, a "knowing" that we expect everyone to have. It is a wisdom based not on scientific analysis but on human experience. There is a Japanese proverb that says, "Those who lose really win. Those who fail are victorious." This kind of wisdom infers it's not good to win just to be winning. When we lose, we sometimes become winners. This is a worldly wisdom, based on "give and take." In the context of daily human affairs, this kind of wisdom takes into account the feelings. It is a wisdom born of many experiences in life, a wisdom not immediately graspable by children. It is not fully subjective, for this wisdom born of experience is always in relation to the object as well.

It is the third, quite different kind of wisdom that is what we mean when we talk about Buddhist wisdom, the wisdom that, in Shinran's view, is the dynamic through which *shinjin* is established. This is a "knowing" that stands in sharp contrast to the "knowing" of science and the "knowing" of common-sense. The focus is "deeply" rooted in the subject, a "depth" referring to the dimension of our human potential for evil, a potential unlimited in our life. This existential depth is expressed in Japanese by *bonno*, another word which it would be well to transpose as is into the English vocabulary.

In his perception of *bonno* as the profound depths of the self, Shinran is not speaking from a scientific nor from a common-sense point of view. Neither is his a psychological perception. Rather, he speaks from the dimension of Buddhist wisdom, which is acutely aware of this aspect of existence. The important difference in the emphasis of Buddhist wisdom is that it is neither subjective *nor* objective. The total self, freed from any split of subject-object differentiation, is involved.

In Chapter Two of *Tannisho*, the slim volume that is the great religious classic written by Shinran's follower Yuienbo, Shinran is quoted as saying "Hell is my only home." This is a statement of the workings of Buddhist wisdom, the wisdom of "deep" heart and mind, with "deep" here referring to existential depth. This wisdom does not simply look outwardly to see things objectively. In "Hell is my only home," Shinran looks inward to the limitless inner depths of his *bonno* in order to come to truly know himself. When he says "hell is my only home," he is talking about the deep mind that undergirds the existential reality of the way we all live. His *shinjin*, which we too can experience, is based on this kind of wisdom, an awakening in which one comes to know totally what one is.

For example, the world in which we live is the world in which we die. This is reality. Yet, in the everyday world we seldom see this essential condition in which our subconscious depths are rooted. In

Buddhism, it is not *in spite of* our constantly "falling into hell" but *because of* this condition that we are surrounded, sustained, embraced in the boundless compassion of Amida Buddha. Buddhism does not have the reward or punishment judgmentalism of the Christian religion. In Buddhism, the end of life does not necessarily mean going to hell or to Pure Land. In fact, our "falling into hell" is crucial to an appreciation of the Buddhist world of awakening in this life, here and now, at this very moment. This critical awareness, developed and taught by Shinran at a profound existential level, is succinctly expressed in his "Hell is my only home."

Shinran's twenty years of monastic practice on Mt. Hiei were mainly at Yogawa, the place where Genshin, an eleventh century religious teacher and writer, has also once studied and practiced. Genshin's writings made such a strong impression on Shinran that in the *Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho* he named Genshin as one of the seven patriarchs through whom he traces the spiritual lineage of the *nembutsu* teaching, back to Sakyamuni Buddha.

Genshin's major work was *Ojoyoshu—Essentials for Birth*, the story of a man falling into hell. It has been compared to that later western work, Dante's *Inferno*. As Dante did, Genshin gives a vivid description of the various levels of hell. For Genshin however, the phrase "bound for hell" expresses symbolically the experience of one who has awakened to the realization of continuously creating karmic evil, and who perceives the bottomless depths of his own potential for evil. In the sutras, the statement: "hell is at the bottom of this great earth" symbolizes the hell we create in the depths of our conscious and unconscious minds. It is this reality which Genshin depicts in his classic work.

Genshin's masterpiece portrays a man who, in his extreme suffering, pleads forgiveness of a demon whose recurrent answer is, "To plead with me is no use. I can't do a thing about it now. Why didn't you state your situation truly while you were still a human

being?" This theme of question and reply, "There's no use asking me now," and "you created your own hell while you were still alive," runs throughout the work. The first part is a detailed description of hell in which, according to Genshin, there are eight levels. One works from the first level and descends down into the eighth level—which he describes as the hell of unlimited suffering.

The first level is the one resulting from committing the slightest evil, such as the killing of fish or chickens. In this life, according to Genshin, we kill animals and then, when we die, the devils in hell come after us and chop us up until a cool wind comes across and makes us whole again. This process happens over and over. The depth of this first stage of hell is described as being 1000 *yojanas* (one *yojana* being the distance of about nine miles or as far as an ox can travel between sunrise and sunset).

From this, the various levels descend to the eighth hell of unlimited suffering, that of persons who have killed their mother and father or, as Genshin phrased it, "taken life away from father and mother." Among those who fall into this hell are those who vainly live on the donations from people. Here, Genshin is talking about himself and through this he tries to clarify the direction into which he sees himself as falling. The depth of this eighth level is described as falling headfirst for 2,000 years to arrive completely into this unlimited suffering which, to Genshin, is his own karmic state. This use of the term "falling" into hell does not refer to a physical fall, but rather to an awareness of the absolute depth of the hell we are all falling *into in the unlimited depths of our unconscious or deep mind*. Thus what Genshin was writing about was the awakening to one's own limitless falling into hell as being the very condition essential for birth in the Buddha Land.

This extraordinary Buddhist view is likewise concisely expressed by Shinran in *Tannisho*, Chapter Three (Taitetsu Unno translation): "Even the good person attains birth in the Buddha Land, how much more so the evil person. But the people of the world constantly say,

'Even the evil person attains birth how much more so the good person.' Although this appears to be sound at first glance, it goes against the will of the Primal Vow of Other Power. The reason is that since the person of self-power, being conscious of doing good, lacks the thought of entrusting himself completely to Other Power, he is not the focus of the Primal Vow of Amida. But when he turns over self-power and entrusts himself to Other Power, he attains birth in the land of true fulfillment."

Shinran then goes on to say, "The Primal Vow was established out of deep compassion for us who cannot become freed from the bondage of birth-and-death through any religious practice, due to the abundance of blind passion. Since its basic intention is to effect the enlightenment of such an evil one, the evil person who entrusts himself to Other Power is truly the one who attains birth in the Buddha Land. Therefore, even the good person attains birth, how much more the evil person!"

In the Buddhist world of awakening, those who have the confidence to fall into hell—that is, to see the existential reality of their *bonno*—are thus able to experience the very joy that they are going to the "Pure Land, "that spiritual realm of reality itself from which the workings of compassion are manifested. Again, translation is acutely important. "Pure Land" does not have any connotation of geographical place or location. It is a spiritual realm, the world of the Buddha, which manifests the great wisdom and compassion of Amida (*prajna* and *karuna*).

Those who do not really see hell interwoven into their lives do not really see the Pure Land. In other words, those who do not see hell in the depths of their own minds are really falling into it. Genshin had this full consciousness of his own evil, and Shinran likewise. So too did an old man in my village temple who used to say, "*Do-sun! Do-sun!*" over and over, an exhortation reminding himself and all those inside and outside the temple of this existential reality.

Do-sun is not translatable. It is one of those onomatopbetic Japanese words whose sounds convey the meaning. I wonder. Is there a like word in English whose sound and meaning are that of falling into hell?

CHAPTER FOUR

GREAT-SELF AND NON-EGO

In both the common-sense way of knowing and in scientific knowledge, there is always a dichotomy, a split between subject and object. As noted in the preceding chapter, the emphasis is usually in the direction of the object, including the "self" as object in such behavioral sciences as psychology. *Prajna*, Buddhist wisdom, is quite otherwise. While there is an emphasis in the direction of the self, *prajna* is actually the "knowing" in which the self gets to know itself as it really is. In this there is no split, no dichotomy, no tension. I look within at myself but the self that I am seeing is, in the Buddhist wisdom of *prajna*, not a subject of analysis. "I" do not become a separate "thing."

As an example, in the common-sense way of knowing I know that someday—maybe even today— I will die. I understand this, but at the same time the "I" that "understands" has no desire to die. When I reflect in such a common-sense or in the objective, scientific way, I don't grasp myself in my totality. My reflection is only partial. I see only parts of myself. Or, to approach the difference from another angle, in terms of my *bonno* — the unlimited capacity for evil in my subconscious depths—I know I am not a good man but this "I" who thinks he is aware of this still harbors somewhere within "me" the thought that "I am good." In parts of myself, as in thinking of my past, I can say that "I" am bad, but the "I" looking at those evil parts of my life which I condemn, this "I" looks at parts of myself which are also "I" and which I objectify. What "I" see about "myself" in this way is only partial seeing, filled with the tension of subject-object dichotomy

In Buddhist wisdom, *prajna*, the wisdom through which *shinjin* is established, subject and object are brought into a unifying whole. What I am and what I think about myself is totally whole, totally

complete. There is an interpenetration of the subject (all that I see inwardly and outwardly in the world) with the object (all that I am in being seen)—thus a simultaneous realization of interdependence and oneness. In his realization, subject and object having become one, the tension of dichotomy is released. I am then able to see all things are objects and at the same time, that all things are subjects. The self that is able to see that all things are subjects is "Great Self." From the perspective of the Great Absolute Self, when we eat other life we see that we are killing our own life and descending into hell. The primary focus of Buddhism is to waken to this basic contradiction of life: that we kill in order to survive. Some of us may have the attitude: "we pay for it and therefore we may consume it." The Buddhist attitude however is that even the life of one egg is equal in life-value to that of my own life. In this attitude, the choice to take other life in order to survive is something I can make based on my awareness of the equal value of all life. Originally, in India, the focus was on not taking the lives of animals, but gradually this evolved to the stage where all things in existence were included into what is called life. The realization developed that man in his egocentricity destroys all these in order to survive.

Man's historical process has shown that the world has developed in material ways through his own ingenuity. He has employed science and technology but yet has not reached a point of security and happiness through these developments. Thus it is important for us to look at life from the perspective of Buddhist wisdom, seeing that all life is interrelated and has the same value as one's own life. "I" am included in all things as object and all things are included in "me "as subject. The world and myself are not separated, not divided, not different, but share a natural oneness.

A Zen Master was once told by a student that he was afraid of death. The fearful student asked whether there was a way to escape dying. The Zen Master's answer was, "When it comes time to die, it's okay to die. This is the only way to escape death" (i.e., to avoid the fear of death). This reply was made from the standpoint of

non-ego: all things are interrelated. It is from this all-object viewpoint that flowers bud, blossom and die, that human beings are born, live and die. All have the same weight, same value—so why the tears? All things have the same value as objects in the natural world.

In the natural world of things-as-they-are, that which is true and real—life—is not beautiful but stark, severe, awesome. How simple and yet how difficult to see that my being "me" is so in exactly the way the rock is a rock, the tree is a tree, the flower is a flower. I am one with all of these and with the droplet of water that as water can flow, can fall as rain, can freeze as steam or fog, be itself and yet at the same time be one drop in the vast ocean or one infinitely small and changing component of a cloud passing an unseen horizon in the sky.

To live in the world of non-ego and at the same time to live in the world in which all objects are equal as subjects is to live in the Buddha-world. The Buddhist sense of all-self means all things have an equal value of life and are equal in value to my own life. This is the Shin Buddhist way of "seeing," the Buddhist wisdom described by the Sanskrit word *prajna*.
Many years ago a Shin Buddhist layman, a man of *shinjin* named Genza, and his friend Naoji, both in their eighties, became ill. Naoii still had an unresolved problem and asked his daughter to take this to Genza. This the daughter did, repeating to Genza her father's statement of his problem: "I am
afraid to die!"

The answer sent back by Genza was, "Naoji, why don't you just die. It's okay to die. I'm one with you." This is the attitude of non-ego which is at the same time the way of the Great Self. It is an awareness rooted in the acitivity of *prajna*—an activity called "awakening" or "realization."

