

(10) T'an-luan (73-84)

**Master T'an-luan was venerated by the King of Liang;
Facing toward his place, the king worshiped him as a Bodhisattva.
When Bodhiruci, the Tr'ipitaka master, gave him a Pure Land scripture,
T'an-luan burned his Taoist texts and took refuge in the Land of Bliss.
He wrote a commentary on the Bodhisattva Vasubandhu's discourse, explaining in it:
Both the cause and the effect of our birth in the Land of Recompense come from
Amida's Vows;
The karmic energy for our birth and returning to this world originates from the Other-
Power.
The cause of attaining the Stage of Right Assurance is Faith alone.
When Faith is awakened in the minds of deluded and defiled. ordinary people,
They are made aware that birth-and-death is Nirvana.
After they unfailingly reach the Land of Infinite Light,
They will save sentient beings everywhere, so says T'an-luan.**

Buddhism reached China through Central Asia in the early centuries of our common era. According to tradition, the oldest Chinese translation of the *Larger Sutra* had already been produced by Lokaksema in the Later Han dynasty, from 147 to 186, followed by the second translation in the 3rd century. The one held as the authentic text in the Chinese and Japanese Pure Land schools has been traditionally ascribed to Sarpghavarman in the middle of the 3rd century, but was presumably produced jointly by Buddhahadra and Pao-yiin in 421. This was followed by two more translations, one in the 8th and the other in the 10th century. Besides those five extant versions, the *Larger Sutra* is said to have been translated seven more times. Although this record is based on incorrect entries in the sutra-catalogs and so cannot be taken to be wholly true, it is undeniable that this sutra enjoyed great popularity in China as it certainly did in India.

Chinese Buddhism entered a new epoch around the 5th century; Kumārajiva from Kuccha translated the *Prajñāpsramitā Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Smaller Sutra*, and the important Mādhyamika literature by Nāgārjuna. The theory of emptiness became popular and also Pure Land Buddhism came to be practiced by eminent monks. It is a well-known fact that the master Hui-yüan (334-416) founded the White Lotus Society on Mt. Lu to practice the Pratyutpanna Samādhi which centered on Amida Buddha. By the time T'an-luan (476-542) appeared, the *Contemplation Sutra* had been translated by Kālayaśas. The time was ripe for establishment of the Pure Land system firmly based on the Mahayana philosophy and in accord with the Buddha's true intention. Such a system of theory and practice centering on Amida was to be followed by ordinary people as well as scholarly monks.

T'an-luan was born in the present Shan-hsi Province, north China, and entered the priestly life at the age of fifteen. He soon distinguished himself in the Mādhyamika doctrine of the Four-discourse school. Later, when he became interested in the *Great Collection Sutra* and wished

to write a commentary on it, he became ill. He then turned to Taoism for health and longevity, and went to see T'ao Hung-ching (452-536), the greatest Taoist authority of the time. T'an-luan was given Taoist scriptures in 10 scrolls, but on his way back, he met Bodhiruci from India at Lo-yang, the capital of China. The Indian monk, who was a great Tripitaka master, admonished him that even if one gained longevity, he would still be bound to Samsara, and that the BuddhaDharma was the true way to eternal life. So saying, he gave T'an-luan a Pure Land scripture, which was believed to be the *Contemplation Sutra* or Vasubandhu's *Discourse on the Pure Land* or both. According to tradition, T'an-luan put both the Buddhist and Taoist texts in the fire to see which would survive. Sure enough, the Buddhist text was not burnt, and so he took refuge in it. Later in 531, Bodhiruci produced a translation of the *Discourse on the Pure Land*, on which T'an-luan wrote an extensive commentary.

Our Master, T'an-luan, accepted Bodhiruci's teaching;
He burnt Taoist texts which he had acquired
And deeply took refuge in the Pure Land Way. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 21*)

Setting aside his lectures on the Four Discourses,
He expounded the teaching of the Other-Power of the Primal Vow;
He led ordinary, unenlightened beings burdened with karmic bonds
To enter the gate of Nirvana. (*Ibid. 22*)

The King of Liang, Wu-t'i (reigned from 502 to 549), especially venerated T'an-luan and always paid homage to him. At the request of the king of Eastern Wei, Hsiao-ching-t'i (reigned from 534 to 550), T'an-luan dwelt at Great Cliff Temple in Shan-hsi. The King also honored him with the title of 'Divine Phoenix'. Later, he moved to Hsüan-chung Temple in Fen-chou. The place where he dwelt came to be known as the 'Cliff of Master Phoenix (*Luan*).

The King of Liang, Hsiao-yen,
Always facing toward the place
Where T'an-luan, our Master, lived,
Worshipped him as 'Bodhisattva Phoenix'. (*Ibid. 54*)

The King of Wei venerated T'an-luan
And honored him with the title of 'Divine Phoenix';
And so the place where he lived
Was called 'Cliff of Master Phoenix'. (*Ibid. 27*)

T'an-luan's *Commentary on the Discourse on the Pure Land* not only explains technical terms and unfamiliar words which appear in Vasubandhu's *Discourse on the Pure Land* but also reveals the full metaphysical and soteriological implications of important concepts. As the *Discourse* is composed of two parts, hymn and explanation, the *Commentary* is also divided into two parts: (1) exposition of the hymn and (2) exposition of the explanatory section. At the outset of the *Commentary*, the author quotes Nāgārjuna's *Chapter on Easy Practice* to show that there are two ways of attaining the Stage of Non-retrogression: the Path of Difficult

Practice and the Path of Easy Practice. T'an-luan's additional explanation of the reason why it is difficult to attain the Stage of Non-retrogression at the time when no Buddha lives in the world is as follows: (1) Non-Buddhist ways of doing what seems to be good are at variance with the bodhisattva's practice; (2) the Hinayanistic pursuit of self-benefit obstructs the bodhisattva's acts of great compassion; (3) evildoers, who have no regard for consequences, destroy the meritorious virtue that accrues from the practices of others; (4) the results of good deeds based on deluded thinking distract the sacred practices; and (5) relying solely on one's own power, one misses the support of the Other-Power.

First, the superficial, pretentious good, to which people are easily attracted, is a hindrance to the Bodhisattva Path. Second, pursuit of self-benefit is easy to understand and is popularly practiced; and so the bodhisattva's acts of great compassion are generally ignored. Third, evildoers who reject the law of karma break the acts of virtue. Fourth, the reward of birth in a heavenly state appears more attractive than Nirvana which the bodhisattva's practices are expected to lead to. Lastly, one habitually relies on one's own power to attain salvation, and hardly realizes that Amida's Power is available. T'an-luan was the first to use the term 'Other-Power,' which became the central theme in Shinran's system of soteriology. Shinran expresses his gratitude to T'an-luan in the *Hymns on the Seven Patriarchs* as follows:

If T'an-luan had not expounded
The teaching of the Bodhisattva Vasubandhu,
How could we realize the Practice and Faith
Endowed by Amida's great virtuous Power. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs* 31)

T'an-luan's exposition includes answers to the many questions which we still ask today. For example, in the opening verse of the Hymn, Vasubandhu professes his faith in Amida as follows:

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.

In commenting on this verse, T'an-luan raises a question:

'Self' is non-existent in Buddhism; for what reason is 'I' mentioned here?

His answer is:

Generally there are three cases in which 'I' is used: (1) when a person has a wrong view (that a permanent self exists in an individual); (2) when one speaks of oneself with self-conceit; and (3) in ordinary parlance (in which a Buddhist sage teaches others by distinguishing himself from them). When the Bodhisattva Vasubandhu said 'I,' he simply referred to himself in ordinary parlance. He did not use it with a wrong view or with self-conceit.

