

**The Nembutsu promised in the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha  
Is difficult for evil people who have wrong views and are arrogant  
To receive and retain with Joyful Faith;  
Of all difficulties nothing is more difficult than that.**

We find in the *Kyôgyôshinshô* Chapter on True Practice, many passages quoted as evidence to show the supreme merit and efficacy of the Nembutsu. One of them, from Tao-ch'o's *Collection of Passages Concerning Birth in the Land of Peace and Bliss*, has this to say:

Sākyamuni advised his father the King to practice the Nembutsu Samadhi. The King asked the Buddha, 'Why do you not recommend the practice of realizing directly the Buddha's virtue, True Suchness or the highest principle of voidness?' The Buddha replied, 'The Buddhas' virtue of Enlightenment contains immeasurable and subtle realms of realization accompanied by various supernatural powers and knowledge of emancipation, which are not objects of perception for an unenlightened person. For this reason, I recommend to you, my father the King, the Nembutsu Samādhi.

Idealist Buddhists may try to enter straightway into the heart of the Buddhas' Enlightenment, but their limited capacities and evil passions inevitably create an iron barrier which defies their penetration. The Nembutsu Samadhi comes from Amida's Heart and reaches each one of those who humbly respond to his Call. The Nembutsu Samadhi is not only practicable, but is the most efficacious of all samādhis. The passage quoted above goes on to explain that in the following parable:

Suppose there is a big forest of foul-smelling eranda trees, in which there is a young sandalwood tree still under the ground. When this tree grows above the ground, its fragrance pervades the whole forest and transforms it into a sweet-smelling forest.

The eranda forest refers to our evil passions and defiled thoughts, and the sandalwood tree refers to the Nembutsu. A single thought of concentration on and communication with the Buddha, which is actually made possible by his boundless Mind Power, is capable of turning our evil karma into the same merit as Amida's.

No other Buddhist practice is easier to follow than the Nembutsu Samadhi, but for those who are misled by wrong teachings and believe in their own power, the Nembutsu of the Other-Power is extremely difficult to accept. In this regard we read in the *Larger Sutra*, in the *Verses on the Visits of Bodhisattvas to the Pure Land* (chap. 27):

Arrogant, corrupt and indolent people  
Cannot readily accept this teaching.  
But those who have met Buddhas in their past lives  
Rejoice to hear it.

Shinran Shonin calls wrong-viewed and arrogant people 'evil' in the sense that they reject the right Dharma and the law of karma and so take the path to degeneration and destruction. But

who are not wrong-viewed until and unless they encounter Amida, the embodiment of the right Dharma? Also, who are not arrogant unless they meet Amida's Light of Great Compassion? We are by nature self-centered, and our frame of thought is naturally constructed on the blind belief in the ego and the power which it appears to possess. As we hear and ponder on the Dharma over and over, we come to realize that what exists in the true sense of the term is the Buddha's Life, Amitāyus, which is all-pervasive, all- inclusive and everlasting. When our eyes are opened to this ultimate reality by being endowed with the Nembutsu-Faith, all our delusory mental constructs disappear like dew on a blade of grass in the morning sun.

Sākyarnuni and Amida are our Compassionate Parents;  
By employing various skilful means  
Have awakened in our minds  
The supreme Faith beyond compare. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 74*)

(11) The Seven Masters (45-48)

**The discourse-writers of India, the land in the west,  
And the noble masters of China and Japan  
Revealed the true purpose of the Great Sage's appearance  
And clarified that Amida's Primal Vow responds to our need.**

Amida's law of salvation is fully described in the three Pure Land sutra~. Even though they were codified a few centuries after Sākyamuni's passing into Nirvana, his original message concerning Amida was presumably transmitted in the form of samādhi to some of his disciples who were able to understand deeper truth. When Mahayana arose, Amida was one of the first Buddhas presented in Mahayana sutras, as evidenced in the earliest Chinese translations dating from the middle of the 2nd century.

The most prominent figure in the Mahayana movement is Nāgarjuna (c.150-250), who is celebrated as the promulgator of the School of the Middle (*Mādhyamika*) and the theory of voidness (*sūnyatā*). His discourse on the *Garland Sutra*, Chapter on the Ten Stages, has important references to Amida Buddha, especially in Chapter 9 'Easy Practice', in which he professed his devotion to Amida and recommended recitation of his Name for attaining the Stage of Non-retrogression. Nāgarjuna is also believed to be the author of the *Twelve Adorations*, which is often chanted in special services.

Secondly, as Mahayana further developed, there arose a system of theory and practice based on the idea that one's existence, along with one's environment, can be reduced to one's consciousness. Eight levels of consciousness are conceived, and the most fundamental one, called Ālaya (literally, 'storage'), stores all karmic energy carried over from previous lives and reproduces it in various forms when there are appropriate conditions. Vasubandhu (c. 320-400) and his elder brother Asaṅga were founders of this new school, which was called Meditation Practice (*Yogācāra*), because it teaches that one realizes ultimate reality and attains Enlightenment through concentration on and observation of objects in relation to one's consciousness.

Vasubandhu was especially selected by Shinran as one of the Seven Masters, because in his *Discourse on the Pure Land with Hymn of Birth* he systematized Amida's law of salvation in a way which can be practiced effectively by ordinary people as well as Bodhisattvas. It is significant that this great authority of Buddhism, who was an adept of Yogācāra practices, sincerely took refuge in Amida. He successfully visualized Amida, the Pure Land and the Bodhisattvas dwelling there, and fully described them in this discourse. He systematized a theory of practice, called 'Five Mindful Practices', thereby setting the course of Pure Land Buddhism as a Yogācāra-Pure Land system of meditation on Amida while emphasizing recitation of his Name to glorify his virtue.

The Third Master is T'an-luan (476-542) of China. At first he became a scholar of the Madhyamika philosophy, but came to take refuge in Amida after he encountered the Indian

monk called Bodhiruci, who gave him Pure Land scriptures. Inheriting the two major Mahayana schools, Mādhyamika and Yogācāra, T'an-luan wrote an extensive commentary on Vasubandhu's *Discourse on the Pure Land*, which has played a vitally important part in Shinran's systematization of the Shin teaching. He gave new dimensions of meaning to Vasubandhu's system of Yogācāra-Pure Land practice, explaining his ideas in ontological, epistemological and soteriological terms. His special emphasis on the Other-Power, which enables us to attain birth in the Pure Land and realize Enlightenment, was adopted and further developed by Shinran. T'an-luan also composed a hymn, entitled *The Hymn in Praise of Amida Buddha*, based on which Shinran praised Amida's virtue in the *Hymns on the Pure Land*.

