

PURE LAND'S CONTEMPLATION IN SHINSHŪ

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The Pure Land tradition, especially in China and Japan, has a great deal of teachings concerning contemplation. To begin with the famous *Sūtra of Contemplations on Infinite Life Buddha* (T. 12, 365), one of the three main sūtra of the Pure Land, presents no less than thirteen contemplations dealing with the Pure Land itself and its inhabitants, especially the main one of them that is the Buddha Amida. Through generations many commentaries have been written on the topic including those by the Japanese master Genshin (942-1017) whose *Ōjōyōshū* provides various contemplative methods, from the detailed contemplation of forty-two marks of the buddha and the general contemplation of his three bodies together with the three truths of the Tendai, down to the simplified and the very simplified contemplation on the tuft of hairs between the eyebrow of the buddha (*byakugō* 白毫). All these contemplations share the same use of calculation (*hakarai* 計) from the practitioner's side to be accomplished. That means they are poles apart from Shinshū teaching which stresses birth in the Pure Land through faith (*shinjin* 信心) that is precisely the giving up of any calculation from the practitioner's side (cf. Shinran, *Mattōshō*, V).

Hence one may wonder how it is possible that some Shinshū masters are speaking about contemplation in Shinshū.

To try to understand that point we first have to examine what a "pure land" (*jōdo* 淨土) is, and I mean here more specifically the pure land of the Buddha Amida which is called "Supreme Happiness" (*Gokuraku* 極樂).

A pure land is first of all a buddha land (*butsudo* 佛土) which may be defined as the field or sphere of activity of a perfectly accomplished buddha who has realized enlightenment and is preaching the Law.

According to the symbolical language of the mahāyāna sūtra, the bodhisattva's career to enlightenment is compared to the building and ornamenting of a buddha land—or field—which is achieved at the moment when the bodhisattva awakes to buddhahood. All the ornaments of such a pure land are nothing else than the symbolical expression of the "pure karman" (*jōgō* 淨業) accomplished through the perfections and qualities gathered by the bodhisattva in order to realize the perfect enlightenment.

Hence this *pure karman* is nothing else than the gathering of merits (*kudoku* 功德) acquired by the bodhisattva through his practice (*gyō* 行) and directed through his vows (*gan* 願) towards the realization of his pure land. In the *Ōjōyōshū*¹, Genshin quotes the *Daichidoron*², which states:

Merits alone are not able to realize a buddha land; they need the power of the vow (*ganriki* 願力). It is like a bull which is able to pull a cart but still needs a driver who knows the direction. The merits [of the bodhisattva] are like the bull, his vows are like the driver.

Genshin also explains in his *Ōjōyōshū*³ that the bodhisattva produces two kinds of vows: general vows (*sōgan* 総願) and particular vows (*betsugan* 別願). The general vows are well known as the "Four Universal Vows" (*shigūzeigan* 四弘誓願) through which the bodhisattva commits himself to become a buddha in order to help all sentient beings to eventu-

ally become buddhas too. The particular vows are intended to adapt the ultimate realization of buddhahood to the needs and conditions of the beings to be saved. In the case of the Buddha Amida these are the 48 vows as related in the *Sūtra on Infinite Life*.

On the other hand, through his practice on the way to buddhahood the bodhisattva is acquiring the perfect wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) through which he comes to know that on the absolute truth's level (*paramārtha-satya*) all things and all beings are devoid of self-nature (*svabhāva*, *jishō* 自性) which eventually means that the bodhisattva advances towards buddhahood in order to liberate sentient beings while knowing simultaneously that there is no buddhahood to be realized nor sentient beings to be saved. That is, says Genshin, that "birth-and-death is equal to *nirvāṇa*, passions equal to *bodhi*" (*shōji soku nehan, bonnō soku bodai* 生死即涅槃煩惱即菩提).

It must be here remembered that when the bodhisattva Dharmākara produced his vows he was not a newly entered one on the bodhisattva's career. This is testified by the *Sūtra on Infinite Life*⁴ where it is related that after having produced his particular vows Dharmākara received the prediction (*vyākaraṇa*, *juki* 受記) that he would necessarily reach the supreme enlightenment. Now this prediction is scheduled to be received by the bodhisattva at a very precise moment of their career. This moment is the eighth of the ten stages of the bodhisattva career and this level is called "Immovable" (*acalā*, *fudō* 不動). This stage is also well known as the moment where the bodhisattva is producing the insight of non-production (*anutpattika-dharma-ksānti*, *mushōbōnin* 無生法忍) that is when he discovers through his perfect wisdom that nothing is produced in absolute truth, so that eventually everything and every-body are void (*sūnya*, *kū* 空). Hence there is no subject nor object, no hate, nor envy nor illusion. Accordingly the

three acts of the bodhisattva are purified, that is "without passions' flow" (*anāsrava*, *muro* 無漏) any more.