Flowers bloom, wither, and die. Man is born, lives, and dies. This is

how things are. This is true and real. And it is in this profound dimension of existential reality that we concretely experience shiniin as religious experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LOGIC OF *PRAJNA*

Sakyamuni Buddha was the first to realize this way of looking at life through the eye of wisdom, of Great-Self, of non-ego. In the subsequent history of Buddhism, the process of this realization took two main streams: the monastic life in which meditation is central and the way of the ordinary lay person in which *nembutsu* becomes central.

In our everyday lives we tend not to see or think about things other than in terms of a subject-object dichotomy, a separation of subject and object. Our assumption in this is that separation implies difference. Only when the dichotomy is negated do we come to see that all subjects are objects, and all objects are subjects. In this view, which is possible from the standpoint of Buddhist wisdom where all is subject (great mind or great self) and all is object (egolessness, non-ego, without permanent substance), simultaneously all these are equal. Subject equals object. Object equals and is the same as subject. Each is part of, and one with, the other. D.T. Suzuki expressed this as 'A= not A.'

The level of dualism where the split of subject-object dichotomy occurs is the level of *samsara* (illusion). It is when one is enabled to see from the eyes of the enlightened one that the split vanishes. The illusion which is *samsara* is then perceived as in itself the same as enlightenment or oneness. In fact, it is often said that in Buddhism, *samsara* is in itself nirvana, enlightenment. Buddhist wisdom (*prajna*) has this power and ability to make two contradictory poles (such as 'A' and 'not A'; *samsara* and nirvana) become as one.

Dr. D.T. Suzuki's 'A' equals 'not A' was devised as a formula to express this activity that makes two contradictory poles able to be

seen as one. However, it is a formula in which the 'equals' is not at all the usual simple kind. *Samsara* ('A') equals nirvana ('not A') *when one is enabled to see with the eyes of the Buddha*. This is the 'equals' of the dynamic experience of *shinjin*. The struggle in our lives is how to work through to become awakened to this.

In this process of awakening, Shinran says the Buddha Dharma, the teaching, is like a finger pointing to the moon. That moon is itself the world of *shinjin*. Do not mistake the finger for the moon! In other words, do not mistake the teachings for reality itself. No matter how good a talk or a book may be, they are only like fingers pointing to the moon, leading us to the moon. Ultimately, each of us must see the moon with our own eyes. *Prajna*, the dynamic activity of *shinjin*, makes this possible.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the focus is on *prajna*, (which is a synonym for *satori* —enlightenment,) and also on *prajna*'s inseparable companion and component, *karuna*—compassion. It can be said that *karuna* has two aspects: to mourn and to cry—not the cry that comes from a child but the cry of anguish that comes out of the activity of deep sorrow. Buddhist wisdom has this aspect of the ability to see things as they are in this world, and at the same time to feel great sorrow for our human condition—a sorrow expressed as Great Compassion.

In Shin Buddhism, the Pure Land (Jodo) is the realm from which the workings of this compassion are manifested. The ceaseless activity of Great Compassion working throughout my life is a process like the maturing of pearls in an oyster shell. Just as the oyster is taking in the piece of the shell that is part of him and yet not part of him, so *karuna* (Great Compassion) is taking my life into its sorrowing embrace. We can say that as the oyster in its own dynamism 'cries' because it is painful to take in a foreign substance, so, as I am taken in and transformed by Great Compassion, great sorrow is expressed at my human condition. In other words, the Buddha is always sensitive, crying, moving to embrace me in the world of

samsara, taking in and transforming me from a being of delusion into a being of enlightenment.

CHAPTER SIX

HELL AND THE PURE LAND

With total sincerity, Shinran told his follower Yuienbo, the author of *Tannisho*, "Hell is my only destination." For me, personally, this too is my realization. The one path I have plunges me into hell and yet, at the same time, into birth in the Pure Land, to which the experience of *shinjin* awakens me. Shinran expresses the existential sadness of falling into hell, but, at the same time he expresses his joy about going to the Pure Land. Thus he says, with equal conviction, "Hell is my only destination" and "I am walking to the Pure Land".

Again, these are the contradictory poles of 'A' equals 'not A', the formula used by Dr. Suzuki to express the logic of Buddhist wisdom. The 'equals' that welds these contradictory poles of Hell and the Pure Land is the very point of *nembutsu*, the point of all-connectedness at which one is enabled to experience the reality of non-dualism. To repeat and emphasize the content of the previous chapter, this is not logical in terms of western logic, but in the way of contradictions, the logic of paradox, a way which Shinran uses freely because he has passed through a depth of experience that unifies the contradictions in his life. To explain in terms of example, there is a haiku that reads:

"*Matsu kage no kuraki wa tsuki no hikari kana*."

This translates as "the starkness of the shadow of the pine tree at night comes from the light of the moon" or, "the stronger the moon radiates its light, the darker the shadow." This poem illustrates the two-fold aspect of Shin Buddhist awakening. The shadow refers to myself, living in hell, living in the everyday world of illusion, ignorance and suffering that is *samsara*. The moon refers to my walking in the light of Amida Buddha's wisdom and compassion—to

my being made able to experience and appreciate myself as I truly am, the world as it truly is, in the boundless freedom of nirvana, of non-ego, of oneness, of Great Self.

The meaning of being born in the Pure Land is that you are going to move away from Hell. But only those who have fallen into hell are going to be saved to move towards the Pure Land! Therefore the statement that Pure Land "equals" Hell forms the very structure of *shinjin*. I, the being creating hell in my life, am the same being who is saved by Amida. The more we listen to the teachings and our awareness deepens, the more we cannot help but awaken to this two-fold aspect of reality in which we live. The question that then arises is, can those who have experienced *shinjin*—who have awakened to this "equals" of *nembutsu*-be called Buddhas?

Shinran called *shinjin* "wisdom." Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen, also made this same equation. Yet, though he and Shinran share the same meaning in this, Dogen places the emphasis on the side of the Buddha, whereas Shinran emphasizes the side of ordinary beings. Zen views wisdom as "who the Buddha is," while Shin views wisdom as "who I am." The reason for this difference is that Dogen's path was that of the monk. His was the realization gained on *becoming* a *Buddha*. This is why Zen's emphasis is *on the side of the Buddha*. Since Shinran's dimension is the common ordinary life of *samsara*, where illusions are spun, his emphasis is on wisdom, *on this side, the side of ordinary beings*.

In Zen, meditation is of primary importance, based on the premise that "I am already a Buddha and only the Pure Land is my destination. Since I am already a Buddha, my practice is a practice that goes on throughout my lifetime." For Shinran, however, the starting point is that he is an ordinary hell-creating being, that "awakening" is made possible only through the Other Power of the Vow (*Hongan*) to save such beings. In the light of Amida's Vow, Shinran becomes able to truly see himself as an ordinary hell-creating being. He emphasizes this realization, this awakening,

seeing Pure Land as the destination *coming to him*, the being heavy with karmic evil, who is awakened and embraced by the Vow. The crucial point of Shin Buddhism is that *the very being who is falling into hell is the one who is born in the Pure Land*. Thus the person of *shinjin* is not a Buddha but, Shinran says, *equal to* or *the same as* a Buddha. The reason for this distinction is that his emphasis is *on the being*, not on the Buddha.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CAUSES AND CONDITIONS

Vasubandhu, the second patriarch through whom Shinran traced the spiritual lineage of *nembutsu* teachings, was a fourth century Indian thinker who said there are two forms of faith. The first he described as that of firm reliance on the Three Treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha. This, he says, is the threshold for the second form which he called "true" faith, that of *cittaprasada*—the lucid, clear purity of mind brought about by the workings of *prajna*.

Even when one views this in the natural way of commonsense, there is apparent here a process that works through from the starting point of the Three Treasures to the culmination of *cittaprasada*. In Shinran's writings and teachings, we find this same basic approach. The starting point for Shinran is to encounter and believe in the teaching, and to encounter and believe in the person who transmits that teaching. Both what is said, and who says it, must become credible and totally dependable.

At Buddhist Study Center's summer session, every morning we chanted *Shoshinge*, Shinran's *Hymn of True Faith*, which is a concise, simplified summary of his teachings. The first of its two parts brings out the essence of Sakyamuni Buddha's teachings as expressed in the Larger Pure Land Sutra. Towards the end of this section there is a line which says, "Believe in the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha." The latter half of *Shoshinge* is a summary of Shin's seven patriarchs (including Vasubandhu) from India, China, and Japan. The hymn gives the essence of their teachings, with the refrain: "Believe only in the teachings of these seven patriarchs." In saying this, Shinran is not referring to the "true faith" that is the awakening gained in *cittaprasada* but to the threshold of belief that, as Vasubandhu made clear, is the starting point for the process that leads to *cittaprasada*.

What is important is that one begin at the starting point of the process—listening to the teachings—in order to ultimately experience *shinjin* and oneself become part of its true meaning. To take off at this starting point, to encounter the *nembutsu* teaching in one's life, means that one meets the person who manifests the teaching in his or her own life. Such an encounter can come through direct listening to that teacher, or through "listening" by hearing or reading the teacher's written words. In *Tannisho*, Yuienbo describes such a good teacher as a person "with whom our spiritual destinies are bound." In Japanese, the word for this is *zenchishiki*, "a good friend of the way," a word which connotes a spiritual guide and gives the importance of the personal dimension in Shinranran's teachings.

Rennyo Shonin, a direct descendant of Shinran, was a great Shin Buddhist teacher and leader of the fifteenth century. His experience of frustration in trying to transmit the teachings to those who literally "did not like the Buddha" led him to develop the concept of "past good"—*shukuzen*— as being a cause-and-condition without which he felt he could not sway even his wife to turn to the teachings. This condition is one of the doctrinal points which has led to much discussion among Shin Buddhist scholars over the years.

"Past good" does not mean past *good* but rather various conditions created for us by parents, teachers, good friends who have made it possible for us to listen to the teachings and take them into our lives. We ourselves, by ourselves, do not create good but rather one bumbling path after another. *Shukuzen* is different from Shinran's term, *shukugo*— past karma. Past karma means to be able to see where one is now in relation to the past. Past good implies that in one's past there exists some kind of condition that results in the effect of one's being able to listen and take in the teachings.

Shukuzen was the first of the five conditions Rennyo proposed as leading to birth in the Buddha Land. The second was that one

encounter a spiritual teacher, a "good friend of the way." A third condition is *komyo*— the Buddha's Light, a symbolic expression for the teachings. The fourth is *myogo*, the Buddha's Name, *nembutsu*. The fifth is *shinjin*.

To me this first condition of *shukuzen* is not a problem of any great importance. I feel rather that in such an expression Rennyo sought to contrast those people with this condition, and those without. He defined those with "past good" as those who have been able to truly hear the teachings. Out of his personal experience, in his description of this as a cause-and-condition, he was primarily lamenting for those who cannot listen or who, if they do listen, cannot experience *shinjin*. Conversely, for him, "past good" expressed a joy for those who can and do listen to the teachings and take them into their lives. It must be emphasized that his awareness of this came from insight gained in his trying to transmit the teachings and to interpret essential steps in the process leading to *shinjin*.

The important issue here is that there must be a starting point, that of stepping onto and moving along the path of the Buddha's teachings. To quote Alan Watts, the American writer on Zen, the truth is something that is there. You might stumble on it, but this is rare. A good teacher leads you to what by chance you might miss or mistake.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GREAT COMPASSION

In Mahayana Buddhism, an underlying premise is that all beings have the potential which, if nutured properly, will blossom into enlightenment—Buddhahood. This universality of the potential for becoming Buddha was understood as his subjective condition by the twentieth century *myokonin*(wonderously devout lay person), Saichi. "Amida's Vow is for me alone," wrote Saichi. "Everyone will be saved because this Saichi is saved." This re-statement of the underlying Mahayana premise is that of a simple layman, but Saichi's deep understanding is that others who become aware that Amida's Vow is likewise for themselves alone will also certainly be "saved"—that is, become Buddhas.

Fulfillment of this universal human potential for enlightenment is not a matter of counting numbers but, as understood by Saichi, of internal awareness on the part of each individual. In Shin Buddhism, "all beings have the potential of becoming Buddha" means that all beings in the universe are embraced and enfolded in the Great Compassion of Amida Buddha.