The Fourth Master Tao-ch'o (562-645) followed T'an-luan's teaching and developed it further. His keen awareness of the age of the Decadent Dharma reinforced his sincere devotion to Amida. He especially adhered to the teaching of the *Contemplation Sutra*, on which he lectured more than two hundred times, and dedicated himself to Nembutsu recitation. He is said to have repeated the Nembutsu seventy thousand times a day, and almost incessantly bowed and offered incense before the statue of Amida. He encouraged his followers to recite the Nembutsu, and advised them to count the number of recitations with red beans and, later, with special rosaries. His *Collection of Passages Concerning Birth in the Land of Peace and Bliss* is a systematic presentation of the Pure Land teaching centering on the Nembutsu. In this work he divides Buddhist ways of salvation into two groups, the Path of Sages and the Pure Land Path, and then expresses his view that, in the ages far removed from Sākyamuni, Buddhists are unable to understand the Dharma correctly and so their practices are bound to fall short of attaining their objectives. He confirms that the only teaching practicable to those of the age of the declining Dharma is the Pure Land Path.

Shan-tao, the Fifth Master (613-681), was Tao-ch'o's disciple, and was an ardent practitioner of the Amida Meditation in accordance with the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi Sutra* and the *Contemplation Sutra*. After he successfully visualized Amida and his Pure Land, he depicted their glorious manifestations in paintings, and explained the method of meditation and the theory behind it in his works. His 4-fascicle commentary on the *Contemplation Sutra*, in particular, became the fundamental text of the Pure Land Way for succeeding generations.

Besides recommending the Amida Meditation, Shan-tao presents in his work a set of five practices for the attainment of birth in the Pure Land: (1) chanting sutras, (2) meditating on Amida and the Pure Land, (3) worshipping Amida, (4) reciting the Nembutsu, and (5) praising Amida's virtue. The fourth is the most essential practice, and the rest are subsidiary to it. He himself recited the Nembutsu diligently, and urged his followers to do the same. When masters of other schools criticized the Nembutsu teaching, saying that mere chanting of the Nembutsu was not enough to make one attain birth in the Pure Land, he clarified that each utterance of the Nembutsu contains pure aspiration (*namu*) and meritorious practice (*amidabutsu*) and so it is the sufficient cause of birth in the Pure Land. After Shan-tao the Nembutsu teaching flourished, and developed into a major current in Chinese Buddhism.

The Sixth Master, Genshin (942-1017), was a Tendai monk on Mt. Hiei. He dedicated himself to both meditative and non-meditative practices centering on Amida, and systematized the Pure Land Way in his *Collection of Essential Passages Concerning Birth in the Pure Land*. This work was celebrated even in China, where he was respected as 'a small Sākyamuni'. Genshin begins with a detailed explanation of suffering in the evil realms of Samsara and of utmost pleasure and happiness in the Pure Land. His realistic description of hell and the Pure Land created a universal tendency towards aspiration for the Pure Land. Although he explains the Amida Meditation in full detail, his ultimate objective was to recommend the Nembutsu, which can be practiced even by ordinary people burdened with heavy evil karma.

The last of the Seven Masters, Honen (1133-1212), was Shinran's teacher and a Tendai master. He was well-known as a highly erudite scholar, but was unable to attain his own salvation for a long time. He read all of the Buddhist scriptures over and over again, until on the fifth occasion he came across Shan-tao's words, "The continual recitation of Amida's Name with singleness of mind, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying, is called the Act of Right Assurance, because it accords with Amida's Vow". At this moment, he realized Amida's Saving Power, and thus attained spiritual liberation. After that he was entirely devoted to the Nembutsu, and taught it to men and women in all walks of life.

At the request of the Lord Chancellor Fujiwara Kanezane, who was a devoted follower of the Nembutsu practice, Honen composed the *Collection of Passages Concerning the Nembutsu of the Best-Selected Primal Vow*. In this work he first proclaims the independence of the Pure Land sect. Until Honen's times, the Nembutsu had been practiced only as an auxiliary act in the Tendai and other schools. Now he established a place for the Nembutsu by declaring the foundation of a new sect solely based on this practice. In clarifying his standpoint, he presents what is known as 'the threefold selection' of Buddhist teachings: (1) of the two kinds of teachings, the Path of Sages and the Pure Land Path, one should leave the Path of Sages and enter the Pure Land Path; (2) of the two kinds of practices, miscellaneous acts and the Right Acts, one should abandon the former and follow the Right Acts; and (3) of the Five Right Acts (i.e., chanting sutras, meditating on Amida and the Pure Land, worshipping, reciting the Nembutsu, and praising Amida's virtue), one should take the fourth and set aside the rest. He confirms that the Nembutsu is the Act of Right Assurance, that is, the cause of our birth in the Pure Land, because it is the practice required by Amida's Primal Vow.

The above is an outline of the teachings of the Seven Masters. Although their ways of presentation were different, they were the same in showing us that the primary objective of Sākyamuni's mission in this world was to guide us to the Pure Land Path. In Shinran's view, Sākyamuni appeared in India as an incarnation of Amida, the Eternal and Transcendent Buddha. The huge bulk of Sākyamuni's teachings preserved in various Asian languages shows the depth and breadth of the Dharma. Some teachings may be suitable for metaphysical contemplations and some others for training the mind for meditative purposes. After expounding various methods of practice corresponding to the different propensities of people, Sākyamuni summed them up in the *Contemplation Sutra*.

In this sutra the Buddha presents both meditative and non-meditative practices, not only to be performed by one's self-power, but to be followed through Amida's Power as well. This sutra induces different types of practitioners to enter the Pure Land Way. Ordinary Buddhist practices are primarily intended to bring about spiritual elevations leading to the same enlightenment as Sākyamuni's in this world. Now the 'direction' and 'objective' of those practices have been changed to the Pure Land. The devotees are urged to direct the merit from their practices towards the Pure Land in order to attain birth there.

Hence, we see a complete change in the use of meditation. Ordinarily, meditation is employed to calm one's mind, purify it, cultivate wisdom, and finally attain Nirvana. The Pure Land meditation as taught in the *Contemplation Sutra* and the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi Sutra* is the special concentration of mind on Amida and the Pure Land. Concentration leads to visualization. When one has a vision of Amida and the Pure Land, one's karmic defilements are removed, and so one's birth in the Pure Land is assured. Throughout the process of meditation, Amida's Power is working. It is this Power that enables the practitioner to accomplish the Amida Meditation.

Explicitly, the *Contemplation Sutra* thus urges the meditative Nembutsu, but its ulterior objective is to guide the practitioner to non-meditative Nembutsu, i. e., recitation of the Name, which is fully explained in the section on the Nine Grades of Aspirants. It is stated here that those who commit the gravest offenses can be born in the Pure Land by repeating the Name even ten times. When such evil persons say the Nembutsu on their deathbeds, a highly concentrated state of mind is spontaneously attained, in which they receive Amida's compassionate Saving Power. The meditative Nembutsu is suitable to those with superior spiritual capacities, but non-meditative Nembutsu can be practiced even by those who have committed the gravest offenses, and yet the result to be attained is the same. We are once again reminded that even after successful accomplishment of the meditative Nembutsu, Shantao kept reciting the Nembutsu throughout his life. His Nembutsu, like Shinran's, must have gone beyond meditative and non-meditative practices.

