



Metta

Spring 2021

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Why Shinran Pointed to the Sky

W. S. Yokoyama

Shinran once wrote :

“This Sutra’s main point is that Amitābha Buddha, on the occasion of making the vast, universal, world-transcending vow, threw open the storehouse of dharma and selected from it the {one} treasure of virtue to be imparted to the ordinary unenlightened ones out of pity, and that Śākyamuni Buddha, on the occasion of appearing in this world, taught a way of enlightening them as the light of the world, by bestowing the multitudinous beings with this {one} benefit of the ultimately real. In this narrative, just as the Tathāgata’s pūrva-praṇidhāna “the prior wish the Tathāgata made for us long ago” indicates the [timeless] doctrinal lineage of the Sutra, the Buddha’s symbolic name is the {one} [timely] essence and embodiment of the Sutra.”

斯經大意者。彌陀超發於誓廣開法藏。致哀凡小選施功德之寶。釋迦出興於世光闡道教。欲拯群萌惠以真實之利。是以說如來本願爲經宗致。即以佛名號爲經體也。 [T2646.589b7-11]



In the above passage, there are three places where I have inserted the word “one” in wavy brackets, like this: {one}. The word “one” does not appear in the original text, it is only implied. I put them in wavy brackets to indicate that this was my own personal interpretation. What I actually wanted to say was that when Shinran pointed to the sky, he was in fact pointing to only “one” star, not to the whole vast Milky Way. So here we come across Shinran’s subtle way of expressing things. He has something to say, but does not come out and say it. Wavy brackets, also called curly brackets, might not be the best way to go, as your high school English teacher will tell you. But I think the “one” in wavy brackets might actually be a useful device for us today. People won’t pick up on these subtle points unless we point it out to them like {this} to help them connect the dots. Plus these days people are tired out from living. We are at the mercy of our iPhones. Most of the time our attention is riveted to the screen, our minds fixed on driving forward, updating ourselves to the latest. We are swimming in a con-

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Rev. Mieko Majima is Assigned as the OBE Minister Assistant

We are happy to announce that Rev. Mieko Majima has been assigned the OBE (Office of Buddhist Education) Minister Assistant helping Rev. Kuniyuki with the research and development of Buddhist Educational Resources that will be produced at the BSC and distributed and promoted through the OBE. She will assist with the translation of source materials and help with the interface between BSC/OBE and Japanese institutions in the area of Buddhist Education. As a part-time Minister Assistant she will be working mostly via the Internet while at the same time functioning as the Resident Minister of the Kapaa Hongwanji Mission.



Rev. Majima was born in Nagoya, Japan and graduated from Ryukoku University in Buddhist Studies. After graduation, she worked as a researcher, editor translator and localization manager at various educational institutions and publishing corporations until 2010. She also received her Tokudo in 1978 and her Kyoshi in 2012. In 2015 she was assigned as the resident minister of the Kapaa Hongwanji Mission. During this time she continued her studies part-time with Ryukoku University and was able to receive an MA in 2012 and is presently completing her work to receive a Ph.D. The title of her Ph.D. thesis is "Visualization of the Buddha in Zen contemplation sutra from Central Asia." As of April 2021, she was assigned as the Resident Minister of the Kapaa Hongwanji Mission and as the OBE Minister Assistant.



The current logo from all the documents I have found was designed in 1992 under the direction of Rev. Yoshiaki Fujitani, when he was director of the Buddhist Study Center. The background of the black circle with the white stripes images a scene of the calm ocean and symbolize serene and tranquil state of

mind created by the Buddhist teachings which is represented by the white lotus flower in the center of the logo.

This also symbolizes the BSC, located in Hawaii on the crossroads of the Western cultures and the Oriental cultures, which shares the better understanding of different cultures and contributes towards the peace of human beings and the world.

The white lotus flower symbolizes a stage that is associated with the state of bodhi; that of becoming awakened to the wonders of it all. When one reaches this state it is said that one has mental purity and has reached a state of spiritual perfection.