T'an-luan does not simply explain difficult terms and concepts. He often raises questions concerning soteriological problems and gives adequate answers, which are extremely useful for our understanding of Amida's salvation. After explaining the reason why calling the Name as 'the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light Shining throughout the Ten Directions' is the 'gate of praise,' T'an-luan asks this question:

You say that Amida's light is boundless, shining on all the worlds in the ten directions without hindrance. Why is it that some people in this world are not illumined by his light?

He answers this question by saying:

The hindrance lies with living beings; it is not that the light is liable to hindrance. It is like the sunlight which shines throughout the four continents. The blind do not see it, but it does not mean that sunlight is not universally present. It is also like dense clouds that bring pouring rain. A hard stone is not saturated with rain-water, but it does not follow that rain does not penetrate things.

Those who have not yet realized Amida's 'here-now' salvation often ask, "Why doesn't Amida save me? If he is really a Buddha of Unhindered Light, his Light should have reached me a long time ago". Their question is leveled against Amida as if to accuse him of neglecting his duties. T'an-luan would answer them, "You are to blame. You have been rejecting his salvation. His Light is here but you do not see it". His kind admonition would lead them to awareness of Amida's boundless Light which has been shining on them from the beginningless past.

According to Vasubandhu, calling the Name is glorifying Amida's virtues. Recitation of the Name is part of Yogacara-Pure Land practice leading to unity with Amida. T'an-luan explains that the Name is capable of dissipating the darkness of the minds of sentient beings and fulfil their spiritual aspirations. Shinran accepts this and praises the wonderful power of the Name in a hymn as follows:

The Name of the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light
And his Light which embodies Wisdom
Destroy the darkness of the long night of ignorance
And fulfil the aspirations of sentient beings. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 47*)

T'an-luan then asks a practical question, "Even if you call the Name and remember Amida, you may still have darkness of mind. Why?" He says that it is because "your practice is not in accord with truth and the connotation of the Name". This means that calling the Name in harmony with the essential nature and working of Amida is effective but the recitation based on the practitioner's delusory thinking or reasoning does not yield spiritual benefit. Recitation of the Name is, therefore, not so much a verbal practice as a mental act. Analyzing the state of mind which is incongruous with the Way, T'an-luan shows three characteristics: (1) lacking sincerity, (2) lacking single-mindedness, and (3) lacking continuity. His explanation of inadequate faith is reproduced by Shinran in his hymns as follows:

Concerning the practice which is not in accord with the Way,
Master T'an-luan explains:
First, one's faith is not sincere;
For it appears to exist at times, and not to exist at other times. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs* 48)

Second, one's faith is not single-minded;
For it lacks decisiveness.

Third, one's faith does not continue without interruption;
For other thoughts arise and interrupt it. (*Ibid.* 49)

Followers should remember that
These three aspects of false faith are mutually related;
Because such a faith lacks sincerity,
Decisive faith is also lacking. (*Ibid.* 50)

Shinran shares with T'an-luan the view that the true practice of Nembutsu in accord with the Way is solely dependent on the true faith - shinjin.

When Vasubandhu presents in his *Discourse on the Pure Land* the seventeen glorious aspects of the Pure Land, he mentions Amida's Inconceivable Power behind them. He says:

"How does one contemplate the glorious aspects of that Buddha-land? The glorious aspects of the Buddha-land are provided with the Inconceivable Power, and their nature resembles that of the Manijewel".

T'an-luan explains the Inconceivable Power in terms of (1) the Karmic Power, namely the Karmic Power produced by Dharmākara Bodhisattva's supramundane goodness and his Great Vow, and (2) Amida Buddha's Power to sustain the Land. Those who visualize the Pure Land perceive Amida's Great Karmic Power working behind the glorious manifestations of the Land and also realize that the same Karmic Power is always working upon sentient beings to deliver them from delusion and suffering.

Amida's Karmic Power takes the form of 'merit transference' (*ekō; parināma*) to reach us. Shinran emphasizes that T'an-luan especially clarified Amida's transference of merits as being the source of our salvation. **It** works in two directions: (1) for our going to be born in the Pure Land and realize Enlightenment (*ōsō*) and (2) for our returning to this world of Samsara to save other beings (*genso*). Two of the Forty-eight Vows, the Eighteenth and the Eleventh, concern the 'Going forth' aspect of the merit-transference, and the Twenty-second Vow explains its 'Returning' aspect.

The gist of the Eighteenth Vow is as follows:

If, when I (namely, Dharmākara) attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me, desire to be born in

my land, and call my Name even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment. (*Larger Sutra 7*)

When we encounter Amida through hearing his Name or contemplating him and his Pure Land, we are filled with the highest spiritual joy - the joy of being embraced by his Light of Wisdom and Compassion. It is also the joy of giving ourselves up to the working of the pure Karmic Power, which is the Other-Power. One's encounter with Amida can be considered as confrontation of the two karmic forces, one's own and Amida's. The more sincerely one is devoted to Amida, the more deeply and inescapably one finds oneself caught in Amida's Karmic Power, until one's entire karma is absorbed in Amida's. In our actual experience of Faith, it is painful to part with our own self to which we have been clinging since beginningless past, but that agonizing experience soon turns into an indescribable great joy - the joy of finding our true Identity in Amida.

When Faith is thus awakened in us, we dwell in the Definitely Assured Stage. We are no longer subject to samsaric states and are free of existential problems. We are assured of attainment of Nirvana through Amida's Karmic Power. This process is described in the Eleventh Vow, which reads:

If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not dwell in the Definitely Assured Stage and unfailingly reach Nirvana, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment. (*Larger Sutra 7*)

T'an-luan has already noted the importance of the Eighteenth, Eleventh and Twenty-second Vows. Near the end of his *Commentary on Vasubandhu's Discourse*, he quotes these Vows to prove that we are enabled by the Power of the Primal Vow to attain Buddhahood quickly. One significant development is found in Shinran's interpretation of the Eleventh Vow. While accepting the sutra's statement that those born in the Pure Land dwell in the Definitely Assured Stage, he goes a step further and says that those *to be born* in the Pure Land, namely those who have attained the Other-Power Faith, already dwell in this state and can rest assured of the realization of Nirvana. He praises Amida's inconceivable virtue in the following hymn:

The Unhindered Light Shining throughout the Ten Directions illumines the darkness of ignorance;
Those who receive Joyful Faith in a moment of spiritual union
Will unfailingly reach Nirvana.

At the end of the first volume of his *Commentary*, T'an-luan raises eight questions about important doctrinal matters and answers them in clear terms. His explanation has formed an essential part of Shinran's thought.

(1) What kinds of beings are to be saved?

The last stanza of Vasubandhu's *Hymn of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land* states:

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

T'an-luan's question is what kinds of beings are specifically meant by 'sentient beings'. Quoting the passage on the fulfilment of the Eighteenth Vow in the *Larger Sutra*, he states that they refer to all beings, including non-Buddhists and ordinary people, who, having heard Amida's Name, joyfully entrust themselves to him and sincerely direct the merit of their practice towards him with aspiration for birth. He next quotes the passage on birth in the lowest level of the lowest grade in the *Contemplation Sutra*, and concludes that 'sentient beings' include even the most wicked persons who are to be born by saying the Nembutsu ten times at their death.

(2) Harmonizing the different descriptions in the two sutras about the salvation of evildoers:

The Eighteenth Vow excludes from salvation those who commit the five gravest offenses and abuse the right Dharma, whereas the *Contemplation Sutra* mentions the birth of those who have committed the five gravest offenses and ten evil acts. Harmonizing this difference, T'an-luan says that those who have committed both the five gravest offenses and the serious karmic transgression of abusing the Buddha-Dharma are excluded from salvation.

(3) Abusers of the Dharma will not be born in the Pure Land:

A single transgression of abusing the Dharma is grave enough to send the person to the hell of incessant pain; how can the abuser of the Dharma wish to be born in the Buddha-land?