The *Contemplation Sutra* was expounded to Vaidehi, heroine of the tragedy in the royal family of Magadha in India. She was a laywoman and had no special training in the Buddhist practice, but was able to visualize Amida and the Pure Land by means of the Buddha's Power. The visualization of Amida gave rise to sincere devotion to him, which must have been expressed as an invocation like '*Namo 'mitābhāya'*', which means 'I take refuge in Amitabha'. It was a spontaneous expression of her unspeakable feeling of awe, respect, gratitude and joy. It was a cry of the spirit freed from the bondage of karma and delusions. For Vaidehi, therefore, the Nembutsu was not a practice of self-power; neither was it so for the Seven Masters and Shinran.

The *Smaller Sutra* reveals that numerous Buddhas in the six directions praise Amida's virtue and urge sentient beings to believe this teaching. The most important part of this sutra is the recommendation to 'hold fast to Amida's Name' for one to seven days, that is, single-minded practice of the Nembutsu, in order to be born in the Pure Land. Concentration on the Name

will induce a sarnadhi, in which one either visualizes Amida or attains spiritual unity with him.

The *Larger Sutra* fully explains Amida's Vows, his Pure Land, and the way of salvation for sentient beings. 'The King of the Vows', in Hōnen's phraseology, is the Eighteenth Vow, which promises our attainment of birth in the Pure Land through the Nembutsu. Needless to say, the majestic body of Amida and the glorious manifestations of the Pure Land are doctrinally important in Shin Buddhism, but they are not meant to be considered as 'objective' descriptions; they are indeed meant to awaken sincere faith and aspiration in us. In this sense, the Eighteenth Vow is the center of the *Larger Sutra* to which the rest of the Vows and the other parts of this sutra converge. By truly understanding and appreciating this Vow, we can come into direct contact with Amida and reach emancipation from the endless cycles of birth-and-death.

All the Buddhas' teachings have, in the final analysis, only one message to give us: Amida's Dharma. Sākyamuni fully explained this Dharma in the three Pure Land sutras and partly in many other sutras. His message, however, had to be rephrased and amplified again and again so that it could be appropriately applied to changing circumstances and also better understood by people of later generations. During the course of transmission of the Dharma through the ages, many masters have played an important part in presenting it in various ideological and social settings.

As we have seen above, the Seven Masters made particularly important contributions to the development and dissemination of Amida's Dharma through their writings. In all the Seven Masters, the Nembutsu was the central practice which they themselves followed and recommended to others. They were also deeply aware and appreciative of the Vows behind the Nembutsu practice. Nāgārjuna, who recommends recitation of the Name in the *Chapter on Easy Practice*, presents the gist of the Eighteenth Vow in his own words as follows:

If one is mindful of me, recites my name, and takes refuge in me, he will instantly enter the Stage of Assurance and subsequently attain the highest perfect Enlightenment.

Then he professes his devotion to Amida in verse form. Vasubandhu includes recitation of the Name in his system of Five Mindful Practices, and expresses his sincere devotion to Amida at the beginning of his *Hymn of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land*:

World-Honored One, with one mind  
I take refuge in the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light  
Shining throughout the Ten Directions,  
And aspire to be born in his land.

Amida is here referred to as 'the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light Shining throughout the Ten Directions'. It is not difficult to see why Vasubandhu used this appellation. Since he actually visualized Amida, he must have been prompted to call him by a name which was more descriptive of this Buddha than 'Arnitābha'. Shinran was especially drawn to this verse and read a deep meaning in it.

In the *Hymn of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land*, Vasubandhu does not simply describe the beautiful manifestations of the Pure Land and the happiness which one can enjoy there. He also depicts how Amida's Vows are working. In the 19th stanza he says as follows:

When I observe the Power of the Buddha's Vow,  
I find that those who encounter it do not pass in vain;  
They are enabled to gain quickly  
The ocean of the treasure of merit.

According to Vasubandhu's own explanation of this verse, if Bodhisattvas of lower ranks see Amida, they will, through the Power of his Vow, quickly attain higher stages and realize the Dharma-body of ultimate equality. The Power of the Vow which Vasubandhu saw was working on the Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land, but it can be perceived in every aspect of Amida's activity - in his Light and Name which reach all sentient beings throughout the universe. When we encounter the Power of the Vow through the Name, we are instantly freed from the bondage of our own evil karma and find ourselves securely embraced by it. Shinran, therefore, read this verse in the light of his experience and describes it in his own words as follows:

Those who encounter the Power of the Primal Vow  
Do not pass in vain;  
They are filled with the ocean of the treasure of merit,  
From which the muddy waters of evil passions are not kept away. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 13*)

T'an-luan was the first to use the term "the Other Power". In his *Commentary on Vasubandhu's Discourse on the Pure Land*, he clarifies the working of the Power of the Vow everywhere. He explains the twenty nine glorious aspects of the Pure Land, Amida, and the Bodhisattvas dwelling there in terms of Vows, and concludes his *Commentary* with quotations of the Eighteenth, Eleventh and Twenty-second Vows to show that anyone who entrusts himself to the Power of the Vow can quickly attain Enlightenment. His emphasis on the Other-Power is also clearly seen in his outline of the Pure Land teaching presented at the beginning of his *Commentary*:

The Path of Easy Practice is followed by aspiring to be born in the Pure Land through faith in Amida Buddha and attaining birth there by the Power of his Vows. In the Pure Land we are sustained by the Buddha's Power and join those Mahayana sages who are certain of attaining Enlightenment.

Tao-ch'o faithfully followed T'an-luan's teaching and quoted extensively from his *Commentary in the Collection of Passages Concerning Birth in the Land of Peace and Bliss*. While fully aware of the working of the Power of the Vow, he goes to great pains to expounding the Nembutsu Samadhi based on the *Contemplation Sutra* and other sutras. His reading of the Eighteenth Vow is strongly influenced by the *Contemplation Sutra*, section on "those who attain birth in the lowest level of the lowest grade":

If there are sentient beings who have committed evils all through their lives but, at their death, sincerely and continuously repeat my name even ten times, they will be born in my land. If not, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

The original text of the Eighteenth Vow excludes from salvation those who have committed the gravest offenses and are rated as "the lowest level of the lowest grade", but Tao-ch'o's deep insight into the nature of his own self and others has revealed their inevitable evildoings, which "arise like a storm or a tempest". His understanding, therefore, is that "the sentient beings" mentioned in this Vow who are to be saved by Amida are neither sages nor morally good persons, but those of the heaviest evil karma. He also pays attention to "the great karmic power of [Amida's] Vows", which enables us to be born in the Pure Land. He says:

The human and heavenly beings in the worlds of the ten directions who wish to be born in my land all avail themselves of the Great Karmic Power of the Vows of Amida Tathagata as the strong cause Amida's Saving Power works in perfect accord with the law of karma. We are bound by the law of karma because we act against it through ignorance of it. The Great Karmic Power originating in Amida's Vows breaks our ignorance and turns our evil karma into pure merits.