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(Continued from page 1)

stantly changing stream of über-information. It's great when things are going our way, yes! what could be better! But then life starts to go haywire and, oh no! those other things start to happen. Our lives start to go into reverse in a kind of synchronized suffering, our lives start falling apart, we fall into a state of panic. In that case it's not easy for us to hold our attention long enough to read this passage at a deeper level. Nothing sinks in. We walk through the words of gold and exit empty-handed. Shinran himself might be talking to us but our minds are so bombed out by all this data that by the end of the day our minds are gone, our souls with it. And we have nothing to show for it, just another day zilched out of our nothing life. When we see that we are so easily seduced by the bandits of the senses, that we are so easily addicted to things, a voice blurts out, as if gasping for air, saying, Help! Save me! In today's world of fear, violence, trauma, where we are stalked by wild beasts and armed crazy men, where are we to turn for sanctuary? That is why Shinran's message on this {one} thing is so important for us today. The message in the wavy brackets reminds us that from before beginningless time we already have enough to truly live. And so we should not miss out on this, our {one} big chance to truly live, to truly love, without fear. Shinran points to the {one} star in the sky to remind us it is there, that {one} tiny photon of the light of reality shining brightly from within us traveling to where we are from long, long ago, calling to us, saying, You must find me! Once we consciously pick up on that fact, it is as if we too have those wavy brackets around our life, our community, our world. To get to that point we have to flip over the digital mind that functions as an iPhone terminal. The digital mind is our sentient side, our state of ignorance, the source of our suffering. Artificial intelligence knows how to plow through the data to make a mathematical formula of our digital mind. Once it has our number, our algorithm, it can pretty much predict what our fickle mind is going to do next and can control us in that way. If you are addicted to anything, it knows how to tempt you. Smoker? Soon your iPhone will have a laser cigarette lighter app that works to light your cigarette as soon as you bring it to your lips. Ain't that cool? Once we reorient our mind to the three points Shinran points out above, we flip over the digital mind of our sentient side, and, snuffing out our addictions, are closer to our original nature, moving in ascent mode in the world of the infinite. That is our real home ground, where we have always been. We know we are home from the wind blowing in our hair and the feel of the sand between our toes. Just live in the light of your own true mind that has been travelling to reach you from before the beginning of time.

Appendix.

For comparison sake, here is D. T. Suzuki's translation of the same passage:

"The true teaching is elucidated in The Larger Sutra of Eternal Life. The essence of this Sutra is, [on the one hand,] the account of Amida who, full of loving concern for all helpless and ignorant beings, evoked the Supreme Prayer to open up widely the house of the Dharma and to give away freely all the selected treasures of merit contained therein, and, on the other hand, the account of Sakyamuni, who made his appearance in this world in order to help all beings with the illuminating teaching of the truth through which they would be benefited with things true and real"

(*The Collection of Passages Expounding the True Teaching, Living, Faith, and Realizing of the Pure Land*, 1972, rev. ed. 2012).

The problem remains of how to present Shinran's message to the Western mind that Suzuki's mind was not well equipped to do.

Here the version from the *Collected works of Shinran*, 1997, page 7 passage 2:

"To reveal the true teachings: It is the *Larger Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*. The central purport of this sura is that Amida, by establishing the incomparable Vows, has opened wide the dharma-storehouse, and full compassion for small, foolish beings, selects and bestows the treasure of virtues. [The sutra further reveals that] Śākyamuni appeared in this world and expounded the teachings of the way to enlightenment, seeking to save the multitudes of living beings by blessing them with this benefit that is true and real. Thus, to teach the Tathagata's Primal Vow is the true intent of this sutra; the Name of the Buddha is its essence."

See page 4 for other comparative translations by W.S. Yokoyama in parallel with the *Collected Works of Shinran*.

Parallel Translation of the Preface of the Kyōgyōshinshō

Language is an imperfect vehicle for the transmission of religious truth, but it is the only vehicle that we have. With that said it is something to be grateful for that the written works of Shinran Shōnin are left for us to help guide us.

A further awareness to share with you is about the efforts and difficulties faced by the translators of the various texts. Translating from one language to another is not so simple as it seems. Different languages and cultures communicate in different ways and in reality a one-to-one correspondence in meaning from one word in one language to another word in another language does not happen as often as one would assume... These are just few of challenges that face scholar translators like W. S. Yokoyama, the successive translators of the CWS, the venerated D. T. Suzuki, etc...