(4) The specific act of abusing the Dharma:

T'an-luan defines the act of abusing the Dharma as denying the existence of Buddhas, Dharma and Bodhisattvas. To entertain such a view through one's own thinking or hearing from others is called abusing the right Dharma.

(5) Graveness of the transgression of abusing the Dharma:

It seems unreasonable to say that abusing the Dharma is a more serious karmic transgression than the five gravest offenses, such as killing one's own parents, because the person who abuses the Dharma does not do any harm to others. But the fact is that without the Buddha-Dharma all the worldly moral teachings and supramundane paths would be destroyed and there would not be any sage or saint in the world. Actually the five gravest offenses are committed through ignorance of the right Dharma.

(6) The law of karma and Amida's salvation:

According to the law of karma, the heavy karmic transgressions, such as the five gravest offenses and the ten evil acts, committed during innumerable kalpas should have their inevitable retribution in spite of the ten times' Nembutsu which apparently produces only a little merit. T'an-luan gives three reasons to explain that the Nembutsu uttered at one's death is a powerful karmic act capable of cancelling the evil karma of the five gravest offenses and

the ten evil acts: (i) the ten times' Nembutsu mentioned in the *Contemplation Sutra* is based on the teaching of True Suchness, whereas evil acts are committed depending on delusory and inverted views; the acts based on delusory thought are no match for the act originating from the ultimate reality; (ii) the Nembutsu arises from the supreme entrusting heart and depends on the Name of infinite pure merits, but the evil acts are dependent upon delusion and evil passions; therefore, the Nembutsu can expiate the evil karma; (iii) the Nembutsu is uttered in a concentrated state of mind in the desperate situation before death when the horrible retribution of the evil karma is about to engulf this person, whereas the evil acts are committed in a less pressing situation; therefore, the Nembutsu induces a stronger karmic effect.

(7) The meaning of 'one thought':

The *Contemplation Sutra* mentions 'ten thoughts' in the passage on birth in the lowest level of the lowest grade. The next question is about the meaning of 'one thought'. T'an-luan first explains it in terms of time, as follows: There are a hundred and one arisings and perishings of every existing thing in one moment; there are sixty such moments in one thought. The term 'thought' under discussion does not have this temporal meaning. 'Ten thoughts' means ten consecutive thoughts of Amida Buddha, not mingled with other thoughts, whether they arise from contemplation of his entire body or part of it or whether they arise while reciting the Nembutsu.

(8) Is it necessary to know the number of the Nembutsu thoughts?

T'an-luan last raises this question and answers it as follows: When the *Contemplation Sutra* speaks of 'ten thoughts', it simply means that the cause of birth in the Pure Land is settled by the Nembutsu thought. There is no need to know the number of its recitations. We have only to remember Amida continually, without thinking of anything else.

T'an-luan took great pains to explain that the Pure Land is a realm of transcendence beyond Samsara and is conformable to the ultimate reality. The three worlds of Samsara in which we transmigrate are impure and delusory. In order to free us from the endless cycle of painful transmigration, Dharmākara made Vows, cultivated Wisdom, and amassed merits with which he established the Pure Land. In other words, it is in perfect accord with the law of karma that Amida's physical glory and his Pure Land have come into existence as the reward for his meritorious practices. The Pure Land, by its nature, is free of mental and physical impurities, and is capable of purifying living beings born there, until they realize the 'unconditioned Dharma-body which is pure and undifferentiated'. The ultimate state of purity is the same as True Suchness. In one of his hymns on T'an-luan, Shinran says:

Birth in the Buddha-land of Peace and Bliss

Is the path to eventual realization of Buddhahood, And so is the most excellent approach provided by Amida.

Hence, all Buddhas recommend birth in the Pure Land. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 43*)

Being a Mādhyamika-Pure Land master, T'an-luan developed Pure Land thought firmly based on a non-dichotomous view of reality. From the viewpoint of the ordinary people, evil passions as well as ego appear to exist, but enlightened sages see them as non-existent and empty. When our delusion is removed, we are enlightened as we stand. The Power of Amida's Vow reverses the course of our karma, and brings us to realize the non-dichotomous wisdom. The following hymn by Shinran dearly describes this Mahayana truth:

The all-merging One-Vehicle teaching of the Primal Vow,
We are taught, embraces even the most wicked evildoers;
Having entrusted ourselves to it, we will soon realize
That evil passions and Bodhi are one in essence. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 32*)

T'an-luan often used analogies to explain highly metaphysical principles of Amida's Dharma. He compared evil passions to ice and Bodhi to water, as shown in Shinran's words in the following hymn:

If we receive Faith of the wonderful great virtue
Through the power of the Unhindered Light,
The ice of our evil passions surely melts
And turns into the water of Bodhi. (*Ibid. 39*)

Speaking ontologically, our karmic hindrances and merits are essentially one.

Karmic hindrances are, in essence, merits,
As in the case of ice and water;
The more the ice, the more the water;
The more the hindrances, the more the merits. (*Ibid. 40*)

T'an-luan also used a fire-ice analogy to explain how ordinary beings born in the Pure Land can realize the Mahayana principle of Voidness. He says that just as a fire made on ice is spontaneously extinguished, even if one has an attached view of life, it will be spontaneously removed upon birth in the Pure Land.

T'an-luan in the *Commentary* presents different ways of interpreting the nature of the Pure Land, of which two may be introduced:

- (1) as a manifestation of the ultimate reality,
- (2) as the reward of Dharmākara's practice of the Six Pāramitas,

From the perspective of the ultimate reality, which is beyond time and space and beyond causal relationships, the Pure Land is its self-manifestation in the sphere of causes and conditions. In Mahayana Buddhism the ultimate reality, or True Suchness as we call it, is not an abstract concept but 'Reality' in the highest sense of the term, which is the all-unifying principle. Its self-manifestation actually takes place within itself, because all the diversified phenomena in Samsara reside in True Suchness and nothing exists outside of it.

When Dharmākara made the Vows, he had already realized True Suchness with the penetrating insight - Prajñā. His Bodhisattva practice that followed signifies the process of self-manifestation of True Suchness through the person of Dharmākara. Also the supreme merits that he is said to have acquired by performing the Six Paramitās are nothing but the intrinsic energy or Power contained in True Suchness. Those merits or energy gave rise to the glorious Buddha-body and the Pure Land.

T'an-luan's highly metaphysical and yet most practical Pure Land thought contains much we should carefully study for a deeper understanding of the basic teaching of Pure Land Buddhism.

We shall lastly see his two views of the Buddha-body. One is the view that Amida has two kinds of body: the body of True Suchness and the body for the sake of sentient beings. The former corresponds to the Dharma-body (Dharmākaya) and the latter, to the Recompensed Body and Transformed Body (Sambhogakāya and Nirmānakaya).

After presenting the twenty-nine aspects of the Pure Land, and so forth, Vasubandhu in his *Discourse* explains that these glorious manifestations enter into the 'Nirvanic Dharma-body of true wisdom'. Commenting on this, T'an-luan introduces the theory of two kinds of Dharma-body. He says:

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have two Dharma-bodies: (1) the Dharma-body of Dharma-nature (*dharmatā-dharmakāya*) and (2) the Dharma-body of Expediency (*upāya-dharmakāya*). From the Dharma-body of Dharma-nature originates the Dharma-body of Expediency; through the Dharma-body of Expediency the Dharma-body of Dharma-nature is revealed. These two Dharma-bodies are different but inseparable; they are one but not the same.