(12) Nagarjuna (49-60)

**Sākyamuni, the Tathāgata, while dwelling on Mount Lanka,  
Prophesied to the assembly of monks that in Southern India  
A Great Being named Nāgārjuna would appear in the world  
And destroy all the wrong views on 'existence' and 'non-existence'.  
Proclaiming the unsurpassed teaching of Mahayana;  
He would reach the Stage of Joy and attain birth in the Land of Peace and Bliss.  
He taught that the difficult practices are toilsome like traveling by land,  
And urged us to believe that the Easy Practice is pleasant like sailing on water.  
When a thought of mindfulness of Amida's Primal Vow arises,  
At that instant we spontaneously enter the Stage of Assurance.  
Always reciting only the Name of the Tathagata,  
We should seek to repay our indebtedness to his Great Compassion.**

Nāgārjuna (c.150-250), which literally means 'dragon-Arjuna', is indisputably the greatest master of Buddhism in history, to whom the major schools and sects which developed in India, China, Tibet and Japan attribute their respective origin. In Japan he has been highly esteemed as 'the founder of the eight schools'. According to the Kegon tradition, Nāgārjuna visited the Dragon Palace, where he was shown three versions of the *Grand Sutra on the Inconceivable Emancipation*: large, medium and short. The first two versions were so extensive that he brought back only the short text consisting of a hundred thousand verses. This version, however, was short-lived. Its abridgement in thirty-six thousand verses came to be used, and was transmitted to China, where it was translated as the *Garland Sutra* in sixty fascicles.

In the lineage of the Dharma transmission from India to China used in Zen in particular to establish the authenticity of the Zen tradition, Nāgārjuna is the thirteenth patriarch. Furthermore, according to Shingon, Nāgārjuna opened an iron tower in South India which had not been opened since the Buddha's Parinirvana, and there he met Vajrasattva to whom Mahavairocana had revealed the esoteric teaching. After receiving a mystic Abhiseka ritual and the two main sutras, Nāgārjuna later transmitted the esoteric teaching to Nagabodhi. Nagarjuna is thus looked upon as the third in the line of transmission in Shingon esotericism.

In a more general way, Nāgārjuna was one of the earliest exponents of Mahayana, and was reputed to have founded the School of the Middle (Madhyarnika). In his verses on "The Middle", he expounds that all things are produced by causes and conditions and hence are devoid of substantiality, that is, void. He negates all possible propositions regarding existence and non-existence, and clarifies that the ultimate truth lies in the Middle.

Nāgārjuna was brahmin by birth. In his early years he had already become well-versed in the four Vedas and mastered other learnings. Later he converted to Buddhism. Having received monastic precepts, he first learnt Hinayana teachings. Later he entered the Himalayas, where he studied Mahayana scriptures. Traveling throughout the country, he further studied other forms of Buddhism and also non-Buddhist philosophical thought. Under the royal patronage

of the Satavahana dynasty in Southern India, he was engaged in propagating Mahayana. It is said that the kings built for him a cave monastery on Black-bee Hill, where he spent his last years.

His biographies compiled in China and Tibet are full of mysterious anecdotes. According to one source, he had learnt some magic when young. With his three friends, he used it to conceal their bodies from sight. They entered the royal palace unseen and raped some court-ladies. When suspicion of the invisible intruders arose, the king ordered the guards to close all the gates and to lash about in the air with their swords. Thus his three friends were killed, but Nāgārjuna escaped unhurt. This incident prompted him to renounce the world.

Several centuries earlier, Sākyamuni had already prophesied in the *Lankavatara Sutra* ("*Sutra on the Buddha's Visit to Lanka*") that Nāgārjuna would appear in Southern India, destroy all the wrong views on existence and non-existence, and thus promulgate the Mahayana. Sure enough, he wrote works refuting both positive and negative propositions regarding the nature of existence.

Our Master, the Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, wrote such discourses  
As *Emancipation by Wisdom* and *Ten Bodhisattvastages*,  
In which he glorified the Land in the Western Quarter  
And urged us to practice the Nembutsu. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 1*)

The Buddha Sākyamuni once prophesied,  
"In Southern India a monk will appear,  
Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva by name,  
and destroy Wrong views on existence and non-existence." (*Ibid. 2*)

'Existence' and 'non-existence' are dualistic concepts which are delusory phantoms like 'flowers in the sky' seen by those with eye-diseases. Nagarjuna took great pains to wean us from all kinds of dichotomous views.

In the *Verses on the Middle*, he demonstrated in logical terms that any relativistic statement regarding existence is fallacious. For example, he negated the notion of 'going' by showing that there was, in the final analysis, neither "goer" nor "going"; he even negated the 'existence' of a Tathagata. Nāgārjuna's theory of total negation formed the central concept of the School of the Middle, and his two discourses and a discourse by his disciple Aryadeva became the fundamental texts of the Sanron (lit. 'three discourses') school. This school thrived in China, and was transmitted to Japan during the Nara period.

In employing his logical negativism, however, Nāgārjuna did not remain at level of mere language. Through his Mahayana experience of voidness (*sunyata*) he had already reached the transcendent realm beyond all verbal expressions and conceptual understandings. Although he negated the existence of a Tathagata conceived in the dichotomous mind, he positively stated the existence and activity of the Tathagata as it really is. In his other works, such as the *Commentary on the Prajnaparamita Sutra* and the *Commentary on the Chapter Ten Stages of the Garland Sutra*, he explained in affirmative terms the glorious virtues of

Buddhas, including Amida. The latter commentary is particularly relevant to Pure Land thought, because he presented in it the method of visualizing Amida and attaining the Nembutsu Samadhi. He particularly recommended practice of the samadhi called "all Buddhas' appearance". According to the *Sutra on the Ssmiidhi of All Buddhas' Appearance (Pratyutpanna Ssmiidhi Sutra)*, one can visualize Amida and all other Buddhas by concentrating on Amida for one to seven days; even if one cannot see Amida clearly, one can still see him in a dream. Successful visualization enables the practitioner to be firmly settled in the Stage of Joy and of Non-retrogression. Nāgārjuna himself is said to have attained the Stage of Joy.

Our Master, Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, expounded  
The supreme teaching of the Mahayana;  
Having attained the Stage of Joy,  
He solely recommended the practice of Nembutsu. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 3*)

For all Mahayanists who have resolved to become Buddhas, their immediate concern is to attain the Stage of Non-retrogression. Until they reach this stage, they are liable to fall back to lower spiritual stages owing to their still imperfect wisdom and evil karmic influence. When the practitioner visualizes Amida, he receives Amida's undefiled wisdom and perfect merit.

The samadhi practice centering on Amida apparently enjoyed popularity in India and Central Asian countries. It was also transmitted to China and eventually to Japan. It is a well-known fact that Master Hui-yūan (334-416) formed the White Lotus Society and practiced this form of Amida meditation on Mt. Lu. Later, Master Shan-tao followed this method and succeeded in visualizing Amida.

By far the most important contribution made by Nāgārjuna to Pure Land Buddhism was his introduction of an "easy practice" leading to the Stage of Non-retrogression, which consisted in reciting the names of Amida and other Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas. In the 9th chapter of the *Commentary on the Chapter Ten Stages of the Garland Sutra*, entitled "Easy Practice", he distinguishes two approaches to the Stage of Non-retrogression:

There are innumerable modes of entry to the Buddha's teaching. Just as there are in the world difficult and easy paths - travelling on foot by land is full of hardship and travelling in a boat on a sea route is pleasant - so it is among the paths of the bodhisattvas. Some diligently exert themselves in practices while others quickly enter Non-retrogression by an easy practice based on faith.