If we look at the karma we create in our life, we really cannot *become* Buddhas. The truth of our lives is that by our daily actions we sow the seeds that will cause us to fall into hell! The path for us to attain Buddhahood is made by *the Buddha's* actions. This being so, the very act that this path is made available to us—isn't this *karuna*, the Great Compassion of the Buddha?

The Sanskrit word *karuna* is translated in Chinese as *Daihi* which can also be literally translated in English as "Buddha's heart." For my own part, this conveys the essence of Great Compassion. The Buddha is always sorrowful, crying for me. It is as if should his eyes be fully opened, all the tears would flow out, for he is focused on

me as a being falling into hell. To awaken to this reality—that this "I" am the being creating seeds to fall into hell—is the experience of *shinjin*. Since Great Compassion is directed to this hell-bent fearsome heart of mine, how essential to nurture the conditions by which I can awaken to the awesome reality of my true nature: my limitless potential for evil which in itself is my "salvation." It is not that *I* have created or can create the seeds of Buddhahood. If someone asked the question as to whether I am creating merit through which I can attain Buddhahood, my honest answer would have to be in the negative. Our deep rooted evil is such that if the conditions are made possible, we don't know what we may do. Often, in reading of violence or watching violence on television, I reflect that I, too, have the potential to kill.

Since Great Compassion is directed to our fearsome hell-bent hearts, how essential it is for us, on our part, to nurture the conditions by which we can become awakened to this reality that is ourselves. Thus the importance of meeting a good teacher on the way, for no matter how profound a teaching or sutra may be, if it is not manifested through such a person, its meaning is difficult to grasp.

Nagarjuna, an early teacher of Buddhism in India, and another of those whom Shinran acknowledges as his patriarch in the lineage of *nembutsu* teachings, says that to tread the Buddha Way is like crossing the river. First you must enter the river and keep walking until you reach the other shore. Likewise, to walk the Buddha's path one must enter and continue onward entrusting that this is the path of True and Real Life. In the person-to-person encounter of those who listen to the Dharma, the belief in the teaching starts, is exchanged, or shared. After this entry, in order to move along the Buddha path there must as well be the strong wish or desire to do so, in order that we can come to see what the teacher we encounter is expressing in his or her life. Great effort is necessary to deepen our awareness of this process and in Shin Buddhism, the crux of this effort is listening, an immediate, direct listening with one's heart,

one's whole being. Shinran says to listen to oneself, which is really difficult, for his meaning of "to listen" is to awaken to and manifest *shinjin* in one's life.

Shinjin is not a speculation or thinking about things, but a joyful experience. For us to meet through these words and mutually share and "listen" to the Dharma is one aspect of *shinjin*. The gradual awareness that comes through the activity of the Buddha's Great Compassion grows through our listening to the Dharma not in conceptual terms, but in terms of our own lives. It is a gradual awareness that, indeed, we are beings sowing seeds for our falling into hell. It is this awareness that shows we are in the process of *shinjin*, and it is through this process true awakening becomes possible.

CHAPTER NINE

NEMBUTSU

"*Nem*" (or "*nen*") has a two-fold meaning. One is "to think of." The other is "to recite." *Nembutsu* therefore means "I think and I utter or call Amida's Name."

In the ordinary meaning, this would imply that the direction of the calling is from me to the Buddha, but in the world of awakening to *shinjin*, there is a complete reversal. The direction is from Amida to me! My saying of the *nembutsu* is *not* merely my saying—it is at the same time *Amida's calling to me!* Thus, Amida is not the object I am calling but the subject who thinks of and calls me.

This is an analysis still within the realm of objective rational explanation. It does not translate the personal experiencing of *shinjin* in one's life in which this other direction of the *nembutsu* becomes real. In order to experience this change of direction, to truly move into the world of *shinjin*, one must take the first step into the world of listening to the Dharma. When this happens, I and the Dharma become of one essence, "of one body."

In Japanese, "of one body" is *ittai* rather than the word *gattai*, which means "combining." "Of one body" (*ittai*) is not a unification where the identity of both are gone. *It is the two coming together and still remaining what they are*. *Gattai* expresses the coming together of a husband and wife, *ittai* that of a parent and child. In terms of the latter, a parent is not a parent without a child. There would be no children in this world without parents. Yet, these two, although they are interdependent, have separate karmas. Unlike the *gattai* of marriage which may end in divorce, there is no split possible in the *ittai* of parent and child. No condition can alter that the parent is a parent, nor that the child is a child.

The Larger Sukhavati sutra relates that kalpas ago Amida made his original vow not to become a Buddha until all beings everywhere are saved. Yet, in the same sutra, the statement is made that Amida has already become a Buddha. This infers that his attaiment of Buddhahood was possible only because all beings are already saved. Amida is *not yet* a Buddha in the sense of his compassionate weeping for the salvation of all suffering beings. Yet, for many who have died and are born in the Pure Land, he *is* Amida Buddha per se. But my Buddha and your Buddha are *not yet* the Buddha, so the question is: what am I seeking in life? Is Amida Buddha my Buddha?

In the "of one body" sense expressed in the word *ittai*, Amida is increasingly, unceasingly working to make his life one with you, one with me. Thus, although he is originally a Buddha, he is at the same time *not* a Buddha because he is working for the salvation—the enlightenment— of each individual, for the deepest wish of each one of us. It is in this sense that he is not yet a Buddha for you, for me.

How do we come to understand this unceasing working of the Buddha to make his life one with yours, one with mine? This is an understanding that is a total apprehension of mind and body. It is for this very reason Amida is shedding great tears for the sorrow I am in. When I experience this, it is the realization that becomes the awakening to my human condition, to his compassion, to the world of what is True and Real, all of which are so difficult for me to realize that I am already a part.

It is in this way that my *nembutsu* is Amida's calling out to me, and that Amida and I are of one body, one essence, *ittai*. Though Amida has become a Buddha in past time beyond our conception, as he works for my salvation he has not yet fulfilled his becoming a Buddha. The logic here is again that of 'A equals not A,' the logic based on the wisdom of *shinjin*. This is the world of awakening in which the *nembutsu* is uttered, the world that opens to us as we tread the path of Shin Buddhism.

In my own life, my own process, I was past the age of forty before I could really utter *nembutsu*, before I myself could experience this world of Buddhist awakening. Yet, it was a process that went back to my childhood, and my experience of having lost my mother at the age of thirteen. It was February when she died, a cold time of the year. As she lay dying, she had said she wanted to see me. When I got home from school, my aunt took me to see her, but her eyes were already closed. I called to her, tugged at her, but she died before me, and from her lips the *nembutsu* flowed at the moment of death. Her dying, and the experience of her death, made me think of life, so after the war, one of the big motivating factors in my going to Kyoto to seek the meaning of Shinran was my mother's utterance of the *nembutsu* as she lay dying. In the dead end I reached at War's end, I was able to go to Kyoto because of this sad but powerful incident of my mother's death still remaining a strong motivation for me. I went to Kyoto to seek the meaning of Shinran in the *nembutsu*, impelled by the love for my mother—rather than being drawn by the *nembutsu* itself.

As she lay dying, I had called but she had not answered as I wanted desperately. I wanted her at death to call *my* name and not the Buddha's name. In so many ways I felt alone, abandoned by my mother. Since I'd entered elementary school she had been ill with tuberculosis and my recollections of her were of her illness. It was out of my deep need of love for her and my loneliness for her, I was drawn to study the *nembutsu* she had uttered as she died.

In Kyoto I entered Ryukoku University and began my studies of Shin Buddhism. Through good teachers and students, I was encouraged to pursue my studies. After twenty years of study, at age forty, the *nembutsu* that I'd heard from my dying mother's lips took root in my life as I realized the passage in *Tannisho*, "In this world of impermanence and burning house... only the *nembutsu* is true and real."

The fact that I had called my mother and that she didn't reply, made me think that for the child what seems really true is the parent just as, for the parent, the child seems real. But the *Tannisho*, through this passage, struck me with the realization that even this relationship is unreliable, impermanent, and that transcending this vain and empty relationship is the *nembutsu*. Now, reflecting back, I can see that the *nembutsu* on my mother's lips as she died showed this. In the end, the ultimate is to return to the *nembutsu*. Thirty years after her death, twenty years after I started studying, I was able to truly touch and be open to the *nembutsu*.

CHAPTER TEN

WHERE IS THE BUDDHA?

In the preceding chapter, we saw that true *nembutsu* comes from the direction of the Buddha. When a small child asks, "where is the Buddha?", either we point to the statue on the altar, or we pick up a flower, and say that this flower expresses the life of the Buddha. Neither of these answers is wrong, but neither makes clear the deeper implication that even the Name, Amida Buddha, is but a symbol pointing to the True and Real Life flowing through our existence. In terms of karma and Shinran's view of life, we create our own hell. In each of our hearts is all of hell itself. But, at the very point where hell resides, this is where the Buddha resides. Yet, to say only "The Buddha is in my heart" can mislead one in terms of the reality of his existence.

Dogen says we are already Buddhas and this is the reason we practice. In Shin Buddhism, especially with children, we speak of the Buddha as being in the temple because in doing so we avoid misleading the young who do not as yet practice bringing out the Buddha from within. As we mature, and begin to perceive the reality of our existence, to see into the depths of our hell-bent hearts, in this inner world through the activity of *prajna*, the negative and positive polarities of our life become one. It is only then that the reality of "where the Buddha is" becomes our existential reality. In Japanese, this is referred to as the area of *shinjitsu*— truth, the truth which is the foundation of *shinjin*.

In his writings, Shinran uses *shinshin*— "True Mind"—interchangeably with *shinjin*. *Shin* (meaning belief) and *jin* (mind and heart) is the same as, or equivalent to the two characters that each express a different *shin*, that meaning "truth" and that meaning "mind and heart." To reiterate, Shinran's "faith," the *shinjin* of Shin Buddhism, the point where the Buddha becomes *my*

Buddha, is not a matter of relationship between the believer and what is believed in but has a deeper dimension of the truth itself.

In the Smaller Sukhavati sutra there is the expression "coming together to meet in one place," referring to the Pure Land. People who live in *shinjin* are always able to meet, truly able to meet each other in this here and now. To be able to say "let's meet again" with this meaning is made possible by the power of truth, for the essence of the life of the person of *shinjin* is rooted in this True and Real Life. I would like to live within this world where such expressions are made possible to say to our loved ones, to say even to ourselves.

"Let's meet again," were the dying words of my father. Isn't this the kind of expression, at my own dying moment, that I'd like to leave with those who love me? I thought of this again recently, at Berkeley, when I met an elderly lady who was devout in the *nembutsu*. She was an invalid, a stroke patient, eighty years old, living alone. She brought a paper and brush and asked me to write something. I wrote, "*NamuAmida Butsu*. Let's meet again." She then said, "I'll be waiting for you!"

I was deeply affected by these words coming out so innocently from her—words that came straight out of the dimension of reality itself. I feel it is Truth sustaining her, making these words come out of her in a totally natural, noncontriving way. Such a woman does not need to ask, "Where is the Buddha?" She knows.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SHINJIN

In Buddhism as a whole, faith is *cittaprasada*, the pellucid and clear mind. As we have seen, in Shin Buddhism, the particular word expressing this is *shinjin*,joyful faith. It is often said that *cittaprasada* is like a flower opening up whereby one sees the Buddha. When one experiences this ultimate truth in one's life, one enters "into the house of the Tathagata." Thus *shinjin* equals Buddha-nature, things-as-they-are-of-themselves; and Tathagata, one who has come from Suchness.

Shinran speaks of awakening to *shinjin* through experiences of this ultimate truth. The person of *shinjin*, although he is still a being creating karma that destines him for hell, has a true mind that results in his already living in the Pure Land, for in the experience of *shinjin*, one receives truth. One receives the Buddha's life into one's own life. It is in this way we say a new life is born to the person of *shinjin*. In essence, the old self dies and a new self is born. The life I received through my parents dies and the life of Amida—my spiritual parent—takes over my life. This is eloquently expressed in *myokonin* Saichi's description of experiencing *shinjin*. "My funeral is now over!" By this he means that his life is now rooted in the Buddha's life. It is in this dimension that "let's meet again" becomes so meaningful.