The Chinese commentator Tanluan (476-542), whom Shinran considered as the main authority about the nature of the Pure Land, wrote:

The pure land of Peace and Happiness has been set up by the pure acts (*jōgō* 淨業) of the bodhisattva [Dharmākara] in his insight of non-production⁵.

And Tanluan adds:

Because the cause [*i.e.* the vow] is pure, the fruit [*i.e.* the land] is pure⁶.

He explains that birth in the pure land of Amida is "birth to birthlessness" (*mushō no shō* 無生之生), while the pure land is described as "the world of Birthlessness"⁷.

It is then clear that the pure land of the Buddha Amida is designed as the representation of the highest reality. Shinran explains that in his famous text about "jinen hōni" 自然法爾, where he states:

A supreme buddha (*mujō butsu* 無上佛) has no form whatsoever. Because he has no form he is said *jinen* (natural, spontaneous, automatic). [...] The Buddha Amida is the means [れう, *ryō* 料] to make us know the way of *jinen*⁸.

If the pure land is such a high spiritual reality one may wonder why this land is located in the west and is not to be sought inside our own mind. Especially a passage of the *Contemplations Sūtra* may seem to support such an idealistic view. This is the famous passage of the eighth contemplation, where it is said: "ze *shin sa butsu*, *zeshin zebutsu*" 是心作佛是心是佛⁹. This passage could mean: "This mind becomes a buddha, this mind is a buddha". But Shandao¹⁰ rejected the opinion of the Vijñānavāda school which interprets this passage as the contemplation on the

dharmabody (*dharmakāya*) of the Buddha penetrating into the practitioner's mind; Shandao also rejected the interpretation which states that the Buddha Amida and his Pure Land are to be contemplated as the pure buddha-nature inside the practitioner himself, as stated in the *Platform Sūtra*¹¹ of Huineng/Enō 慧能 (638-713), the sixth patriarch of the Chan/Zen school.

According to Shandao this passage of the *Contemplations Sūtra* simply means: "This mind creates a buddha; such mind, such buddha". Hence this contemplation is but a mental construction bound to the practitioner's abilities. Generally speaking, according to Shandao, all the contemplations provided by the *Contemplations Sūtra* aim simply to "establish marks to fix the mind" (*rissō jūshin* 立相住心 SSZ 1, p. 519) because to meditate without marks at all in a purely abstract way—as in the case of the dharmabody—would be far too difficult "as a man building a house in the sky".

In his *Kyōgyōshinshō*¹², Shinran also criticizes those who believe that their own nature is the Buddha Amida or that the Pure Land is in their mind only (*yuishin* 唯心). Shinran¹³ also quotes Shandao—both directly and indirectly—to warn against the meditation of no-image or no-thought (*musō rinen* 無相離念) used in the Zen tradition. Eventually, Shinran states¹⁴ that the buddha described in the *Contemplations Sūtra* is the body of transformation (*ke-shin* 化身) and not the true body of Amida who is a reward body (*hōjin* 報身) due to the accomplishment of his vows. Thus all the beautiful descriptions of the Sūtra are eventually but skillful means (*hōben* 方便) using the language of relative truth (*samvṛti-satya*) in order to impress the mind of the practitioner.

Shandao himself states meaningfully that the contemplation provided by the *Contemplations Sūtra* are but skillful means devised in order for the sentient beings to "get birthlessness because they rejoice in their minds

as they see these marvellous things"¹⁵.

Still these contemplations are basically rejected by Shinshū as the height of "self power" (*jiriki* 自力), which is defined by Shinran (*Ichinen-tanen-mon'i* SSZ 2, p. 614; *Mat-tōshō* II, *id.* p. 658.) as "trusting myself" (*wagami o ta-nomu*) instead of trusting the Buddha's vows. Such a choice means that one dares to calculate (*hakarai*) the Buddha's wisdom which has designed and accomplished the vow to liberate all the sentient beings who have faith in the transference of the Buddha's own merits through his Name.