Therefore, rather than only rely on one translation, someone looking for deeper insights into Shinran's thought would do well to keep an open mind, and examine other translations of the same text by Shinran.

With this approach in mind, we are very fortunate that W. S. Yokoyama gives us an opportunity to perhaps gain further insight by sharing an alternative translation of *Preface* and *The Chapter on The True Teaching of the Pure Land Way* of the Kyōgyōshinshō. The Yokoyama Version is presented in the left column and CWS (Collected Works of Shinran) Version appears in the right column.

Yokoyama Version

Statements from the Literature Revealing of the Theory Practice Proof of the Ultimate Reality of the Pure Land: Preface

Ken jōdo shinjitsu kyōgyōsho monrui: jo

[Shinran's Preface]

*After long and quiet reflection in my foolish mind, this is what I have come to realize. The Universal Vow hard for us to conceive is the great ship crossing the ocean hard for us to cross. The Radiant Light impossible for us to impede is the sun of wisdom rending the darkness of our ignorance.

*Just at the time, as the conditions for the pure land were maturing, Devadatta instigated Ajātaśatru to commit acts of treachery. To make perfectly clear who the recipient of the pure act was, Śākyamuni selected Vaidehī as first candidate for pure land. These cosmic actors, filled with kindness, sought to save the multitudinous beings and deliver them from their suffering. The World Hero, saddened by their plight, wished to somehow help even the lying, traitorous *icchantika*.

*For that reason, [Śākyamuni] thought that, by perfectly infusing them with the virtue of the

CWS Version (pp. 3-4)

The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way

Preface

I reflect within myself: The universal Vow difficult to fathom is indeed a great vessel bearing us across the ocean difficult to cross. The unimpeded light is the sun of wisdom dispersing the darkness of our ignorance. Thus it is that, when conditions for the teaching of birth in the Pure Land had matured, Devadatta provoked Ajātaśatru, Vaidehī – All aspired to save the multitudes of beings from pain and affliction, and in his compassion, Śākyamuni, the great hero, sought indeed to bless those committing the five grave offenses, those slandering the dharma, and those lacking the seed of Buddhahood. We know, therefore, that the auspicious Name embodying the perfectly fulfilled supreme virtues is true wisdom that transforms our evil into virtue, and the diamond like shinjin so difficult to accept is true reality that sweeps away doubt and brings us to attainment of enlightenment.

Yokoyama Version

symbolic Name, the Name would transform them with its virtue of true wisdom. Eliminating the doubts of those who find it hard to believe, the indestructible diamond of the joy of faith would take them into its custody as it showed them the way to their true home. For the ordinary people and those with little experience, it would be a true spiritual teaching that is easily cultivated. Indeed, in the ocean full of virtue of the teachings the Great Sage taught during a lifetime career, there would be nothing quite like it. There were those who wished to abandon the defiled world and aspire for the pure, who wandered aimlessly in their practice and were at a loss what to believe, whose minds were muddled and whose knowledge was scant, whose hearts were laden with wickedness and whose hindrances were many. Let them especially pay reverence to the Tathāgata to send them off [on their mission], let them necessarily seek to return to that land by taking the most assuredly direct route, let them devotedly worship this practice and this faith alone.

*Alas, it is unlikely for us to ever have enough of the strong conditions planted within us for us to be recipients of the Universal Vow. And yet, as unlikely as it may seem for you to obtain the pure faith of ultimate reality, we indeed encounter the conditions for just that—our process of faith being conditioned by good karma dwelling within us from the distant past. And yet, if on this round of transmigration we should find ourselves covered belly up in the net of doubt, then once again we have to pass through vast kalpas of transmigration. How truly sad! The words of truth, that “we are taken up and never abandoned,” mean that a rare, true Dharma exists that transcends the world. Listen and think for yourself, never lag behind lost in deliberations.

(Continued on page 7)

CWS Version

This, then, is the true teaching easy to practice for small, foolish beings, it is straight way easy to traverse for the dull and ignorant. Among all the teachings the Great Sage preached in his lifetime, none surpasses this ocean of virtues. Let the one seeks to abandon the defiled and aspire for the pure; who is confused in practice and vacillating in faith; whose mind is dark and whose understanding deficient; whose evils are heavy and whose karmic obstructions manifold – let such persons embrace above all the Tathagata’s exhortations, take refuge without fail in the most excellent direct path, devote themselves solely to this practice, and revere only this shinjin.

