

A STUDY IN THE THOUGHT OF 'HON-GAN', OR THE BASIC VOW OF A BODHISATTVA

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I. *The thought of the basic vow and the path of religious practice in Buddhism.*

One of the outstanding features of Mahāyāna Buddhism lies in its clarification of the religious life of the bodhisattva, the seeker after enlightenment. His religious life consists in the two aspects of 'benefiting oneself' (seeking after enlightenment for himself) and 'benefiting others' (imparting the Teaching to others, and aiding them in their quest for enlightenment). As a result, the numerous Buddhas as preached in the Mahāyāna are those creatures who have thus perfected themselves in this religious life. And the bodhisattva takes as his ideal that Buddha which most closely resembles himself in his practice of the religious life. The bodhisattva first produces the determination or the will to strive after enlightenment, referred to as 'hotsu bodai-shin', or the production of the mind of 'bodhi' or enlightenment. Next, in order that they may make more concrete their individual bodhisattva-paths, each one of them puts forth a 'hon-gan' or basic vow (mūla-praṇidhāna, pūrva-praṇidhāna), and then continues his religious practices in accordance with this vow. And it is the unity of this religious practice and the aim of this vow that constitutes the perfection of the bodhisattva's religious life, and when this takes place the bodhisattva's promise is fulfilled that all other creatures attain to Buddhahood at the very same time.

Bodhisattvas put forth vows that are common to all bodhisattvas, as well as their own, individually unique vows. The former type of vows

are called the 'sō-gan' (sāmānya praṇidhāna), and the latter are referred to as 'betsu-gan' (viśeṣa-praṇidhāna). The bodhisattva is one who has absorbed unto himself the Buddhist view of society and of the world, and in general is any Buddhist having this consciousness. Consequently any Buddhist or follower of the teachings of the Buddha would take upon himself the general vows, the 'sō-gan' of the bodhisattva. In general, these are the 'Four Universal Vows' (shigu-zeigan), or the vows to: save all creatures without limit, to cut off all delusions without limit, to master all the dharmas of the Teaching without limit, and to attain to unlimited Buddhahood. In addition to these general vows, however, the the 'betsu-gan' or specific vows may be, for instance, the six vows of Avalokiteśvara, the twelve vows of Bhaiṣajyaguru-tathāgata (Yakushi-nyorai), the forty-eight vows of Amitābha-tathāgata (Amida-nyorai)-viz the Wei dynasty translation by K'ang Seng-k'ai of the *Wu-liang-shou-ching*-and the five hundred vows of Śākyamuni-tathāgata (Shaka-nyorai).

The bodhisattva Dharmākara (Hōzō-bosatsu) put forth forty-eight vows, and he later evolved into the Tathāgata Amitābha (Amida-nyorai). While we may refer to these vows as the forty-eight vows of Dharmākara, they are also called the forty-eight vows of Amitābha Buddha. What is the reason for this? Although he has thus become a Buddha, his basic nature or character is a continuation of his nature as the bodhisattva who had thus put forth these vows. In short, Buddhahood may be said to be an existence lived by virtue of ones previous 'basic vows'. This fact corresponds to the Mahāyāna Buddhist phrase which defines, and hence limits bodhisattvas and Buddhas, that 'they do not reside in Nirvāṇa (fujū-nehan). This phrase takes its origin from the belief that although they have attained to the enlightenment of Nirvāṇa, they do not reside within the realm or sphere of Nirvāṇa, but are striving earnestly for the benefit of all creatures. We may therefore, grasp the essentials of Mahāyāna Buddhism as we view the development of the concept of the basic vow of the bodhisattva. Indeed, if we were to remove the concept of the basic vow of the bodhisattva from out of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Mahāyāna

Buddhism would cease to exist. Nevertheless, at the present time, there are some who regard the study of the basic vow as being primarily or even exclusively within the range of Pure Land studies (Jōdo-kyō). If this is indeed the case, all previous studies in Mahāyāna Buddhism are due for some critical re-evaluation.

