

PART ONE

***Tannisho*: Notes Lamenting the Differences**

by Yuien-bo

Preface

When I humbly reflect on the past and the present, I cannot help but deplore the fact that there now exist deviations from the true faith which was taught by our late master Shinran Shonin. I am afraid that this will cause confusion as the teachings are transmitted to future believers.

Unless we are fortunate enough to come into contact with a good teacher, how can we ever hope to enter the gate of Easy Practice? We must not distort the doctrine of Other Power with our own opinions and interpretations!

Thus, I am writing down some of the words of the late master Shinran Shonin which still ring in my ears. My sole purpose is to dispel the doubts of my fellow-believers.

I

When we believe that we have been saved by the inconceivable power of Amida's Vow and are therefore going to be reborn in the Pure Land, there arises from deep within us the desire to say the Nembutsu. At that moment we receive the benefit of being embraced by Amida Buddha, never to be cast away.

We should know that the Original Vow of Amida does not discriminate whether one is young or old, good or evil. True faith alone is necessary, for the Vow was made to save sentient beings who are burdened with great karmic evil and intense, fiery passions.

Thus, if we have true faith in Amida's Original Vow, other good acts are not necessary because there is no good superior to the Nembutsu. Neither should evil actions be feared, because no evil is capable of obstructing the working of Amida's Original Vow.

II

You have all travelled through more than ten provinces at the risk of your lives solely in order to see me and to ask me how to be born in the land of Utmost Bliss. But if you imagine that I know of ways to attain birth other than the Nembutsu, or that I know other teachings, you are greatly mistaken. If that is what you are looking for, you should visit the many distinguished scholars in Nara and on Mt. Hiei, who can answer in detail your questions on rebirth.

As for me, Shinran, I can only accept what my venerable master Honen said: "Just say the Nembutsu and be saved by Amida."

I, personally, do not know whether reciting the Nembutsu will be the seed of my birth in the Pure Land or whether it will create the karma which will cause me to fall into hell. But even if I discover that I have been misled by Honen Shonin, and that because I have said the Nembutsu I will fall into hell, I will have no regrets. If it were possible for me to become enlightened by performing some other practice, but I fell into hell because of saying the Nembutsu, I might well regret having been deceived. But since I am incapable of any religious practice whatsoever, hell will be my home in any case.

If Amida's Original Vow is true, Shakyamuni's teachings cannot be false. If the Buddha's teachings are true, Zendo's commentaries must not be false. If Zendo's commentaries are true, how can the words of Honen be deceptive? And if Honen's words are true, then what I, Shinran, say surely cannot be meaningless.

This is the faith of the foolish person that I am. And now, whether you entrust yourself to the Nembutsu or reject it is entirely up to you.

III

Even a good person can be born in the Pure Land, how much more so an evil person!

However, people commonly say, “Even an evil person can be born in the Pure Land, how much more so a good person!” This may sound reasonable, but it is contrary to the intent of Other Power, the power of the Original Vow. The reason for this is that those who believe that they themselves have the power to perform good acts are not inclined to rely completely on Other Power. Thus they are not in accord with the Original Vow of Amida. However, if they abandon their attachment to self-power and entrust themselves completely to Other Power, then they, too, will be born in the True Land of Recompense.

It was because of his compassion for those of us who are full of blind passions, and so are unable to escape from the bondage of birth and death through any religious practice whatsoever, that Amida made his Original Vow. And since his purpose was to enable people like us to attain Buddhahood, it is particularly the evil person who completely entrusts himself to Other Power who will be born in the Pure Land.

Thus the master said, “Even a good person can be born in the Pure Land, how much more so an evil person!”

IV

There is a real difference between the compassion of the path of the sages and the compassion of the Pure Land path.

In the path of the sages, compassion is expressed by feeling pity and sympathy for sentient beings and caring for them. But it is extremely difficult to help others escape the bonds of samsara as we would wish.

In the Pure Land path, compassion is expressed by saying the Nembutsu; quickly attaining Buddhahood through birth in the Pure Land; and then with a great compassionate and merciful heart, bestowing merits on all sentient beings to one’s heart desire.

In this present life, it is hard to save others, no matter how much love and pity we feel towards them. Thus our compassion

is limited and ephemeral. Only through saying the Nembutsu can perfect compassion be expressed.

