

Reading the *Kyōgyōshinshō*: Reading the General Preface⑰

I . Section 4 of the Preface: About Our Relationship to that “Activity and Acceptance”

A) A Look at the translations

本文：爾れば、凡小修し易き真教、愚鈍往き易き捷徑なり。大聖一代の教、是の徳海に如く無し。穢を捨て浄を忻い、行に迷い信に惑い、心昏く識寡なく、悪重く鄣り多きもの、特に如来の發遣を仰ぎ、必ず最勝の直道に歸して、専らこの行に奉え、唯だ斯の信を崇めよ。

DTS: This being so, this teaching is the true one which is easy to practice for all of us who are small and helpless; it is the shortest passage to walk for us who are stupid and ignorant. Nothing surpasses this teaching of the Great Sage, which was given by him while on earth and which is indeed the ocean of merit.

Let those who, aspiring for purity, wish to give up defilements, let those who are at a loss as to the right practice and the right faith, let those whose minds are darkened and whose understanding is deficient, let those who are troubled with evils and hindrances weighing heavily on them—let them all be reverently mindful of Śākyamuni’s command to come to the Pure Land, let them be sure of taking refuge in the most excellent path of truth, and let them devote themselves exclusively to living it and piously embrace this faith only.

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

Inagaki: This is indeed the true teaching which is easy to practice even for ordinary, inferior people and is the shortest way that is easy to follow for dull and stupid people. Of all the lifetime teachings of the Great Sage, nothing surpasses this oceanlike virtue. Those who wish to leave this defiled world of samsara and aspire to the Pure Land, those who are confused about religious practices and faiths, those who are dark in mind and lacking in wisdom, and those who are burdened with heavy evil karma and many hindrances should, by all means, esteem the Tathāgata Śākyamuni’s exhortation and follow the supreme direct

path to enlightenment; they should exclusively hold fast to this practice and only uphold faith.

Yamamoto: Therefore this is the true religion that all *common mortals and petty persons* can easily practice and this is the shortest way that the ignorant can take. Of all the teachings of the ‘Great Sage’, nothing can equal this sea of virtue. O thou who desirest to abandon this world of filth and seek birth in the Land of Purity, thou who art lost in practices and in faiths, thou whose mind is beclouded and lacks light, whose sins weigh, and who are garbed in hindrances! Now that especially thou art shown the Way by Shakyamuni Buddha, take at all costs to this best and direct Way and exclusively follow this *Practice* and revere but this *Faith!*

試訳: Since this is the case, it is the true teaching easy for base, ordinary people to cultivate, the shortcut easy for the ignorant and dull to take. In the teachings delivered in the course of the life of the great sage, none compare with this ocean of wondrous qualities. Those who wish to abandon the defiled and aspire to the pure, lost in practice and confused in faith, with dull minds and a paucity of insight, heavy evil and many obstructions, should in particular respect this exhortation of the Tathāgata and necessarily return to this most excellent, direct path, exclusively serving this practice and just respecting this acceptance and understanding.

D) On the significance of the third sentence

2) On the rarity of Shinran’s use of the imperative and its significance here

3) Sources for “respect the exhortation of the Tathāgata” and “serve”

Further, since the Buddha’s hidden intent is both broad and profound, it is difficult to gain clarity about the gates of the teachings. Even the three types of wise ones and the ten sages are not able to understand it through their considerations, so how possibly could one like myself, so easily influenced and having not yet stepped on the bodhisattva path, dare to claim to understand their gist? Respectfully considering, Śākyamuni exhorts us from this side and Amida welcomes us from that country. Called from there and sent from here, how could we not go in that direction? One should just with an earnest mind, serve the Dharma and, taking the completion of one’s life as a certainty, abandon this defiled body, thereby immediately realizing the constant contentment of Dharma nature there.

Shandao 善導, “Xuanyifen” 玄義分, *Guanjingshu* 觀經疏, SSZ 1: 443

5) What should be the guiding force of our lives?

sū 崇 = The form of the character indicates the top of a tall mountain that one “looks up to.”

The lower portion of the character refers to “leader” or “chief.” The character means to look up to as a guide or leader.