Shomatsu, a *myokonin* who lived 150 years ago on the island of Shikoku, was returning from a pilgrimage to Kyoto, when a violent storm came up, endangering the boat on which he was traveling. Shomatsu slept through the storm. His worried friends finally found him asleep in the hold and shook him awake. When they did so, his first words to them were: "Are we still in the world of illusion?" This kind of attitude comes only from the reality of living the life of Suchness. How to attain this for my own life is the question.

Another *myokonin*, Oseki, a woman who also lived about 150 years ago, was spiritually nurtured by a priest, Tokuryu. One day, as she was serving him tea, he asked, "Is your birth into the Pure Land clear? If you should die now, are you ready to be born in the Pure Land?"

As she held out the tea to him she simply said, "Yes, Just like this. Just as I am!"
Tokuryu replied, "Oseki! Oseki! That's wonderful!"

Thus, in Shin Buddhism, in the experiencing of *shinjin*, our salvation is established, a salvation one hundred per cent in this life. Nothing is withheld. Nothing is conditional. Nothing is postponed until after death. We have total assurance of our birth in the Buddha Land and that assurance is confirmed by the experience of *shinjin* being accompanied by the experience of a new life, an utter transformation of oneself.

In that transformation, we simply live in truth as such. It is this kind of life-the kind of life lived by Saichi and Oseki-that Shinran taught and that his teachings make possible for each one of us. In order to meet the Vow Power moving towards us, we need to be moving on the Buddha Path. Anyone can walk that path. And for the person who does so, he or she must walk it personally, alone. Whether one awakens to this or not is the problem. *Shinjin* is not like a ticket with which you reach your destination. *Shinjin* is the destination.

The person who has not awakened to *shinjin* is not saved. *Ketsu-jo*— the settledness of *shinjin*— implies that one "knows" from the deepest part of one's life, a "knowing" which is expressed from the body, for in *shinjin* we receive truth as it is and simultaneously that truth becomes our salvation. Therefore, "birth into the Pure Land at the moment of our death" means the Pure Land begins within this here and now in which we live. With regard to salvation, Shinran doesn't talk about the kind of happiness you get after you die. His

emphasis is solely on the experience of *shinjin* in this life.

I don't really know about the after-life. While I live, there is nothing to be concerned about except meeting the Buddha in my present life, encountering the teachings in my present life. What happens to me after death? I feel I can leave that up to the Buddha.

When salvation takes root in our lives, whether the Pure Land is going to be there at the end or not—all this we leave up to the Buddha to do what is best for us. This is the essence of faith that expresses itself as Amida's faith in me being realized by me with tears of contrition and a smile of gratitude. The process of our life and death occurs in the heart of the Buddha's life itself. To me, this is the meaning of being saved by the Buddha. It is a salvation here and now, right this moment, in the present.

But then, if this is so, why didn't Shinran designate the person of faith as Buddha, and this life as the Pure Land? Dogen, Nichiren, Eisai(the founder of Rinzai Zen) all proclaim one does become a Buddha in this life, and that one who is able to see with the eyes of the Buddha is already in the Pure Land. The reason Shinran did not say this is because of his hardships, his struggles in life treading the Buddha path for nearly ninety years. Through his experience, his perception of his own inner life was more truthful. He was honest in regard to his real existential condition. Thus the stark severity of his teaching.

In Buddhist tradition, Shinran was one who focused on *bonno*, the defilements of the body. The ego which is rooted in this body of ours, no matter how old we get, simply cannot be set aside, for it is rooted in these defilements. It is because of this that Shinran came to the realization he was a common ordinary being, unable to escape from his ego which is rooted in his cravings and attachments. In Buddhism, human beings are not viewed as different from other living beings. The word used in Japanese is *shujo*: *shu* meaning "many" or "numerous" and *jo* meaning "those

with consciousness." The Sanskrit word for this is *sattva*. This is basically similar to, and yet different from Darwin's theory of evolution. Scientific study looks objectively at the history of mankind through archeological finds. The Buddhist view of shujo is not a reality objectively validated by science but an insight that within the depths of our hearts we lead a life that corresponds to the most fearsome and repulsive of animals.

It was in this light that Shinran says, "My heart is like the scorpion and the snake." Outwardly, we are human beings who control our lives moralistically and ethically, but deep within each of us is an uncontrollable unconsciousness identical to the most savage primitive animals. Our ego-centered lives are rooted in such instincts and urges. The deep truth is that we are all-out for ourselves.

As he came to realize this, Shinran saw himself as nothing great, a common ordinary being, and so named himself *Gutoku-Ran*—literally, Shinran, the foolish, bald-headed one. With his keen eyes seeing into the depths of his own heart, Shinran was aware he was embraced in the compassion of the Buddha even as he was creating his own karmic hell. Yet he could also see that embraced as he was, he was not a Buddha and that his world was not the Pure Land. My thoughts are that Shinran had to carry a burden of worry and sorrow to the moment of his death—the effect of karma in his life. At his death, he was born into the Pure Land. This is my imagining, my opinion as I reflect on Shinran's death at the age of eighty-nine.

CHAPTER TWELVE

OTHER-POWER

Deeply connected to the "True Mind" is *tariki*, often translated as "Other-Power." Even those outside Shin Buddhism know this term, but there is much misconception as to its real meaning.

Tariki is that which enables me to see that my *bonno*-stuffed mind and "True Mind" are interrelated in the same way as the interrelatedness of there being no shadow without light, no light without shadow. Thus the more Shinran encountered the light oi *shinjin* in his life, the more he was able to see the darkness of himself.

What he came to understand as not his, but a gift given to him, was this realization that he is a being who cannot hear Amida, cannot hear the Dharma, is falling into hell. His *receiving* of this gift is what Shinran calls the *shinjin* of Other-Power. What is "not of me" really is already here. I don't have "True Mind" and yet it is part of me and I am part of it. In expressing his awakening to this, Shinran says, "There is no thought that penetrates it completely, no words that express it fully." In other words, surprise, surprise! it's inconceivable!

The shocking astonishment of experiencing this gift of what was not here, and yet has always been here, and is now here, is—literally—"no-root *shinjin*."

When we meet the Buddha here and now in this experience there are no roots of *bonno* in this gift that is given me although having received it *I* am still a person rooted in *bonno*. But when I have received this gift that was always there, my ego-centered life is no longer the focus. My focus now becomes non-ego centered life.

Tariki no shinjin does not mean "believing in the Other Power." *Shinjin is itself the Other Power*. To clearly awaken to and experience the world of *nembutsu* is to realize that everything we have is given to us. From our side all is received—even the awakening itself is not mine, is given to me, is in itself Other Power.

In regards to this gift of *shinjin* given by the Buddha and received by us, Shinran urges that we seek it out wholeheartedly. There is, in his letters to his followers after he left Mito-Kanto and returned to Kyoto, a constant admonition to raise the wish to live so as to become Buddhas. Unless this wish emerges in our life, *shinjin* will not be realized by us.

There is a saying at the end of the Larger Sukhavati Sutra: "Though fires may envelop the totality of our universe, we must transcend it, work through it, and listen to the Dharma." Again, "We must pass through this universal world of fire and listen to the teachings." Shinran reiterates this, emphasizing that we must pass through the fires of blind passion that envelop the universe to listen to the Buddha's Name.

Shinjin is the wholehearted giving of the Buddha to me, but to fully receive this, I too must fully seek the meaning of my existence. There is no 50-50 here, no half-way potential either in the seeking or the receiving of the *shinjin* which is Other Power. Shin Buddhism is often called the "Easy Way," but it is easy only once you have gotten there! "Easy Way" refers to the way possible for everyday people, in contrast to the "difficult" path of sages which is the fulltime dedication of the monks.

In some sense, no matter which way is followed, the Buddha path is "all easy." In some sense, it is "all difficult." What is essential is a total commitment. Shinran constantly stated how truly difficult is this "easy way" of the *nembutsu* path that is open to all—lay people, priests, everybody. In the *Shoshinge* he repeats, "Of all the difficulties none is more difficult that this."

The point of total commitment is that if you want to truly become Buddhas, the possibility for this awakening becomes more real. In Shin Buddhism we talk about *cho-mon*, "Listening to the Dharma," as the essence of this commitment. "Listening to the Dharma" means listening to oneself, "listening deeply to what is happening to oneself." In Shin Buddhism, "to listen" means "to listen to what one is truly about."

Dogen says: "To study the Buddha's Dharma is to study oneself." To study oneself is to forget-or throw away-one-self, to have that ego-self crushed so it is no longer the center, the focus of one's total thrust in life. When I listen to the teachings, and I find my ego-self being taken away, then I know I am beginning to truly listen to the Dharma. If I listen simply to accumulate knowledge, it is like putting on the clothes I wear. This kind of listening manipulates or uses the Dharma for my own convenience. This is not truly listening.

I do not listen to become "good." I do not listen to make possible my entrance to Pure Land. I do not listen in order to die better or to live better. These kinds of listening all approach the teaching from my own *hakarai* or self-centered calculation. To *really* listen means the ego-self which is doing the contriving is taken away from me, is no longer my focus, and is replaced by something True and Real which offers me really nothing beyond the affirmation of life itself.

For example, if I take home what I hear at a lecture or sermon or study class, it will become my crutch. Whatever crutch I have—I must leave it at the session, including what I think I am listening to and hearing about *nembutsu*. I, in my daily life, have my own treasure chest. Whatever treasures I cling to, as I listen, whatever I think I possess—throw it away! My pride, my impression that listening more will become the seeds of my happiness, the belief in my being different or better in the future, cast it away! When I so strip myself, all that is left is my *bonno*. There, as I am-that is how Amida affirms and grasps me. I myself, who is totally incapable of

anything but selfish calculation, ego inflation, ego gratification.

What is this "something" that accepts me as I am, that moves me to an illumination of the naked reality of myself, that brings me to another focus—myself and yet far greater, far more incomprehensible than myself? It is *tariki*, Other Power, the awakening of *shinjin*, the experience that through the *nembutsu* I come to know the unreliability of everything I bank on. I constantly live on the razor's edge, constantly create the karmic seeds that destine me to hell. To truly listen means to cast this aside—to leave it all here, now—to throw away what I am grasping in my life because, ultimately, I have nothing to take with me into my death.

This listening is not simply a matter of listening with my right ear but of listening with a sense of having the very foundations of my being shaken. For example, when the Apollo satellite shot into space, the news of the resonating through the world caused me to reflect on the return of the spaceship which had to come in at a certain angle, otherwise the ship would bounce off the earth's atmosphere. There was no second chance. He had to come at the right angle, and not too steep an angle or otherwise he would burn up in the descent. This is the condition of our way of listening to the teaching. We can bounce back into egocentricity. We can burn out in too steep angle of descent. The approach of our direction to the Pure Land, to the awakening through our listening over and over and meeting various teachers is like that return of the spaceship. We must constantly correct the angle of our listening so we really listen and so that we really encounter the awakening of *shinjin*.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE FINGER AND THE MOON

One aspect of *tariki*, Other Power, is *paratantra*—a Sanskrit term which translates literally as "through or in relationships or in conditions, things occur, rise or emerge." For example, I went to the summer session in Honolulu not solely on my own volition or calculation but because of the conditions maturing in my life that made it possible for me to go there. We exist in relationships, in conditions from which things emerge. Thus, as another example, I am here on this earth through the existential cause of my parents bringing me to life. This example brings us to an examination of the second aspect of *tariki*. "to rely, depend on, entrust others."

As Other Power moves into my life, I become object as well as subject. The unreliabilities and unreality of my everyday life become part of reality. This is the awareness that comes about through Other Power. To throw away the focus of my ego is an inexhaustible process. The dynamic of Amida in this process is the non-judgmental, non-discriminating, unconditional embrace of the ego I cannot throw away.

To "throw it away" means throw away your ego-focus so you can see your real relationship with your husband, your wife, your children, your parents, so you can begin to understand your life, yourself. This is the illumination of wisdom and compassion.

