

Reading the *Kyōgyōshinshō*: Reading the General Preface①

I. Six Sections of the Preface

A) About the Ultimate Source of Universal Liberation

- 1) The ship of the vow
- 2) The sun of wisdom

B) About the Teachings Coming into the World

- 1) The tragedy at Rājagrha as the opportunity for the teachings to be preached
- 2) The object of the teachings: “Abhorrent sinners, those who slander the Dharma, and those lacking in all roots of goodness”

C) About the Immediate Source of Our Liberation

- 1) The name as wisdom
- 2) Insight and acceptance as a “liberative principle”

D) About Our Relationship to that “Activity and Acceptance”

- 1) Serving the message in the name
- 2) Revering the principle

E) Shinran’s Commands to Us

- 1) Rejoice at the opportunity of encountering the vow
- 2) Don’t get caught up in uncertain ideation
- 3) “Listen to and consider” the true words of the teachings

F) Shinran’s Statement of His Intentions in Writing the *Kyōgyōshinshō*

- 1) The joy of now encountering what must be encountered, having already heard what must be heard
- 2) In order to express his joy at what he has heard and praise what he has been able to attain

II. Section 1 of the Preface: The Ultimate Source of Universal Liberation

A) A Look at the translations

本文：竊かに以んみれば、難思の弘誓は難度海を度する大船、無碍の光明は無明の闇を破する恵日なり。 (『聖典』149頁)

DTS: As I humbly reflect, Amida’s Prayer for universal deliverance is beyond my understanding. It is the great boat that crosses the ocean of impassability. Amida’s Light knows no hindrance. It is the sun of transcendental wisdom (*prajñā*) which illumines the darkness of ignorance (*avidyā*). (p. 42)

CWS: I reflect within myself: The universal vow difficult to fathom is indeed a great vessel bearing us across the ocean difficult to cross. The unhindered light is the sun of wisdom dispersing the darkness of our ignorance. (p. 3)

Inagaki: When I humbly contemplate matters, I realize that the inconceivable Universal Vow is the great ship that carries us across the sea of samsara which is difficult to cross, and that the unhindered Light is the sun of wisdom that breaks the darkness of ignorance. (p. 3)

Yamamoto: As I humbly turn matters over in my mind, I see that His inconceivable *vow* is a great galleon that passes us across the impassable flood of birth and death and that His unhindered light is a merciful sun that breaks the gloom of ignorance. (p. 3)

試訳: As I consider the bit of insight I have gained, I can see that the universal vow hard to conceive is the great ship that takes us across the ocean difficult to cross and the unobstructed light is the sun of wisdom that dispels the darkness of our ignorance.

B) About “hisoka ni omonmireba” 竊以

- 1) The meaning of the character *hisoka* 竊
- 2) The meaning of *omonmiru* 以
- 3) Precedents for this usage in Shandao’s *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* and *Fashizan* 法事讚

C) About “the universal vow hard to conceive” (*nanshi no guzei* 難思の弘誓)

- 1) The limits of human ideation
- 2) Translations of *guzei* 弘誓 and the problems with the phrase “universal deliverance”

D) About “the ocean difficult to cross” (*nandokai* 難度海)

- 1) Basis for the phrase in the *Shizhupiposhalun* 十住毘婆沙論

One rides on the ship of the eightfold path and is able to cross the ocean difficult to cross. One takes oneself across and also takes others. I bow before the person who naturally exists.

From the verses in praise of Amida in the chapter on easy practice in *Shizhupiposhalun* 十住毘婆沙論

SSZ 1:261

- 2) What makes our lives “difficult to lead”?

E) About the vow as a “great ship” (*taisen* 大船)

- 1) How does the vow serve as a “ship” that carries us?
- 2) Soga Ryōjin’s discussion of the ship

Even among the followers of Shin Buddhism, there are those who, hearing the voice of the Tathāgata floating nearby on the great ocean of birth and death, riding on the great ship of the original vow and calling out to them, agonize solely over how they might get onto that ship. They discover themselves struggling aimlessly outside the ship of the vow, presently drowning in the

vast ocean of birth and death, even as they hear the faint voice of the Tathāgata from aboard and sincerely think of the Tathāgata's original vow. These are the ones who fruitlessly lament the darkness of their eyes of wisdom while wishing for the torch that lights the long night of ignorance, those who uselessly cry over the weight of their sins while thinking of the raft that will carry them over the great ocean of birth and death. Then just what is the reason that they are not liberated in spite of thinking of the original vow that liberates sentient beings? Because the original vow that they are imagining is not the actual original vow, but instead the vacuous object of their own yearning and desires. Because their hopes cannot be proven in reality. And there is no actual proof [of the realization of their hopes] because they are lacking true *shinjin*. The object of an aspiration is in the future, while the object of faith is in the present. The object of an aspiration is in the objective realm, while the object of faith is in the subjective one. Future birth in the Pure Land and the Tathāgata who teaches in the Pure Land are not the object of direct faith, but are really nothing more than the object of our aspirations. Really the immediate proof of faith, the object of actual experience, is nothing other than one's subjective experience of the power of the original vow and present liberation. . . .

