The Pure Land Teaching On the Necessity of Fundamental Understanding from Within

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The Pure Land Teaching, with all its difficulties that apparently prevent such understanding, needs to be viewed as having its basis in the *prajñā-pāramitā* standpoint. My point is that, once the necessity as well as possibility of this is known, one realizes that leaving the literal Pure Land Teaching behind, instead of keeping it, is the very consummation of that Teaching itself, and that all this is indicated by Shinran (1173-1262), the author of the 'COLLECTION OF PASSAGES EXPOUNDING THE TRUE AND REAL TEACHING, PRACTICE, AND, ATTAINMENT OF THE PURE LAND' (J., *Ken-Jōdo-Shinjitsu-Kyōgyōshō-Monrui*, 6 vols.) and by a few other texts.

According to Shinran, the Pure Land True Principle consists of two aspects of "turning-around" (*ekō*; Skt., *pariṇāmana*). One is the "turning-around in the 'going' aspect" (*ōsō-ekō*). The other is the "turning-around in the 'return' aspect" (*gensō-ekō*). In other words, the aspect of 'going' to *nirvāṇa* has no identity except as a working of the *prajñā*-based Compassion or *karuṇā*. The latter, which works out of *nirvāṇa*, by turning itself around and including the 'going' aspect as its own working, at once makes the 'going' aspect alive but in the same process makes it unnecessary. What obtains here is the Great Compassion turning itself around as the 'aspect of going toward *nirvāṇa*.' The other "turning-around in the 'return' aspect" obviously expresses the *prajñā-pāramitā* principle of abiding on the basis of no-abiding. In other words, once *nirvāṇa* is attained, there

must naturally be a 'return' to the world of ignorance to help it attain *nirvāṇa*, since by attaining *nirvāṇa* one means abiding-nowhere. But for the same reason, this 'return' aspect also has no separate identity. It is none other than the Great Compassion turning itself around as the aspect of 'return' to the *saha* world. Thus, the two aspects of 'going' and 'return' are both the *karuṇā* that abides nowhere, and that which provisionally turns itself around as 'going' and 'return'. This is the pure Land True Principle as expounded by Shinran. Now we see that the "turning-around" in two aspects expresses the *prajñāpāramitā* principle of no abiding, or the cessation of 'going' and 'return'.

Of these two kinds of "turning-around," as is easily seen, the one that presents problems is the 'going' aspect. In the case of the 'return' aspect, that which 'turns around' and that which 'returns' are one and the same *karuṇā*-working of *prajñā*. On the other hand, in the case of the 'going' aspect, in so far as the 'going' as such remains, there is a distinction between that which 'goes' toward *nirvāṇa* and that which 'turns' itself around to appropriate that aspect to itself. As to the "turning-around in the 'going' aspect" Shinran contrasts the true and real Teaching-Practice-Faith-Attainment with the provisional (*ke*), instrumental (*hōben*), or seeming (*ken*) one. By the latter he means the two ways of the being of faith:

1. Despairing of his ability to attain the ultimate Awakening, the Way-seeker believes in the "turning-around" which he takes as that which at his entreaty on his deathbed will make its appearance as *Amita*, the Buddha from the Pure Land surrounded by a host of attendants, and carry him to the Buddha Land. With this faith he practices concentration on seeing the Buddha. He recollects the Buddha, re-calling the Buddha's Call, "Come to *Amita Buddha*."
2. Having full faith in this "turning-around," which he takes as the Call for him to come to *Amita* for final deliverance, the Way-seeker single-mindedly and exclusively recollects and gives voice to the Call in the firm belief that this Call will unfailingly fulfill itself after death.

In these two ways of faith's seeking the Pure Land, the 'going' aspect and that which 'turns' itself around, are characteristically taken as self-

power (*ji-riki*) and Other-Power (*ta-riki*), respectively. Both these ways of faith are defective because, according to Shinran who identifies himself with them, despite the appearance of abandoning self-power, they take the Other-Power as something to make use of for deliverance. Because of this, Shinran says, "one cannot have faith; one cannot realize the Buddha-Wisdom; one cannot understand the cause (of Pure Land attainment) having been established. That is why there is no entering the Land of Recompense." Seeking for the Power of "turning-around," which Shinran calls "Power of Basic Desire" (*hon-gan-riki*), as something to ride on, is itself "being exclusively self-power-minded" according to Shinran.

Shinran's criticisms of these two ways of faith are considered to be those from within the Pure Land Teaching itself. He considers those ways of faith as his own, as well as those of typical Pure-Land seekers. He utters lamentations over such ways of faith as being thickly covered with the hindrances of ignorance. It is not surprising that there have been criticisms, even strong ones, of the Pure Land Teaching from without! But criticism has its real effect when it comes from within, or rather from the deepest root source where there is no "within" or "without."

Now, according to Shinran, the Pure Land faith is "the true and real mind that is turned around to benefit otherness" (*ekō-riyaku-ta no shinjitsu-shin*), which is "unthinkable, beyond calling, beyond word," which is the "single vehicle, the Great Ocean of *prajñā*-based Basic Desire." Here the self-power of the 'going' aspect is seen as 'otherness' in the sense that the self is the basis of discrimination, estrangement, and alienation; that the self is not what is essential but provisional, not original in nature but accidental, or "coming from outside" (Skt., *āgantuka*); that it has no self-identity because ultimately it is a non-entity, and so forth. Therefore, "benefiting otherness" means benefiting the self by freeing it from the otherness. When "the true and real mind" is said to be "turned around" into the faith "to benefit" its "otherness," it means that there is no duality between the faith and the true and real mind, no duality between the 'going' aspect and the 'turning-around,' and that there obtains just "the unthinkable,

beyond word, the single vehicle, the Great Ocean of *prajñā*-based Basic Desire.” Shinran speaks of this as “the unthinkable faith-quest” (*fukashigi-no shingyō*).

Based on this understanding, we see that the problem-posing term “Other-power” (*ta-riki*) should, because it is that which turns itself around “to benefit otherness” and is itself free from discrimination or otherness, be taken to mean “Power-for-otherness” (*ta-no-tame no chikara*) instead of Other’s Power (*ta-no chikara*). An Other’s Power cannot constitute “the single vehicle.” “Power-for-otherness,” on the contrary, is itself “*prajñā*-based Basic Desire” or *karuṇā*. It is a genuinely Buddhist concept, whereas “Other’s Power” is not.

In his ‘*Yuishinshō-Mon’i*’ (on ‘*gokuraku-mui-nehan-gai*’) Shinran speaks of this “true and real mind” as “the mind of the all-the-living-beings ocean.” He says, “*Nirvāṇa* is also called.....*Buddha*-nature. *Buddha*-nature is no other than *Tathāgata*. This *Tathāgata* fills even the smallest particles of the world. That is the mind of the all-the-living-beings ocean.” And he says, “Because it is this mind that has faith in and seeks for the Vow-Desire, this faith-mind is no other than *Buddha*-nature, ... It has no form, so that it is beyond thought, beyond word.” This seems to mean there is neither that which turns itself around nor that which is to be benefited by the turning-around. Then we know that such terms as “turning-around,” “what benefits otherness,” and so on, which make up the Pure Land Teaching, are not for us to keep, but are for penetrating so deeply that they, as well as we penetrators, cease to work at building up concepts. They are there so that we may realize the unthinkable, the beyond-word, beyond-calling.

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