II. Section 5 of the Preface: Shinran’s Commands to Us

A) A Look at the translations

噫、弘誓の強縁、多生にも値い巨く、真実の浄信、億劫にも獲叵し。遇たま行信を獲ば、遠く宿縁を慶べ。若し也た此の廻、疑網に覆蔽せられば、かえってまた曠劫を径歴せん。誠なるかなや、撰取不捨の真言、超世希有の正法、聞思して遅慮することなかれ。(『聖典』149-150頁)

DTS: It is, indeed, a rare event, however many lives one may go through, that one happens to find oneself so happily situated as to be taken up in Amida’s Prayer for universal deliverance! To attain to the pure faith of truth, however many numberless kalpas one may live, is, indeed, the most difficult thing. If not for the most favorable karmic combination in one’s past lives, how could one ever come to cherish a faith in the Pure Land and live it accordingly?

If one should miss this opportunity through being beclouded by a veil of doubt, one may have to wait in vain for another numberless kalpas. There is absolutely no falsehood in the statement, “All will be taken up and none left behind!” The Right Dharma is indeed something wonderful, transcending things of this world! Let us, therefore, feel no hesitancy in listening to it and reflecting on it. (p. 43)

CWS: Ah, hard to encounter, even in many lifetimes, is the decisive cause of birth, Amida’s universal Vow! Hard to realize, even in myriads of kalpas, is pure shinjin that is true and real! If you should come to realize this practice and shinjin, rejoice at the conditions from the distant past that have brought it about. But if in this lifetime still you are entangled in a net of doubt, then unavoidably you must pass once more in the stream of birth-and-death through myriads of kalpas. Wholly sincere, indeed, are the words of truth that one is grasped, never to be abandoned, the right dharma, all surpassing and wondrous! Hear and reflect, and let there be no wavering or apprehension. (p. 4)

Inagaki: How difficult it is to encounter the strong influence of the Universal Vow, even in many cycles of birth and death! How difficult it is to attain the true pure faith, even in millions of *kalpas*! If you are fortunate enough to attain practice and faith, you should rejoice at your close relationship with Amida from the distant past. If your mind is still

covered with a net of doubt, you will continue to wander about in samsara for myriads of *kalpas*.

How trustworthy are the words of truth which say that we are embraced in Amida's Light and never forsaken! How extraordinary and wonderful is the Right Dharma! Hear and reflect; be careful not to hesitate too long. (p. 3-4)

Yamamoto: Ah, hard is it in many lives to meet with the Great Way of the Vow! Hard is it in millions of *kalpas* to be blessed with faith true and pure! If it is faith comes to us, let us be thankful for what was made ours by him in our long past lives. If it is we are still in doubt, we shall have again to turn back and repeat the wheel of life for myriads of *kalpas*. True is His promise which embraces us once for all! Unsurpassed and rarest is the Right Dharma! Let us hear! Let us not tarry!

試訳: Oh, it is virtually impossible to directly encounter the powerful karmic condition of the universal vow, even in many lives! It is near impossible to attain true clarity, even in billions of *kalpas*. If you happen to attain this movement and insight, rejoice over the favorable conditions from the far past that made it possible. If again on this round, you are caught up in a net of uncertainty, then you will again have to pass through a vast number of *kalpas* [in delusion]. How true it is! Listen to and consider the true phrase, "One will be taken up and never abandoned," and the extraordinary right dharma for transcending the world, but do not ruminate haltingly.

B) Sources and meaning of terms in the first sentence

1) Source for "powerful karmic condition of the universal vow"

When the *kalpa* is coming to an end, the five defilements flourish. Sentient beings are caught up in perverted views such that insight and acceptance are extremely difficult. Although taught to be exclusively exclusive and to return to the western track, they are undermined by others and end up just as they were at the start. From *kalpas* long ago down to the present, they have always been this way. It is not that they awaken by themselves for the first time in this life. Truly, it is because they have not encountered the favorable, strong karmic condition that they are made to continue to transmigrate and find it hard to achieve liberation. Now, at this very time, we hear the essential Dharma. Taking the end of one's life as a limit, vow to be firm. Firmly maintain your mind and do not spare your body.

Shandao in *Fashizan* 法事讚, SSZ 1:611. See *Seiten*, 350.

