

Revisioning Shin Buddhist Teachings for Today:
Thirteen Contributors to a Book, *The Tide of Wisdom: Shinran's Wisdom,
Authentic Individuality and Social Engagement*

Kenneth K. Tanaka

Professor Emeritus, Musashino University

Former Assistant Dean and Associate Professor, Institute of Buddhist Studies

1. Opening

Mrs. Alice Unno, Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Mark Unno, Rev. and Mrs. Tetsuo Unno, Bishop Marvin Harada, President David Matsumoto, Dean Scott Mitchell, faculty, staff and students at IBS, ministers and friends in the Dharma, it is truly an honor to serve as the speaker for the inauguration of the Dr. Taitetsu Unno Memorial Lectures.

All of us here today have been impacted enormously from what Dr. Unno contributed to our understanding and appreciation of the Dharma through his teachings, writings and mere presence. We, along with all who are unable to join us today, acknowledge and are grateful for Dr. Unno's contributions to Shin Buddhism in North America and beyond.

I am also deeply appreciative of what he has meant for me *personally*. In my early years of academic studies, he wrote me detailed handwritten replies to my questions. Dr. Unno gave me valuable advice, such as to study *broadly* in Mahayana Buddhism *first* in order to better understand Shin Buddhism. Of course, the final decision was mine, but it is noteworthy that I ended up doing my master's program at Tokyo University and writing my Ph.D. dissertation on Chinese Buddhism, following in the footsteps that Dr. Unno had walked a couple of decades earlier.

I, thus, felt a profound debt of gratitude to Dr. Unno, which motivated me to facilitate the publication of his unfinished translation of a text, *A Treatise on Doctrinal Distinctions in the Huayan One Vehicle*, the object of his Ph.D. dissertation. With his son, Mark and his colleague making the finishing touches, I am happy to report that the translation by Dr. Unno of this important work in the Huayan tradition will be published within one year. It will be part of the English Tripitaka Translation Series of the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism, with which I am currently involved.

I also wish to dedicate my presentation today to Dr. Unno and to the entire Unno family, and particularly to Mrs. Unno for her life-long support of her husband, her role as Dharma teacher in her own right, and for her uplifting smile, and to Rev. Tetsuo Unno (Dr. Unno's younger brother), whose contributions to Shin Buddhism have been enormous as well and, in the area of humor, well, *legendary!* So, I am honored to be able to express my debt of gratitude to my *sempais* – my seniors – who preceded me and showed the way on this marvelous path.

2. Preface:

I have entitled my talk, “Revisioning Shin Buddhist Teachings for Today: Thirteen Contributors¹ to the Book, *The Tide of Wisdom: Shinran's Wisdom, Authentic Individuality and Social Engagement (New Horizon Seen from Shinshū Theology)* (『智慧の潮 親鸞の智慧・主体性・社会性 — Shinshū Theology から見えてくる新しい水平線) (henceforth, *Anthology*), published in Japanese in 2017 by Musashino University Press. The anthology is the outcome of a research project that I organized and served as its editor.

My basing the talk today on the views held by a group of scholars in Japan, not only broadens the perspective beyond my own opinion, but also contributes to the bi-cultural

exchange between Japan and North America. This promotes the growth and diversity in Shin Buddhist discussion in a global arena.

That diversity is also reflected in the backgrounds of the contributors, even though they all reside in Japan. Their university affiliation includes Ryūkoku, Ōtani, Musashino, and Tokyo; their religious affiliation includes both Hongwanji branches of Shin Buddhism; the ages of the writers range from the millennials to the baby boomers. However, when it comes to gender diversity, I regret that there were no women scholars available from the pool to be invited to our research project. We definitely plan to improve on this in future projects.²

We, the thirteen contributors to the anthology, were quite clear of our aim from the outset. We wanted to seek a greater *balance* in the heavy tilt toward what we are calling “traditional scholarship” (*dentō kyōgaku* 伝統教学),³ which has influenced our contemporary understanding of the teachings in Japan and in the West. In particular, we felt that not enough attention was being given to the three dimensions of Shinran’s teachings; the three are, 1) wisdom (*chi’e* 智慧; *prajñā*), 2) authentic individuality embraced in wisdom and compassion (*shutaisei* 主体性), and 3) social engagement (*shakaisei* 社会性). Our hope is that our anthology will contribute in some small way toward a more balanced understanding of Shinran’s teachings and, thus, of Shin Buddhism.

3. Image of Shin Buddhism

We clearly need a more accurate portrayal of Shin Buddhism in order to rectify the incorrect image that is prevalent in both Japan and the West. For example, a German scholar of Buddhism, Heinz Bechert, has remarked, “Amida Buddhism has won a broad following through all of East Asia, primarily as a *folk religion*. ... [Amidism] takes the ideas of the Buddha and, in a way, *twists them into their opposite*. The most radical spokesman for this approach is Shinran-Shōnin”⁴ (emphasis added in italic)

Even in Japan, a noted Buddhist scholar, Shizuka Sasaki, recently wrote:

“[Shin Buddhists] teach that what we must do is to *simply rely and surrender* ourselves to the power of Amida Buddha. Shinran’s teaching is undoubtedly superb as a religion and provides an extremely comforting support for those who are unable to make any self-effort, but this is completely a *separate thing* from the “Buddhism of Shakyamuni.”

And books such as, *Popular Buddhism in Japan: Shin Buddhist Religion and Culture* by Esben Andreasen⁵ perpetuates the image of Shin Buddhism as merely devotional, popular, and even a deviation from authentic Buddhism. If Shinran were here with us, he would certainly be disheartened, for he saw his own tradition as “the consummation of Mahayana Buddhism” (*daijō no naka no shigoku* 大乘の中の至極).⁶ (*CWS*, p. 524)

4. Shinshū Theology

In order to rectify this misrepresentation of Shin Buddhism, we sought an approach that signals a qualitative departure from the traditional scholarship. In the past, I adopted terms such as “Shinshuology” and “Shin Doctrinal Studies” for this, but with this group we decided on, “Shinshū Theology.” Some may regard the term, “theology” as being strange given its association with God, but this term has already been adopted in a title of another anthology entitled *Buddhist Theology*, published in 2000 with nineteen mostly American writers contributing.⁷ Further, “theology” carries a broader meaning as advocated by David Tracy, a noted American theologian, who defines theology as, “an intellectual interpretation within a religious tradition” and emphasizes the point that it can be employed, “whether that tradition is theistic or not.”