Furthermore, those persons who have carried out Pure Land studies purely within the range of the Jōdo or Pure Land-related sectarian traditions have been compelled to elucidate the superiorities of the Pure Land teachings, and have thus come to neglect the relationship to the total background of the Buddhism religion. And it is only recently that the relationship of the Pure Land teachings to Buddhism as a whole has come to be re-examined. In addition to being part of Buddhism, the Pure Land teachings have come, in Japan, to stand above the total Buddhism tradition, and it is necessary to investigate why it is that such words as 'basic vow' (hon-gan), 'nem-butsu', 'Pure Land' (Jōdo), 'faith' (shin-jin), and 'birth in Buddha-land' (ōjō) have come to be regarded as the exclusive property of those sects of the Pure Land tradition. We should like to see future Pure Land orientated studies move from the thesis that 'the Pure Land teaching is Buddhist' to the direction of the thesis that 'Buddhism is the Pure Land teachings', and to do this, a study of the basic vow, the 'hon-gan' of the bodhisattva, is an integral part.

II. *Various views of the Pure Land (Jōdo).*

Professor KIMURA Taiken wrote an excellent article on the thought of the basic vow (see *Daijō-Bukkyō-shisōron*, Chapter Three, Section 5, "Hongan-shisō no kaiten to sono dōtokuteki, bunkateki, shūkyōteki igi ni tsuite", "Concerning the development of basic vow thought and its moral, cultural, and religious significance"; Tokyo, 1936, Meiji-shoin), and in this article he divided into three the major aspects of understanding the Pure Land within the context of Buddhism.

1. The Pure Land of meditation (kannen no Jōdo). This is as taught in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa sūtra* (*Yuima-kyō*), when it says, ".....the Amī-tābha of the mind; the Pure Land of one's body....." (yuishin no mida;

koshin no Jōdo). If our minds are pure, then these pure minds become of themselves the Pure Land, and the Buddha Amitābha, the creator and the lord of the Pure Land, is then none other than ourselves, in our present bodies. In short, even if in this instance we would say that the Pure Land exists, it exists only in and of our meditations.

2. The 'other-direction' Pure Land (tahō no Jōdo), or the Pure Land described with concrete characteristics (shi-hō rissō no Jōdo). This is the teaching that the Pure Land of the Buddha Amitābha lies in the west, beyond myriads of Pure Lands of the various other Buddhas, and that this Pure Land is decorated with a variety of concrete objects which are familiar to us living on this world. In short, this type of Pure Land exists, and hence is to be known only with reference to the world that we live in, and further, since all the various different Buddhas each have their own Buddha-lands, they may all be said to exist with reference to the human realm. Actually however, can such a geographically-orientated Pure Land be said to exist? Professor KIMURA presented only the mistaken concept of the Pure Land—of the geographically situated and very concretely decorated Pure Land which the vast majority of Pure Land believers have found in their sacred scriptures—and he failed to point out the correct interpretation of the Pure Land, and for this reason, he relates the Pure Land of the Buddha Amitābha into this second category. The author's views on this point will be stated later.

3. A future Pure Land in this world (shōrai shido no Jōdo). Following Śākyamuni Buddha, the Buddha Maitreya will appear in this world, and this world will then become a Pure Land. This is also the significance of the phrase 'this world is none other than the world of calmness and light' (shaba-soku-jakkōdo). Professor KIMURA denied the reality of the Pure Land as described in categories one and two (as above), but stated, "I believe that it is our duty to bring to realization the age of Maitreya's Pure Land." Further, he stated, "The true Pure Land is of course an Ideal and a Spirit; but it must take shape in objective, physical matter." For him, and ideal society, which is the Pure Land, must be constructed on

this earth, and it is the Buddhists' destiny to carry this out.

In addition to the above, there are some intellectuals who deny the existence of the Pure Land, and state rather that it is a motivating force which brings about the evolution, or the change in the hearts and minds of men. This is perhaps based on their reaction to the over-mythologization of the Pure Land on the part of Pure Land believers and their ignorant and misguided efforts at portraying the Pure Land as a world existing apart from this world.

Above is a broad outline of the three categories of the Pure Land as envisioned by KIMURA Taiken, and yet it is to be regretted that this esteemed Professor did not truly understand the significance of the Pure Land message as handed down to Hōnen and to Shinran. Now it is with reference to this orthodox understanding of Hōnen and Shinran's interpretation of the Pure Land teaching that we should now like to examine the structure of the Pure Land and the forty-eight basic vows of the Buddha Amitābha as presented in the Wei dynasty translation of the *Wu-liang-shou-ching*.