He then gives the names of many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, saying that recitation of any of those names ensures attainment of the Stage of Non-retrogression.

Mahāsattva Nāgārjuna appeared in the world and taught us  
That there are two paths, Difficult Practice and Easy Practice;  
He then led us who are repeating the cycle of birth-and-death  
In Samsara to board the ship of Amida's Great Vow. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 4*)

When Nāgārjuna recommended recitation of the name of a Buddha or a Great Bodhisattva as an easy and sure way of attaining the Stage of Non-retrogression, he did not mean by this a mere repetitive verbal act, but an act of devotion with mind and body. Of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas listed in the *Chapter on the Easy Practice*, Nāgārjuna particularly professes his sincere faith in Amida. After presenting the names of a hundred and seven Buddhas, which correspond well with those of the past Buddhas in the Sanskrit text of the *Larger Sutra*, Nagarjuna goes on to praise Amida's virtue and express his devotion to him. In this section he first presents the gist of Amida's Vow in the following words:

If one thinks of me, recites my Name, and takes refuge in me, one will instantly enter the Stage of Assurance and then attain the highest perfect Enlightenment.

'The Stage of Assurance' is the same as 'the Stage of Nonretrogression'. Those who reach this stage are assured of attaining Enlightenment. In the 32-stanza verse which follows, he glorifies Amida's virtue with reverential faith in accordance with the *Larger Sutra*:

The Buddha of Infinite Light and Wisdom, whose body is like a mountain of genuine gold,  
I worship him with my body, speech and heart by joining my hands and bowing down toward him. (1)  
If anyone thinks of the Buddha's infinite power and merit,  
He will instantly enter the Stage of Assurance; hence, I always think of him. (4)  
Those born in his land are free of attachment to 'self and 'mine';  
They do not produce discriminative thoughts; hence, I bow down and worship him. (11)  
If anyone, aspiring to become a Buddha, contemplates Amida in his heart,  
Amida will instantly manifest himself before him; hence, I take refuge in him. (14)  
If a man plants roots of goodness but entertains doubt, the flower (he will be born into) will not bloom;  
For those who have pure faith, flowers will bloom, and they will see the Buddha. (18)  
The Buddhas of the ten directions praise this Buddha's merit  
For various reasons. I now take refuge in him and worship him. (19)  
He is the most honored of all men and heavenly beings; all gods kneel down and worship him, With their crowns made of seven treasures touching his feet. Hence, I take refuge in him. (26)  
All wise and holy men and multitudes of human and heavenly beings  
Together take refuge in him; hence, I, too, worship him. (27)  
Boarding the boat of Eightfold Noble Path, he ferries people across the sea that is difficult to cross;  
He crossed it himself and carries others across. I worship the one who possesses unrestricted power. (28)  
With whatever merit I have acquired in this and previous lives,  
I wish to be in the presence of the Buddha and attain eternal purity of heart. (32)  
May the supreme merit I have acquired by this meritorious act  
Be shared with all other sentient beings. (32)

Those who hear and receive the teaching  
Of our Master, Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna,  
Should be mindful of the Primal Vow  
And continually recite Amida's Name. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs* 5)

It is clear from the above quotation that, in spite of his much reputed philosophical approaches to ultimate truth, Nagarjuna's real concern was to entrust himself to Amida, who delivers with boundless merit and power all sentient beings from the bondage of karma and suffering. Shinran reverently followed his footsteps and quoted from his discourse in the *Kyogyoshinsho* to clarify the essence of the Shin teaching. We are also deeply indebted to Nāgārjuna for his hymn in praise of Amida, entitled *Twelve Adorations*, which has become a popular gatha for Shin Buddhists all over the world.

In keeping with his reputation as the founder of eight schools, Nāgārjuna was well-versed in various Buddhist teachings, and also attained a high stage of spiritual progress toward the Buddha's Enlightenment. He was especially renowned as the greatest authority on the philosophy of Voidness, but before anything else, he was an earnest follower and exponent of the Bodhisattva Path. The theory of universal Voidness, in fact, constitutes an essential part of the practice of the Six Para mitas. Without removing attachment to all that exists, including one's own self, through the realization of Voidness, one cannot effectively perform the Bodhisattva Practices. Dana, for example, should be an unattached act of giving in three ways: there should not be any attachment to the donor, the recipient or the gift. Such an attitude applies to all the other practices. When this attachment is removed, one attains the pure wisdom of non-attachment. One who does so is said to have reached the Stage of Joy. Only after the eradication of deep-rooted attachment can one effectively proceed toward Enlightenment.

Under normal circumstances, a bodhisattva must perform various practices for a long time, over many lives, to reach the Stage of Joy. While admitting this, Nāgārjuna proposed an easier way of approach, which guarantees quicker attainment of this spiritual stage. In the *Chapter on the Easy Practice* he first points out three disadvantages in the normal bodhisattva practices: (1) the practices one must perform are many, (2) the time required is extremely long, and (3) there is a danger of falling into the pit of nihilism. Nāgārjuna especially cautions us against the danger of Hinayanistic nihilism, saying: "If one falls into the state of śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha, this is called the death of the bodhisattva, for he loses all merit.... Even if one has fallen into hell, one will eventually be able to reach Buddhahood; if one falls into the stage of the Two Vehicles, the path to Buddhahood will be blocked forever". In his *Commentary on the Prajñāpāramita Sutra* Nāgārjuna notes that many bodhisattvas were unable to reach emancipation by various self-power practices but finally attained it by the Nembutsu Sarnādhi.

He says in the *Commentary on the Sutra of Prajñāpāramita*,

"The Tathāgata is the Supreme King of the Dharma  
And Bodhisattvas are the retainers of the Dharma";  
One should revere the World-Honored One. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 8*)

All Bodhisattvas remarked,  
"When we were in the causal stage of bodhisattvahood,  
We performed a myriad goods and various practices For innumerable kalpas; (*Ibid. 9*)

But our attachments were difficult to remove  
And so it was impossible to leave birth-and-death.  
By practicing the Nembutsu Samadhi,  
We destroyed karmic hindrances and attained emancipation." (*Ibid. 10*)

The Easy Practice of the Nembutsu ensures attainment of the Stage of Joy and, consequently, of Buddhahood. As quoted before, "If anyone thinks of the Buddha's infinite power and merit, he will instantly enter the Stage of Assurance". Recitation of the Buddha's Name while being mindful of and entrusting in his power is the cause of instantaneous attainment of the Stage of Non-retrogression. It should be noted here that even though one's effort is bound to be involved in the Nembutsu practice, it is soon absorbed in the Buddha's all-embracing power, and thus one *spontaneously* enters the Stage of Assurance. By *spontaneously* Shinran means 'through the Power of Amida's Vow,' which has been working on us since time immemorial and will continue to work on all sentient beings until they are all emancipated from Samsara. After we are awakened to Amida's Power, what remains in our minds is a feeling of gratitude, a desire to repay his Great Compassion, and a joy of participating in the eternal altruistic activity.