Experientially, the natural movement of *shinjin* is to move outward toward others. In the case of Sakyamuni's enlightenment at age thirty-five, for a week afterward he sat in contemplation before his decision to share and express his experience. Shinran's was a similar experience of being moved to share. Even in old age he wrote, "I cannot see any more and I have forgotten many things," but he continued to write to his disciples, to share with them his

thoughts on his *shinjin* experience. This sharing of religious experience is not exclusively Buddhist. It is a universal movement in religions.

In Shin Buddhism, to be able to listen, study, learn from the teachings, all comes from the predecessors who gave their full life to extend their *shinjin* experience and express it so that I, centuries later, could understand. There is, however, a gap between the original religious experience and its expression—whether that expression be in music, art, or words. For example, the sutras were developed 2,000 years ago in the Northwestern areas of India. They state that there are flowers and birds in the Pure Land, and that the Pure Land is in the west. This kind of content developed within the stream of mankind's history, as moulded 2,000 years ago within the context of Indian life.

Similarly, we must not forget that Shinran's writings were developed within the environment of the experiences of the Kamakura period. The historical and societal aspects of Sakyamuni's time, and of Shinran's, were each woven in their own way into their expression of the teachings. Shinran's fundamental religious experience of *shinjin*, however, transcends his historical and societal environment, as likewise Sakyamuni's religious experience of enlightenment transcends his societal environment. Each expresses the ultimate in words that are naturally conditioned by the very different times in which each lived.

For both, the expression of the experience came directly from the pure religious experience itself, but between the experience and its expression in language or written words, there exists a gap which Shinran described as being between the finger and the moon. Thus his admonition not to mistake the pointing finger of the teachings for the moon of Dharma, the pure religious experience itself.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SYMBOLISM AND PARADOX

There are, in this perspective of "the finger pointing to the moon" two aspects I should now like to discuss. One is that of symbolism. The other is that of logic—the Buddhist logic based on paradox or contradiction. 'A' equals 'not A' which I found in many of Shinran's writings.

The area of symbolism, and the problems in that area, deal with what Sakyamuni and Shinran encounter when they try to communicate their experience to those who have not had it. Symbolism then becomes the vehicle for trying to express their experience as one might try to express the pain of a toothache to one who has never had an aching tooth.

Or, for example, I am given a pencil which belonged to a dear friend who had died. For me, the pencil which may have been a cheap one in price is cherished because it symbolizes the depth of my friendship, the memories of my friend and all he meant to me. This particular pencil thus in itself carries deep meaning, and to simply replace it with other pencils, other similar objects, does not carry the meaning that lies beyond that object and which that object expresses to me.

Myogo, the technical expression for the six characters *Namu-Amida-Butsu* can be placed in the category of symbols. Symbols communicate the depth of religious experience to those who have not yet experienced the world of ultimate reality. This communication comes through the use as symbols of that which is found in daily life. For example, the symbolism of the Pure Land as birds and flowers is symbolism used in the sutras to affirm what is in this world and yet beyond it. Cool streams, birds, flowers and trees express and affirm something simultaneously of this world but

there is, at the same time in this symbolism, a logic that negates a purely literal understanding of these things.

The name of Amida Buddha comes from the Sanskrit, *Amitabha* and *Amitayus*. *Amita* means "that which is limitless." *Abha* means "light" and *ayus* means "life," thus the meaning—"the one with limitless light and life." This expression is inconceivable! What is the light that has no bounds and yet is light that can be realized because of the contrasting conditions of darkness? What is limitless life? Can we realize the symbolic meaning of such a phrase? Only when our conditions as we understand them are negated, then in this contradiction offered by the expression "limitless life and light" can we begin to understand the direction in which the finger of the teachings is pointing.

To entrust one's life in Amida, we must realize that the real Buddha lies *beyond* the symbol of Amida. We must encounter that experience! We can't walk around clinging to the symbol as if it were the Buddha itself. We must go beyond the symbol, just as in the sutras we go beyond the symbols of cooling water, cooling wind, which were used to give a contrast to the hot harsh reality of the Indian climate. In terms of the natural conditions of that environment, such symbols took the mind to an experience beyond the limits of one's own actual experience, pointing beyond their literal meaning, like a finger pointing to the moon.

To the question, "Where is Amida Buddha?" the sutra gives an answer in two ways. Amida Buddha and his land, viewed from here, is far, far away. But, also, in order to get from here to Amida is "not far." He is right here! His being at the same time both right here and infinite Buddha worlds away is an expression of Buddhist logic. This is the same mind-transforming logic woven into Shinran's expression of his experience of "awakening," the paradox there being that Shinran—the very person creating karma that carries him along on a fall into hell—is able to experience Pure Land.

The problems of symbolism and paradox come from the meaning received from them by this "I" who have not yet awakened to pure religious experience. Thus the difficulty with language, words, expressions. These two problems: symbol and paradox, are encountered in Shin Buddhist teachings. How to get through them to experience the truth is my problem, your problem. It is not good enough to grasp the finger as if the finger were the moon itself.

Since Shinran, who lived eight hundred years ago, used the words and symbols of his own century to express his experience, there may be a gap in our understanding of some of the words and symbols he used. In spite of this, shining through those words and symbols, bridging the gap in time and societal conditions, is the totality of his commitment. His touching of my human reality makes the "finger" of his teachings beckon and touch me, extend the moon of the experience which Shinran had as potential for me, too.

It is this experience that Shinran was trying to express in his teachings, and through his writings, that we deal with today. Through the direction of the symbols and paradox of his "finger pointing to the moon," we too may have Shinran's original pure experience of *shinjin*. For this reason, the study of Shin Buddhism must be with one's mind and with one's body, a total integration of the understanding of our mind into our experience.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TASTING THE TEACHING

The word sutra originally meant "that which is strung together on a string," which in a literal sense describes the collections of the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha, transmitted orally for some three hundred years before being written down in the form we know today. It is of course likely that over such a long period of oral transmission, the content of the sutras was transformed.

The teachings dealing with Amida Buddha that evolved during this period were gathered into three sutras, of which the major is the Larger Sukhavati Pure Land Sutra. In it are presented various aspects of the teachings concerning Amida—his Original Vow, his many Vows, and a description of his Pure Land. Other sutras also talk about lay persons becoming Buddhas, but in this sutra there is an emphasis on telling lay people *how* they can become Buddhas.

The other two collections dealing with Amida Buddha—the Meditation and Amida Sutras—can be regarded as supplementary to the Larger Sukhavati Sutra. It is this Larger Sutra that during a period of 2,000 years moved in its development from India, through China, Korea, and into Japan. Shinran taught that for those who lead an everyday existence in this world, this is the fundamental sutra. In a previous chapter we discussed two contradictory statements made in the Larger Sukhavati sutra: Amida Buddha is far, far away- and, Amida Buddha is right here! We cannot grasp Amida with our senses, our touch, our vision. In that sense, Amida is far, far away. Yet, he is always with us, surrounding us, grasping us. How do we unify these contradictions in our experience of *shinjin*?

Osono, a *myokonin* in the countryside of Nagoya, lived in an area heavily influenced by both Shin Buddhism and Zen. Near her village lived a young Zen master. Osono had the reputation of being a

devout Shin Buddhist, but the Zen master felt that because of his training he must be deeper in his understanding. One day he went to see Osono and asked her,
"What is the name of the Buddha you are worshipping?"

Osono answered, "Amida Buddha."

The Zen master then asked, "Where is that Amida Buddha?"

Osono answered, "My *oya-sama* (spiritual parent) Amida is far, far away in the West."

"Ah, your *oya-sama* is really far away, isn't he?" said the Zen master.

"Oh, no!" said Osono. "Though Amida is far away, right now at this moment, he is out of the Pure Land in the West."

This answer surprised the Zen master. "If Amida is out, where is Amida now?"

Osono broke into a smile. "Oh, Master, you ask good questions! Amida is right here! Right here! *Namu Amida Butsu!*"

Later, the Zen master told his friends that Osono was deep in her expression of the Buddha Way. "Even I could not reply as spontaneously as this illiterate old country woman!" he exclaimed.

For Osono, the contradiction of Amida being far away and "out" visiting right there in her heart, was fully integrated as a whole into her life. When we listen to the teachings, the symbolism and apparent paradoxes must in the same way be integrated into the depths of our own life. Otherwise we cannot say "I am truly listening, truly hearing."

In Chinese there is an expression (*homi*) which means the "flavor of

the Dharma." In Japanese, Buddhists often say, "*Aji o miru*"—"to see the flavor." To study Shin Buddhism and to experience the Dharma in one's everyday existence is to "taste" the teachings with one's whole being. Shinran used the word jin-shin— profound heart and mind—as a synonym for *shinjin*. The symbols of Amida and Pure Land, the logic of paradox and contradiction, are to be "tasted" in this way.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CHANGE AND GROWTH IN SHINJIN

Shinjin is something that grows. It is the awakening to a new dimension of existence, an awakening in which there is change and growth. This is not a change or growth of objective knowing, which is dualistic, but that of the subjective knowing of *prajna* in which subject and object become one.

No matter how strong we may become intellectually, that strength does not necessarily mean we have grown or become changed in an affective way. We may, however, be quite uneducated and out of our capacity to love and to be touched there can come such an inner transformation. For example, when we subjectively understand our parents' love and their suffering for us, and we feel gratitude, our heart changes in a subtle way. Another example: intellectually, though we may have been listening to the Dharma for a long time, we have not been really moved. It is only when we become genuinely touched in our hearts by the Buddha Dharma that we grow and change in *shinjin*, that we awaken to this reality and experience the transformation Shinran described as "to die to oneself and to be born anew to the life of the Buddha." To experience *shinjin* means to become a person assured of Buddhahood. This also has that sense of growth and change in my life.

To meet the Dharma itself is to be nurtured, to grow, because it is something we receive, a transformation that comes to us naturally, spontaneously. In Kyoto there is a women's college founded by Wariko Kai, who died a few years ago at the age of ninety. She said, "After listening to Shin Buddhism, my life and I have changed. Because of the *Nembutsu* I was transformed and changed as a human being. This, to me, is due to Amida Buddha."

It is truly difficult for us to change since we are constantly creating karmic evil which destines us for hell. Yet, I constantly meet the Buddha just as I am. This change of waking up to my reality is a great transformation that occurs through my awakening itself—not from any change coming from me but from *Sodatsu*—"leaving it up to the power of sustenance itself." *Sodatsu* means "to grow, to nurture" and thus its meaning in a religious sense that through listening, a person grows and develops. This process is also expressed as ten-jo, "to turn, to revolve, to become." It is not a straight line change. Our solid core of *bonno*, which we carry just as it is, is turned about and ultimately transformed into Buddhahood by Amida's power.

A century ago, a famous Shin scholar was visited by an old woman whom he asked, "Did you bring me any gifts?"

"No," she answered, "I decided to come so suddenly I didn't bring anything."

"You must have something with you!" he pursued. "Give me that something!"

"No. I'm sorry. I have no money, nothing like that to give you."

"Ah!" he said. "But you have your *bonno*l Leave some of it here!"

"No, no!" said the old woman. "If I give you my *bonno*, then I don't have anything to go to the Pure Land with!"

This is the essence of *shinjin*, expressed with direct simplicity. The old woman well realized that to be saved by the Buddha is to realize that her only direction is hell, but moving in that direction which is created bv her evil karma, her *bonno*, she has become the being destined for the Pure Land, the being through whom Amida's Vow is again being fulfilled.

In a number of his poems, Shinran uses the metaphor of *bonno* being like ice which the power of the Buddha melts into water. I, who am full of the ice of *bonno*, am embraced and enveloped in the warmth of the Buddha's compassion. Beginning to melt in this awakening, yet full of karmic evil as I still am, having "died" to my old self, my new life becomes intimately connected to the life of the Buddha. I am not yet a Buddha, but I am being led to Buddhahood. Shinran states: "The person of *shinjin* is equal to the Buddha, but not the Buddha." This is a delicate point, one to taste, to settle into.

