# Reading the *Kyōgyōshinshō*: Reading the General Preface⑳

## 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.

### D) Sources and significance of terms in the last two sentences

1) The significance of Shinran’s admonishment of doubt

Our return to our home of transmigration in birth-and-death is decided by our sentiment of doubt, which is what keeps us there. Our quick entry into the content, unconditioned capital of quiescence, is necessarily made possible by *shinjin*.

Shinran in praise of Hōnen in the *Shōshinge*, T, 91; *Seiten*, 207

The time came for the expedients of the myriad Buddhas,

Appearing as Genkū the sage,

They taught the unsurpassed *shinjin*

And opened the gate to nirvana.

Encountering a true guide

Is very difficult among even difficult things.

The endlessness of our transmigrating transmigration

Is excelled only by the obstructions of our sentiment of doubt.

Shinran in praise of Hōnen in *Kōsō wasan*, *Seiten*, 499

Next, as to the profound mind, it is the mind of profound acceptance. One should understand that it is doubt that keeps one in the home of birth-and-death and it is acceptance that allows one to enter the castle of nirvana. Therefore, [Shandao] sets forth these two types of *shinjin* as the thing that settles the births of the nine grades.

Source for Shinran’s praise in the *Senjakushū* 選択集, SSZ 1: 967

[The sutra states:] “Thus I have heard at one time”. [The treatise comments:] Question: What is the reason that the various Buddhist sutras begin with the word “Thus”? Answer: One is able to enter the great ocean of the Buddha Dharma through acceptance. One is able to cross it with wisdom. The significance of “thus” is acceptance. If a person has pure acceptance in their mind, then this person can enter into the Buddha Dharma. If a person lacks acceptance, they will not be able to enter into the Buddha Dharma. When one does not accept, one says, “This thing is not thus.” When one accepts, one says, “This thing is thus.” For example, if a cowskin is not yet malleable, it cannot be bent or shaped. A person who lacks acceptance is this way. For example, if a cowskin is already malleable, it can be made to conform to any sort of use. A person with acceptance is this way. Further, next, in the sutras, acceptance is explained as similar to a hand. If a person with a hand enters into a mountain made up of treasures, they can freely take the treasures there. Acceptance is also this way. When one enters into the mountain of treasures of the Buddha Dharma, undefiled sense faculties, awakening and meditation, one can free take what is there. Lacking acceptance is like lacking hands. If a person without hands enters the mountain of treasures of the Buddha Dharma, then they will not be able to take what is there. Lacking acceptance is also this way. If one enters into the mountain of treasures of the Buddha Dharma, one will gain nothing at all. The Buddha said, “If a person has acceptance, this person can enter into the great ocean of my Dharma and will be able to attain the fruits of the practitioner, without fail. They can shave their heads and dye their robes. If one lacks acceptance, this person cannot enter the ocean of my Dharma. They are like a withered tree that will not bear fruit. They will not attain the fruit of the practitioner. Although they might shave their heads, dye their robes, read various sutras, and can engage in debates, within the Buddha Dharma, they are entirely in vain and gain nothing. For this reason, the significance of “Thus” is the starting point of the Buddha Dharma, because it is the form of accepting well.

2) 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

3) 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

4) 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

5) 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