# Reading the *Kyōgyōshinshō*: Reading the General Preface⑲

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

### A) A Look at the translations

噫、弘誓の強縁、多生にも値い叵く、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、摂取不捨の真言、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 *kalpa*s! 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 *kalpa*s.

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 a true and real sense of clarity, even in billions of *kalpa*s. 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 doubt, then you will again have to pass through a vast number of *kalpa*s [in delusion]. How true it is! Listen to and consider the true phrase, “One will be taken up and never abandoned,” and the right dharma that wondrously surpasses the ordinary, but do not ruminate haltingly.

### B) Sources and meaning of terms in the first three sentences

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 *kalpa*s 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* 法事讃, SSZ 1:611. See *Seiten*, 350.

Question: If you already hold that that the 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 possibly 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.

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

叵 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

浄信 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. ; Kāvyâd. ; 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 is.

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 *kalpa*s in the past, revolving through the six ways in inexpressible suffering. Foolish and with evil views, they are attached to perverted airs, 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. Avalokitêśvara 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 lüe fashiyizan* 淨土五會念佛略法事儀讃, T 47: 489a

### C) Soga on the chance nature of happenstance

This character for chance encounter (*gū* 遇) has the same meaning as the character for happenstance (*gū* 偶). It refers to something absolutely unexpected. It happens that one unexpectedly happens to encounter someone one has not seen in decades on a train. People often fail to do what they have promised to do. There is much that happens in the world that is entirely unexpected, to the extent that it seems that in fact almost nothing that is expected actually happens. Since that is the case, ultimately things are based on the natural working out of the Dharma, the result of which is that things only happen in the way that they can happen, regardless of whether our human intellect likes it or not. We should face the circumstances that we have been given with a fair, solemn attitude that transcends our personal sentiments about whether it is favorable or disadvantageous, and deeply enter into the basis of the chance circumstances we have been placed in, discovering the significance of inevitability contained within them, equally bearing, following, trusting, respecting, and serving them in contentment and gratitude. Happenstance denies our human intellect, declaring it to be ineffectual, and leading us to recognize its limits, while also further opening up the pure emotion of the inevitable internal summons of the power of the original aspiration of oneness that assures none pass in vain.

Soga Ryōjin 曽我量深, *Gyōshin no michi:* Kyōgyōshinshō *Sōjo kōdoku* 行信の道：

『教行信証』総序講読, *Soga Ryōjin senshū* 曽我量深選集, 7:128-129

### D) Sources and significance of terms in the last sentence

1) Source for “One will be taken up and never abandoned”

The Buddha of Immeasurable Life has eighty-four thousand gross features. In each feature, there are eighty-four thousand fine features. Each fine feature further has its own light. Each light shines entirely throughout the worlds of the ten directions, taking up sentient beings of the *nenbutsu*, never abandoning them. That light, those gross and fine features, and the transformed Buddhas cannot be fully described. One should just hold them in mind and make them be seen by the mind’s eye. When one sees this, one immediately sees all the myriad Buddhas in the ten directions. Because one sees the myriad Buddhas, it is referred to as the *nenbutsu samādhi*. Viewing in this way is referred to as viewing all Buddha bodies. Because one views the Buddhas’ bodies, one sees the Buddhas’ mind. The Buddhas’ mind is great compassion. The myriad sentient beings are taken up with objectless compassion.

*Contemplation Sutra*, Seiten, 105-106; SSZ 1: 57

2) Shinran on being “taken up, never to be abandoned”

Since the ocean of entangled beings in the ten directions follows the direction of this movement and insight, one is taken up and never abandoned. Therefore, it is referred to as Amida Buddha. This is called other power.

Chapter on practice, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Seiten, 190; TK, 68

3) Soga on “taken up, never to be abandoned”