T'an-luan and the other Pure Land masters did not encourage us to meditate on the former aspect of Amida, but emphasized the latter aspect, urging us to take refuge in Amida in action. T'an-luan further states in the *Hymn in Praise of Amida*:

Ten kalpas have elapsed since Amida became a Buddha;
His Life is truly immeasurable.
The Light of his Dharma-body reaches everywhere in the universe,
Shining upon the darkness of the world. So I worship him.

Amida's intrinsic virtue and his saving activity are manifested as the Twelve Lights. In accordance with the *Larger Sutra*, T'an-luan describes them in the *Hymn in Praise of Amida*, as follows:

- (1) Immeasurable Light: "the Light of Wisdom is immeasurable";
- (2) Boundless Light: "the wheel of the Light of Emancipation is boundless";
- (3) Unhindered Light: "the cluster of Light is unhindered like open space";
- (4) Unequaled Light: "the Pure Light is unequaled"; (5) Majestically Flaming Light: "the Light shines with utmost brilliance";
- (6) Pure Light: "the Light of Enlightenment is brilliant and its colours surpass

everything";

(7) Light of Joy: "the Light of Compassion reaches distant places, giving sentient beings peace and bliss";

8) Light of Wisdom: "the Light dissipates the darkness of ignorance";

(9) Unceasing Light: "the Light shines everywhere at all times";

(10) Inconceivable Light: "the Light cannot be measured, except by Buddhas";

(11) Ineffable Light: "the majestic Light, above all dimensions, is beyond description";

(12) Light Outshining the Sun and the Moon: "the Light shines more brilliantly than the sun and the moon".

Based on the above explanation, Shinran composed hymns in praise of Amida (*Hymns on the Pure Land* 4- 15). The twelve lights are contained in the Unhindered Light Shining throughout the Ten Directions, to which Vasubandhu paid homage in his *Hymn of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land*. Amida's Universal Light illumines all beings everywhere, awakening them to Truth and Reality. Those who have been illumined by this Light and so attain Joyful Faith dwell in the state of non-duality. Their diverse desires and karmic acts are completely absorbed into Amida's Vow and his Work of Salvation.

When many river-waters of evil passions
Enter into the sea of Great Compassion and Great Vow
Of the Unhindered Light Shining throughout the Ten Directions,
They become one in taste with Amida's Wisdom. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs* 42)

The pure Primal Vow of the Tathagata enables us To be born in the Land of
Unproducedness; Although we are originally divided into nine classes, Such distinction
no longer exists in the Pure Land. (*Ibid.* 46)

T'an-Iuan's soteriological system based on Amida's Merit-transference is summarized in the following three hymns:

Amida's Merit-transference having been actualized,
It works in two phases: Going forth and Returning.
Through this Merit-transference
We can attain Faith and Practice. (*Ibid.* 34)

Merit-transference in the phase of Going forth is:
When Amida's skilful means fully matures,
One attains Faith and Practice of the Compassionate Vow;
Then one realizes that Samsara is Nirvana. (*Ibid.* 35)

Merit-transference in the phase of Returning is:
Having attained the Stage of Compassionate Guidance,
One enters into various states of existence
And puts into practice the Virtue of Samantabhadra. (*Ibid.* 36)

T'an-luan passed away at the age of sixty-seven. At his death miraculous signs were evident: streamers, flowers, flags and canopies appeared above the temple, exquisite fragrance was in the air, and music was heard.

At the age of sixty-seven

T'an-luan passed away into the Pure Land.

At that time, miraculous signs appeared

And so all monks and laypeople were awestruck. (*Ibid.* 29)

(15) T'ao-cho (85-92)

**Master Tao-ch'o determined that by the Path of Sages Bodhi is difficult to attain
And clearly presented the Pure Land Path as the only way of salvation.
He disparaged practicing thousands of acts of merits with self-power
And urged us to recite exclusively the Name of perfect virtues.
He kindly taught us imperfect and perfect faith, each having three aspects.
He compassionately guided those of the ages of Semblance Dharma, Decadent Dharma
and Extinct Dharma alike.
Whatever evils we may commit throughout our lives, if we encounter the Universal
Vow,
We shall reach the Land of Peace and Provision and realize the Supreme Fruition.**

Tao-ch'o (562-645) was born in Ping-cho District in the present Shan-hsi Province, and entered the priestly life at the age of 14. He became well-versed in the *Nirvana Sutra*, and lectured on it as many as twenty-four times. At the age of forty-eight he visited the Hsiian-chung Temple and read a stone inscription that praised T'anluan's virtue. Inspired by T'anluan's admonition that trying to become a Buddha in this world by self-power is futile, Tao-ch'o was converted to the Pure Land teaching. He is said to have practiced Nembutsu seventy thousand times a day, and continually offered incense before a statue of Amida. He was especially devoted to the *Contemplation Sutra*, on which he lectured about two hundred times. He spread the Nembutsu practice among the populace, urging them to count the number of recitations with red beans, later with special rosaries. His teaching was so widely accepted that it was said that there was no one who did not recite Nembutsu in the Shan-hsi Valley. He passed away at the Hsüan-chung Temple at the age of eighty-four.

Shinran composed seven hymns praising the virtues of Tao-ch'o, of which the first two read as follows:

Our Master, Tao-ch'o, set aside
Ten thousand practices of the Path of Sages,
And taught that the Pure Land Path
Is the only way we can follow. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs* 55)

Our Master, Tao-ch'o, setting aside His great work on the *Nirvana Sutra*,
Entrusted himself to the Other-Power of the Primal Vow,
And recommended it to the beings of the five defilements. (*Ibid.* 56)

His Pure Land theory and practice are extensively discussed in his *Collection of Passages Concerning Birth in the Land of Peace and Bliss*. He distinguishes two Buddhist approaches: Path of Sages and Path to Birth in the Pure Land. The former is difficult to follow because we are far removed from the time of the Buddha and so our understanding of the Buddha-Dharma is very slight. Based on the *Great Collection Sutra*, Tao-ch'o asserts that the last Dharma-age has set in and the world is filled with the five defilements; hence, only the Pure Land Path is available. He also quotes from the same sutra to show that his time is already in

the fourth five hundred-year period after the passing of Buddha Śākyamuni, when Buddhists are no longer able to cultivate wisdom or practice meditation successfully but can attain salvation by reciting the Name with the mind of repentance.

The following hymns by Shinran bring home to us the stark reality, as Tao-ch'o pointed out, that in the last Dharma-age no one is able to attain salvation by self-power:

Even if beings in the last Dharma-age in the world of the five defilements
May perform the practices of the Path of Sages,
None will realize Enlightenment;
So said the Teacher, the World-Honored One. (*Ibid.* 57)

Having accepted the teaching of T'an-Iuan,
Tao-ch'o in the same line of thought
Asserted that to awaken aspiration for Bodhi and perform practices
In this world is called self-power. (*Ibid.* 58)

Beings in this defiled world commit evils and make karmic transgressions
As furiously as violent storms and torrential rains;
Buddhas, seeing this, pity such beings
And lead them to seek refuge in the Pure Land. (*Ibid.* 59.)