Thus, “Shinshū Theology” will allow us to go beyond the framework of traditional scholarship for interpreting Shinran’s teachings. In our view, “Shinshū Theology” contains the following three features: 1) not being limited to traditional methods and

perspectives, 2) an openness to a global perspective, and 3) an emphasis on the needs and experiences of the aspirants or seekers.

The first feature is a conscious attempt to go beyond the traditional scholarship. However, in our effort to do so, we do not seek to reject its importance, for they contain approaches and findings that are valuable to our fuller understanding. They provide insights that our Shinshū Theology alone would not uncover. We are, thus, calling for cooperation, since what we need is greater diversity in the approaches and not the privileging of one at the exclusion of others.

The second feature, the need to respond to diverse perspectives demands that we go beyond Japanese language and worldview. Needless to say, Shinran was Japanese, and the subsequent development of Shin tradition took place within the Japanese cultural environment. It has only been in the last 140 years that Shin Buddhism has left the Japanese milieu, where its teachings continue to be tested to see if they can take root in the “universal soil.” Consequently, our explanations cannot be limited to Japanese sensibilities but must incorporate a wider global perspective.

The third feature of Shinshū Theology focuses on the *experience* of the aspirants, constituting another departure from the traditional approach. The Hongwanji branch, in particular, has emphasized the ultimate truth perspective (*hottoku-ron* 法徳論), while minimizing the aspirant-centered perspective (*kisō-ron* 機相論). While the importance of the ultimate perspective should not be denied, there is a greater need today for promoting and valuing the perspectives based on the *experience* of the seekers. Expressed differently, we wish to give greater attention than before to “self-realization” (*koshō* 己証) over “tradition” (*dentō* 伝統).

I believe Dr. Unno supported this perspective, for he has written:

“This tradition of *self-cultivation* forms the unseen background of Shin Buddhist life, which shuns theoretical discussions and encourages people to *embody* the teachings.” (*Shin Buddhism*, 41)

With our basic approach laid out, let us now begin a deeper examination of each of the three dimensions of Shinran’s teachings.

5. Wisdom

The first of the three dimensions is wisdom. Wisdom, in fact, constitutes a vital feature of Shinjin. Shinjin is the experience of spiritual awakening in Shin tradition, which has commonly been translated as “true entrusting.” I consider Shinjin to be comparable to “satori” in Zen Buddhism as made famous by D.T. Suzuki.⁸ As for Shinjin, it is described as an endowed gift of Amida within the spiritual process in which the seeker whole heartedly entrusts in Amida’s Vow. This description, then, has led to “true entrusting” as the most common translation for Shinjin.

While “entrusting” does express a vital feature of Shinjin, it fails to capture the *full* picture of this term with its multiple meanings. I believe, this was one of the reasons the Hongwanji translating team did *not* render Shinjin into English in the *Collected Works of Shinran*. The fact that “entrusting” does not adequately reflect the *full* meaning becomes readily apparent in Shinran’s following description of *shingyō* (信樂), a term synonymous with Shinjin:

Entrusting (*shingyō*) is the mind full of truth, reality, and sincerity; the mind of ultimacy, accomplishment, reliance, and reverence; the mind of discernment, distinctness, clarity, and faithfulness; the mind of aspiration, wish, desire, and exultation; the mind of delight, joy, gladness, and happiness.⁹

Here, we find terms that are synonymous or similar in meaning to “entrusting,” such as “reliance” (*yū* 用), “reverence” (*jū* 重), and “faithfulness” (*chū* 忠). However,

there are other terms such as “discernment” (*shin* 審) and “clarity” (*sen* 宣) that are much closer in meaning to “wisdom” or “insight” than “entrusting.”

In my view, there are four primary features to Shinjin, which are 1) entrusting (*itaku* 委託), 2) joy (*kangi* 歡喜), 3) no doubt (*mugi* 無疑) and 4) wisdom (*chi'e* 智慧). Since the topic at hand is wisdom, we shall focus on it as it relates to Shinjin by first examining a passage from one of Shinran’s hymns :

“It is by entering the wisdom of Shinjin (*shinjin no chie* 信心の智慧)

That we become persons who respond in gratitude to the Buddhas’ benevolence.”

(*Hymns of the Dharma-Ages*, Verse 34, *CWS*, p. 407)

As has been taught, Shinjin is not produced as a result of the aspirant’s practice or effort. The traditional doctrinal position is firm on this point, and we have no problem with the view that the seeker is not the *initiator* or the *cause* but is the *recipient* or the *effect* of endowed wisdom.

However, based on the approach of our Shinshu Theology, we are interested in how the seeker *experiences* what Amida endows. We are fortunate that Shinran actually explains this passage in a note; it reads “the *emergence* of the mind of entrusting oneself to it is the *arising* of wisdom.” It is safe to assume from this that some degree of wisdom actually arises in the seeker’s mind, but there is very little thorough discussion within traditional scholarship on *how* this wisdom manifests in one’s experience. It is to this very question that some of our contributors respond.

Yoshinari Fuji, Professor of Ryūkoku University, argues that wisdom manifests in the aspirants in the form of their ethical inclination to reject the Three Poisons. For this, Fuji cites one of Shinran’s letters sent to his disciple:

“... since you have begun to hear the Buddha’s Vow you have gradually awakened from the drunkenness of ignorance, gradually rejected the three poisons, and come to prefer at all times the medicine of Amida Buddha.” (*CWS*, p. 553)

Fuji acknowledges that humans still possess blind passion but points out that because of Amida's endowed wisdom that emerges within, they can see their Three Poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance more objectively and seek to become freer from their shackles.