V

I, Shinran, have not once said the Nembutsu for the sake of fulfilling my obligation of filial piety toward my late parents.

The reason is that all sentient beings have been my parents and my brothers and my sisters during my innumerable past lives. When I become a Buddha in the next life, I must save every one of them.

If the Nembutsu were a good act which we could perform by our own efforts, we could direct the merit that we acquire by saying it towards saving our parents. But since this is not the case, we should discard self-power and attain Buddhahood quickly. Then, through supernatural abilities and expedient means, we will be able to save all beings, beginning with those with whom we have past bonds, no matter what kind of karmic suffering they may be experiencing in the six realms of mortal existence and the four modes of birth.

VI

It is absurd for those who practice the Nembutsu exclusively to quarrel among themselves, saying, "These people are my disciples," or "These people are somebody else's disciples."

I, Shinran, have not even a single disciple. If I could bring people to say the Nembutsu, then I could call them "my disciples." But it would be preposterous to call somebody "my disciple" when he says the Nembutsu solely through the working of Amida's compassion.

If karmic conditions bring us together, we will come together. If karmic conditions separate us, we will part. Yet some say that if a person turns away from his teacher and follows another teacher, then even though he continues to say the Nembutsu, he will not be born in the Pure Land. This, too, is ridiculous. Are they saying that they can take back the true

faith which was given by Amida as if it were their own? They should not speak this way.

When we are in accord with the principle of Naturalness and Spontaneity, we will feel grateful for the compassion of Amida Buddha and the compassion of our teachers.

VII

The follower of the Nembutsu treads the unobstructed Single Path. If we ask the reason why, it is because even the gods of heaven and earth reverence and bow to the devotee who has true faith, and the evil spirits and those of false ways never hinder. Sins and evil cannot result in karmic retribution. Because good deeds never surpass the Nembutsu, it is the unobstructed Single Path.

VIII

For the devotee, saying the Nembutsu is neither a religious practice nor a good act. It is not a religious practice because we do not perform it by our own deliberate effort. It is not a good act either because it is not something we do by our own deliberate effort. It is entirely the working of Other Power; it has nothing to do with self-power. Thus, for the devotee, it is neither a religious practice nor a good act.

IX

When I asked the master, "Even when I say the Nembutsu, I cannot really say that I feel like dancing for joy. And I find that I am in no hurry to get to the Pure Land. Why should this be so?", he answered, "I, Shinran, have also had this doubt. And now you, Yuien-bo, are feeling the same way!"

"When I think deeply about this, I conclude that it is precisely because I do not rejoice, when I ought to be dancing with joy, that I feel all the more assured of birth in the Pure Land.

It is our blind passions that keep us from rejoicing when we should rejoice. The Buddha, knowing that this would be so, said that we are all foolish beings filled with blind passions. That is how I know that Amida's compassionate Vow was made for people like us, and so feel all the more trust in it.

"If we are in no hurry to get to the Pure Land, if we worry that we might die whenever we are even slightly ill, that is also because of our blind passions and attachments. We find it difficult to leave this old home full of suffering in which we have been born again and again for incalculable ages. We do not long to be born in that Pure Land of peace where we have never been born before, so powerful are our burning passions. But no matter how reluctant we are to leave this world, when the karmic bonds which hold us to this realm of suffering wear out—when, in spite of everything we can do, our lives come to an end—we will go to the Pure Land. Amida has particular compassion on those who do not want to go there quickly. When I think of this, I feel all the more trust in Amida's great Vow and in his great compassion. And I feel that my birth in the Pure Land is certain.

"If I felt like dancing for joy and wanted to be born in the Pure Land right away, I might wonder whether it was really true that I am full of blind passions."

X

The master said, "The meaning of the Nembutsu is that it is beyond all logic. For it is beyond calculation, beyond explanation, and beyond understanding."

Special Preface

In the past, when Shinran Shonin was alive, fellow believers all shared the same faith and all had the same goal, namely, rebirth in the Land of Recompense in the life to come. They encouraged each other to travel all the way to the distant capital, where they all listened to Shinran's teachings at the same time. But recently, I hear that among the countless Nembutsu practitioners, young and old, who follow these direct disciples of Shinran, there are many who say things that are very different from anything Shinran ever said. I will now examine these groundless misconceptions in detail.