This “grasping and not abandoning” is the true form of the Tathāgata’s liberation. Being grasped never to be abandoned refers to the identity of character of the Tathāgata and us sentient beings. Knowing that there is no Tathāgata separate from myself and that there is no self separate from the Tathāgata, seeing the form of the unity of the Dharma and the subject of liberation in the Tathāgata that liberates me, and seeing the wondrous form of the unity of the minds of the Buddha and the ordinary being within the self that is liberated by the Tathāgata: this is to be grasped, never to be abandoned. The Tathāgata divorced from human beings is nothing more than an empty principle that the spiritual light of wisdom will shine everywhere, while the self divorced from the Tathāgata is just an ignorant, unawakened hunk of flesh and sinful karma. In this way, the Tathāgata has the principle and wisdom capable of shining forth, but lacks the heart and mind to be shined upon, while human beings just have the carnal desires that need to be shined upon, but lack completely the light of wisdom to do the shining. Therefore, the Tathāgata introspected upon sentient beings’ carnal desires and gave rise to the original vow and here the Dharma body of Dharma nature, which completely lacks human characteristics, brought about the Dharma body of expedient means, which has human character. Thereby us human beings could then be shone upon by that Tathāgata’s light of wisdom where there is no distinction between the one that shines and the shone upon, which awakens us to the reality of this self as the result of the eternal past, freeing us from the realm of animals so that we could become true human beings. Being grasped never to be abandoned refers to the life force that flows forth from our minds that are filled with the passions of anger and desire in response to the all-pervading light that shines upon us from without. Said in another way, the all-pervading light, in contrast with the Tathāgata’s [immeasurable] life, is the two-dimensional wisdom of principle that is abstracted from the Tathāgata’s life, while the grasping light truly becomes the substance of that [immeasurable] life itself, becoming a light with human character that is indivisible from that life. It is this very grasping light that is the life which truly makes the Tathāgata the Tathāgata. Our truly making the Tathāgata the Tathāgata means that we human beings truly become human. The life of the Tathāgata is ultimately none other than our human life. The recognition of the identical nature of the life of the Tathāgata and us human beings is itself liberation. This recognition is the Tathāgata’s original vow, the name, faith; it is to be grasped never to be abandoned. Outside of this being grasped and never abandoned, there is no faith, no name, no original vow, no liberation. To be grasped and never abandoned is none other than the identity of the Buddha and ordinary human beings at the level of their character. Then how, exactly, is the full expression of this oneness of character of the Buddha and ordinary beings realized?

The *Contemplation Sutra* teaches that “[the Tathāgata’s] light shines throughout the worlds of the ten quarters and grasps sentient beings of the *nenbutsu*, never abandoning them.” These sentient beings of the *nenbutsu* are grasped by the Tathāgata and become a great human character that is one with the Tathāgata. What we should note here is that the *Contemplation Sutra*’s statement about the sentient beings of the *nenbutsu* is really about people [and not practice]. It describes “which people” are grasped, but does not refer at all to the experience of the insight at the instant of being grasped. People mistake this point and ultimately become attached to the calling of the *nenbutsu*. Hōnen’s three hundred eighty some odd disciples all made this error. The Shin followers today who promote the *nenbutsu* are no different from these three hundred eighty or so people. Once the *nenbutsu* has been externally expressed, it is already dead and divorced from true human life. Such a dead thing might have some power, but how could it possibly liberate living human beings? People of self power strongly encourage this sort of abstract *nenbutsu* that is divorced from one’s true self, taking it to be a great good and a great virtue, becoming attached to it, either consciously or unconsciously, as a condition for self-powered liberation. By taking the *nenbutsu* in this way as the sole condition for being grasped, it ends up becoming a condition that pulls the self away from the Tathāgata. Although such people might talk about being grasped through the *nenbutsu* and imagine that they are already within the Tathāgata’s light, in reality they are actually just looking forward to being greeted at the moment of death. When we are giving voice to the *nenbutsu*, haven’t we already completely returned to our [self-power-oriented] selves? Isn’t the *nenbutsu* that has been voiced just the afterimage of faith? What life is there in that voice? This is the reason that our master founded Shin Buddhism. “At the very moment when we . . . genuinely accept . . . and the thought to say the *nenbutsu* arises within our minds, we receive the benefit of being grasped never to be abandoned.” The Tathāgata is not so tepid as to wait until hearing the voice of the *nenbutsu* to grasp us. When the faith of the Tathāgata’s inconceivable vow truly moves our entire selves giving rise to the desire to say the *nenbutsu*, at that moment we are already united in character with the Tathāgata.

Soga Ryōjin, “Tsune ni shin no hatsu ichinen ni tatsu beshi” 常に信の初一念に立つべし

SRS 2: 405-407

4) Source for “wondrously transcend the ordinary”

That Buddha country is pure and peaceful, finely wondrous and pleasantly content. It is next to the path of unconditioned nirvana. The myriad people, devas, bodhisattvas, and *srāvaka*s there have clear, excellent wisdom and have profound accomplishments of spiritual conversance. They are all of the same type, with no difference in form. It is simply because [the explanation] follows on other realms that there are names such as people and devas. Their facial features are well proportioned, and they wondrously transcend the ordinary. Their form is finely wondrous, and they are neither people nor devas. They have all received bodies of natural emptiness and unlimitedness.

*Sutra on Immeasurable Life*, Seiten, 39; SSZ 1: 21