(*Anthology*, p. 63)

Hisao Maeda, Associate Professor at Musashino University, points out further textual evidence of the transformation that takes place in the persons of Shinjin. For example, he cites Shinran's view that "Their minds perpetually play in the Pure Land," "They are equal to Tathagata," and they attain 'the mind of equality.' (*Anthology*, p. 81-85) And he even brings to our attention a passage that is not often mentioned in traditional scholarship, in which Shinran clearly states that a person of Shinjin *realizes* wisdom:

"To entrust oneself to the nembutsu is to already have become a *person who realizes wisdom* and will attain Buddhahood; know that this is to become free of foolishness. Hence the expression, 'Buddha of the light of wisdom' is used."¹⁰ (*The Virtue of the Name of Amida Tathagata, CWS* pp. 656-657) (emphasis added)

In the similar line of thinking, I myself have argued that wisdom or understanding is found in Shandao's (613-681), the fifth master in the Shin lineage, celebrated statement on Deep Mind or Shinjin, which Shinran quotes.¹¹ Here, the seeker is shown to have come to "*truly know*" (*shinchi* 信知) that, 1) that oneself is a foolish being full of blind passions and that, 2) one can attain birth through the Vow. Here, it does not say "entrust" but comes to "*truly know*," and not just "know" but "*truly know*." This is also not mere knowledge but a deeper understanding or wisdom. Hence, Deep Mind or Shinjin involves *truly knowing* or gaining wisdom into the truth about one's foolish nature and the Primal Vow (*Anthology*, p. 134) We, thus, come to *realize* that we are "one big mess" or Onemess but are embraced in Oneness!

Ichijō Ogawa, a former President and Professor Emeritus of Ōtani University, contends that this insight or wisdom does not occur in a vacuum. He stresses the need for *self-realization* (*jikaku*自覺). And that realization takes place within the context of the seeking earnestly to attain Shakyamuni’s enlightenment but coming to realize that one is unable to fully overcome one’s blind passions. In other words, “one’s limitations” is a product of *deep realization* within the context of one’s effort on the Buddhist path.¹² (*Anthology*, p. 39)

As the last point in our argument for wisdom, I wish to point out how Shinran explains the level attained by the persons of Shinjin to be like those at the first level of awakening, the stream enterers (*sotāpanna*).¹³ I am very much aware that in this passage Shinran is making the point that persons of *Shinjin* attain the level of non-retrogression or the rightly-established state, which traditional scholarship also take note.

However, I have not seen traditional scholarship acknowledge the possibility that persons of Shinjin can actually attain the other qualities of a stream-enterer, which include, 1) overcoming doubt (*vicikitsā*), 2) overcoming the belief in the efficacy of rituals (*śīlavrata-parāmaśā*), and 3) overcoming attachment to substantial self (*satkāya-dṛṣṭi*), a belief that the self is unchanging and not dependent on others. In our estimation, it is quite reasonable to assume, based on the above discussions of wisdom, that persons of Shinjin can very well achieve them. After all, as mentioned earlier, the overcoming of doubt was one of the four dimensions of Shinjin. Moreover, when we look at Shinran’s life, we see a man who rejected superstitious belief and rituals. And finally, I believe his overcoming of the attachment to the view of substantial self can be demonstrated in his exuberant statement that he is now *rooted in the Vow*, and no longer in the substantial self:

“How joyous I am, my heart and mind being *rooted* in the Buddha-ground of the universal Vow, and my thoughts and feelings flowing within the dharma-ocean, which is beyond comprehension!” (*CWS*, p. 291)

Thus, given the much stronger wisdom dimension seen in the experience of the persons of Shinjin, we believe that as an English translation for Shinjin a greater consideration should be given to “true realization” or its cognate such as “true awakening.” In the end, no one translation would fully be satisfactory, but, at the least, “true realization” deserves an equal place on par with “true entrusting.”¹⁴

Moreover, as an English term, “realization” conveys a sense of fulfillment on the part of the seeker to experience deeper levels of reality and of oneself. This can be seen in the frequent usage of the word, “self-realization” in the field of psychology and in everyday usage. Further, its verb form, “to realize,” conveys a greater sense of active and dynamic qualities than, “to entrust.” And it, more than “entrusting,” challenges the stereotype of Shin Buddhism, where its followers “simply *rely and surrender* to the power of Amida Buddha.”

6. Authentic Individuality Embraced in Wisdom and Compassion

The second of the three dimensions under discussion is what we are calling “authentic individuality embraced in wisdom and compassion.” Unlike “wisdom,” there is no term in the classical Buddhist literature that exactly corresponds to it. Nevertheless, we feel it to be a fundamental dimension of an individual who realizes a certain level of awakening. For this reason, this authentic individuality is not to be associated with “individualism” in the secular sense, but with the authentic self that emerges within wisdom and compassion, the primary qualities of awakening. Thus, I have rendered it, “authentic individuality embraced in wisdom and compassion.”¹⁵

Some may wonder that “authentic individuality” would contradict the hallmark teaching of Buddhism, “non-self” (*anātman*). I believe such a concern is rooted in a limited understanding of that teaching, for Buddhism has always recognized the conventional self as well as the awakened self. One example is the Buddha’s legendary

admonition to “Make yourself the lamp” in his last sermon. On another occasion as found in the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha stated:

Your own self is your own authentic individuality (*Atta hi attano natho*),

For who else could your authentic individuality be?