XI

Some people intimidate illiterate Nembutsu practitioners by asking, "Do you utter the Nembutsu because you believe in the inconceivable power of the Vow or because you believe in the inconceivable power of the Name?" They do not explain what they mean by these two "inconceivabilities." All in all, they confuse people.

This matter must be very carefully examined. It was through the inconceivable power of his Vow that Amida devised the Name which is easy to hold in mind and easy to say, and that he promised to embrace those who say this Name. Thus, it is all Amida's doing that we come to say the Nembutsu, and that we trust that the inconceivable power of his great compassionate Vow will enable us to escape from samsara. When we realize this, when we see that our own efforts had nothing at all to do with it, we are in accord with the Original Vow and will be born in the Pure Land. Therefore when we entrust ourselves to the inconceivable power of

the Vow, we are also entrusting ourselves to the inconceivable power of the Name. The inconceivable power of the Vow and the inconceivable power of the Name are one. There is no difference between them whatsoever.

Furthermore, those who think that good deeds can help them to be reborn in the Pure Land or that evil deeds can prevent it, strive to attain rebirth by their own efforts, believing that their own intelligence can save them. Such people turn the Nembutsu into a self-power practice. They do not entrust themselves to the inconceivable power of the Vow, nor to the inconceivable power of the Name, either.

But even those who do not trust in Amida will be reborn in the borderland, the land of sloth and pride, the castle of doubt, or the womb palace. Then, because of the Accomplishing Vow, they will eventually be reborn in the Pure Land. Such is the inconceivable power of the Name, which is nothing else but the inconceivable power of the Vow. Thus the Name and the Vow are one and the same.

XII

Some people say that those who do not read and study the scriptures are not assured of birth in the Pure Land. This idea is not even worth discussing.

All of the sacred texts which show us the truth of Other Power and explain its significance, state that if we entrust ourselves to the Original Vow and say the Nembutsu, we will become Buddhas. What else do we need to learn to be reborn in the Pure Land? Anyone who is confused about this teaching should by all means study, so that he may come to know the significance of the Original Vow. But people who read and study the scriptures and yet do not understand their fundamental meaning are truly pitiable.

Saying the Nembutsu is an easy practice, even for illiterate people who are quite ignorant of the scriptures. Those who follow the path of the sages consider learning to be of fundamental importance; hence their practice is difficult. And there

is a passage in one of Shinran Shonin's letters about a man who engaged in study for the wrong reasons, studying just to gain fame and profit. It says, "I wonder if he will be born in the Pure Land in his next life."

Nowadays, people who do Nembutsu practice exclusively are engaging in doctrinal disputes with people who follow the path of the sages. While they argue, saying, "My school is superior; yours is inferior," enemies of the Dharma are appearing; and the Dharma is being slandered. But if we engage in doctrinal bickering, are we not slandering the Dharma ourselves?

Even if all of the other schools together should say, "The Nembutsu is only for worthless people. Its teachings are shallow and contemptible," we should not argue. We should simply reply, "We trust in what we are taught, which is that even foolish, illiterate people like ourselves, people of very inferior abilities, can be saved if we entrust ourselves to Amida. Highly gifted people may find this teaching beneath them; but for us, it is the highest teaching we can follow. Although other teachings may be superior, we are incapable of practicing them. Since the deepest desire of all the Buddhas is that everybody should be liberated from samsara, you should not hinder our practice." If we say this without showing any anger, who will harm us? Moreover, there is a sutra passage which says, "All sorts of blind passions arise during arguments. Wise people stay away from them."

Our late master said:

Shakyamuni Buddha foretold that some would entrust themselves to this teaching but that others would denounce it. So, since I have entrusted myself to the Nembutsu while others are, indeed, denouncing it, I know that what the Buddha said was true, and am all the more certain that my birth in the Pure Land is assured. If it happened that some people believed in the Nembutsu but no one denounced it, one might wonder why.

I am not saying that somebody has to vilify the Nembutsu. I am only saying that since the Buddha knew that some people would believe in it and some

would denounce it, he told us this fact in advance so that we would not be confused by it.