III. *The nature of the Pure Land of the Buddha Amitābha.*

1. *The nature of the Buddha Amitābha.* Two great natures to the Buddha Amitābha are shown by vow number twelve, the vow of unlimited light, and by vow number thirteen, the vow of unlimited life. In short, the Buddha Amitābha is an existing creature embodying and personifying eternal 'life' and 'light'. He is none other than a Buddha who continues his work of salvation for all creatures, and who spans limitless time and space. 'Light' represents wisdom (*prajñā*), and 'life' represents love (*maitrī-karuṇā*), and these are then the two great aspects to the nature of the Buddha Amitābha.

2. *The various decorations and ornaments in the Pure Land.* The Indians knew of the marvellous ornaments that graced the palaces of the various gods, and in this sūtra, the Pure Land is described in terms of the heavenly palace of Parānirmita-vaśavartin (Take-jizai-ten), one of these devas. This Buddha Land is composed of gems and fragrant smells (the

thirty-second vow); and there are no differences in the four seasons—it is neither too hot nor too cold, but a completely ideal world. As is also taught in the Smaller Sukhāvati-vyūha sūtra, the sounds of the small birds, the rustling of the trees, and the murmuring of the flowing waters—all these are as a symphony which teaches the Truth of the Dharma, and those that hear it, reach by virtue of these sounds, the stage of the bodhisattva in which there is no longer any chance of regression into lower spheres of existence (avinivartaniya). Further, anyone who feels the breezes of this Pure Land obtains the highest pleasures of both body and mind. The adornments in this realm are marvellous in their shape and in their color (vow number twenty-seven). This realm is purity itself, and is so filled with light that all the other Buddha-lands are seen at a glance (vow number thirty-one).

3. *The bodies of those born in the Pure Land of Amitābha.* Those who are born into this land are radically different from those still living in this world, but only for expedient's sake are they still referred to under the categories of gods or men (vow number four). Their bodies are of a golden hue (vow number three,) and they possess on their bodies the thirty-two major marks of a Buddha (vow number twenty-one); there are no differences in beauty or ugliness (vow number four). The numbers of this multitude are limitless (vow number fourteen), and their life-span is also without limit (vow number fifteen). Their powers of remembrance, of vision, of hearing, of clairvoyance, and their ability to fly through the air are super-human; they have destroyed the stain of any delusion, and they are totally without grasping or greed of any kind (vows number five through ten). They possess the visual power to distinguish between objects (vow number twenty-seven), and they can accomplish or obtain anything at all that they desire. They have a visual power that projects the other Buddha lands to within a grasp of their hands. They have the ability to give offerings to all the various Buddhas freely (vow number twenty-three and twenty-four); they can obtain clothing at will, and it never requires washing or mending (vow

number thirty-eight). They have also the ability to understand the Buddha when they hear Him, and they have the power of persuasion when teaching the Dharma to others. The area of this pure Land is without limit (vows number twenty-nine and thirty). However, these people do not remain idly in the Pure Land; rather, they travel to other worlds in their mission of helping others, thus carrying out the religious practice of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra (Fugen-bosatsu). For this purpose, they are able to lengthen or shorten their life-spans as they see fit (vows number twenty-two and fifteen).

4. *The methods by which persons can be born in the Pure Land.* Those wanting to be born therein are bathed in a light by the Buddha Amitābha, and both their bodies and their minds receive a blessed sense of peace (vow number thirty-three). Hearing of the varmelious adornments of the Pure Land, they form a resolve to practice the religious life of the Buddhists (vow number thirty-two); hearing the name of this Buddha, they continue the brahma-carya (bongyō), the pure actions of their religious life (vow number thirty-six). While they continue this practice based upon their hearing the name of the Buddha, there shall be no one who does not profoundly respect them (vow number thirty-seven). They shall obtain the power to hold on to and to maintain their understanding of the truth that they obtained upon hearing the name of this Buddha (vows number thirty-four and forty-eight). At the instant of hearing the name of this Buddha, their hearts obtain a calmness and peace; and they give offerings to the Buddhas; yet while they give offerings to the Buddhas, their hearts do not for one instant depart from this feeling of peace and calm (vow number forty-two), and through this calmness, they obtain a vision of all the Buddhas (vow number forty-five). The bodhisattvas who have heard the name of this Buddha—from that moment on until they reach Buddhahood, they shall possess perfect faculties of consciousness (vow number forty-one). By the virtue of having heard the name of this Buddha, they shall be reborn in noble families (vow number forty-three); women who upon hearing the name of this Buddha