According to Tao-ch'o, the central theme of the *Contemplation Sutra* is the samādhi of visualizing Amida, which he explains in terms of the Nembutsu Samādhi. Quoting from the *Sutra on the Samādhi of Contemplation of the Buddha*, he demonstrates that Sakyamuni taught his father the Nembutsu Samādhi. In this sutra the Buddha compares Nembutsu to a sandalwood plant that grows in a forest of foul-smelling *eranda* trees; even when it is still young, it emits luxuriant fragrance all around and completely changes the atmosphere. Tao-ch'o explains this, saying that even though sentient beings are full of evil passions, spiritual hindrances and countless karmic evils, a single Nembutsu that grows in their minds can destroy all impurities. He further quotes from the *Garland Sutra*, which states that Nembutsu can destroy all evil passions and hindrances and so the Nembutsu Samādhi is called the king of samādhis. Later in his work, Tao-ch'o gives scriptural evidence to prove that the Nembutsu Samādhi is the central practice advocated in various Mahayana texts, including the *Nirvana Sutra* and the *Garland Sutra*. Shinran pertinently describes in a hymn the effectiveness of the Nembutsu as follows:

Even though we commit evils all through life,
We should always recite the Nembutsu
With diligence and with singleness of heart.
Then all hindrances will be removed naturally. (*Ibid.* 60)

Next Shinran deeply appreciates Amida's Vow which actualized salvation through the Nembutsu:

In order to take sentient beings in his embrace
Who commit evils throughout their lives,

Amida made the Vow of saying the Name,
Promising not to become a Buddha if those who recite it should not be born. (*Ibid.* 61)

Tao-ch'o faithfully followed T'an-luan's teaching and in his work quoted many passages from the *Commentary on the Discourse on the Pure Land*, one of which is the explanation of imperfect faith. T'an-luan earlier raised a question: Recitation of the Name should remove spiritual ignorance but there are some Nembutsu practitioners in whom ignorance still exists. Why is this so? His own answer is twofold: (1) Because they do not know that the Buddha has two kinds of body: Body of True Suchness and Body for the sake of beings; (2) because they have imperfect faith, which is lacking sincerity, single-mindedness, and continuity. These three aspects of imperfect faith are indications of self-power. They are related with each other, and those who cannot get rid of the attachment to their own power are bound to repeat this vicious circle.

By quoting this important passage, Tao-ch'o kindly admonished us against the faults of dependence on self-power.

Tao-ch'o's contemporaries and masters of the Path of Sages generally considered Amida as a Buddha of Accommodated Body and his Pure Land as a land of inferior quality. For example, Hui-yüan of Ching-ying Temple (523-92), the most distinguished scholar of the time, classified pure lands into three: (1) mundane lands of purity, (2) supramundane lands of purity, and (3) true lands of purity. Ordinary beings with pure karma produce and dwell in mundane lands of purity, and Hinayana sages and bodhisattvas of lower stages produce and inhabit supramundane lands of purity. Buddhas and bodhisattvas above the first stage produce true lands of purity, which are in accord with True Suchness. According to Hui-yüan, Amida is a Buddha of Accommodated Body and his land of bliss is a mundane land of purity which is still within Samsara. Chih-i (538-97), the systematizer of the Tendai teaching, held a similar view that the Pure Land was a land of mixed habitation for ordinary beings and sages and so it belonged to Samsara.

In his *Collection of Passages Concerning Birth in the Land of Peace and Bliss*, Tao-ch'o refutes the above views and emphasizes that Amida is a Buddha of Recompensed Body and his Pure Land is a Land of Recompense originating from his Vows. As the *Larger Sutra* states, even bodhisattvas of higher rank, such as those in the Stage of Non-retrogression, go to be born there. The Pure Land also admits ordinary beings of little wisdom who aspire for birth with deep faith.

Tao-ch'o follows the general Mahayana principle in asserting that Amida has all the three bodies, and contends that Amida in the Land of Utmost Bliss is a Sambhogakaya Buddha. He also explains the relationship between Dharmakāya and the two other bodies by a metaphor of the sun and the light:

Dharmakāya is like the sun and Sambhogakāya and Nirmānakaya are like its rays of light.

Tao-ch'o also distinguishes two aspects of the Pure Land: the land of form and the land of non-form. Those who have realized the Mahayana principle of non-form or non-arising of all

existences but still seek birth in the Pure Land in terms of cause-condition relationship (*pratītya-samutpāda*) are born in the land of non-form, where it is understood that they attain Dharmakāya. But those who seek birth while still attached to forms are born in the land of form, where they behold recompensed and transformed bodies of the Buddha and advance to higher spiritual states. We must note that in Tao-ch'o's view we ordinary beings, full of evil passions, can attain birth in the Nirvanic Pure Land. In this connection we recall that T'an-luan has earlier said that those of the lower grade who have an attached view regarding birth can also be born in the land of no-birth. It is just as a fire made on ice is soon extinguished; once we are born in the land of no-birth, all our attached views will be spontaneously removed.

As we have seen above, the location of Amida's Pure Land was a popular subject of debate among Buddhist masters in Tao-ch'o's days. In his work he raises this question and gives it his answer as follows:

Question: In which of the three worlds is the Land of Peace and Bliss contained?

Answer: The Pure Land, being exquisite and sublime, transcends the worldly existence. The three worlds are the dark house inhabited by ordinary beings of birth- and-death. There are different degrees of pain and pleasure, but the common feature is defilement.... *The Commentary on the Prajñāpāramitā Sutra* says, "The fruition of the Pure Land is free of desires; hence, it does not belong to the world of desire. Since the Pure Land has the solid ground to rest on, it does not belong to the world of form. Since there are phenomenal manifestations, it does not belong to the world of non-form, either. Although it has solid ground, it is exquisite, supernal and indescribably wonderful". For this reason, Vasubandhu says in his *Discourse on the Pure Land*:

As I contemplate the nature of that Land,
I find that it surpasses the three worlds.
It is ultimately like space,
Vast and without bounds.

Whether and where the Pure Land exists is not a theoretical question to be discussed in logical terms. Tao-ch'o *knew* that it exists - beyond the sphere of our ordinary perceptions and relative thinking.

(16) Shan-tao (93-100)

**Shan-tao alone clarified the true intent of the Buddha Śākyamuni.
Out of compassion for those who practice meditative or non-meditative good as well as those who commit the five gravest offenses and the ten transgressions,
He clarified that the Light and the Name are the cause and condition for birth in the Pure Land.
When aspirants are led into the Sea of Great Wisdom of the Primal Vow,
They are endowed with Faith, indestructible as diamond;
After attaining a single thought of Joy of oneness with Amida,
They obtain the three insights, as did Vaidehī,
And will realize the Eternal Bliss of Dharma-nature.**

Shan-tao (613-681) was born at Ssu-chou in the present An-hui Province (according to another tradition, Lin-tzu in the Shan-tung Province). When young, he entered the priesthood and devoted himself to the study of the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*. One day when he saw a painting of the Pure Land, he wished to be born there. He visited Mt. Lu and other places to study and practice the Pure Land teaching. For several years he lived at Wu-chen Temple on Mt. Chung-nan and devoted himself to contemplation of Amida and the Pure Land in accordance with the method of the Pratyutpanna Samādhi, until he successfully visualized them. When he was about twenty years of age, he went to see Tao-ch'o and became his disciple. While attending his lectures on the *Contemplation Sutra*, he diligently practiced contemplation as prescribed in this sutra and finally attained the Nembutsu Sarnādhi and visualized Amida and his Land of Bliss. Later he went to Ch'ang-an to spread the Pure Land teaching. He continued to practice contemplation and recitation, and also strictly observed the precepts. It is said that when he saw a woman in the street, he did not raise his head to look at her.

In those days, the *Contemplation Sutra* was popular among Buddhist scholars, but their interpretations were often unacceptable to Shan-tao. He then wrote a four-fascicle commentary on this sutra and clarified the standpoint held by his predecessors, T'an-luan and Tao-ch'o. He is said to have copied the *Smaller Sutra* more than a hundred thousand times and made more than three hundred paintings of the Pure Land. When Emperor Kao Tsung issued an order to build a niche for a statue of Mahāvairocana at Lung-men in Ho-nan Province, Shan-tao was appointed as supervisor.

His influence was so great that thousands of people took refuge in Amida and practiced Nembutsu. While following T'an-luan and Tao-ch'o, he developed his own system of practice which centers on the Nembutsu. His line of Pure Land teaching, known as the Shan-tao School, was widely practiced in China and was later transmitted to Japan. His successors, Fa-chao (-773) and Shao-k'ang (-805), were considered as his incarnations.