All who wish to attain quickly  
The Stage of Non-retrogression  
Should reverently and resolutely Recite the Name of Amida Buddha. (*Ibid. 6*)

The painful sea of birth-and-death has no bounds,  
Where we have been sunk from the beginningless past.  
The ship of Amida's Great Vow is the only means  
To carry us across safely to the Other Shore. (*Ibid. 7*)

(13) Vasubandhu (61-72)

**The Bodhisattva Vasubandhu composed a discourse, in which he professed  
That he took refuge in the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light;  
In accordance with the sutras he expounded the true merits,  
And clarified that the Great Vow enables us to leap over Samsara crosswise.  
He revealed One Mind in order to emancipate multitudes of beings  
Through Amida's transference of merits by the Power of his Primal Vow.  
Upon entering the Great Treasure-Ocean of Merits,  
We will unfailingly join the Great Assemblage.  
Upon reaching the World of Lotus-store,  
We will realize True Suchness and attain Dharma-body.  
Then, playing in the forests of evil passions, we will display supernatural powers;  
Entering Samsaric states, we will manifest accommodative and transformed bodies to  
save beings.**

Mahayana to which the Jodoshinshu belongs had two major currents in India: (1) School of the Middle (Madhyamika) originated by Nāgārjuna during the 2nd and 3rd centuries and (2) School of Consciousness-Only (Yogācāra) founded by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu in the 4th century. Nāgārjuna negated all modes of existence conceived and perceived by unenlightened beings, thereby presenting transcendent reality which is above the dichotomous views of 'existence' and 'non-existence'. He recognized Amida as transcendent reality - not as a lifeless abstract principle, but as a Person possessed of boundless Wisdom and Compassion.

The School of Consciousness-Only teaches how to meditate on phenomena in relation to one's consciousness and reach Enlightenment through realization of the intrinsic unity between the subjective self and environmental manifestations. Vasubandhu applied this Yogācāra meditation to the exploration of Amida and his Pure Land. The object of meditation has been shifted from the worldly phenomena and their corresponding perceptive faculties to the phenomena in the transcendent realm, known as the Pure Land, and the Mind which has produced it, that is, Amida's Mind of Compassionate Vow.

Vasubandhu, the second master of Shin Buddhism, was born in Purusapura, the capital of Gandhara, in Northern India. He was the second son of Kausika, a Brahmin, and his brother, Asati.gā, was a great master of Buddhism, celebrated as one of the founders of the Yogacara School. Tradition has it that Asati.gā, while in meditation, used to visit the Tusita Heaven and learnt the teachings of Yogācāra from Maitreya Bodhisattva. Vasubandhu's younger brother, Vilificivatsa, belonged to the Sarvāstivāda School of Hinayana and was said to have reached Arhatship.

Vasubandhu was first ordained as a monk of the Sarvāstivāda School, and became well-versed in the Abhidharma philosophy which centered around analyses of physical and mental elements. Later he moved to Ayodhyā where he enjoyed the patronage from King Vikramāditya and his son, Bālāditya. He systematized the doctrine of Abhidharma, and presented its essentials in more than 600 verses, which, together with his own commentary on

them, are known as *Abhidharma-kośa* (*Discourse on the Repository of Abhidharma Discussions*). He thus became well-known as an Abhidharma master. Later, under the influence of Asaṅga, he converted to Mahayana. While he was a Hinayana master, he abused Mahayana. When he realized the profound truth of Mahayana, he deeply repented of the evil he had done by this abuse of Mahayana and wanted to cut out his tongue. Asaṅga admonished him, "Why don't you now use your tongue to expound Mahayana?" Since then Vasubandhu energetically propagated Mahayana by writing Yogacara discourses and commentaries. He especially systematized the doctrine of Consciousness-Only. His treatises explaining it laid the foundation of the Hossō school, which thrived in China and Japan.

Vasubandhu's contribution to the development of the Pure Land thought is beyond measure. He composed the *Hymn of Aspiration for Birth: A Discourse on the Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life*, in which he presented the theory and practice centering around contemplation of Amida, his Pure Land and the Bodhisattvas dwelling there. In the 24-stanza hymn which forms the main part of this discourse, he first addresses Sākyamuni to profess his devotion to Amida Buddha:

O World-Honored One, with singleness of mind,  
I take refuge in the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light  
Shining throughout the Ten Directions,  
And aspire to be born in the Land of Peace and Bliss.

Shinran paid special attention to this opening stanza. First of all, he takes 'singleness of mind' as referring to the Other-Power Faith.

Single-hearted trust in Amida is awakened by his Power, not by the aspirant's intellectual understanding or emotional feeling. There are two ways of perceiving Amida's Power: (1) through visualization of Amida and his Land of Bliss and (2) through hearing and concentrating on his Name. Like other Mahayana masters in those days, Vasubandhu was capable of sophisticated meditation, through which he visualized Amida and the Pure Land. He perceived Amida as the Buddha of transcendent Light shining everywhere without hindrance. Amida's Light is the Light of Wisdom and Compassion, and so one who beholds Amida is freed from the darkness of spiritual ignorance and self-centeredness and is assured of birth in the Land of Nirvanic Bliss.

With the guidance of the Pure Land sutras, Vasubandhu described his experience of visualization in the *Hymn of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land*. The hymn and the commentary he added to it are popularly called '*the Discourse on the Pure Land*'. Honen especially valued this work and included it in 'the four texts which directly expound the Pure Land teaching' (the other three are the Three Sutras). Following him, Shinran quotes Vasubandhu frequently in his works, often in conjunction with T'an-luan's commentary on the discourse.

In describing the Pure Land and discussing relevant doctrinal points, Vasubandhu followed the Pure Land sutras, presumably the *Larger Sutra* in particular, which presents Amida's merit and virtue in full detail. 'The true merits' which Vasubandhu reveals in the *Discourse*

are the result of Dharmākara's Vows and Practices. By performing various bodhisattva practices of supra mundane good, Dharmākara accumulated a vast stock of pure merits, which, on his attainment of Buddhahood, are exhibited as the glorious physical and environmental manifestations. All his merits are also contained in his Name, and so anyone who hears and recites it with sincere devotion is endowed with the supreme merits.

Vasubandhu's description of his experience is threefold, and each division has various aspects: (1) the Pure Land (17 aspects), (2) Amida's physical manifestation (8 aspects), and (3) the Bodhisattvas dwelling in the Pure Land (4 aspects). The following is an outline of the twenty-nine aspects:

#### [I] The Pure Land

- (1) The Pure Land is the realm of purity above various states of existence in Samsara which are defiled and delusory.
- (2) The Pure Land is vast and boundless like empty space.
- (3) It has originated from Great Compassion and supramundane goodness.
- (4) It is suffused with pure light.
- (5) It is full of exquisite adornments.
- (6) Its brilliant light illumines the whole world.
- (7) Jeweled ornaments produce delightful sensations to those who touch them.
- (8) Jeweled flowers fill the ponds; there are majestic towers and brilliant trees; and decorative nets hang in the sky.
- (9) Flowers and ornamental robes shower from the sky.
- (10) The Buddha's wisdom is like the sun; it dispels the darkness of the world.
- (11) The sacred Name which enlightens living beings is heard throughout the ten directions.
- (12) Amida presides over and sustains the land.
- (13) Bodhisattvas are born miraculously from the flower of Amida's Enlightenment.
- (14) They always enjoy the Buddha-Dharma and dwell in meditation.
- (15) They are free of afflictions and always enjoy happiness.
- (16) The Pure Land is the realm of Mahayana good, and those born there are free of mental and physical handicaps and imperfections.
- (17) All their aspirations are fulfilled.