These days, it seems that people only study in order to silence their critics and overcome their opponents in debates and discussions. If, by studying, one becomes more and more aware of the true intent of the Buddha and the greatness of his compassionate Vow and if one is able to use such knowledge to explain, to those who are worried about how such wretched people as themselves could ever be reborn in the Pure Land, that the Original Vow is not concerned whether they are good or evil, pure or impure, then it is worthwhile to be a scholar. But if a scholar intimidates simple-hearted people who are saying the Nembutsu in accordance with the Original Vow by saying, “You should study!”, he is a demon obstructing the Dharma, an enemy of the Buddha. Not only does he himself lack trust in Other Power, he confuses other people. He should not only tremble lest he go against his revered late master’s teachings, but also grieve at not being in accord with Amida’s Original Vow.

XIII

Some people say that those who are not afraid to do evil deeds because the inconceivable power of Amida’s Original Vow will save them anyway are presuming on the Original Vow and therefore will not be reborn in the Pure Land. To say this betrays both a lack of trust in the Original Vow and a failure to understand how past karma causes both our good acts and our bad ones.

Good thoughts arise because of past karma. Evil thoughts and deeds are caused by past evil karma. The late Shonin said, “Know that all evil acts, even those as insignificant as a dust particle on the tip of the hair of a sheep or rabbit, are caused by past karma.”

Once Shinran Shonin asked, “Yuien-bo, do you believe everything I tell you?”

“Yes, I do,” I said.

Then he said, "If that is so, will you do anything I tell you to do?"

I humbly said yes.

"Would you murder a thousand people if it would guarantee your birth in the Pure Land?"

To this, I replied, "Even though you tell me to, I do not think I have it in me to kill even one person."

"Why, then, did you say you would obey me completely? Let this be a lesson. If you could just decide to do anything, then when I said, 'If you kill a thousand people, you will be reborn in the Pure Land', you would have gone out and started killing at once. But because your karma does not predispose you to kill even one person, you are not going to harm anybody. It is not that you do not kill because you are a good person. Likewise, it could happen that a person who does not want to hurt anybody could end up killing a hundred or a thousand people."

In saying this, the master showed us that when we think that the goodness within us makes us worthy of birth in the Pure Land and that the evil within us makes us unworthy of it, we are failing to grasp the fact that we can only be saved by the inconceivable power of Amida's Vow.

In Shinran Shonin's time, there was a man who held a mistaken view. He said that since the Vow exists to save people who do evil deeds, evil deeds must be the karmic cause of our rebirth in the Pure Land. Therefore, he reasoned, one should deliberately do evil things. When, eventually, Shinran heard of this man's misdeeds, he wrote a letter in which he said, "Do not take poison just because there is an antidote." He said this solely to dissuade this man from harboring this wrong view. He did not mean that evil actions can prevent one's birth in the Pure Land, not at all.

Shinran also said, "If we could not trust the Original Vow unless we kept the precepts and upheld the monastic rules, how could we ever escape from samsara?"

The truth is that when such wretched creatures as ourselves meet with the Original Vow, we always "presume" on it. But

nonetheless, we will not do evil deeds unless our karma predisposes us to do them.

Shinran also said, "There is no difference between people who make their living by casting nets and fishing in the seas and rivers, or who hunt birds and wild animals in the plains and mountains; and people who engage in commerce or cultivate the fields and rice paddies."

He also said, "If our karma so moves us, we will do anything." Yet nowadays we see people playing the role of "aspirants for future Buddhahood," and acting as if only virtuous people should say the Nembutsu. These persons even post signs in training halls stating that persons who have done such-and-such impious things will not be admitted into the halls. Are they not just making an outward show of wisdom, goodness, and diligence while cherishing falsehood within?

Even those evil deeds which people do because they presume on the Vow have their roots in those people's past karma. We should simply leave both our good acts and our evil acts to our karma and entrust ourselves entirely to the Original Vow. That is the way of Other Power. In the *Essentials of Faith Alone*, it says, "Do you know the limits of Amida's power, that you think yourself too evil to save?"

It is precisely because we feel able to "presume on the Vow" that complete trust in Other Power grows firm in our hearts. If you got rid of all your evil karma and blind passions before entrusting yourself to the Original Vow, then, fine, you would never think of presuming on the Vow. But if you got rid of all your blind passions, you would become a Buddha then and there. And for a Buddha, the Vow that Amida made after five kalpas of contemplation would not be necessary.

People who admonish others against presuming on the Vow seem to be full of blind passions and defilements themselves. So are they not themselves presuming on the Vow? What kind of evil act is "presuming on the Vow" and what kind isn't? Is not such talk a product of immature thinking?