Manifesting from Amida's Great Mind,
Master Shan-tao appeared in the world.
For the sake of the people of the defiled world in the Last Dharma-age,

He sought testimony of the Buddhas of the ten directions (when he wrote the commentary on the *Contemplation Sutra*). (*Hymns on the Patriarchs* 62)

Shan-tao appeared in successive ages,
Once as Fa-chao and at another time as Shao-k'ang;
Opening wide the storehouse of the supreme merits,
He fulfilled the true intention of all the Buddhas.

One of the greatest contributions which Shan-tao made to the development of Pure Land Buddhism was his clarification of the soteriological meaning of Nembutsu. **In** those days there were some masters of the Path of Sages who rejected the view that ten recitations of the Name could become only a remote cause of birth in the Pure Land. Their assertion was based on the theory presented in Asanga's discourse on Mahayana to the effect that when Śākyamuni encouraged recitation of Amida's Name as the cause of birth in the Pure Land, he actually meant that such a practice alone would only lead to birth at some time in the future. Those masters misinterpreted Nembutsu as a mere act of aspiration lacking in practice. Shan-tao refuted them, saying:

The ten times' Nembutsu taught in the *Contemplation Sutra* contains ten aspirations and ten practices. How? 'Namu' means 'taking refuge in'; it also means 'aspiring (for birth in the Pure Land) and transferring (the merit of practice towards it)'. '*Amidabutsu*' is the 'practice' (to be transferred for birth). For this reason, one can surely attain Birth.

As compared with ordinary Buddhist practices, such as the Six Pārarnitās, recitation of the Name must have appeared to masters of other schools to be merely an expression of one's aspiration for birth; they thought that there was no element of practice in the recitation. Shan-tao's explanation of the Name is no doubt based on his sāmādhi experience in which he perceived Amida as the embodiment of the pure merits accumulated during his career as a bodhisattva. **All** that is required of the aspirant for birth is simply to receive and make use of Amida's merits; this he can do by repeating the Name with singleness of mind.

Another doctrinal point of great importance which Shan-tao clarified concerns the nature of Amida's Buddhahood. Eminent masters of other schools in China, such as Hui-yuàn of Ching-ying Temple, Chih-i of T'ient'ai School and Chi-tsang of San-lun School, shared the view that Amida was a Nirmanakaya Buddha. One of the reasons for advancing this theory is that Amida can be perceived even by ordinary beings and Hinayana sages. Reasoning in accordance with scriptural evidence, Shan-tao refuted them and determined that Amida is a Sambhogakāya Buddha manifested as the reward for his Vows. He pointed out that the *Contemplation Sutra* mentions the welcoming of 'the Tathāgata Amida ... together with innumerable transformed Buddhas' (Birth on the highest level of the highest grade); this is clear evidence that Amida is a Sambhogakāya Buddha.

It follows then that Amida's Pure Land is the land of a Sambhogakāya Buddha. Even if this were so, the masters of other schools would not accept the view that ordinary beings could be born in such a superior Buddha-land. But Shan-tao made it clear that they could attain birth

because of the Power of Amida's Primal Vow. In the *Essential Meanings of the Contemplation Sutra* he says:

Question: If that Buddha and his land are those of a Recompensed Body, the nature of a Recompensed Land is too high and too subtle for lesser sages; how could ordinary beings with impurities and hindrances enter there?

Answer: Speaking of the impurities and hindrances of sentient beings, it is indeed difficult for them to aspire to and attain birth there. But by the powerful working of the Buddha's Vow the beings of the five different paths of Samsara can all equally enter there.

Buddhist methods of practice leading to Enlightenment, which were originally provided by Śākyamuni Buddha for people of different capacities, can be divided into two groups: meditative and non-meditative practices. Concentration and meditation in a cross-legged posture have been extensively employed among Buddhists of nearly all denominations, whether Mahayana or Theravada, because they are most effective in cultivating wisdom. Other forms of practice, such as chanting sutras, observing the precepts, and abstaining from wrongdoing, are non-meditative good acts; they yield "merits", that is, good karmic energy, by which one can reach a higher spiritual state.

So long as those meditative and non-meditative practices are based on one's self-power, which is limited and defiled by passions, one cannot hope to attain Enlightenment. As a skilful means of guiding such a person to the Other-Power teaching, the Buddha provided in the *Contemplation Sutra* (1) the Pure Land meditation consisting of thirteen contemplations, beginning with the contemplation of the setting sun, and (2) non-meditative acts of merits, including performance of the ten good deeds and observance of the precepts. Those who have accomplished the Pure Land meditation are rid of various spiritual hindrances and so can attain birth in the Pure Land, but the non-meditative practices, which are of inferior quality as compared with meditative ones, if accompanied by a fervent wish to be born in the Pure Land, can also become the cause of birth there. **In** his four-fascicle commentary on the *Contemplation Sutra*, Shan-tao fully explains the Pure Land practices presented in this sutra and clarified Amida's Great Compassion which reaches everywhere, embracing all beings, whether good or evil.

The teaching of the *Contemplation Sutra*, according to Shinran, corresponds to the Nineteenth Vow. It provides two kinds of practice, meditative and non-meditative, to lead beings of different spiritual propensities to the Pure Land Path. **In** anticipation of the welcome of Amida and Holy Sages at the time of death, as promised in the Nineteenth Vow, the aspirants diligently cultivate merits by performing various practices, including recitation of the Name. Shan-tao's teaching was to lead such people to concentrate on the Nembutsu. He first divided the Pure Land practices into two: right acts and miscellaneous acts, and chose the following five as the Right Acts:

1. Chanting sutras: single-mindedly chanting such sutras as the *Contemplation Sutra*, the *Smaller Sutra* and the *Larger Sutra*;

2. Contemplation: concentrating on Amida and his Land of Bliss;
3. Worshipping: single-mindedly worshipping Amida;
4. Recitation: single-mindedly reciting his Name;
5. Praising and making offerings: single-mindedly praising Amida and making offerings to him.

The miscellaneous acts are other Buddhist practices, such as moral disciplines, worshipping other Buddhas, chanting non-Pure Land sutras and Zen-type of meditation. They originally belong to the teachings other than the Pure Land Path, but are tentatively allowed to be pursued if they are intended to serve as the practices for birth in the Pure Land. On the other hand, the right acts are in accord with the true meaning of the Pure Land teaching. Shinran explains Shan-tao's teaching in the Hymns as follows:

Śākyamuni opened the Gate of Essential Teaching (of the Nineteenth Vow),
 Thereby leading practicers of meditative and non-meditative good to the Pure Land
 Path;
 He provisionally established two kinds of acts, right and miscellaneous,
 But urged us to follow the exclusive practice of the Nembutsu. (*Hymns on the
 Patriarchs 65*)

For those who have been following non-Pure Land teachings, it is difficult to give up their systems of devotion and practice and suddenly change over to the Pure Land system. They are allowed to continue to do the same acts but their Buddhist disciplines should now be directed to Amida and his Pure Land. For example, one can chant the *Heart Sutra* and practice *zazen* as before; but the objective should be changed from the attainment of *satori* to that of birth in the Pure Land. This internal change will spontaneously lead to a change in the system of practice. Shan-tao's system of the Five Right Acts is to be adopted by anyone who finds it more comfortable than self-power practices.

Of the Five Right Acts, the fourth is the most important and is called the 'Act of Right Assurance'; the rest are called the 'Auxiliary Acts'. Concerning the Act of Right Assurance, Shan-tao explains that it is to call the Name of Amida with singleness of mind, whether one is walking, standing, sitting or lying, without interruption and irrespective of the duration of this practice. Such an act is called the 'Act of Right Assurance', because it accords with the Buddha's Vow.