The Pure Land which Vasubandhu visualized is a transcendent realm, beyond time and space, which only Buddhas can fully perceive.

The glorious adornments of the Pure Land of Peace and Provision  
Can be known only through the wisdom of the Buddhas.  
The land is infinite like space,  
Vast and without bounds. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 12*)

Vasubandhu next discerns the following eight aspects of Amida's glorious qualities and manifestations:

#### [2] Amida Buddha

- (1) His lotus seat is adorned with numerous treasures. (2) His majestic appearance is beyond

compare.

- (3) His wonderful voice is heard throughout the ten directions.
- (4) He has no thought of discrimination.
- (5) Heavenly and human beings in the Pure Land are born out of his pure wisdom.
- (6) His sovereign power is unsurpassed.
- (7) He is worshiped by all beings.
- (8) The Power of his Vow enables those who encounter it to gain the supreme merits.

Those born in the Pure Land attain Mahayana enlightenment and, as bodhisattvas, manifest all kinds of meritorious activity for the sake of suffering beings. Vasubandhu distinguishes the following four aspects of their activity:

[3] Bodhisattvas

- (1) Without moving their bodies, they can manifest various forms throughout the ten directions and display Buddhist activities.
- (2) In an instant, they can simultaneously visit all the Buddha-lands throughout the ten directions to edify sentient beings and remove their suffering.
- (3) They can illuminate all the Buddhas' teaching assemblies and make offerings to them without discriminative thought.
- (4) They can visit any land where the Three Treasures do not exist to spread the Buddha-Dharma like Buddhas.

Upon reaching the Pure Land, we shall fully partake of Amida's boundless merits and virtues and, as bodhisattvas, join his universal acts of salvation.

The holy sages arising from within the Tathāgata's pure flower  
Are born transformed from the Flower of Enlightenment;  
All the aspirations of sentient beings  
Are thus completely and quickly fulfilled. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 14*)

The holy sages with the resolute mind in the forms of devas and humans  
Arise from the oceanic Wisdom of the Universal Vow;  
The virtues of their minds are pure and undefiled,  
Free of discriminative thoughts like space. (*Ibid. 15*)

According to the Yogācāra teaching, of which Vasubandhu and his brother, Asanga, were the greatest authorities, the length of time normally required of a practitioner to attain Enlightenment is "three asamkhyā kalpas" (three incalculable aeons). During such a long time one must continuously perform various meritorious practices over many lives. Since in the Yogācāra all phenomenal manifestations and the noumenal principle are conceived in terms of 'consciousness', theoretically speaking, Enlightenment is none other than realization of one's true consciousness. The actual practice of meditation is of two kinds: concentration (*śamatha*) and contemplation (*vipaśyana*). By concentrating one's thought on a specific object of high spiritual value, one's mind is purified and freed of evil passions. Next, by contemplating the object with deep insight, one gains spiritual benefit.

When Vasubandhu applied this Yogācāra meditation to Pure Land Buddhism, he carefully included 'concentration' and 'contemplation' in his system of practice. He devised the Yogacara-Pure Land system, called the 'Five Mindful Practices', which are as follows: (1) worshipping Amida, (2) praising him as 'the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light Shining throughout the Ten Directions', (3) aspiring to be born in the Pure Land, (4) contemplating the Pure Land, Amida and the Bodhisattvas, and (5) transferring the merit of practice to other beings.

The first three Mindful Practices are shown in the first stanza of the *Hymn of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land*:

I take refuge in the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light  
Shining throughout the Ten Directions,  
And aspire to be born in the Land of Peace and Bliss.

'I take refuge' is the act of worshipping; needless to say, the mental attitude of devotion is essential in worshipping. The act of glorifying Amida is shown by calling him by the name which best expresses his supreme merit and virtue, namely, 'the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light Shining throughout the Ten Directions'.

The Third Mindful Practice is aspiration for birth in the Pure Land. Vasubandhu related this to the *śamatha* practice, as he explains in the Commentary section:

"How does one aspire (to the Pure Land)? One constantly resolves, and fixing one's thought on eventual attainment of birth in the Land of Peace and Bliss, one wishes to practice *śamatha* in accordance with the truth". Originally, *śamatha* is meant to pacify the mind by stopping it from taking external objects. In the Yogācāra-Pure Land system *śamatha* is practiced towards the Pure Land and is accompanied by a strong wish to be born there. As the practitioner concentrates on it, worldly desires which are defiled by self-attachment gradually subside, and evil passions and wrong views attending them are removed. All physical and mental acts now converge on this pure aspiration, and so the karmic energy required for birth in the Pure Land gains power. Speaking from Amida's side, the aspiration for birth in the Pure Land is the reflection of Amida's wish to bring sentient beings there, and the merits and karmic power required for birth are provided by Amida himself. "*Samatha* in accordance with the truth" means the true *śamatha* practice which is free of all defilements and accords with True Suchness; such a practice is possible only when one is in perfect accord with Amida's Vow and its Power.

The Fourth Mindful Practice is *vipaśyana*, which is contemplation of the twenty-nine aspects of glorious merits, namely, seventeen aspects of the Pure Land, eight aspects of Amida, and four aspects of Bodhisattvas. By contemplating them, the practitioner perceives Amida's merits and the Power of his Vow, and is assured of his birth in the Pure Land.

Vasubandhu especially mentions the Power of the Vow in the eighth aspect of Amida's virtue:

When I contemplate the Power of the Buddha's Primal Vow,  
I see that those who encounter it never pass in vain;  
It enables them to gain quickly the supreme merits.

Speaking in terms of the Vow, all that Amida attained on his realization of Buddhahood was due to the Vows which he had made when he was a bodhisattva. The Twelfth Vow was the cause of Amida's Infinite Light (Amitābha), the Thirteenth was the cause of his Infinite Life (Amitāyus), and by extension these two vows were also the cause of the Pure Land of Infinite Light and Life. The Eighteenth Vow of Shinjin and Nembutsu is the most concrete expression of Amida's wish to save all beings in delusion and suffering. The Vow of universal salvation, as the Eighteenth Vow may be called, having been fulfilled, the most effective way of salvation has become available for us. This is the Easy Way of emancipation through the Name. The Name contains "all the elements of moral good and all the roots of virtue" and is "the treasure-sea of the merits of True Suchness" (*Kyōgyōshinshō*, Chapter on True Practice). Amida's supreme merits which are in accord with the ultimate truth and reality are transferred to those who receive and recite the Name with the heart of absolute trust in him. To encounter the Power of the Vow, therefore, means to hear and receive the Name and to attain the boundless pure merits. Shinran is grateful to Vasubandhu for his compassionate teaching:

Sākyamuni's teachings are numerous,  
But the Bodhisattva Vasubandhu compassionately urged us,  
Who are possessed of evil passions,  
To take refuge in Amida's Universal Vow. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 11*)

The last of the Five Mindful Practices is merit-transference; concerning this, Vasubandhu states in the last stanza of his *Hymn of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land*:

I have written this discourse and hymn  
With the wish to see Amida Buddha  
And, together with all sentient beings,  
Be born in the Land of Peace and Bliss.