Again, when the practitioner gives himself up to Amida's vow he will exactly answer the intent of the Buddha and share accordingly his realization of the supreme enlightenment by going to be born in his Pure Land. Such an entrusting has been defined by Shandao¹⁷ as the "twofold deep faith" (*nishu jinshin* 二種深信) where one realizes both that he is too weak—especially in this period of decreasing *dharma* (*mappō* 末法)—to gather any merit and that the Buddha's vows answer perfectly his needs. In some way this twofold faith arises from a spontaneous contemplation of the practitioner's own situation together with the awareness to the Buddha's vow.

But the true contemplation will be realized at the time of birth in the Pure Land as Shinran says in his *Kyōgyōshinshō*¹⁸:

Upon our reaching the Buddha Land of Peace and Bliss, our buddha-nature (*bussō* 佛性) will reveal itself through the transfer of the power of the original vow.

Also, according to Zonkaku (1290-1373), one of the benefits gained through birth in the Pure Land is the "samādhi of *nembutsu*" (*nembutsu sammai* 念佛三昧)¹⁹.

Nevertheless from the very moment one realized the *nembutsu*'s faith until he is actually born in the Pure Land, he is not without dwelling in a kind of contempla-

tion which is spontaneous and effortless. This state of mind has been precisely described by Genchi 玄智, a Shinshū master in the 18th century. His *Kōshinroku* 考信錄 states²⁰:

Even if they try the people of our time do not realize true contemplation. Nevertheless in the *nembutsu* we think of the Pure Land's marks and our confused thoughts stop by themselves, and then the pure mind shines alone.

Notes

1. Fasc. 1b; SSZ 1, p. 796.
2. Fasc. 7; T. 25, p. 108c; Lamotte, *Traité*, p. 406.
3. Fasc. 1b; SSZ 1, p. 783.
4. Fasc. 1; SSZ 1, p. 14.
5. *Ronchū*, Vol. 1; SSZ 1, p. 290.
6. *id.*, Vol. 2; SSZ 1, p. 336.
7. *id.*, Vol. 2; SSZ 1, p. 327-328.
8. SSZ 2, p. 530-531, 664; *Shinshū shiryō shūsei* 1, p. 623a-624a.
9. SSZ 1, p. 55-56.
10. *Kangyōsho*, Fasc. 3 (*Jōzengi*); SSZ 1, p. 519.
11. *Dangyō 障經*: T. 48, No. 2008, p. 352a13-24. Cf. *id.*, No. 2007, p. 341b6-20; td. Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York, 1987), § 35, p. 156-159. Kenneth K. Tanaka: *Where is the Pure Land?: Controversy in Chinese Buddhism on the Nature of Pure Land*, in "The Pacific World", N.S., No. 3 (Berkeley, fall 1987), pp. 36-45.
12. Chapter. 3, preface; SSZ 2, p. 47.
13. Chapter. 6, § 34; SSZ 2, p. 154.
14. Chapter. 6, § 1; k. 2, § 101 (SSZ 2, pp. 143 and 43).
15. *Kangyōsho*, Fasc. 7 (*Gengibun*); SSZ 1, p. 461.
16. SSZ 2, pp. 614, 658.
17. *Kangyōsho*, Fasc. 4 (*Sanzengi*); SSZ 1, p. 534.
18. Chapter. 5, § 37; SSZ 2, p. 140.
19. SSZ 2, p. 390; 3, p. 281.
20. *Shinshū shiryō shūsei* 9, p. 551b. Cf. *Kikan Shōshin 起觀生信*; *Shinshū-daijiten*, 1, pp. 279b-282a.

SHINRAN'S SHINJIN AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

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When we Buddhists, outsiders of Christianity, talk about Christian tradition, we necessarily face the discussion about the significance of the doctrinal or theological concepts such as "God," "Ultimate Truth," "Ultimate reality," "crucifixion," "eschatology," "Messiah," "Revelation," and so on. It is truly very important and meaningful to discuss these concepts in order to know about Christianity, but it is quite difficult to grasp the definitional meanings of terms like these by looking up certain literary works, because we find a wide variety of interpretation of these terms there. The central meaning of "knowing others" must lie in one's endeavors to understand others by standing on the same and common plane with them and, at the same time, to better understand oneself. In order to do so, we must get the key to understanding of a central concept of Christian tradition, by virtue of which various doctrinal and theological concepts could be better understood.

My interest lies in the spiritual attitude of religious devotees both in Buddhist and Christian traditions. It would be even more meaningful for Shin Buddhists to know how Christians are involved in God's salvific activity. Christian faith, however, has many varieties, so we should first look at several concrete instances of the individual faith in Christian history. In so doing, we will find two major streams for salvation and a certain