How astonishing this process! The more our defilements, the more we are sustained by the Buddha. I ask you, please integrate this into the depths of your life, not on the surface of your existence!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BUDDHIST SALVATION

The Larger Sukhavati sutra expresses salvation within the *nembutsu* as "each and every person stands tranquilly, peacefully'—that is, everyone is okay living tranquilly in the present as such. The late Professor Soga of Ohtani University was once asked by his students, "What is the nature of salvation in Jodo Shinshu?" His reply, after a moment's pause, was "Salvation is just like this, just the way I am standing here. Just like this." This is "tranquilly, peacefully standing right here in the present, in the here and now."
To die to one's old self, to be born to the new self, is "just like this." My new life is centered in Amida's life. I too become an active part of compassion. To be saved by the Buddha means no matter what the circumstance of my life, I am able to stand in that circumstance tranquilly, and at peace.

In the various religions there are generally two types of salvation offered. In the first, not the self but the environment and society become the problem. The changing of these becomes the focus of being "saved"—not my personal questioning and problems but the surroundings of my physical and societal environment. For example, when we become ill, or our work experience is one of failure, or we have family problems—any and all of these affect our surroundings so that many resort to supplicatory prayers to alleviate these problems. Salvation is equated with some answer to this prayer perceived as having taken place. Such a kind of prayer for relief to a god who is seen as a divine intervenor, a controller of destiny, is an ancient human dependence. This literature of cure and change through supplicatory prayer ranges from ancient primitive societies to modern religions.

The second general type of salvation stands in sharp contrast to

such a focus on miraculous change in one's condition. It is not simply an alteration or cure of surroundings but instead goes deeply into the personal dimension, the inner environment, seeking out a change in one's *personal* life. This second kind of salvation in itself divides into two differing kinds. In the first, there is acknowledged a supreme being, a god that controls one's destiny, judges, and punishes or forgives. In the second, which is the salvation of Shin Buddhism, the "just like this, standing peacefully tranquilly here and now in the present" of Professor Soga is the salvation of the *nembutsu*.

Salvation in terms of a supreme being perceived as the controller of one's destiny is acutely illustrated by an incident that happened in my village when a motorcycle rider fell from a high place and so injured his leg that he was told amputation was necessary. After this was done, and he had to walk with a crutch, he began to contemplate suicide because of his condition. While in this despair, he was encouraged to join a religion and after going into that religion, his life changed. The response of this religion to him was: "the accident you were in was so severe that you were supposed to lose two legs, but because of God's intervention you lost only one and should therefore be grateful for this one leg you have left." The accident victim was finally able to believe this explanation was right and by accepting this, he experienced the salvation of that religion in his life.

In this example there is a personal change in his life—no miraculous cure, his leg is still gone—but his acceptance of it on the terms of that religion is very different from the personal change that occurs in the salvation of Shin Buddhism. In Shin, personal change does occur, but a personal change of a very different nature. There is not a change in terms of stopping crying over the loss of one leg to experience happiness over still having the other leg. Rather, it is a change that occurs at a deeper dimension in life. If I were that amputee, I would find it difficult to be grateful for the loss of that leg. I would carry that loss in my memory as pain and sorrow at my

suffering. To be able to accept my suffering tranquilly as such in my life, to stand peacefully with all that burden of pain and suffering is the inner change, the salvation of Shin Buddhism.

No matter what the condition of our daily life—if we face that condition directly, not running away from it but moving forward in our life, we transcend suffering and in this transcendence, we tranquilly peacefully stand right here in the present no matter what the circumstances of our life.

The three Chinese characters meaning salvation are expressed in Japanese by the words *tasuku*, *sukui* and *wataru*. *Tasuku* designates strength. The ideograph is one box placed on another, so that power is supplemented, as for example, in illness when you add medical power so that the illness is cured and you are "saved." In *sukui*, the left portion of the character symbolizes a water bag tied at the top. The character at the right denotes action, or movement. An illustration of this would be a sense of stopping—you move something to stop something as, for example, when you pour water on a fire, the fire stops.

The third, *wataru*, is Buddhism and Shinran's type of salvation. The ideograph illustrates the span of a hand, which was the original Chinese form of measurement across an area—a movement step by step like an inch worm. It is this sense of crossing step by step that is the sense of salvation in Shin Buddhism. In Sanskrit, *uttarana* means "crossing over." It was from this word that the Chinese *sai-do* and from it the Japanese *wataru* were derived. Since the basic meaning of salvation in Buddhism is "crossing over," the use of the English word "salvation" may present a problem, for this "crossing over" of Buddhism does not mean we get to our destination immediately, but implies there is something we must cross over and that there is something that pulls us over. In Shin Buddhism we "cross over" pulled by the *nembutsu* and the multitudinous obstacles and suffering in our life. In terms of this, each person must be able to be centered at the point where he is. By receiving

the new life of the Buddha, which makes our basis tranquil and strong, we can truly grow and cross over. We are nurtured, developed, sustained, enabled to cross over, to stand tranquilly in the breath-to-breath circumstances of our life.

Shinran explained salvation by the word *ocho*—our being enabled to move straight forward in our life toward Buddhahood. The technical term for this is "lateral transcendence." Something inconceivable, beyond our reasoning—a transcendence made possible by the Buddha's power.

In the first line of *Kyo-gyo-shin-sho*, Shinran says that in the *nembutsu* teaching we are able "to cross over the ocean that is difficult to cross." That ocean is his symbolism for the existential suffering in our life. In Shin Buddhism, "moving straight forward in our life towards Buddhahood" holds the meaning that in saying the *nembutsu*, and in living it in our existence, through the power of Amida we are made to "cross over" our sufferings, to stand moment by moment bearing that burden tranquilly in the present.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE PROBLEM OF DEATH

The symbolism of "crossing the ocean that is difficult to cross" poses a critical question. On the "other shore"of this ocean of life is death. The critical question in Shin Buddhism is: have you resolved the direction in which you are moving in terms of your own death?

Death is the problem that surrounds the very being who is going to die: the "myself who thinks about the problem will one day or one night—how or when I cannot know—experience that problem as my terminal conscious awareness. Only humans can be conscious of their death. We are probably the only species that can be aware of our last moments. How has man throughout the ages viewed death?

First is the focus of how to escape from death. Hospitals in Japan have no room numbered "4" because the character for *shi*—"4"—has the same pronunciation as that of the character for "death." There is at the basis of mankind's view of death this kind of aversion to reminders of it, and a wish to be able to escape it. Last year in California I read a news commentary written by a mother: "I don't want to show my child the sight of a funeral because it will create dark images in its mind and be psychologically damaging."

Intuitively speaking, my first reaction is that this expresses the fact she herself is escaping from death. Many people today look upon death as a dark intruder in life, an intruder which we wish to escape. This is a very shallow viewing of life. Is keeping the child from funerals truly educating the child himself? Why not teach him that one day all beings must die—even his own parents.

The Chinese word for "forgetting" is composed of two characters, one meaning "to lose" and the other "heart and mind." Today we "forget" this dimension of death. How often do we reflect on the

problem death poses us: that there is no guarantee there may be a tomorrow for our husband, wife, children, ourself. We keep that at a distance, thus losing a problem that, essentially, we ought to reflect upon within our heart. Forgetting, being busy, are forms of escaping from reflecting on this great problem of death—a problem we cannot escape since eventually each of us must die our own death.

Another attitude is: "If I have to die anyway, then I'll leave some kind of substitute for myself here in this life." For example, even if I should die—whether it's my writings, my own children, my grandchildren, or something I've built, all these give me an illusion of immortality to which I can cling. In Japan there is a new custom becoming quite popular in this respect. The living person tries to select a beautiful gravestone for himself before he dies. In America, there are beautiful "pre-need" grave sites you can choose now. If you think you are going to be under such a site, isn't your heart eased a little? People say, "Now I have completed my house I will go ahead and build myself a grave site." In Japan, department stores even have sales on grave sites! Does this really become a resolution to one's death? To a friend who offered to build the dying Shomatsu a fine grave site, myoko-nin Shomatsu said, "No thank you! I won't be living there."

From ancient times another form of escape from death has been the view of reincarnation. This is an escape which says since we're going to be born into this life again, death should not be feared. In the pyramids of Egypt were many mummies, a physical preservation that was the result of a belief that at death, the soul leaves the body, wanders, but needs a body to which it can return. This is a simple way of viewing reincarnation and a kind of belief that persisted strongly in the past.

The fourth attitude towards death is that of transmigration into another kind of world, another kind of life, and therefore, again, a reason not to fear death. In the east, this view of transmigration is prevalent. The hope is that man can be born again to another life as

a human being, but perhaps also as an animal. In Shin Buddhism, the salvation that occurs in *shinjin* effects our birth into the Pure Land, but we do not go to be born in a Pure Land because it exists as another world, another life. To be born into the Pure Land is not to posit a Pure Land which is in the distance. When I die, the very point at which my death occurs: that is the Pure Land. It is not a place, not another world.

Rennyo Shonin, the great fifteenth-century Shin Buddhist leader, emphasized "the great matter of the after-life." This focus on after-life is not on talking about what happens after you die, but on your crossing the ocean of this life. To bring the consciousness of death into the great matter of the after-life is the major thrust of Shin Buddhism. When we look at death it is very dark, but when we look at it—we are carrying so much baggage. We don't know when, but we must cross over and in our daily life, things such as health, money, inheritances, can all seem to be aids. We can fool others as well as ourselves by our blind attachment to these things. Yet crossing over becomes clear only when we are stripped to the very being we were when we came into this world. If I bring the problem of my own death into focus right now—whether I am sustained, focused, whether I am saved or not should become clear to me.

In Japan, the general mode for cancer patients is that most doctors do not let the patients know they are terminal. In the United States, they are told, and the doctors and nurses are much involved in the battle the patient wages against the disease. If this happened in my life, how would I cope? Before it happens, while we are still healthy, this is a problem we ought to think about. For those who live in *shinjin*, how do they respond to the problem of their own death? In the process of working this through, where one stands in one's faith will become much clearer.

In my own life, at age thirteen, my home life was filled with darkness due to the death of my mother and grandmother, the illness of my brother, and my negative reaction to my father's

remarriage. A few years later my brother died. I myself was so sickly it was predicted I would not live to age twenty. My family life was engulfed in a kind of personal darkness, a dark confusion. I ran away from home several times in my negative reaction to my father and stepmother. I entered college in 1945 but was soon drafted and at the end of June of 1945 was sent to Hokkaido. Within a month the war ended and I went back to school—again it was a very confusing time not only in terms of my personal life but how I felt about my allegiance to my country as well.

At the end of the following year I transferred to Kyoto to study Shin Buddhism and in the search to find some kind of personal stability, I met my teacher, Professor Tada. It was about a year after my transfer that I came across the Meditation Sutra and the story of Ajatasatru, the young king of Rajagriha who murdered his father and tried to also kill his own mother. I was truly struck by this story, by the weight of karma piled by Ajatasatru's acts, an awful weight and yet one that led him to seek the teachings of the Buddha and caused him to be saved. Then, during my twenty-first year, one night during autumn I was struck by the *nembutsu* in my life. It was an experience I cannot forget. At that time, I wrote a long letter to my father and my stepmother. This was truly an awakening to me—to be touched by the Dharma and to begin to see myself. From that experience I feel my life changed—a change within me, coming through my family, through my stepmother, through my young sister and brother, a change coming through Professor Tada, my teacher who, years afterward, gave me a profound teaching in the way he resolved the problem of his own death.

Shortly before Professor Tada died at age seventy-five, the doctor told Mrs. Tada that her husband had only a few days left to live. When the doctor left, Professor Tada asked her, "What did the doctor tell you? If there's something that needs to be known, let me know completely!"

"Death is close at hand," she replied.

"Is that right!" said Professor Tada. "I guess I can just let go of everything now"—and he died soon thereafter.

To be able to accept in terms of "I guess I can let go of everything now" was his way of accepting the moment, but his accepting was also due to his wife's being able to freely open the truth of his condition to him. There is much to learn from the attitude of Mrs. Tada being able to tell her husband so directly what his condition really was. All of us are humans involved in relationships which are not easy to yield to death, but when death comes—can we speak our heart openly? Can we relay whatever direct information needs to be relayed as such? With the Tadas, the relationship was such as to indicate the depth of Professor Tada's faith, and that of his wife. When we think of our own death, we suffer our own suffering, but at the same time there is much suffering by those who love us: family, friends.