With you yourself well-trained

You obtain the authentic individuality hard to obtain.¹⁶ (*Dhammapada* 160)

The original Pāli is “*natho*,” which English translators have also rendered, “mainstay,” “mastery” and “refuge.” All these meanings recognize the “awakened self” that we are calling “authentic individuality.” Mahayana sutras, such as the *Nirvana Sutra*, also affirm such a self in the statement, “Amidst the teaching of “non-self” there exists a “true self” (眞我).¹⁷ It also speaks of a “great self” (大我).¹⁸

This authentic individuality, according to Ryūsei Takeda, Professor Emeritus of Ryūkoku University, is also found in the Shin Buddhist tradition. Even though Shin Buddhists are not monks or nuns who have renounced the world, Takeda claims that many have been able to gain similar awakened spiritual levels. And they are represented in the *myōkōnins* (妙好人), “the wondrously excellent persons,” and in what Shinran calls, “the true disciples of the Buddha” (眞の仏弟子).¹⁹ (*Anthology*, pp. 147-169)

In regard to Shinran, I wish to look at his authentic individuality in the three qualities of his action as seen in, 1) the deeply personal nature of his seeking, 2) the importance of the individual in decision-making, and 3) the steadfastness of his conviction.

First with regard to the deeply personal nature of his *seeking*, this spirit is found in the well-known passage from the *Tannishō*, in which Shinran acknowledges:

“When I consider deeply the Vow of Amida, which arose from five kalpas of profound thought, I realize that *it was entirely for the sake of myself alone!*” (*CWS*, p. 679)

It is certainly not the case that Shinran was “monopolizing” the Vow as being made just for himself and not for others but was, instead, expressing his joy and amazement at realizing that the Vow was *tailored exactly for someone like himself*.

And he arrived at this realization due to the compassionate working of Amida’s Vow causing him to reflect deeply on his predicament and to initiate his intense seeking. His seeking was motivated not by some intellectual concern, for example, “What happens to those hearing-impaired children who would not be able to hear the Name.” While such concerns are commendable, the seeker ought to focus first on resolving one’s own *personal* needs and concerns. For Shinran, this culminated in the words, “It (Vow) was entirely for the sake of myself alone!”

The second quality of authentic individuality is the importance of the individual in decision-making. In Shinran’s case, he reveals the same spirit of relying on one’s own decision when he responds to his disciples who had traveled 300 miles on foot. They wanted to resolve the confusion that had emerged in their minds after hearing that there were some special teachings other than what Shinran had taught them.

Shinran flatly rejects that notion and tells them that if they still doubted him, they should go to see the eminent scholars elsewhere. And Shinran says to them:

“Beyond this, whether you take up and accept the nembutsu or whether you abandon it *is for each of you to determine*.” (A Record in Lament of Divergences, *CWS*, p. 662)

As I read this passage, I cannot help but to recall how the late Dr. Alfred Bloom, a former Dean, with whom I worked for eight meaningful years at the IBS, often cited this passage as one of the main reasons why he had “come to fall in love with Shinran.” Having come from a fundamentalist Christian background, he frequently told us how he appreciated Shinran’s openness to allow individual to *decide for oneself*.

Finally, as for the steadfastness of his conviction, the third quality of authentic individuality, I cite the example of Shinran’s willingness to harshly criticize even the

Emperor for persecuting Buddhism, for he wrote, “The emperor and his ministers, acted against the dharma and violated human rectitude.”²⁰ This took enormous courage, particularly in his time, for it had the potential for severe punishment, including execution. However, it seems Shinran was ready to take the consequence as elsewhere he had stated:

“Mindful solely of the profundity of the Buddha’s benevolence, *I pay no heed to the derision of others.*” (The True Teachings, Practice and Realization, *CWS*, p. 291)

Such expressions reveals his firm conviction, which led to actions at the risk of his own safety.

Another contributor to our anthology, Taishin Kawasoe, Professor Emeritus of Ryūkoku University, picks up on this point by stressing Shiran’s determination in terms of his steadfast commitment to his teacher, Honen. Kawasoe points out how for 61 years, from the age of 29 when he first met Honen to his own death at the age of 90, Shinran maintained a steadfast dedication and did not waver in the confidence for Honen’s teachings. (*Anthology*, 196)

This concludes the three qualities of authentic individuality embraced in wisdom and compassion as seen, again, in, 1) the deeply personal nature of his seeking, 2) the importance of the individual in decision-making, and 3) the steadfastness of his conviction. I wish to close this segment by citing the late Prof. Takamaro Shigaraki, one of the leading spokespersons for Shin Buddhism in the past 50 years. On the question of “emancipated beings,” which I take to be synonymous with persons of authentic individuality, he explains:

“Hence, one is able to achieve personal transformation and become an ideal human being. ... Ordinarily, we do not live with this kind of independence. Usually, we worry about how other people view us However, when we realize true

enlightenment and establish our true selves, then we will be able live in reliance upon ourselves and exist as we are.”²¹

Thus, “authentic individuality” refers to the state of one’s awakening to a true self, which serves as the basis for living a life of unwavering commitment to one’s conviction, free from excessive concern about the criticism and even praise of others.

I saw this spirit embodied in the statue of Shinran, which stood near the front gate of Musashino University and serving as an inspiration during my 20 years of teaching there. (show photo of the statue.)

7. Social Engagement

I now wish to move to the third dimension of Shinran’s teachings, that of social engagement. As we do so, we need to be aware of the general perception that sees Shin Buddhism as a path that rejects this world in favor of the Pure Land. While that may be on the mark for Pure Land Buddhism in general, but it does not accurately reflect Shinran’s thought, for it contains ample teachings that emphasize, 1) the importance of this present world and 2) engagement in activities to benefit others.

I believe that Dr. Unno, again, supports our assessment, for he stated, “Pure Land Buddhism might suggest an otherworldly orientation, but its primary focus is on the here and now.” (*River of Fire River of Water*, p. 12) And with regard to social engagement:

“The fifth and final stage²² reminds us that this is not simply an internal, subjective process and *underscores our responsibilities in society*. We meet all kinds of challenges – personal, social, and historical – and we vigorously respond to them, knowing that there are no quick and easy solutions.” (*Shin Buddhism: Bits of Rubble Turn into Gold*, p. 35)

Despite the views expressed by Dr. Unno, there clearly exist factors that mitigate social engagement in contemporary Shin Buddhism. One such factor has been the issue of, 1) self-power (*jiriki*) and 2) a message found in a major Shin text, the *Tannishō*.