and despising their sex, shall not in their next life receive the body of a woman (vow number forty-four). Hearing the name of this Buddha, and rejoicing in faith, those who desire birth in this Pure Land, shall receive a positive and definite assurance of their eventual Buddhahood, and they are then at a stage from whence they shall never regress. Also, at the moment of their death, this Buddha shall come to their bedsides and escort them into the Pure Land (vow number eleven, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-two, and forty-seven).

5. *The Pure Land as the realm of enlightenment.*

A. The Pure Land is a world that does not contain the three evil destinies, or areas of rebirth (hell, hungry spirits, and animals), as bliss (sukha) is the basic quality of the Pure Land (vows number one and two). Consequently, no evil persons exist there—there is not even the mention of a bad person (vow number sixteen). As stated in the latter half of the sūtra, “.....there does not exist (here) the name of the three evil (states) nor of any hardship; only the sound of spontaneously generated pleasure. For this reason, this land is called the land of bliss (anarakukoku, Sukhāvatī).....” The three evil states refer to our existence, full of error and delusion, and the Pure Land is a world without the rebirth of delusion and ignorance; it is the realm of Nirvāṇa and of enlightenment.

B. The Pure Land is the realm of śūnyatā. All the bodhisattvas born in this Pure Land do not have any thoughts whatsoever of “me” or “mine” in regard to any object existing in the Pure Land, nor is there any feeling of attachment in their minds. Their minds reside in the Middle Way, and are thus freed of any and all impediments. They observe that whereas the three realms are basically and essentially ‘śūnya’, there is nowhere and nothing upon which the idea of “me” or “mine” can alight. Thus, to say that the bodhisattvas of the Pure Land have attained the insight of śūnya means that the Pure Land itself is of the nature of śūnya (śūnyatā). It may thus be said that the religious practices necessary for one to be born into this Pure Land must of itself be affiliated or associated with the realization of the śūnyatā (suññatā) of all existence,

i. e., the religious life must be *suññatā-paṭisaṃyutta*. This is also the meaning of the phrase 'jinen-hōni' of Shinran.

C. The Pure Land as a realm that expresses the ultimate nature of the basic vow. The Pure Land is a world of enlightenment (*satori*) which is grounded upon the vow of the bodhisattva Dharmākara (*Hōzō-bosatsu*). And it is a realm that also serves as a place of refuge for those who are searching for enlightenment based upon a faith in the basic vow and the practices of the bodhisattva Dharmākara. And it is the Pure Land teachings (*Jōdo-kyō*) which is the essential identity (*sōsoku*), the mutual correspondence (*sōō*) of both the basic vow of Dharmākara and the basic vows of those who are striving to live according to this belief.⁽¹⁾ The Pure Land is a world which expresses in tangible form the ultimate nature of the basic vow—the nature of the Pure Land is the perfection of the vows sworn to perfection by Dharmākara. His vows embrace all the vows possible to the Pure Land follower. Consequently, the concept and the reality of the basic vows of the Buddha cannot be extracted from the Pure Land, and still have it exist as the Pure Land. The enlightenment of the Pure Land—being born in the Pure Land and becoming a Buddha—is none other than that awakening to one's individual and personal basic vow in relation to the basic vow of the Buddha; by means of the Buddha's basic vow, one discovers one's true self, and the Pure Land is the area in which one discovers one's true self in this sense. The various views that deny the existence of the Pure Land all overlook such statements as "the enlightenment of becoming a Buddha", and "our vows and the Buddha's vows"; such views denying the Pure Land are simply arguments that would deny the spatial or temporal existence of the Pure Land.

D. The Pure Land is a realm that possesses the power and the activity to purify and to give meaning and validity to all objects and actions. In Indian religious thought, a vow contained in and of itself truth, and Buddhism adopted this view. A vow based upon truth and upon sincerity must of necessity be fulfilled, and the power inherent in this vow is considered to be superhuman (cf. *Milindapañhā*, pp. 119-123).