We describe *shinjin* as an experience of awakening but at the same time it is an experience of *shinjitsu*—true mind and heart in our life. In this dimension of the truth of *shinjin* is the receiving of the Buddha's life in our life. In this receiving, our birth in the Pure Land is assured. We are one with the Buddha. If so, and we understand *shinjin* in such a way, there is always a way to transcend death, to cross over death, to be enabled, like Professor Tada. to "just let go of everything here." *Shinjin* means to experience truth as it is—that we become one with Amida in this here and now which means the Buddha always sustains this hellish ego world which we create.

So when you die, simply die. It's okay to die. At that point is the Pure Land.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

OJO

There are two aspects of *ojo*, a word that means "birth to a new life." The first aspect is that in this very life we live, we experience birth to a new life in the experience of *shinjin*. The second aspect is that of birth in the Pure Land at the moment of death. Over and over in his writings Shinran repeats: "Life is very short. I will be in the Pure Land. Be sure you meet me there." What he is saying is that in the life of *shinjin*, the Pure Land is real.

An old haiku says: "O snail, wherever you die, you are home!" This is Shinran's view of *ojo*. It is in this world of defilements and illusion we become human beings bound for the Pure Land. When our death occurs, sad and lonely through we may be, at that very moment, the Pure Land occurs. Technically, the two aspects of *ojo* are "not-body-losing-birth" and "body-losing-birth." In order to experience the one at the time of death, the other must be settled during my life. Thus the problem is the awakening that occurs in this here and now. We must be clear on this point of *ojo*-having *shinjin* settled in this life, here and now, clear in our understanding that the awakening experience of *shinjin* takes place within the time we call our life.

Time, in this Buddhist view, differs from the ordinary concept. Generally, our idea of existence is that it takes place within time, that all things existing happen within "time." However, Buddhism thinks in terms of existence per se as "time." Thus, the very point of my life, that is the fact I am living now, already indicates history and time itself. "I am born," "I die" shows the process of history. Because I am, there is in relation to my own existence history and "time." The Japanese term *Gen-zai* conveys the meaning of *Now*—the present-in this way. *Gen* refers to "this present moment." *Zai* refers to "living" or "existing." This "now" of *genzai* forms the

basis of the Buddhist notion of "time"-not an objective appraisal of time but "time" as a strong subjective element.

Ordinarily, time is seen as moving lineally from past into future. But in Buddhism, time is real in the "now." From the present you see the past as well as the future. The Chinese character for "past", used in Buddhism, means something past and gone, seen from the vantage point of the present in which we really exist. The future—*mirai* (not yet, not yet come)—is seen also from this vantage point of ima, now, the present—my present.

In the Buddhist view, we live in a world of illusion created in timeless past, but we say this in the depth of the realization of what we are in the present. The act which is propelling us into hell in terms of the future is rooted in the present realization of the depth and weight of that karmic burden which we carry from the timeless past. Both in our total human and our unique personal condition, this is a problem in the "now," *my* "now," a now in which the problem is to resolve the self for what it really is.

Objectively speaking, because of this subject, this "self," there is time. Because there is time, there is this self. Therefore the ordinary perception of time, an objective time that exists before our birth and after our death, a time determined by calendar year and watch, a "time" that is outside us, is totally different from the Buddhist perception of time, which is subjective. In the "here and now" of Buddhist time, subject and object are united in the vantage point of this present moment in which I resolve the problem of "myself."

The awakening experience of *shinjin* is fulfilled at this point, which we call the Absolute Now. To realize the Buddha in one's life and simultaneously to realize oneself as a being creating the burden of karma that leads us to hell, can only take place in the absolute of Now, the Absolute Now. In terms of our daily life, the realization and experience of true gratitude happens always in this present moment of "now" for it is in the urgency of this present we feel the

lives, the influence, of our parents, of our teachers, of our mates or former mates, our children, our friends, our adversaries, and awaken to a real understanding and appreciation. In terms of the evils we have committed in the past, this is often objective, left in the past. But when we truly awaken to our negative acts, the impact of that realization is always in the present: This very moment! Now!

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE PROCESS OF SHINJIN

For those who have already experienced *shinjin*, I hope these writings will help to deepen it. For those who have not yet experienced this awakening, I hope it will make the process more clear. The key is that *shinjin* is an *experience*, one that goes beyond the meaning of the English word, into the Japanese *tai-ken* or *tai-ge*. *Tai* is "body." *Ken* is "test." *Ge* is "understand." Experiencing *shinjin* means it must be tested with the body, understood with the body. It is not just a psychological condition, nor just a physical condition. One's total being is involved in this experience based in true mind and heart.

One sees the Dharma, one shares it, extends it, and must discuss it in terms of one's personal experience of *shinjin*. Whether one has been saved by the Buddha or not must become clear in one's life. If we are not sure, then our sharing and teaching of the Dharma will not be clear. For myself, I like the metaphor that *shinjin* is the entrance and the exit of "crossing the river." The starting point of the *nembutsu* as the entry into the Buddha's way is not entry into *shinjin*. But, at this starting point of *nembutsu*, is where it is important to meet a teacher who is a "good friend of the way" for in studying the teachings of the Buddha, it is important to be able to walk a path tread by a person whose footprints were deep in *shinjin*.

Where does this process begin? To be able to stand at the point where you choose to study and to live the *nembutsu*: this is the starting point both of the life of *nembutsu* and the *shinjin* process. From this starting point it is urgent to listen with one's total being in order to awaken *shinjin*, an experience which transforms one's life. Though I am not initially full and complete, this total listening opens within my life a clear direction towards Buddhahood, towards the Pure Land.

What was Shinran's process? At age nine he was sent to Mt. Hiei. He practiced the monastic disciplines with diligence there for twenty years. His search was harsh, disciplined as far as looking into the inner working of his *bonno*, his burden of karmic evil, was concerned. During this period he lived the life of a celibate monk, but in spite of that life he saw more and more acutely his own blind desires and defilements. At age twenty-nine, he encountered the *nembutsu* teacher Honen and came to realize there is a true way to become Buddha though there are these defilements in one's life.

With his teacher, Shinran had the real awakening experience, the experience of *shinjin*. It took him twenty years of perseverance to arrive at this. At the age of twenty-nine, he threw everything away and returned to Amida Buddha or, in other words, Shinran "died to his old self and was born to a new self." It was a deep experience in his life, which he expressed through the phrase "one single moment of *shinjin*," meaning that the experience of *shinjin* is fulfilled in a single moment.

It is here, at this single moment when the experience of *shinjin* is awakened in our own life, that we can truly discuss and see the world of *samsara*, of illusion, as well as the world of enlightenment (Pure Land, Nirvana). Without this experience, there is not true listening, true hearing, but only listening with one's brain. Such listening is *not* "testing with one's body." It is superficial and unclear.

William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* deals with two types of conversion: one gradual, one abrupt. James describes two factors as bringing about an abrupt conversion. One is the type of personality and the other is the kind of situation—for example, much anguish and suffering in a person's life. Though James spoke of this area in terms of Christianity, I feel it is also valid in terms of Shin Buddhism. For example, *myokonin* Genza's experience of faith was very abrupt. Genza was only eighteen when his father, working

alongside him in the field, died, saying at the last, "When I die, rely on the Buddha!"

Shocked by this, Genza began to listen to the teachings. The following summer, at nineteen, he experienced awakening. At that time, farmers used to go up into the mountains to gather grass. They would load the grass on cows or horses and bring it down from the mountains in such loads that often one could hardly see the animal under its burden of grass. It was while Genza was loading grass on his cow, in that very moment, that he realized—experienced with his body—the meaning of Amida's compassion in his life. "Just as the cow carries grass down the hillside, Amida carries that *bonno* I am always creating . Amida carries it *and has always carried it!*"

In contrast to such an abrupt conversion is the gradual, slow ripening illustrated in the life of another *myokonin*, Saichi. Saichi's father, though not of a temple family, became a Shin Buddhist priest in Shimane, a devoutly Shin Buddhist prefecture. Saichi then began listening to the teachings at about age eighteen, listened but did not understand and so quit for a few years. At age thirty he began listening again, but only after the age of fifty did he ripen to an experience of *shinjin*.

In the past, the question in Shin Buddhism used to be, "When did you receive *shinjin*?" But, based on this categorization of William James, it may not be necessary for everyone to have such an abrupt awakening—a gradual awakening may happen. The point is, whether abrupt or gradual, the awakening must be clear in one's life, a transformation in one's life in which the dark shadows of *bonno* and the light of Amida stand out distinctly.

Shinjin is complete in itself, but it happens over and over again and deepens one's sensitivity to the joys and sorrows one experiences. The Buddha is always embracing us and yet, only at times do we realize we are being embraced. The "absolute" of awakening, the

experience of *shinjin* which is Other Power, the working of Amida's Vow, is *always*—without interruption—the environment of myself. It embraces the "time" which is my process of history from birth to death. Only in my awakening to the paradox of my inescapably defiled self—the self who is always contriving, justifying, selecting, discriminating, trying to organize the world of experience around myself—as being this very self that is embraced by Amida—do I realize this ever-present environment of *shinjin*.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE ESSENTIAL INTEGRATION

If, in your mind, as you read and reflect, you are spreading out a map of the process of the Buddha way of *nembutsu*, let me caution you against simply carrying around such a map! Rather, from this map, find your own path in the process.

Historically, before Shinran, there are descriptions of the Buddha Way expounded in the sutras based on the original teachings of Sakyamuni: the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths describe four truths that are inherent in reality. The first two describe our delusory condition, our real condition as it is: *samsara*. Human life in its illusory condition is described as the result or responsibility of my karma creating the delusions and suffering in my world. By this I mean not my family, not my social environment, etc., but *my* personal karma. *Samsara* has this direct personal meaning.

The content of the third truth points to the urgency for us to attain enlightenment to realize the ideal condition in our life. The fourth truth also deals with us. Thus the four truths express the real condition of our daily lives: suffering, joy, sorrow, and the way to true happiness which is what we foolish beings seek. The Buddha Way, as Sakyamuni preached over and over again, is the way of the Eightfold Path, the way by which a common ordinary being can become enlightened. Within it is right speech (verbal action); right action (bodily expression, right karma); right thought (our own mental process). These form the totality of our human existence. To direct this totality of ourselves toward Buddhahood is the thrust of the Buddha's teaching through this path. This is primary, but in the sutras there are also preached many other ways. In the Larger Sukhavati sutra there are described three ways in which one can become a Buddha. One is the way by which monks can attain the

Pure Land. Second is the way in which the ordinary man or woman can attain the Pure Land. Within this second way are two possibilities: the first of which is offerings by those who can give them and thus accumulate merit. But for those poor both in wealth and poor psychologically, spiritually, there is the way of the Original Vow, whereby the ordinary being, carrying heavy karmic burdens of evil, simply by saying the *nembutsu*, listening to the Buddha's name, becomes a Buddha. This is the original Shin Buddhist way.

Concerning this *nembutsu* path, Shinran says in *Tannisho*: "Even if I should be misled by Honen and fall into the depths of hell I will have no regrets"—but at the same time, he relied implicity on the teachings of Sakyamuni, and sought refuge in the power of that teaching. Thus the "belief or "faith" which Shinran expresses as *shinjin*, the experience of awakening, is a world of enlightenment, of awareness, that opens only through an experiential integration of belief and practice. To emphasize once again, *shinjin* is taige, understanding with the body, the experience at the point where awakening occurs: a result both of belief and practice.

What you truly have to listen to is the heart of what Sakyamuni and Shinran are saying about the true and real in life, in *your* life. The act of doing, of practicing in our daily life is important for if we cannot connect the teaching we hear into our daily life, the effort is incomplete. Simply "believing" is not Shin Buddhism. Unless experience has been integrated into one's commitment and understanding, unless there is this sense of process, it is not Shin Buddhism.