XIV

Some people believe that one utterance of the Nembutsu wipes away all of the evil karma that one has accumulated over eight billion kalpas.

The basis for this assertion is a passage in a sutra about an evildoer who is guilty of the ten evil deeds, has committed the five deadly sins, and has never said the Nembutsu in his life. But, through the guidance of a good teacher, he begins to say it on his deathbed. By saying it once, he wipes away the evil karma that he has accumulated over eight billion kalpas. By saying it ten times, he eradicates the evil karma that he has accumulated over eighty billion kalpas, and so is reborn in the Pure Land.

The sutra mentions “one utterance” and “ten utterances” in order to impress upon us the seriousness of the ten evil deeds and the five deadly sins, and to show us how the Nembutsu takes all of our evil karma away. But all this falls far short of what we believe. The reason is as soon as Amida’s light shines upon us and awakens in us an instant of complete trust in his great Vow, we are endowed with indestructible diamond-like faith. From that moment on, we are assured of being reborn in the Pure Land. And when our lives come to an end, all of our blind passions, all of the evil within us, are transformed into the wisdom of perfect enlightenment; and we are awakened to the truth of non-origination.

We should look on the Nembutsu as an expression of gratitude for the Buddha’s great benevolence and compassion. We should say it all our lives, thinking, “If it were not for Amida’s compassionate Vow, how could such a wretched evildoer as myself ever hope to be liberated from samsara?” If we believe that we are extinguishing our evil karma every time we say the Nembutsu, we are trying to eliminate that karma and attempting to attain rebirth in the Pure Land by our own efforts.

If we believe that every single thought that we have in a lifetime is another fetter binding us to the endless round of birth and death, then we can only be reborn in the Pure Land by saying the Nembutsu up until the very end of our lives. But

it may be our karma to die in some totally unforeseen accident, or to die of some extremely painful disease. If that happens, it will be difficult to remain in the right state of mind and difficult to say the Nembutsu. So how could we nullify the evil effects of karma that we accumulate just before death? And if we could not nullify the effects of evil karma, how could we be reborn in the Pure Land?

If we entrust ourselves to the Vow which embraces and never casts away, then if we die suddenly and unexpectedly even after committing evil acts, or die without saying the Nembutsu, we will immediately be reborn in the Pure Land. Moreover, even if we are able to say the Nembutsu at the end of our lives, we are expressing gratitude for Amida's compassion, entrusting ourselves to Amida all the more as the time of our enlightenment draws nearer.

People who pray to be in the right state of mind at the end of their lives are trying to eradicate their evil karma by themselves. This shows that they have a self-power mentality and that they have no real trust in Other Power.

XV

Some people claim to have attained Buddhahood in this very body, full of blind passions though it is. This claim is preposterous.

The attainment of Buddhahood in this very body, that is, liberation through the three mystic practices, is the goal of Shingon esotericism. And the One Vehicle teaching expounded in the *Lotus Sutra* advocates purification of the six sense organs through "the four practices for the attainment of happiness." These difficult practices, which lead to the attainment of enlightenment through meditation, can be performed only by people of superior ability.

By contrast, the goal of the Other Power teaching of Pure Land Buddhism, attained through absolute trust in the Original Vow, is enlightenment in one's next life. This path is easy to practice and therefore suitable for those of inferior

ability. It does not discriminate between good people and evil people.

It is extremely difficult to eliminate our blind passions and to sever our evil karma in this life. It is so difficult that even the holy monks of the Shingon and Tendai schools pray for enlightenment in the life to come. So what is to be said about people like us?

It does not matter that we lack wisdom and cannot observe the precepts. If we board the ship of Amida's Vow, we, too, will cross the sea of suffering, the dreadful ocean of birth and death. And as soon as we reach the shores of the Pure Land, the dark clouds of passions will clear away and we will see the bright moon of things-as-they-really-are. At that moment we will become one with Amida's unhindered light and will radiate blessings on all sentient beings throughout the ten quarters. Then and only then can we say that we have attained enlightenment.

Are those who claim to have attained enlightenment in this very body able to manifest themselves in various Transformed Bodies, as a Buddha should be able to do? Do they have the thirty-two major marks and the eighty secondary features of a Buddha? Can they teach the Dharma and save sentient beings as Shakyamuni did? That is how we would recognize a Buddha who had attained enlightenment in this life.