Question: If you already hold that that Buddha and land are a fulfilled [Buddha and land], fulfilled Dharmas are lofty and wondrous, difficult for even lesser sages to achieve. How can a defiled and obstructed ordinary being possible enter [such a realm]?

Answer: When one discusses the defilement and obstructions of sentient beings, then it is really difficult for them to aspire for or move toward [such a state]. Truly it is because they rely on the Buddha's aspiration, which serves as a powerful karmic condition, that the five vehicles are all equally caused to enter [into that state].

Shandao in his *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*, *Xuanyifen* 玄義分, SSZ 1: 459
See *Seiten*, 320

2) On the meaning of the characters

噫 This character signifies an exclamation in surprise, sadness, pain, lamentation, and sometimes praise.

值 This character has the sense of encountering head on, or running directly into something.

𠄎 This character is the inverted form of the character for possible (可) and signifies impossibility.

遇 This character also has the sense of an unexpected encounter, coming across someone on the roadside while meandering aimlessly.

3) On the meaning of the technical Buddhist terms

淨信 This is the translation of the Sanskrit term *prasāda*

“pra-sāda (Nom. P. °sādati, to be clear or bright, Śatr.); pra-sāda a m. (ifc. f(ā).) clearness, brightness, pellucidness, purity (cf. ambu-p°), Up. ; Kālid. &c. (Nom. P. °sādati, to be clear or bright, Śatr.); clearness of style, perspicuity, Pratāp. ; Kāvyaḍ. ; Sāh.; brightness (of the face), Ragh.; calmness, tranquillity, absence of excitement, KaṭhUp. ; Suśr. ; Yogas.; serenity of disposition, good humour, MBh. ; Suśr. ; Ragh. &c.; graciousness, kindness, kind behaviour, favour, aid, mediation (°dāt ind. through the kindness or by the favour of; °daṃ √ kṛ, to be gracious; cf. duṣ-p°, dṛk-p°), Gobh. ; MBh. ; Kāv. &c.”

Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, 1899

<https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/MWScan/2020/web/webtc/indexcaller.php>

行信 This term appears to be unique to Shinran's thought and refers to the insight that contains the action of following the direction of immeasurable light and life

4) On the source for “favorable conditions far in the past”

Question: It is unclear to me what the significance of the fact that these followers of heterodox paths always follow the Buddha.

Answer: There are two perspectives from which this can be interpreted. I will explain first from the perspective of the Buddha and the second from the perspective of those of heterodox paths. . . .

Next, as to the intention of Nadikāśyapa and the others, they have simply been sinking in birth and death for an immeasurably long time since innumerable *kalpas* in the past, revolving through the six ways in inexpressible suffering. Foolish and with evil views, they are attached to perverted aims,

so unless they encounter an excellent teacher, they will forever be afloat in the ocean of suffering. Only because of favorable conditions far in the past did they happen to be able to directly encounter the compassionate worthy. Since the stream of the Dharma is not a private matter, they too were able to receive its sustenance. Thus, when they consider their debt of gratitude to the Buddha, they had a stunning willingness to go to great lengths, even to the point of grinding their bodies to dust. They were caused to intimately serve his awesome countenance without changing even for a short time.

Shandao in his *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*, Xufenyi 序分義, SSZ 1: 467

Amida's aspiration and practice is broad and limitless, compassionately saving the tangled masses and universally pitying them all. In hoping to comprehensively teach them and cause them to return to their original country, sentient beings and the evil karma are together unconditioned. Avalokitêsvara Bodhisattva, with great compassion, was able to appear in this ocean of suffering in the rare form of a deep purple gold body with the thirty two features received at the time of Amida. Mahāsthāmaprāpta, profoundly difficult to conceive, also was endowed with the same golden form, not lacking in any way, with a crystal bottle on the top of his head that shows light, universally encompassing those who are born in the Pure Land through the *nenbutsu*. You should rejoice that you have favorable karmic conditions from far in the past so deep that you have been able to encounter the sound of the pure teaching of Amida. If you hold fast to the name without cease, you will ultimately be rewarded at the time of your passing with a body of deep purple gold.

Fazhao 法照 in *Jingtu wuhui nianfo lue fashiyizan* 淨土五會念佛略法事儀讚, T 47: 489a