The transmission of these teachings was neither fast nor easy. From India to China to Japan, the way was beset with hardships: the Gobi desert, tigers, rough ocean, lives lost. Similarly, difficulties accompanied the transmission of Shin Buddhist teachings from Japan to Hawaii and the mainland United States over the past hundred years. We must listen to the history which evolved out of many people's selfless, wholehearted effort to share the dharma,

for it is out of these conditions we today can take the first step of listening to the teachings. This nearly 3,000-year process of transmission in order for us to meet what is difficult to meet, was all made possible by nearly 3,000 years of commitment, of believing and totally living in this Buddha Way.

Shinran expressed this historical process in his *Hymn of True Faith*, *Shoshinge*, wherein he praises the seven patriarchs through whom he traces his spiritual lineage. For Honen, the seventh of these patriarchs (the *nembutsu* practicer whom Shinran always regarded as his teacher), the Buddha Way was mind and heart plus practice (*gyo*) leading to *ojo*—birth in the Pure Land. Mind and heart corresponds to the original point of "believing." *Gyo*, practice, is the recitation of *Nembutsu*. For Honen, by believing in and relying on *nembutsu*, one is able to meet Amida at the point of *Raigo*— the "welcoming." This point, of welcoming and meeting the Buddha in one's life, is the point of experience at which one is able to be born in the Pure Land.

Honen taught Shinran that the way of *nembutsu* was the way of the Eighteenth Vow. Yet, among Honen's students a great problem arose—a difficulty in terms of the practice. How many callings were necessary? Honen said, "Don't get stuck on the number of times. Just throw yourself wholeheartedly into the utterance with total involvement."

After Honen's death, his various disciples began to form their own branches based on his teaching. Shinran also dealt in detail with this problem of "how many times?" Through following Honen's way, he explored the teaching of Honen and that of Sakyamuni in an academic and scholarly fashion, as his writings attest; but most importantly, he explored their teachings by totally integrating them experientially into his life. Thus in his writings, Shinran left us both a scholastically and an existentially clear map of the path he followed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

ONLY NEMBUTSU IS REAL

Honen says, through the calling of the name one can be born in the Pure Land, but Shinran goes on to say that simply calling the name is not enough. This differentiation between their teachings remains a problem today, making it necessary to be very clear in our understanding of Shinran's way to *nembutsu*.

The character *nen* (or *nem*) originally referred to "thought," to "thinking of." Concretely, it was translated as "thinking with the body," which in turn was translated as "calling" and thus the *Nembutsu* has come to be translated as "calling of the Buddha name." This was the way opened by Honen, a way embracing all the original and translated meanings of this character *nen*. In the thought, and in the calling also, there is really an encounter, or at least a yearning of encounter with the Buddha. That yearning points me toward the Buddha Way.

D.T. Suzuki's translation of *gyo* (practice) as "living" is a more precise expression of the union of shin plus *gyo* which Honen teaches. This practice of *Nembutsu* is expressed in our daily life as we place our hands in *gassho* (palms together in an attitude of reverence) in front of the household altar. *Nembutsu* permeates our lives as we live daily activities with awareness of the "thought of Amida Buddha," of the reality of Amida, of the reality of myself. For Honen, this was senjaku-*nembutsu*, the *nembutsu* as the "selected" practice of one's life, and so it became for Shinran.

Senjaku—"selecting"—has both the aspect of "to take or receive" and, at the same time, the aspect of "to throw away." Honen says that uttering *nembutsu* is the only treasure, the only virtue in life. Throw away your reliance on worldly treasures and possessions for only the *Nembutsu* is true and real. Only it can usher you with

peaceful heart through the gates of death.

When you die, you cannot take your money, your family, your fame, with you. When you die, you die just as you were born: stripped, naked, alone. The reality of my life is that everything I have now is borrowed. There is an ultimate aloneness in my life. Only *Nembutsu* sustains me. I must throw away these attachments to my possessions, my family, fame—not throw them away but throw away my dependent clinging, my reliance, my attachment to them in order to see the compassion that envelops my life.

Honen said, "If you can recite the *nembutsu* better by getting married, then get married. But if marriage becomes an obstacle, then get rid of the marriage." Whatever the conditions of your life, live in a way that you can say the *nembutsu* and say it thoroughly. *Nembutsu* then becomes your only treasure in life, and becomes real in and through you.

Shinran's view extending this "selected *nembutsu*''' as the sole real treasure is expressed in *Tannisho* as "All things in this life are vain and empty, only the *Nembutsu* is real." Really, what Honen's teaching allowed Shinran was to be himself, see himself, to become aware as a *bombu*—a. foolish, ignorant being embraced by Amida's Vow. Shinran married, had a full family life—six children and later grandchildren. In that warm full environment he said, "Only the *Nembutsu* is real!"

This was his point of definite choice. In spite of his deep relationship with his wife Eshinni, with the children—facing the temporariness of all such relationships, he selected *nembutsu* as the only dependable reality, as the expression of his relationship as a human being with Amida Buddha.

For me, there was a period in which I both rejected and, at the same time, was drawn to the *Nembutsu* that had come from my mother's mouth as she lay dying. When she died, the winter of my thirteenth

year, all the family was there watching her die. She had long been ill. All through my childhood, my only recollection is of her being in a dark room at the back of the house. Shortly before her death, she had asked to see me, but when I came home from school, she had lost consciousness. She did not respond to my anguished call, "Mother! Mother!"

In the moment of regaining consciousness as she died, she spoke not my name—which I yearned to hear her say—but she uttered the *nembutsu* and died. This is not to say my mother was a person of deep faith, but as all around her were reciting *nembutsu*, so she too—perhaps as a response. In my teenage years I often thought, if my mother had been waiting for me to return to her deathbed, why didn't she call my name rather than that of the Buddha's for I yearned to have heard her recognize me one last time. Yet through this *nembutsu* that had been my mother's dying utterance, I came closer to the Dharma and was able to learn the teachings. Thus it was through my mother that the meaning of the reality of the *nembutsu* filtered into my life. I reflected then. Had my mother held my hand and said my name at death—truly what could I have done? Instead, her dying utterance of *nembutsu* gave me the understanding that she must cast me aside as she dies. Somehow, I became able to see through this lesson of her death, able to see that the *nembutsu* is true, that she is all right as she is now.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE ESSENTIAL GATE

I feel it is important here to distinguish between the *nembutsu* which is false, the *nembutsu* which is temporary, and the *nembutsu* that is true. Concretely speaking, false *nembutsu* is the *nembutsu* used to gain present benefits in this world. It is like trying to add something to my life by using *nembutsu*—as, for example, like using *nembutsu* to cure illness or family problems.

True *nembutsu* basically cuts the blind thinking one does. False *nembutsu* does not cut, but merely helps inflate the ego, puffs it. In the case of *nembutsu* used merely as a prayer for one's own benefit, Shinran says that should a thousand persons do this *nembutsu*, not a single one will be born in the Pure Land. Likewise, the *nembutsu* recited only for the deceased—that too is false *nembutsu*. This is because the *nembutsu* is for those who are alive, to show the way to the Pure Land. *Nembutsu* is not ritual or ceremony. It is a teaching, a pathway towards Buddhahood, a pathway towards the Pure Land.

"Temporary" *nembutsu* is that condition which lies in between, which is neither false nor true. While this is not true *nembutsu*, it is however still directed towards it and is that process by which one arrives at true *nembutsu*. The technical expression used for this by Shinran, and in the Shin Buddhist tradition, is *yomon*—essential gate. *Shinmon* is the technical expression used for the true gate of true *nembutsu*.

Temporary *nembutsu* contains the two aspects of the essential gate and the true gate. It is through this that Shinran's process points to the essential and true gate of true *nembutsu*, through which the Great Vow is experienced. *Yomon* is the kind of *nembutsu* expressed in the Meditation Sutra, one of the many good deeds which that

sutra encourages. The Meditation Sutra does not express the completeness of *nembutsu*, but it does describe the process by which one moves through *nembutsu* towards the Pure Land, saying that the *nembutsu* is the essential step in moving in that direction.

In *Shinmon*, the true gate, there is no mixed practice, one stands on the *nembutsu* alone—sifting down to selecting this single choice as did Shinran. *Nembutsu* generally means, "I call the Buddha's name." In its fullest realization, *nembutsu* expresses cutting aside all roots, but still it is like a crutch, and "temporary" since it is still *my* addition. It becomes my good, my virtue, by my saying it. By throwing all aside however, we are able to meet the Buddha's compassion in our life, to encounter the transformative power of the *nembutsu* that is true and real, the *nembutsu* that is *Gugan*—Great Vow. In this, the Buddha is calling me, and because he is calling me, I am able to utter his name!

My father is eighty-eight years old and yet, he writes to me. Even if I forget, my father is constantly thinking of me. Thus, often our calling as a child is a response to that which comes from a parent. In this way, to be able to accept the heart of the Buddha—to know the Buddha who is constantly calling us, ceaselessly thinking of us, focusing on us—is the "turning over," the transformation of true *nembutsu* in which my calling of the Buddha's name is to hear at that very same moment the Buddha calling me. This kind of turnabout or transformative experience is what is called *shinjin*, and therefore we can say that true *nembutsu* equals *shinjin* which in turn equals awakening.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

GUGAN - GREAT VOW

The Buddha's power effecting a transformation in my life is the *nembutsu* of Great Vow (*Gugan*), the "true" *nembutsu* taught in the Larger Sukhavati Sutra. The three "Pure Land" Sutras, all of which point us in this direction, are called Vows or "gates" by Shinran. For him, Meditation Sutra is the nineteenth Vow, what he calls the essential gate—*Yomon*. The Amida Sutra, the twentieth Vow, is the "true gate," *Shinmon*. The Larger Sukhavati Sutra, the eighteenth Vow, is for him *Gugan*, the gate of Great Vow. All three constitute the process culminating in *shinjin*, the process selected, experienced, and taught by Shinran. The meaning of the last one, the transformative "true *nembutsu*" of *Gugan* is that there is no gate, there is no process, there is only the Great Vow.

Today, in my life as a scholar and professor of Shin Buddhism at Ryukoku University in Kyoto, I often tell the students I am able to teach that Shinran and the *nembutsu* offer a real sense of decision, a decisiveness in one's life. To put it in words from *Tannisho*, ultimately all deep loving relationships are unreliable. You can't hang on to anything. To be able to throw away those relationships, to stand on a point of real choice, means that *nembutsu* is not a matter of vague acceptance but a personal decision. To clarify this sense of choosing, you have to know what to throw away. If your cup is full, nothing else comes in. If you're clinging, you can't accept anything else. Only when you throw all else out, is the *nembutsu* able to strike you. "All things are empty." All things —wealth, prestige, relationships—are ultimately unreliable. That realization, and the realization that only the *nembutsu* is real, is a reality that is made the decisive choice in the meaning of life.

Shinran's teacher Honen said we should live in such a way that we can say the *nembutsu* through these essential gates, so as to touch

with our life the fullness of hearing the *nembutsu* which the Buddha directs to us. This is existentialism beyond the Absolute of Camus and Sartre's absurdity and despair. The Pure Land is an Absolute of acceptance of life as it is, and of myself as an interconnected part of this. *Gugan*—the Great Vow which is "no gate"—opens to me this Absolute which I can share, perceive, live in, in the vantage point of my awakening in this here and now to this reality.

The areas of death and karmic evil are often emphasized to lead to this insight. However, I feel the sense of secularism alluded to in *Tannisho*, "all things in the world are empty and vain," becomes more pointed in our modern secular world. We see this finite, nihilistic dimension of life pointing to the reality of the *nembutsu*. To be definite and clear about this reality is to arrive at the clarity of *Gugan*, the "true" *nembutsu*. The stark finiteness of this realization in itself then leads to our seeking the teachings more in our life.

The teaching is like a mirror which reflects oneself. By looking into the mirror of the teachings we can look into our daily lives. The starkness presented is part of the teaching. To listen is always to focus on the reality that is existence itself, to deeply seek the self with all its meaning and thus to choose the *nembutsu* as the meaning for our lives.

My effort in writing of all this has been like a map, like a finger pointing to the moon. What you do to walk this path, to point your life in the direction of the Buddhist world of awakening is your choice.