And it is a recognized fact that Shinran, throughout his works, used the words 'Pure Land' (Jōdo) and 'Amitābha-tathāgata' (Amida-nyorai) as synonyms for the Truth. Shinran appears to have reached a realization that he himself was 'deceived, and unsubstantial' (koke-fujitsu), and an 'ordinary person, deeply enmeshed in sin' (zai-aku jinjū no bombu), but actually such expressions were not said through his self-will, but were expressions prompted by the Buddha's Truth. The Truth caused him to think and to believe that what he regarded as untrue was in fact untrue. The Truth is the truth by reason and virtue of the fact that it does indeed have this power to act on behalf of truth.

The beautiful ornaments of the Pure Land are classified into twenty-nine categories in Vasubandhu's 'Commentary on the Pure Land' (*Jōdo-ron*), and in Donran's sub-commentary on the above work, the *Jōdo-ron-chū*. These ornaments are described by the words 'pure, undefiled' (shōjō), and the reason that the "Pure" Land, the "clean, undefiled" land are the words used to describe the realm of the Buddhas, is simply to make us humans understand its nature by referring to concepts that we can understand. Yet it is clearly not enough to refer to the realm of the Buddhas by reference to our dirty, defiled world. The Pure Land would then be simply a reaction, and a negation of our every-day experiences. As in the case of the Truth as quoted earlier, purity is purity by reason and by virtue of the fact that it possesses the power and the ability to purify.⁽²⁾ In this way, the Buddha-land of the tathāgata Amitābha, which is purity and truth, continues to produce in an active manner a purifying and a truth-giving activity, and for this reason we are caused to be born in this Pure Land, and we are caused to harbor thoughts or 'basic vows' leading to our birth in this realm. We who by ourselves do not partake of the nature of truth and purity, are made by the all-embracing enlightenment of Buddhism to go for refuge to this realm which is by its very essence truth and purity. Truth is of itself truth; purity is of itself purity—and it is Buddhism which teaches us to grasp hold of the meaning of this sentence. The 'basic vow' is activity which truly possesses Truth

and Purity; it may indeed be said to be the condition of activity reflecting these states.

IV. *Nirvāṇa and the Pure Land.*

In the *Milindapañhā*, there are eight discussions or dialogues that deal with the sphere of enlightenment or *Nirvāṇa*. The purport of all of them can be said to be the following: All men are capable of attaining enlightenment. But when they speak of all men, this means in effect those who are able to grasp the principles of the Four Noble Truths—those who can know suffering, who can cut off the accumulation of suffering, who can realize the extinction of suffering, and who can practice the path leading to this extinction of suffering. Gotama Buddha preached a religious life that was aimed at the realization of the state of *Nirvāṇa*; he did not preach concerning the origins or beginnings of *Nirvāṇa*. The reason for this is that *Nirvāṇa* is equal to the state of *śūnyatā*—absence of self-nature, and totally relative—and consequently the state or condition of *Nirvāṇa* is not produced by karma (mental and physical activity is produced by karma), it is not generated by a first-cause (objects generated by seeds can be said to be generated by a first-cause), nor is it produced by time. Nevertheless, the sphere of enlightenment which is *Nirvāṇa* does exist. Yet even though we may say that *Nirvāṇa* exists, it does not exist in the sense that we humans are able to grasp it by any means present in the physical world. In other words, *Nirvāṇa* cannot be expressed or represented by any tangible or perceivable object. As a consequence, *Nirvāṇa* cannot be represented adequately by parables, reasonings, references to its origins or by any means whatsoever—and this holds true whether we are speaking of the shape of *Nirvāṇa*, its location, its duration, and its quantity. Nor can there be said to be an ultimate location or resting-place for the state or condition which is *Nirvāṇa*. We can only provisionally explain or represent the various qualities of *Nirvāṇa* by referring to the special characteristics of various concrete objects. For example, the purity of a lotus which remains clean even though being rooted in the mud may be likened to *Nirvāṇa*. The