It was Vasubandhu's fervent wish to share the merits acquired with other beings in order to attain birth in the Pure Land together.

At the beginning of the *Hymn of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land*, Vasubandhu expressed his single-minded devotion to Amida as "One Mind". One Mind is complete trust in Amida, and is itself awakened by his Saving Power. Emancipation from karmic bondage is very difficult to attain through one's own power, but easy if one avails oneself of Amida's Power. This Power spontaneously carries the devotee to the Pure Land. Let us see Shinran's praise of it in his hymn on Vasubandhu:

Vasubandhu, the author of the *Discourse*, took refuge  
With One Mind in the Buddha of Unhindered Light;

Having entrusted to the Power of the Primal Vow,  
One reaches the Land of Recompense, so he says. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 16*)

The strong karmic Power engendered by the Primal Vow has produced the Pure Land, maintains it everlastingly, and brings anyone who puts absolute trust in it to be born there. Shinjin, or absolute trust, is here expressed as One Mind. Shinran's penetrating eye saw the internal relationship between One Mind and the three aspects of Faith in the Eighteenth Vow, namely, Sincere Mind, Serene Faith and Desire for Birth. In fully discussing this problem in the *Kyôgyôshinshô*, Chapter on True Faith, he begins with the following question and answer:

Question: In the Primal Vow, the Tathāgata already made the Vow of Sincere Mind, Joyful Faith and Desire for Birth. For what reason, does the author of the *Discourse* profess his faith as 'One Mind'?

Answer: In order to make us, ignorant beings, understand better. Although Amida Tathāgata made the Vow of Three Minds, the true cause of Nirvana is Faith alone. For this reason, the author of the *Discourse* made the three into one.

In a hymn, Shinran further demonstrates:

Faith is One Mind;  
One Mind is the Diamond-like Mind;  
The Diamond-like Mind is the Bodhi-Mind;  
This mind is given us by the Other-Power. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 19*)

The undivided One Mind constitutes the cause of Enlightenment. Since it is the Bodhi-Mind, it has two aspects:

To take refuge with One Mind in the Buddha  
Of Unhindered Light Shining throughout the Ten Directions  
Is the mind aspiring to become Buddha;  
So says Vasubandhu, the Master of Discourse. (*Ibid. 17*)

The mind aspiring to become Buddha  
Is the mind seeking to save sentient beings;  
The mind that seeks to save sentient beings  
Is True Faith endowed by Amida's Compassion. (*Ibid. 18*)

Vasubandhu's Pure Land system has two aspects: (1) causal practices and (2) resultant states. The Five Mindful Practices are performed in this world, and each of them brings about its result in the Pure Land. The correspondence between the five causal practices and the five resultant states can be shown in the following diagram:

<b>Cause</b>	<b>Result</b>
1.Worship	Approach
2.Praise	Great Assemblage
3.Aspiration	Residence

4.Contemplation	Inner Chamber
5.Merit-transference	Playing in the Garden

The five resultant states are shown by the analogy of gradual access to the inner chamber of a house; after reaching it, one comes out in the garden to play. The Great Assemblage is the Assemblage of innumerable Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land. Those born there all become Bodhisattvas and as such participate in the endless Buddhist activity.

If the aspirants are led to entrust themselves to Amida and are wholly encompassed by his Wisdom, Compassion and Power, their birth in the Pure Land is the natural outcome. Amida's land, or sphere of activity, is called by various names: Land of Utmost Bliss (*gokuraku*), Land of Peace and Provision (*annyō*), Pure Realm (*jōsetsu*) and Pure Land (*jōdo*). Here it is called "the World of Lotus-store" (*rengezō sekai*). This term was used by Vasubandhu himself in explaining the fruition of the Third Mindful Practice:

If one single-mindedly aspires to be born there [in the Pure Land] and practices Samatha, the Samadhi of Tranquility, one will reach the World of Lotus store. This is called the entry into the Third Gate.

The term 'World of Lotus-store' is not found in the Pure Land sutras, but occurs in the *Garland Sutra*, where it refers to the land of Vairocana, the Cosmic Buddha. This land has appeared from within a huge lotus-flower that grows in the Sea of Perfume, and consists of twenty layers, each surrounded by innumerable worlds. Another sutra, entitled "*Brahma-net*", describes this lotus-flower in detail: Vairocana sits on the lotus dais in the center; on each of the thousand petals there are ten billion Mount Sumerus. He manifests a thousand transformed bodies of Sākyamuni, each dwelling on each petal; each Buddha body of Sākyamuni, surrounded by ten billion Bodhisattva bodies of Sākyamuni, preaches the Dharma under the Bodhi-tree.

Vairocana is the central Buddha in the *Garland Sutra* and is widely recognized as the highest Buddha in the major Mahayana schools. He is a Sambhogakāya Buddha in the Kegon sect, and a Dharmakāya Buddha in the Tendai sect. It is generally thought that Vairocana is the original body of Sakyamuni and is superior to Amida. Both Vasubandhu and Shinran, while recognizing the supreme Buddhahood of Vairocana, identified his land with Amida's, because all Buddhas share the same essential body of Dharmakāya and their pure lands are the same transcendent realm of True Suchness.

Upon reaching the Pure Land, we will realize Enlightenment and attain the same Dharmakāya as Amida's. Dharmakāya is the highest personality, unsurpassed and all-embracing. It is the fountainhead of all Buddhist activities. We read in Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Chapter on True Enlightenment:

If ordinary persons full of evil passions and multitudinous beings defiled by karmic evils and bound to Samsara, attain Faith (*shinjin*) and Practice (*Nembutsu*) for birth in the Pure Land, they instantly join the group of Mahayanists assured of Nirvana. Since

they reside among them, they will unfailingly reach Extinction; Extinction is Eternal Bliss; Eternal Bliss is Ultimate Tranquility; Ultimate Tranquility is the unsurpassed Nirvana; the unsurpassed Nirvana is the unconditioned Dharmakāya; the unconditioned Dharmakāya is True Aspect; True Aspect is Dharma-nature; Dharma-nature is True Suchness; True Suchness is Oneness. Amida Tathāgata has appeared from Suchness, and manifests various forms of recompensed, accommodative and transformed bodies.

If one attains the highest wisdom (Bodhi, Prajñā) and realizes with it the ultimate reality (True Suchness, etc.), Great Compassion for all living beings is spontaneously awakened in the mind. Shinran ends his hymns on Vasubandhu with the following:

Upon reaching the Land of Recompense, One realizes the unsurpassed Nirvana And then awakens Great Compassion; This is due to Amida's Merit-transference. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 20*)