In any Buddhist system, concentration is of primary importance. Shan-tao emphasizes this in his *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* as we see later. This is a mental attitude accompanying any of the Five Right Acts, but it is easier to practice and more effective if we concentrate on one particular act. The Nembutsu is chosen as such an act. Clarifying this point, Shinran says in a hymn:

To perform the practice of the principal and auxiliary acts in a mixed way
 Is called 'the mixed practice'.
 Those who practice thus lack singleness of mind,
 And so fail to appreciate the Buddha's Benevolence. (*Hymns of the Patriarchs 66*)

In Shan-tao's system of salvation single-mindedness is of great importance. In his commentary on the *Contemplation Sutra*, he pays special attention to the three kinds of faith mentioned in the sutra's section on "those who attain birth on the highest level of the highest grade". The three aspects of faith are as follows: sincere faith, deep faith, and faith that resolves to be born by transferring to that land the merit acquired. Shan-tao interprets deep faith as having two aspects:

(1) to accept in deep faith the fact that we are ordinary beings of karmic evils, who have been transmigrating since the eternal past without a chance to escape;

(2) to accept in deep faith the teaching that Amida's Forty-eight Vows embrace us and that we shall definitely attain birth through the Power of his Vow.

These two aspects serve as the two poles that create the tension and dynamics of faith. The first aspect of deep faith concerns our evil and defiled nature, full of blind passions and wrong karmic tendencies. This is a realization that we have no means of salvation with our own power. The second aspect of faith is acceptance of Amida's Saving Power which was motivated by his Vows. Since Amida's salvation reaches us through his Light and Name, our deep faith is established when we awaken to his Light and receive his Name deep in our mind and heart.

We find in Shan-tao's *Liturgical for Birth* the passage which emphasizes the Light and the Name as the factors of our salvation and presents faith as the requisite for birth in the Pure Land:

Amida, the World-Honored One, originally made Great Vows and embraces and emancipates beings in the ten directions with his Light and Name; he makes beings awaken faith.

In the third section of his commentary on the *Contemplation Sutra*, entitled "On the Meaning of Meditative Good Acts", Shan-tao begins his exposition of the thirteen contemplations by raising a question and then presenting a practical method of visualization, as follows:

Question: Vaidehi made a request to the Buddha wishing to see the Land of Utmost Bliss. He agreed to explain and first taught the method of concentration on visualizing the sun. What does this mean?

Answer: There are three meanings. First, in order to make sentient beings know about (the location of) the object (of contemplation) and the direction in which one should concentrate one's thought. Avoid winter and summer, and choose only spring and autumn, when the sun rises due east and sets due west. Amida's land is in the direction in which the sun sets, namely due west, passing over a hundred thousand kotis of lands. Second, in order to make sentient beings realize whether their own karmic hindrances are light or heavy. How do they know? Because they are taught to fix their minds on and contemplate the (setting) sun. Before they concentrate their minds, they are taught to sit upright in the lotus-posture: the right leg is placed on the left thigh while keeping balance with the contour of the body; next the left leg is placed on the right thigh while

keeping the balance with the contour of the body; the left palm rests on the right one, and the body should be upright. The mouth is closed, but the two rows of teeth should not be joined; the tongue touches the palate to enable the passage of air through the throat and the nostrils. Let them contemplate the four elements of the body until they realize that it is empty, inside and out, and that nothing exists. Imagine that the earth-element of the body, that is, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, and so forth, disintegrate and disappear in the west; when they reach the farthest end of the west, even a single dust-particle of their bodies does not remain to be seen. Next, imagine that the water-element, that is, blood, sweat, secreting fluid, tears, and so forth, is dispersed towards the north; when it reaches the farthest end of the north, not even a single drop of it is perceived. Next, imagine that the wind-element of the body is dispersed towards the east; when it reaches the farthest end of the east, not even the minutest portion of it remains to be seen. Next, imagine that the fire element of the body is dispersed towards the south; when it reaches the farthest end of the south, not even the smallest part of it remains to be perceived. Also imagine that the body is of the space-element, being in complete unity with the empty space that pervades the ten directions; there is not a speck of it to be perceived as non-empty. Also imagine that the five elements of the body are totally empty but consciousness exists as the sole pervasive entity; it is like a round mirror, lucid inside and out, brilliant and pure.

When one accomplishes this exercise all delusory thoughts are removed, and so one's mind attains a state of deep contemplation. After that, one can gradually proceed to the visualization of the sun. Those of superior capacity can in one sitting visualize a clear image. When it appears, it looks like a coin or a mirror in size. On its bright surface one sees one's light or heavy karmic hindrances: (1) a black hindrance like a dark cloud obstructing the sun, (2) a yellow hindrance like a yellow cloud obscuring the sunlight, and (3) a white hindrance like a white cloud veiling the sun. Just as the sun covered by clouds does not shine brightly, karmic hindrances of sentient beings cover their pure mind and keep it from shining. If the practitioner sees such a hindrance, he should adorn the room, set up a Buddha statue, bathe and cleanse himself, put on a clean robe, burn fine incense, and make a confession (of his evil karma) to all Buddhas and sages. Before the Buddha statue he should repent of the transgressions committed with his body, mouth and mind, from the beginningless past, such as the ten evil acts, the five gravest offences, the four major prohibitions, slandering of the Dharma and destruction of all roots of goodness. If he does so, shedding tears of sorrow like rain, as deep repentance arises in his mind, it penetrates to the core and torments him as if his bones were cut to pieces.

After such an act of repentance he should resume the sitting meditation as before, and visualize with a peaceful mind. If the clear image appears but there is none of the above-mentioned three kinds of hindrances, the pure object of visualization manifests itself brilliantly. This is called 'abrupt expiation of karmic hindrances'. Those who destroy all hindrances by a single act of repentance are called 'men of superior capacity'. If only the black hindrance is removed by an act of repentance, or only the

yellow and white hindrances are removed, or only the white hindrance is destroyed, we call such acts 'gradual removal', not 'abrupt destruction'.

Keeping in mind those symptoms of karmic hindrances, one should diligently repent. Those who can repent by just remembering them three or six times a day and a night are men of superior capacity and higher practice. It is just as one is burnt by hot water or fire (in a dream); when one awakes, (the pain) is completely removed. Why do you vainly wait for an appropriate time, place, circumstance or person to come in order to remove the karmic hindrances?

Third, in order to make sentient beings know that Amida and the Pure Land, with all the glorious adornments and light, are brilliant inside and out, shining more brightly than the sun by hundreds of thousands of times. If the practitioner has not yet visualized the light of that land, he should gaze at the brilliant image of the sun. If he worships and remembers (Amida and the Pure Land) while constantly keeping in mind the image (of the sun), he will attain concentration, in which he will visualize various pleasant adornments of the Pure Land. For these reasons, the World-Honored One first taught the method of visualizing the sun.

Shan-tao's explanation of the practical method of contemplation, such as that just quoted, is found here and there throughout his writings.

Repentance is an important part of Shan-tao's Pure Land theory and practice. He took every opportunity to urge an act of repentance. In the *Liturgy for Birth* he distinguishes three kinds of repentance:

(1) the higher degree of repentance is to shed blood from pores of the body and from the eyes; (2) the middle degree of repentance is to exude hot perspiration from all the pores of the body and shed blood from the eyes; (3) the lower degree of repentance is to become feverish all over the body and shed tears from the eyes.

Repentance is an effective way of expiating evil karma, but there are prescribed methods to follow. One can confess one's evil acts to other Buddhists, all Buddhas of the ten directions, sages, or to images of them, or to oneself. By the act of repentance one is rid of karmic hindrances and one's birth in the Pure Land is assured.

Shan-tao used a parable to illustrate how an aspirant, full of evil passions, awakens faith and attains birth in the Pure Land.