When I forget liberation through the Tathāgata, I am drowning in the vast ocean of birth and death. When I think for a moment on liberation through the Tathāgata and hear the great order calling me to come, I am at that time a person on board the ship of the vow. We do not imagine liberation while drowning in the great ocean of birth and death, but instead hear the great order of liberation aboard the ship of the vow. The moment that we hear it is the moment of faith and the moment of liberation. The ship of liberation is not in front of our eyes but below our feet. Truly thinking of the ship of liberation is the recognition that we have been freed in the present moment. To take the argument a step further, while the ship of liberation, the voice of liberation, and the liberator appear to be three, they are in fact just one. Those who get caught up on the difference between these three will likely be unable to hear the great path of liberation throughout their lives. That is, the ship is the original vow of the Tathāgata's causal stage, the voice is the name of the completed stage, and the liberator is the awakening substance set in motion by [Amida's] attainment of enlightenment ten *kalpas* ago. Those tepid Pure Land Buddhists, who are caught up in these three names and yearn in vain for their savior billions of worlds away to the west, in squeezing out their sad, disconsolate voices, are expressing their present suffering and their empty desire for future liberation by calling the *nenbutsu*. This is because they seek the liberator outside of the voice of liberation and because they seek the ship of liberation outside of the voice. However, what we come into direct contact with is neither simply a ship nor simply a savior, but nothing other than the voice of liberation.

F) About a verse with similar imagery in *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 正像末和讚

It is the torch that lights the long night of ignorance. Do not lament that your eyes of wisdom are dark! It is the raft that carries one over the great ocean of birth and death. Do not cry over the weight of your sins!

Shōzōmatsu wasan 正像末和讚, *Teihon Shinran shōnin zenshū* 定本親鸞聖人全集 (hereafter, TSZ), vol. 2, “Wasan hen” 和讚篇, p. 176

G) About “unobstructed light” (*mugekō* 無碍光)

For this reason, the Buddha of Immeasurable Life is called the Buddha of Immeasurable Light, the Buddha of Unlimited Light, the Buddha of Unobstructed Light, the Buddha of Unequaled Light, the Buddha Who Is King of Blazing Light, the Buddha of Pure Light, the Buddha of Light of Joy, the Buddha of Light of Wisdom, the Buddha of Uninterrupted Light, the Buddha of Light Difficult to Conceive, the Buddha of Ineffable Light, the Buddha of Light That Transcends That of the Sun and Moon.

Daimuryōjūkyō 大無量壽經, SSZ, vol. 1, p. 16

World-Honored One, I, with single mind, follow the direction of the Tathāgata of Light Unobstructed Throughout the Ten Directions and aspire to be born in the land of peace and contentment.

Jōdoron 淨土論, SSZ, vol. 1, p. 265

Question: If you hold that the light of the Tathāgata of Unobstructed Light is immeasurable and free of hindrances in shining upon the lands of the ten directions, why is it that the sentient beings in this world are not shone upon by that light? If there are places where the light does not shine, then isn't the light actually obstructed? Answer: The obstruction is in sentient beings and is not an obstruction of the light itself. For example, although sunlight shines all over the four continents under the heavens, a blind person does not see that light. That does not mean that the light is not shining all over. Also, it is similar to how in spite of the fact that thick clouds might downpour a deluge, a hard rock may not be soaked through. That does not mean that the rain lacks the capacity to moisten.

Jōdoron 淨土論, SSZ, vol. 1, p. 265

H) About “the sun of wisdom” (*enichi* 惠日)

If you wish to understand the principle of non-arising, you should just think of the Buddha's name. The clouds of defilement and suffering will be dispersed entirely and the sun of wisdom will shine brightly. If you wish to see the principle of true suchness, you should just contemplate the tuft of hair on the Buddha's forehead. The clouds of ignorance will be dispersed entirely and the mirror of wisdom will shine out on high.

Jingtu wuhui nianfo songjng guanxingyi 淨土五會念佛誦經觀行儀, by Fazhao 法照, T 85: 1264

H) About “dispelling ignorance” (*mumyō o hasuru* 無明を破する)