Ah, hard to encounter, even in many lifetimes, is the decisive cause of birth, Amida’s universal Vow! Hard to realize, even in myriads of kalpas, is pure shinjin that is true and real! If you should some to realize this practice and shinjin, rejoice at the conditions from the distant past that have brought it about. But if in this lifetime still you are entangled in a net of doubt, then unavoidably you pass once more in the stream of birth-and -death though myriads of kalpas. Wholly sincere, indeed, are the right dharma all-surpassing and wondrous! Hear and reflect, and let there be no wavering or apprehension.

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What Kind of Fool I Am: A Gatha of Faith

What kind of fool I am,
Sunken in the pit of karmic evil,
Scorched by my burning passions
And a victim of my foolish self-will.

Yet somehow Amida Buddha
Knew all this and much more,
Gaining salvation and Buddhahood
Carrying all to the opposite shore.

Amida Buddha's Great Compassion
Reaches out to the suffering throng
Through His Primal Vow he assures
Buddhahood despite all their wrong.

Amida is greatest of all Buddhas,
Only He made Buddhahood possible
For us entrenched in evil karma and
Otherwise lost forever in hell.

The Nembutsu, Amida's Great Name
Is salvation for the evil ones first
And then the good persons too--
No longer by our evil natures cursed.

Buddhahood in the Pure Land
Is the reward to all who entrust
In Amida's great Primal Vow
When their bodies are turned to dust.

Namu Amida Butsu
I thank Amida Buddha, my Savior
Let us all learn to trust His Compassion
And pass through that Golden Door!

NAMU AMIDA BUTSU

It is so easy for us to forget
Amida Buddha's great dispensation
For the likes of our pathetic lot
Beset constantly by blind passions

The Larger Sutra brings to mind
The sacrifices for us by Dharmakara
Who spent many long kalpas of hard practices
Accumulating merit to deliver us from Samsara

The Other Power of Amida Buddha
Dharmakara Bodhisattva brought to pass
Fulfilling His Forty-Eight Great Vows
Thus saving our karma-beleaguered mass

All we need to do to claim this salvation
Is entrust ourselves completely to Amida
By simply repeating His Holy Name
In gratitude for His powerful Dharma

Let us set aside all calculation,
All defeating self-power and doubt,
Let us fully accept Amida's salvific embrace
Never abandoning us or leaving us out.

NAMU AMIDA BUTSU

The sweet sound of His Holy Name
Brings me tears of deep thankfulness
Saved by Him without condition or blame!

Thank You, Amida Buddha!

Gassho,
Richard St. Clair (Shaku Egen)

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(Continued from page 5)

*And then, Gutoku Shaku Shinran, celebrate! The sacred literature of the Xifan and Yuezhi, the expositions of the teachers of the Dongxia and Riyu—How hard they are to encounter and yet now you have encountered them! How difficult it is to hear them and yet you have heard them! Reverently believing in this true school of the theory practice proof, you know how especially deep the benevolence of the Tathagata is that it makes you want to celebrate, for what you have heard, praise be, is what you have gained!



This parallel translation on continues to *The Chapter on The True Teaching of the Pure Land Way* that will appear in a subsequent Metta.

(Continued from page 5)

How joyous I am, Gutoku shinran, disciple of Śākya-muni! Rare is it to come upon the sacred scriptures from the westward Inad of India and the commentaries of the master of China and Japan, but now I have been able to hear encounter them. Rare is it to hear them, but already I have been able to hear. Reverently entrusting myself to the teaching, practice, and realization that are the true essence of the Pure Land way, I am especially aware of the profundity of the Tathagata's benevolence. Here I rejoice in what I have heard and extol what I have attained.

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We are happy to announce the resumption of classes:

ZEN MEDITATION: TUESDAYS 6:30PM

YOGA : WEDNESDAYS 5:00PM

**PLEASE OBSERVE SANITATRY PRECAUTIONS
AND PROPER SOCIAL DISTANCING AS GUID-
ED BY YOUR INSTRUCTORS.**

FACE MASKS/COVERINGS ARE REQUIRED

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