A man is traveling to the west. In the wilderness he finds himself pursued by bandits and wild animals. Trying to run away, he comes to a place where two rivers confront each other: one is a river of fire which flows to the south and the other, a river of water which flows to the north. These two rivers are a hundred paces wide but endlessly long. Where they meet, there is a narrow white path, about five inches wide, which leads to the west bank. As fire is raging on one side and water is breaking over the path from the other, he hesitates to take the path, but since death appears inevitable, he thinks of crossing between fire and water. Just then he hears a voice from the eastern bank,

urging him to go forward across the path, and another voice from the western bank, urging him on. Encouraged by these voices, he proceeds determinedly along the path and soon reaches the western bank.

The river of fire represents anger, and that of water, greed. The white path symbolizes the possibility of awakening faith in a mind full of evil passions. The voice from the eastern bank is the teaching of Śākyamuni, and the voice from the western bank is Amida's call. The western bank represents the Pure Land.

This parable became very popular and, together with the painting which depicts it, has been widely used to explain the Pure Land teaching.

Master Shan-tao, having sought the Buddhas' witness,
Urged practicers of meditative and non-meditative goods to convert their minds;
He presented the parable of Two Rivers of Greed and Anger
To safeguard Faith of the Universal Vow. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 69*)

Through the Name and Light Amida reaches everyone of us. When his mind of Wisdom and Compassion is accepted deep in our hearts, it turns our hearts into the Diamond Faith and gives rise to the supreme Joy of oneness with Amida. 'Diamond Faith', or literally 'Diamond Mind', occurs in Shan-tao's *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* to refer to the mind of a bodhisattva of the highest rank. This is originally the state of samadhi in which such a bodhisattva destroys his subtle mental obscurity and, when accomplished, immediately leads to final Enlightenment. Shinran uses this term for the Nembutsu-faith of the Other-Power, because such Faith as given by Amida is itself Amida's Mind and so becomes the cause of our Enlightenment.

In general usage in Buddhism, 'diamond' (*vajra*) is the most precious substance, said to be the finest essence of gold, and is the hardest material. As Shan-tao explains elsewhere, it is used metaphorically for supramundane pure wisdom because it is indestructible. **In** Shinran's usage, Diamond Faith and Mind of Great Joy are synonyms for the Other-Power Faith. Once established in our hearts, the Nembutsu-Faith is not shaken by other beliefs or ideologies. **It** is also accompanied by pure spiritual joy, the joy of awakening to Amida's Wisdom and Compassion and the joy of spiritual unity with Amida.

How can such Faith be awakened in us? Shinran explains in a hymn using Shan-tao's phraseology:

Śākyamuni and Amida are our compassionate parents;
Using various skilful means,
They awaken in us
The supreme wonderful Faith. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs 74*)

As explained above, in Buddhism, as in other religious systems, repentance is an effective way of expiating evil karma. A question may arise: Is repentance required in Shin Buddhism? Shan-tao gives his answer in the *Liturgy for Birth*, saying that although it is difficult to shed

tears and blood, if one has a completely sincere mind (True Faith), one attains the same effect of repentance. This is repeated by Shinran in the following hymn:

Those in whom True Faith is firmly established,
Which is itself the Diamond Mind,
Are equal to those who repent of their evil karma In three ways;
so says our master Shan-tao. (*Ibid.* 75)

Even though we cannot possibly destroy even a small portion of our karmic evil by our own power, Faith of the Other-Power effectively cancels all our evil karma and ensures birth in the Land of Nirvana.

For us who live in the evil world of the five defilements,
Diamond Faith alone is available;
It enables us to leave Samsara forever
And reach the Land of Naturalness. (*Ibid.* '76)

Shinran further praises the virtue of Diamond Faith:

As soon as Faith, which is firm as diamond,
Is established in us,
Amida embraces us in his spiritual Light,
Severing us forever from birth-and-death. (*Ibid.* 77)

Shan-tao's Pure Land system is largely based on his transcendent experience centering on visualization of Amida and his Pure Land. From the beginning, his motive of following the Pure Land Path is said to have been a casual encounter with the painting of the Pure Land in his early days. Even before he became Tao-ch'o's disciple, Shan-tao had already had some mystical experience while meditating on Amida in accordance with the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra* (*Sutra on the Samādhi of All Buddhas' Appearance*). His spiritual experience advanced as he concentrated on the *Contemplation Sutra*. Later, when he wrote a four-fascicle commentary on this sutra, as he recounted in the epilogue, a divine person appeared in dreams and gave him instruction about essential points. His *Method of Contemplation* also is a useful manual for the contemplative practice. Side by side with contemplation, Shan-tao concentrated on chanting the *Amida Sutra* and also copied it thousands of times. He gave these copies to his followers. Further, he made more than three hundred paintings of the Pure Land, which no doubt became the prototype of the Pure Land mandalas produced later in Japan.

Of the three Pure Land Sutras, the *Contemplation Sutra* provided Shan-tao with the basic theory and practice for birth in the Pure Land. Queen Vaidehī, the heroine of the tragedy in the royal family of Magadha, was imprisoned by her son, Ajātaśatru, but, under the guidance of Śākyamuni Buddha, was relieved of suffering and attained salvation. By the Buddha's power she was able to visualize Amida and thereby gained the superior insight into the non-arising of all existences (*anutpattika-dharmas-kṣānti*). Although this insight is generally equated with realization of voidness (*śūnyatā*), which bodhisattvas attain after strenuous

meditative exercises, Shan-tao interpreted it as the spiritual state given to ordinary persons like Vaidehī by the Buddha's power. In his interpretation this insight has three aspects: (1) joyfulness, (2) awakening to the Buddha's Wisdom, and (3) complete entrusting to his Saving Power. Shinran further explains it more explicitly, saying that those three aspects are the spiritual benefit attending the Nembutsu-Faith of the Other-Power. For Shinran, gaining the insight into the non-arising of all existences is the same as receiving the Diamond Faith. Since such Faith is the Buddha's Wisdom and Compassion endowed to the aspirants, they are assured of attainment of the ultimate Nirvanic Bliss in the Pure Land. Shinran says in a hymn:

Since Faith arises from the Vow,
Becoming a Buddha through the Nembutsu is natural;
The ultimate state of Naturalness is the Land of Recompense,
Where realization of Great Nirvana is certain to come. (*Hymns on the Patriarchs* 82)

Those who have attained Nembutsu-Faith and live the life of Naturalness are often called 'rnyōkōnin' (wondrous, excellent person). This term was first used by Shan-tao when he explained the term 'white lotus' (*pndarika* to which Śākyamuni compared a person of the Nembutsu in the *Contemplation Sutra*. "One who is mindful of the Buddha", says Śākyamuni, "is a white lotus among humankind". In his commentary on this sutra, Shan-tao explains that the 'white lotus' means an excellent person, a wondrous excellent person, an unsurpassed person, a rare person, and a supreme person. In the common usage since the pre-modern period in Japan, a *myōkōnin* has no educational background to speak of but has understood the depth of the Other-Power Faith and expresses it in daily living. One of Shinran's hymns refers to the above explanation by Shan-tao:

One who has heard the Nembutsu teaching of the True Pure Land Way
And holds fast to it without harboring a single thought of doubt,
Is praised by the Buddha as a rare and supreme person,
For such a person, Shan-tao says, is one who possesses right mindedness. (*Ibid.* 80)

As Shan-tao stressed throughout his writings, it is by the Power of the Primal Vow that ordinary people with little or no spiritual capacity attain emancipation.

If it were not for the Universal Vow,
When would we ever escape from this world of suffering?
Being deeply mindful of the Buddha's Benevolence,
We should always recite his Name. (*Ibid.* 86)