With regard to the first factor, rather than understanding the meaning of self-power according to Shinran, we have gone so far as to equate self-power with any *effort* we make. For example, a former graduate student, who was critical of this misguided understanding, once remarked with a smile on her face that some Shin Buddhists are even afraid to give up a seat in a train for an elderly person, out of fear that it would constitute ‘self-power.’ If all *efforts* were to be negated, then even the hallmark Shin religious act of “listening to the Dharma” (*monpō* 聞法) would have to be jettisoned.

This point was taken up by Norio Watanabe, a Lecturer at Ryūkoku University, who argues that the problem of self-power lies not in the *effort* itself but in the *motive* or *attitude* behind the effort. Watanabe takes up what Shinran calls, “the mind that believes in evil or good” (*shin zaifukushin* 信罪福心), which represents the attitude that seeks matters to go their ego-centered ways. Shinran called that “self-power”:

“... seeking the power of the Primal Vow with a mind that believes in [the recompense of] evil and good. This is termed the single mind of ‘self-power.’” (*CWS*, p. 228)

Thus, even if a seeker is thinking about the Primal Vow, as in this case, an attitude that believes and seeks good awards by avoiding bad outcomes would constitute self-power. Hence, the problem of self-power has to do with the attitude or the intent of one’s action. (*Anthology*, p. 222) On the other hand, Watanabe goes on to argue that without the self-power attitude, one is permitted as Shin Buddhists to carry out any practice. He cites, for example, Shandao’s well-known Five Correct Practices, which are bowing, sutra chanting, contemplation, recitation, and praising and offerings.²³

By this line of thinking, contemplation (觀察), a form of “meditation,” would be permitted, allowing contemporary Shin Buddhists to take up meditation if desired. In my view, this would allow us to engage in a spiritual activity that has become the most attractive practice for a vast number of people to take interest in Buddhism in the West

and even in Japan. I, myself, have promoted what I call, “Nembutsu Meditation,” which is partially based on contemplation and recitation in the Five Correct Practices and adapted for contemporary lay audience. Here, too, they are to be carried out not with the self-power attitude but as an expression of “practice rooted in gratitude” (*hōongyō* 報恩業).

Further, in line with Watanabe’s views, I have since my days at the I.B.S. in the late 1980s promoted the teaching of “constantly practicing great compassion,” (*jōgyō-daihi* 常行大悲) which constitutes one of the ten benefits that a person of Shinjin realizes in this very life. Shinran did not elaborate its meaning, but, in my view, traditional scholarship has understood it in a narrow sense to mean to just recite the Nembutsu.²⁴

I, however, do not agree in limiting the ‘practice of great compassion’ to the spiritual act of reciting the Nembutsu but agree in expanding its scope to include social engagement in response to such issues as homelessness, employment, and health care based on the ideals of compassion, equality, and interdependence. This engagement should not be motivated by the self-power attitude of desiring to be a “good person” or to be doing a “good deed.” Instead, it should be an act rooted in gratitude and a concern for others, even though greatly limited, as participants in the ongoing compassionate activity that we call “Amida.”

The second factor suppressing social engagement among Shin Buddhists lies, I contend, in the enormous influence of “Chapter Four” of the *Tannishō*. The chapter states that because of our limited compassion, we are unable to fully care for or save others as we wish. Thus, it directs us to say the Nembutsu in order to quickly attain Buddhahood in the next life. As Buddhas, we can then save others freely as we wish because of their unlimited compassion. In my view, this may be acceptable as a message on the spiritual level, but it can and has discouraged efforts on the ethical and social

levels. It has often been understood to mean, in this life, we are to concentrate only on our personal spiritual salvation but to postpone any effort to care for others *until* we become Buddhas in the next life, at which time we will be able to save all beings as we desire out of true compassion as Buddhas.

Fumihiko Sueki, Professor Emeritus of Tokyo University,²⁵ takes strong issue with this message that this *Tannishō* chapter sends out.²⁶ He fully advocates greater social action in efforts to show concern for others in this life, even if our abilities are limited. To do so, he draws on Shinran's teaching of the "phase of returning (*gensō*)," which the *Tannishō* chapter also referred to. Sueki, however, does not see this phase of returning as the aspirants' post-death activity. Instead, he sees that when the aspirants in this life are socially engaged, they are already embraced within the workings of Amida's 'phase of returning.' In other words, the seekers' social engagement is inspired by the working of Boundless Compassion or Amida in the phase of returning, for they are, in some sense, assisting in and assisted by Amida's compassionate activities to benefit others in both the spiritual and social arenas.

A very similar point is made by Takeshi Kaku, Professor of Ōtani University, as he encourages the seekers' effort to work to benefit others with the confidence and assurance of knowing that they are embraced within the workings of the Buddha's phase of returning. Kaku underscores the point that we need not wait until after death but *in this very life* we can reach out to support each other with greater confidence that we are participating in the compassionate workings of the Buddha. Thus, our activities of social engagement take on greater spiritual meaning knowing that our actions are supported by the workings of the Buddha in the phase of returning.

The final point that I wish to make with regard to social engagement has to do with how we Shin Buddhists tend to see ourselves. The traditional image based, for example, on the *Tannishō* chapter is one of "ordinary foolish beings beset by blind passions,"

whereby we are unable to benefit others as our hearts desire. And to that, I say “How true that is!” Yes, we are woefully inadequate. *Nevertheless*, however limited, we *can* be transformed as the earlier discussions of wisdom and authentic individuality demonstrated.²⁷ Shingyō Saitō, Lecturer at Ryūkoku University, focuses in on this point by quoting Shinran, who says that when a foolish person possessed of blind passions attains Shinjin, “such a person does not belong to the group of ordinary foolish beings.” (*CWS*, p. 629) Thus, such a person is still possessed of blind passion but is no longer your *regular* foolish being but is, in Shinran’s words, a “white lotus among people.” (*Hymn of the Two Gateways*, *CWS*, 629) Yes, such a person is like the lotus flower that is rooted in the mud of blind passions but rises above the muddy waters to bloom magnificently as an inspiration to others.