numerous aspects of Nirvāṇa have been frequently described by various words, 'unconditioned', 'perfect calm', 'bliss', 'a marvellous purity', 'at rest', 'joy', 'absence of blemish', 'unmovable', 'liberation', 'separateness', 'destruction', and 'emptiness'—such words have been used as synonyms of Nirvāṇa, yet all fail to express it fully. Nirvāṇa is bliss, and by saying this, one would mean that a state of bliss is one in which there is not the slightest bit of pain whatsoever, and so the word 'bliss' (anraku) came often to be used as a synonym for Nirvāṇa. The Chinese monk T'an-luan (Don-ran) stated that whereas the Pure Land is a world of bliss and that if someone wanted to be born therein in order to obtain this feeling of bliss, this person could not thereby gain birth in the Pure Land; in short, he denied the validity of the premise 'to desire birth (in the Pure Land) for the purposes of enjoyment' (tanoshimi no tame ni umaren to negau). For being born in the Pure Land is not the means by which one would seek a favorable birth in this world. In the Smaller Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra, in explaining why the Pure Land is a land of highest bliss, it states, ".....the multitudes in that land have no sufferings whatsoever, but receive only pleasure....." When this passage is compared with the Sanskrit original, the word for pain refers to both the mental and physical sufferings of humans, and it is these two types of sufferings that do not plague those who are born into the Pure Land; and it is taught that they receive the highest pleasures of these two spheres. In other words, the inhabitants of the Pure Land do not possess the faculties for the sense impressions of pain or suffering. This is precisely the same teaching concerning the realm of enlightenment of an Arhat in the period of Early Buddhism—the period of the direct teaching of the Buddha Śākyamuni himself, and preserved in the Pāli Canon. To an enlightened person, there is no feeling or perception of any physical affliction or mental pain whatsoever, and to say that they do not receive a sense faculty for the reception of such sense impressions means that they have transcended such sense impressions. To find a fitting name for such a stage or realm of transcendence, we are obliged to call

it 'bliss' (anraku) or 'purity' (shōjō). To say, however, that the realm of enlightenment is 'bliss' does not mean that the bliss of Nirvāṇa is of the same quality and of the same nature as the bliss or feelings of joy that we humans feel—such a bliss in this world may be said to be simply a state of relative happiness, relative in relationship to a state of misery, which itself is in turn relative; the bliss of Nirvāṇa is not relative, since in the state of Nirvāṇa misery is seen not to exist; indeed, it is not even perceived, so by definition, the bliss of enlightenment is absolute.

Further, it says in the same sūtra, ".....there is a world to the west of here, beyond myriads of Buddha-lands, and its name is Highest Bliss (Gokuraku)....." The use of the word 'beyond' (sugite) has the significance of 'transcending'. To say, as the sūtra does, that there is a Pure Land in the west that is above and beyond not only our finite, human world, but which also transcends all other Buddha-lands signifies that the Pure Land is a realm of enlightenment, and this is indeed the highest realm.

How may we know that there is indeed the realm of the bliss of Nirvāṇa; there is no other method than to listen to the words of those who have experienced this Nirvāṇa for themselves. In this way, Nirvāṇa may only be known or obtained by the correct and orthodox practice of the way to enlightenment. However, this Nirvāṇa cannot be understood by us to exist—we cannot truly perceive it to exist by our sense faculties as an objective state. We can not know it until we are totally immersed in it.

We and all that surround us are called by the term 'sabbe saṅkhārā' (shogyō) or 'all conditioned', but Nirvāṇa exists as 'unconditioned' (mui) in direct opposition to our experience and environment, which is thus classified as 'conditioned' (ui). It is only in this sense that Nirvāṇa can even be said to exist. "We do not experience an already existing Nirvāṇa; neither do we experience a Nirvāṇa after it has been produced." In other words, an objectively existing Nirvāṇa is denied, and the only thing that is affirmed is the experience of one who has thus traversed the path to

Nirvāṇa.

If it is thus the case that a Nirvāṇa is experienced that is ultimately based only upon the actual practice of the religious life, upon what grounds is Nirvāṇa ultimately dependent? One who practiced the religious life comes to understand Nirvāṇa and to experience this feeling of enlightenment based upon his thoughts and actions of purity, uprightness, and lack of error and delusion. Further, he understands the nature of our world of 'conditioned' (ui)—for example, by meditation upon the truth that all conditioned are impermanent (shogyō-mujō-kan)—and by that wisdom (chi-e) he attains to Nirvāṇa. One may also attain to Nirvāṇa by the strenuous power of attention. And one who seriously and carefully upholds the commandments as taught in Buddhism can at any time and in any place attain to the peace and freedom that is Nirvāṇa.