Shinran wrote in a *wasan*:

At the moment when unshakable, diamond-like trust
in the Original Vow
Takes root within us,
We are embraced by the light of Amida's compassion
And escape samsara forever.

This means that at the moment when absolute trust in Amida takes root in our hearts, we are embraced never to be abandoned. After that we no longer wander in the endless cycle of birth and death. That is why Shinran Shonin wrote that we "escape samsara forever." To confuse this with enlightenment is truly a pathetic misunderstanding!

The late Shonin said, “In the Jodo Shinshu, we entrust ourselves to the Original Vow in this life and then attain enlightenment in the Pure Land. That is what I was taught.”

XVI

Some people say that whenever a Nembutsu practitioner becomes angry, does something wrong, or has an argument with a fellow practitioner, he should repent and try to have a change of heart. This reflects an attitude that we should seek rebirth in the Pure Land by refraining from evil and doing good.

A person who says the Nembutsu wholeheartedly and exclusively experiences only one great change of heart. This happens when a person who has never before grasped the true significance of Other Power of the Original Vow is inspired by Amida’s wisdom and realizes that he, an ordinary person with an ordinary mind, cannot possibly attain rebirth in the Pure Land. He therefore casts off all his old ways of thinking and entrusts himself entirely to the Original Vow. This is what is called “the change of heart.”

If we could not attain birth in the Pure Land without going through a change of heart every time we did something we should not do, we would have to go through changes of heart night and day. Would that not make a mockery of Amida’s Vow to “embrace us and never cast us away”? For our lives can end between the time that we exhale and the time that we inhale again. What if we were to die without going through a final change of heart or without thinking gentle and patient thoughts?

Some people claim that they trust in the power of the Vow but think in their hearts that although the Vow is said to have inconceivable power to save evil people, it is, after all, mainly designed to save good people. Thus they doubt the power of the Vow and do not really trust in Other Power. They will be reborn in the borderland—how sad!

Once genuine trust in the Original Vow takes root in our hearts, Amida will bring about our rebirth in the Pure Land.

We must give up all of our own efforts for our rebirth. Even if we are evil, our hearts will naturally grow more gentle and patient by relying on the power of the Original Vow ever more. We should not harbor clever thoughts about how we are going to manage to be reborn into the Pure Land. Instead, no matter what happens, we should, with the warmest gratitude and devotion, constantly remind ourselves of the depth of Amida's compassion. Then we will find ourselves saying the Nembutsu effortlessly. This is Naturalness and Spontaneity. If we truly discard all of our own efforts and contrivances, what remains is Naturalness and Spontaneity. It is purely and simply Other Power.

Yet I have heard that some people say, with a knowing air, that "Naturalness and Spontaneity" has another meaning. This is deplorable.

XVII

Some people say that those who are reborn in the borderland will eventually fall into hell. Where in the scriptures is there a passage that says this? It is deplorable that people who call themselves scholars say such things. How are they reading the sutras, commentaries, and Buddhist scriptures?

Shinran Shonin taught me that practitioners who do not truly trust in Amida, who doubt the Original Vow, will be born in the borderland. Then, after they expiate their sin of doubting the Vow, they will attain enlightenment in the Land of Recompense.

Since few practitioners have true faith, Amida will lead many into the borderland. To say that in the end they are born there in vain [i.e., fall into hell] is to say that the Buddha has deceived us.

XVIII

Some people claim that the size of one's offerings determines whether one will become a large Buddha or a small Buddha.

This statement leaves me speechless. It is utter nonsense.

To begin with, how could anyone determine the size of a Buddha? When the size of a great Dharma teacher [i.e., Amida Buddha] in the Pure Land is described in a sutra, reference is being made to his Body of Recompense. A Buddha who has awakened to things-as-they-really-are transcends all categorization. He has neither shape, long or short, square or round, nor color, blue, yellow, red, white, or black. How, then, is it possible to tell whether the Buddha is large or small?

There is a sutra passage which states that by saying the Nembutsu, one may have a vision of a transformed Buddha. It also says that if you say the Nembutsu loudly, you will see a large Buddha; and if you say it softly, you will see a small Buddha. Perhaps some people have interpreted this passage in a distorted way so as to make it apply to offerings.