8. Religion of Awakening and Action

Having now examined the three dimensions of Shinran’s teachings – wisdom, authentic individuality embraced in wisdom and compassion, and social engagement – I believe we are equipped with more resources for revisioning Shin Buddhist teachings as a “religion of awakening and action,” not as a “religion of belief and inaction.”²⁸

Ogawa in our anthology has also adopted the phrase, “religion of awakening” (目覚の宗教). (Anthology, p. 24) to describe Shinran’s approach. I, too, in my talks in Japan to both clergy and lay audiences, have promoted the need to see Shinran’s teaching as a “religion of awakening” and not “of belief.” So far, I have not heard any criticism, at least among those that I am aware of!²⁹

Another contributor to our anthology, Dennis Hirota, Professor Emeritus of Ryūkoku University and well known as the chief translator of *The Collected Works of Shinran*, speaks to this dimension of *awakening* by employing a term, “holism.” He states, “The religious role/status of Shinran as ‘practitioner of Shinjin’ reveals a model of

a new self-realization called ‘holism,’ which constitutes a true departure from the Pure Land Buddhist path.” (*Anthology*, p. 172) For Hirota, Shinjin is not merely one’s subjective decision or mental function but a self-realization, wherein the self and the world together reveal themselves anew. It is a radical transformation in which the world emerges with new meaning in the spirit of “holism.” (*Anthology*, p. 179)

What we have presented so far, I contend, calls into question the image of Shin Buddhism as a religion for “illiterate peasants.” I have even heard some members of the Buddhist Churches of America speak of Shin Buddhism echoing this description as a religion for “illiterate peasants,” thus reinforcing the image of Shin Buddhism as simply a devotional path that is basically a folk or popular religion. I must, at this point, emphasize that I am not opposed to or look down upon “illiteracy” or “peasants.” It is a fact that in the past, much of the population was of peasant class and many could not read or write.

Nevertheless, you might find it surprising that a recent scholarship has revealed that most of Shinran’s direct disciples were not *illiterate peasants at all*. Prof. Junko Yamauchi, not one of the contributors to the anthology, has reported the social status of fifty-seven of Shinran’s direct disciples based on records from the Tokugawa period. Of the fifty-seven, 3 were aristocrats (*kuge*), 10 were priests (*sōryō*), 4 were Shintō priests (*kan’nushi*), 10 were warriors with priestly ordination (*bushi, sōryō keikensha*), 27 were warriors and estate stewards (*bushi/jitō*), and 3 were commoners. (*shomin*).³⁰ Thus, only three were commoners or so-called “peasants.”

Even if we did not rely on these records, Shinran’s own letters indicate that his disciples were able to read and write. They may not have been able to write in classical Chinese (*kanbun*), but they were well versed in Japanese letters. The letters to Kenchi, Shōshin, and Ren’i, among others, demonstrate their full-fledged literacy. And, of course,

we have Yui'en, who wrote the famous *Tannishō* that we looked at today was Shinran's trusted disciple.

I am, of course, not discounting the 'illiterate peasants' among the disciples, for many who fit that description followed Shinran during his lifetime and in subsequent centuries, but that was not the entire story. Therefore, it will serve us better to construct a more accurate picture of the disciples in our revisioning of Shin Buddhist teachings, especially outside Japan.

9. Revisioning is Already Taking Place in America

The revisioning of Shin Buddhist teachings as a "religion of Awakening and action" and not "of belief and inaction" has already begun especially in America. This becomes apparent when we acknowledge the four of the changes that have taken place beyond what we find in Japan.

The first evidence has to do with the tradition of actively promoting the practice of Six Paramitas (Perfections) during the time of the spring and fall equinox or Ohigan observances. I had thought that this was part of the Shin tradition but was very surprised when my Shin priest colleagues in Japan reacted with disbelief that we in America had such an understanding. Such a practice is nowhere to be found in Japan but has been valued in America.³¹

One Shin priest who recognized its importance was Rev. Itsuzō Kyōgoku, who served as a BCA minister (1919-1941) and made considerable contribution to the religious education curriculum. He felt that we could better understand Other Power by undergoing practices found in Six Paramitas, which provided the ideals to aspire as Buddhists and serve as an opportunity to awaken to the truth of our foolish ignorant nature. His books emphasized the need for such action, including *dāna*, the acts of selfless giving. You might find it interesting to learn that a major publisher in Tokyo,

Chikuma Shobō, recently reprinted one of his books almost half a century later! And their reasoning for republishing is that Rev. Kyōgoku's emphasis on action and concern for others offer a refreshing and needed insight for Buddhism in Japan today.

The second example of “religion of awakening and action” is, I believe, lies in the enduring popularity of the “Golden Chain,” which does not exist in Japan at all. This immensely popular expression of Shin Buddhist faith was the creation of Rev. Dorothy Hunt in Hawaii sometime in the 1930s. Not only does it offer a sense of interconnection and one's place in it through an attractive imagery, but it further encourages us to take responsibility for our interactions with others, especially those who are weaker than ourselves. It also promotes wholesome actions in thought, speech and deeds and concludes with the wish for all beings to attain the ultimate Buddhist goal of “perfect peace.”³²

The third evidence of the trend in the U.S. can be seen in a brief survey that I conducted in 2013 of Shin Buddhists, 47 lay and 17 priests. They were asked to choose one or two of the four options to two questions. The first question was for the laypersons, who were asked, “What does Amida Buddha mean to you?” The four options were: a) The Buddha who resides in the Western Pure Land; b) An ultimate being but differs from the Christian God; c) A symbol of wisdom and compassion; d) A personification of the working of Life in our everyday life. The largest was for c) at 50% (39 responses), the second was for d) at 23% (18), the third was for b) at 18% (14), and the least was for a) at 9% (7). Next, the ministers were asked, “How would you explain Amida to those who are new to Buddhism?” The largest was for c) at 64% (16 responses), the second was for d) at 36% (9), and the third was for a) and b) both at 0%.