The above are the concepts of Nirvāṇa as taught in the *Milindapañhā*, and upon which the original teachings of the Buddha Śākyamuni are based. Nirvāṇa is the realm of enlightenment. To say that it exists in the sense that a concrete material object exists is incorrect. To say that Nirvāṇa exists means that error as error has ceased to exist, and it is this condition that is termed Nirvāṇa; truth appears naturally with the absence of error. Nirvāṇa is the world of truth. Truth cannot be understood to exist by means of our senses, but any person who experiences for himself the principles of dependent origination (en-gi) can experience the existence of Nirvāṇa, or enlightenment, and it is this truth that is said to exist.

The Pure Land of the Buddha Amitābha is the world of Truth, the world of Nirvāṇa. In order that all men might understand it and obtain it, the Truth appeared with form and shape, and these constitute the ornaments and decorations of the Pure Land. These are the actions of the Buddha Amitābha which are directed to the salvation of all creatures. The Pure Land embodied the nature and essence of Nirvāṇa as taught since the time represented by the term 'Early Buddhism' and preserved

in the Pāli Canon, but while the Pure Land embodies enlightenment (Nirvāṇa), it also demonstrates the salvation-directed activities inherent in Nirvāṇa.

For instance: Nirvāṇa is śūnyatā, purity, Truth, and bliss, and these aspects of its nature and essence are taken completely into the definitions of the Pure Land. Moreover, the Pure Land is defined in relationship to its actions taken in our direction, for our salvation; Truth is not therefore absolutise, but is always conditional with respect to our salvation. Since the Pure Land is Truth, śūnyatā, and Purity, the Pure Land's activities in purifying and giving meaning to all creatures must be necessity continue without limit.

When such actions on the part of the Pure Land are directed towards us, the Pure Land comes to control and regulate those aspects of our life which are in contact with the saving activities of the Pure Land. In other words, the Pure Land becomes that part of us which is living in the grace of the life of 'Nem-butsu'.

Shinran said, "we have to discard the speculations of common men, and rely solely upon the other-power"; and Rennyo has said, "The Nem-butsu is based upon non-self (muga;anattan)", and this teaches the importance of direct and essential identity with the basic vow of the Buddha Amitābha.

In the Pāli Canon, the Smaller Sutta on suññatā (Cūḷasuññata-sutta, M. 121) gives three conditions for entering into suññatā or śūnyatā (i. e., becoming enlightened as to the nature of śūnya). The first is 'yathābhucca', being in suchness or reality (ari no mama ni aru koto), the second is 'avipallattha', not being in perversion, and the third is 'pari-suddha', or absolute purity. It has been taught by the teachers and patriarchs of the Pure Land tradition that the faith of the Pure Land follower must be regulated according to the above three conditions, if one would ever hope to obtain birth in the Pure Land, the nature and essence of which is identification with śūnyatā, the essence of the universe itself.

If we think of the "Pure Land" as having a geographical or even a concrete existence, the Pure Land teachings cease to be Buddhist; to affirm the existence of Enlightenment (satori) is precisely the same thing as to affirm the existence of the Pure Land (Jōdo), since they are exactly the same thing.

Birth in the Pure Land is to discover the true self, and the self that lives and takes its meaning from Truth, is a self that can never stop or be hindered in any way in its eternal striving after this Truth.

Note:

- (1) YŪKI Reimon: II, Chap. 5 'Jōdo-kyō-no-shinri-sei, (The Nature of Truth in Pure Land Doctrine) p. 561—Bukkyō-no-Kompon-shinri. 1956.
- (2) YAMAGUCHI Susumu: Daijō -toshiteno-jōdo(The Pure Land as manifested the essential of Mahāyāna) pp. 52~56, 1963. YAMAGUCHI Susumu: Bukkyō-gaku-no-hanashi(Talks on Buddhism) pp. 64~73, 1965.

(昭和四十年年度綜合研究による)

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