Of course it may be said that those who give offerings are practicing the *paramita* of giving. But though you offer great treasures to the Buddha and precious gifts to your teacher, if you do not have true faith, it is pointless. And even though you may not give a single sheet of paper or a single half *sen* for the Buddha Dharma, you are in accord with Amida's Vow if you surrender yourself to Other Power in deep faith.

It seems that some people are just using the Buddha Dharma to intimidate their fellow-practitioners into satisfying their greed.

Epilogue

1

All of the problems that I have discussed arise because believers differ in their understanding of faith.

According to the late Shinran Shonin, very few of Honen Shonin's many disciples had the same faith as their master. Thus Shinran got into an argument with his fellow practitioners when he said, "Zenshin's [i.e., My] faith and Honen Shonin's faith are one."

Seikan-bo, Nembutsu-bo, and other fellow disciples strongly objected, saying, "How can you have the same faith as Honen Shonin?"

Shinran replied, "If I said that I had Honen Shonin's great wisdom and learning, that would, indeed, be absurd. But as for my faith that I will be reborn in the Pure Land, mine does not differ from his at all. His faith and mine are one."

But the others still argued, "How can that be?" Finally they told Honen Shonin all about the argument and asked him to decide who was right and who was wrong. At this Honen declared, "My faith is a gift from Amida Buddha. Shinran's faith, too, is a gift from Amida Buddha. Therefore his faith and mine are one. Those with a different kind of faith will not go to the Pure Land where I, Honen, am going."

If this could happen in Honen's day, it seems likely that some of the people who practice the Nembutsu exclusively today do not have the same faith as Shinran's.

2

Although my words must seem repetitious, I have written them down anyway. For while life still clings to this old body like a dewdrop to a withered blade of grass, I will be able to listen to the questions of those around me and tell them what Shinran Shonin taught. But I am afraid that there will be confusion among my fellow-believers after these eyes are closed.

Whenever advocates of the mistaken views which I have discussed try to mislead you, you should carefully read those sacred writings which the late Shonin most approved and which he himself used to read. In Buddhist scriptures, true and real teachings are generally intermixed with expedient and temporary ones. The Shonin intended that we should abandon the expedient and keep the real, set aside the temporary and follow the true. You must be very careful not to misread the sacred scriptures. I have selected some important passages and appended them to this book as a standard reference.

3

Shinran Shonin often said, “When I deeply consider the Vow which Amida made after five kalpas of contemplation, I realize that it was made for me, Shinran, alone! Therefore I am filled with gratitude for the Original Vow, with which Amida decided to save me, burdened with evil karma though I am.”

As I contemplate these words now, I think that they are not at all different from Zendo’s golden statement, “Know that we are in reality foolish beings weighed down with evil karma, who have been drowning in samsara for immeasurable kalpas, who wander through an endless cycle of birth and death with no chance of liberation whatsoever.”

Thus, by giving himself as an example, Shinran showed us how deluded we are—how we know neither the depths of our own karmic evil nor the greatness of Amida’s compassion. How grateful I am to Shinran!

I and other people only talk about what is good and what is bad. We do not pay any attention to Amida’s compassion. But the late Shonin used to say, “I know nothing at all about good and evil. If I possessed Amida’s ability to tell whether something is good, then I would know what ‘good’ is. And if I possessed Amida’s ability to tell whether something is evil, then I would know what ‘evil’ is. But for a foolish being full of evil passions, living in this burning house, this world of transiency, all things are deceptive, vain, and unreal. The only truth is the Nembutsu.”

Indeed, we speak only empty things to each other. In that connection, there is one thing I find really lamentable. That is that when we discuss among ourselves the nature of faith and its relationship to saying the Nembutsu, or when we explain these things to others, some people, just to win an argument or to silence other people, claim that Shinran said things that he never said. How shameful and deplorable! We should stop and think about this!

Although the words I am writing are by no means my own, I am afraid that they must sound foolish. After all, I do not know the sutras and commentaries and am incapable of

grasping the profound doctrines of Buddhism. Nonetheless, recalling only a hundredth part of what the late Shinran said, I am writing it down.

How sad it is when someone who has been fortunate enough to say the Nembutsu is reborn in the borderland instead of being reborn in the Pure Land right away! Therefore, with tears in my eyes, I wet my brush and write all this down so that there may be no differences in faith among believers of our tradition.

This text is to be called the *Tannisho* (*Notes Lamenting the Differences*). It should not be shown openly.