For both the lay and the ministers, c) and d) received much higher responses. They reflect an outlook that I describe as being more immanent, this worldly, and non-dual in nature. In my view, these sets of answers are in line with what we are calling a “religion

of awakening and action.” On the other hand, far less popular were a) and b), the outlook of which are far more transcendent, other worldly and dualistic. These are more in line with the outlook of a “religion of belief and inaction.” The second question had to do with the Pure Land, and the response showed the same outcome.³³

The fourth and final example has to do with social engagement, which is also found among Shin Buddhists in Japan. However, I feel that its fervor is stronger in America especially among the younger generation. Looking back to the 1960s, the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) initiated what was called “the Buddhist Life Program” to revitalize the Young Buddhist Association but also included calls to apply the teachings beyond their strictly religious setting. In the 1970s, the *sansei* (third generation) Shin Buddhists created the BCA-wide program called the “Relevant American Buddhists” (RAB) with the aim to make Buddhism relevant to American society. (a video of a talk on RAB is available)³⁴ As one of the persons directly involved, I feel that we made sincere effort to address some of the social issues of the period, which included drugs, sex, generation gap and the war. RAB also supported Taiko, initiated and promoted by Senshin Buddhist temple, which spearheaded the dissemination of Taiko to become the immensely popular American phenomenon that it has become today. Another example of an initiative that began in a Shin temple and transcended Buddhist and even religious boundaries is the award-winning Project Dana, the care giving voluntary program for the elderly in the state of Hawaii.³⁵ Finally, the Shin temples have long made contributions to social welfare needs of the wider communities and have spoken out against events in society that conflict with the Buddhist spirit of compassion, equality, and oneness. The latest is the 2020 stand taken by the BCA Ministers Association in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement.³⁶ And this spirit has intensified among the younger groups, such as the Young Buddhist Editorial.³⁷

We have now looked at four examples, the Six Paramitas, the Golden Chain, the opinion survey, and social engagement, which demonstrate that tendency toward a religion of awakening and action. I believe these are encouraging signs for the future of Shin Buddhism in the West. And they do reflect developments that differ from Japan. This is inevitable, for the cultural sensibilities are quite different. That is something I have come to feel more acutely, now that I have lived half of my life in Japan, including the last 22 years. Time and time again, I have encountered Japanese cultural traits that I believe have determined how Shin teachings are appreciated and understood in Japan. It is, therefore, natural for North American Shin Buddhism to differ from that found in Japan.

In this regard, Rev. Prof. Tomoyasu Naitō, Professor Emeritus of Ryūkoku University and a member of the Kangaku (the highest academic body of Hongwanji), has expressed on a number of occasions his view that North American Shin Buddhism would and should develop its own form, not always in sync with Japan. I concur wholeheartedly with this view, as long as we remain true to Shinran's teachings. This means that we can and should more actively acknowledge the three dimensions discussed today: wisdom, authentic individuality embraced in wisdom and compassion, and social engagement.

10 The Survival of Shin Buddhist Temples

As an academic presentation, I should probably stop here. However, the minister in me and my concern for the future of Shin Buddhism in the West, prod me to address the issue of the survival of the temples.

As expressed in some of my previous talks, my vision for the Shin Buddhist sanghas is that of a “big tent” supported by the central pole that is Buddhist in substance. For the first hundred years of Shin Buddhism in America, the nature of the central pole was largely ethnic. Common ethnicity kept the central pole strong and firm

to hold up the tent. This meant that virtually everyone under the tent were Americans or Canadians of Japanese ancestry, who found the temples to serve their religious but also their cultural and social needs.³⁸

So, what is needed is to change the center pole to be Shin Buddhist in substance. In this way, the pole will welcome people of any ethnicity to come under the tent, since, in my view, all true religions foster compassion, equality and interdependence. This will also permit people with varying interests, regardless of ethnicity, for joining the temples to gather under the tent.

It is the nature of religious organizations in America to attract people for various purpose. So, there will be numerous types of “B-Buddhists,” such as, Bazaar Buddhists, Basketball Buddhists, Bingo Buddhists, Book Buddhists, Burial Buddhists, Bon/Obon Buddhists and Board Buddhists. Despite this diversity, they can agree on the core unifying mission and value of the sangha, the Dharma. In so doing, everyone regardless of interests and ethnicity will be welcomed under the big tent.

This does not mean that in the near future the importance of Japanese culture and ethnicity would be disregarded. I can see that this need will remain even among the fourth generation Americans and Canadians of Japanese ancestry who attend the temples, especially given the recent spike in anti-Asian harassment and violence. And they should be given a space under the big tent to be addressed.

However, if the cultural and ethnic concerns supersede other needs to create disharmony under the tent, then I believe everyone must join together in affirming the center pole to prioritize the Dharma. If the temple functions are guided by Dharma, all the different B-Buddhists would be welcomed under the tent to pursue their respective interests. And the Dharma will help to nurture greater wisdom, authentic individuality embraced in wisdom and compassion, and social engagement among the members,

wherein they will be better able to transcend differences and treat everyone under the tent as *spiritual family*.

Speaking of “family,” I conclude with one of my favorite inspiring lines attributed to Shinran in the *Tannishō*, which Dr. Unno translated:

“I, Shinran, have never even once uttered the nembutsu for the sake of my father and mother. The reason is that all beings have been my fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth-and-death.”³⁹

¹ They are Yoshinari Fuji, Dennis Hirota, Takeshi Kaku, Taishin Kawasoe, Hisao Maeda, Ichijō Ogawa, Naoyuki Ōgi, Shingyō Saitō, Fumihiko Sueki, Ryūsei Takeda, Kenneth Tanaka, Muryō Tanaka, and Norio Watanabe. All are mentioned in the main text throughout the talk with their affiliations listed, with the exception of Muryō Tanaka and Naoyuki Ōgi. One of their views is cited in the notes below. (See notes #6 and #19)

² This was one of the three projects initiated while I served as the Director (2008-2016) of the Institute of Buddhist Culture at Musashino University. Unfortunately, there were only a handful of female members associated with the Institute, and two of them joined the other two projects. I have personally encouraged female presence in the academic circles. My efforts include, for example, the Japanese Association for the Study of Buddhism and Psychology, where the new incoming President is a woman. Also, women scholars are now among the cohort of young scholars of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies. My efforts were made while president of these two academic associations. Though I am not directly responsible, Gender and Religion Research Center has been established at a Buddhist university, Ryūkoku Univ., with woman scholar as its director. Thus, we see gradual improvement in the situation in the dearth of female scholars in the academia in Japan.

³ Traditional scholarship is represented, for example, in a book entitled, *Doctrine and Settled Mind of Shin Buddhism* (真宗の教義と安心)³ published by the Hongwanji as a textbook during the ordination session of its priests.

⁴ Küng, Hans, et. Al. *Christianity and the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 373.

⁵ Published by Japan Library in 1998.

⁶ Muryō Tanaka, one of the contributors and Lecturer at Ryūkoku Univ. and a Researcher at Musashino Univ., dedicates his essay to show that Shinran’s teachings include doctrinal structure of wisdom in keeping with the Mahayana teachings of Vasubandhu and Tanlva. (*Anthology*, pp. 68-93)

⁷ Roger Jackson and John Makransky, eds. *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (Curzon Press, 2000).

⁸ The Hongwanji translation team did not translate “shinjin” into English in hopes that it would become part of the English lexicon as “satori.” Unfortunately, that aim has not been actualized.

⁹ *Kyōgyōshinshō* in *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 2 vols., trans. Dennis Hirota, et. al. Hisao Inagaki, Michio Tokunaga, and Ryushin Uryuzu (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), 94. Hereafter, *CWS*.

¹⁰ Maeda, then, goes on to make special mention of the fact that Shinran experienced Amida as wisdom itself. This, he asserts, facilitates the seekers to experience some elements of wisdom.¹⁰

¹¹ “Deep mind is true and real Shinjin. One *truly knows* [*shinchi* 信知] oneself to be a foolish being full of blind passions, with scant roots of good, transmigrating in the three realms and unable to emerge from this burning house. And further, one *truly knows* [*shinchi*] now, without so much as a

single thought of doubt, that Amida's universal Primal Vow decisively enables all to attain birth." (CWS, 1: 55)

¹² Ogawa states, "This kind of deep faith (realization) is not possible without the aspirants facing up to Shakyamuni's enlightenment [to make the effort to attain it for oneself]. No matter how deep one's self-introspection is, based on rationality or reasoning, it would not qualify as [true] self-realization of "one's foolishness" [that Shandao and Shinran speak of]. (*Anthology*, p.39) (Emphasis [] added)

¹³ This points to *the sages of the first fruit (shoka shōja 初果聖者)*. This was taught in early Buddhism and is actively taught today by Theravādin Buddhists in Southeast Asia. I am leaving any discussion on the Stage of Joy (*kangi ji 歡喜地*), which Shinran also mentions, for now to concentrate on the Stream-enters. It is the first of the *bhūmi* stages within the Mahayana doctrine. I am highlighting the fact that persons of Shinjin are equated with these higher levels of awakening.

¹⁴ Our proposal appears to be supported by the website of the Hongwanji in Kyoto, which includes *both* meanings in describing the essence of its teachings as follows: "Attaining the "entrusting heart" – awakening to the compassion of Amida Tathagata (Buddha) through the working of the Primal Vow – we shall walk the path of life reciting Amida's Name (Nembutsu). At the end of life, we will be born in the Pure Land and attain Buddhahood, returning at once to this delusional world to guide people to awakening." <https://www.hongwanji.or.jp/english/teaching/index.html>

¹⁵ In the past, we have adopted, "subjectivity," which served as the theme of the year 2015 conference of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies hosted by the IBS. I have, however, found "subjectivity" to be too vague, so have gone with "authentic individuality within wisdom and compassion" for today's presentation.

¹⁶ My translation is based on the following Thanissaro translation, but I have replaced "mainstay" with "authentic individuality." Ven. Bhikkhu Thanissaro, *The Dhammapada: A Translation* (Taipei: Buddha Dharma Education Assoc. Inc.), p. 66. http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/damapada.pdf.

¹⁷ Taishō no 374, Vol. 12, page 590a19-20.

¹⁸ Taishō no 374, Vol. 12, page 520c15-16.

¹⁹ Naoyuki Ōgi, researcher at Musashino University, finds similar exemplary qualities of authentic individualism and a spirit of social engagement in Shinran's act of referring to himself as "the stubble-headed ignorant one" (*gutoku*) and "neither monk nor lay" (*hisō hizoku*). (*Anthology*, pp.308-325)

²⁰ "The emperor and his ministers, acting against the dharma and violating human rectitude, became enraged and embittered. As a result, Master Genku – the eminent founder who had enabled the true essence of Pure Land way ... were summarily sentenced to death or consigned to distant banishment. I was among the latter." I have slightly modified the first sentence of this passage in the main text to make it grammatically correct to adjust to its shortened form. (*The True Teachings, Practice and Realization, CWS*, p. 289)

²¹ Takamaro Shigaraki, *Heart of the Shin Buddhist Path: A Life of Awakening*, translated by David Matsumoto. Wisdom Publications, 2013, p. 149.

²² Dr. Unno summarizes the five stages: 1) Open receptivity to the Buddha Dharma; 2) Unfolding awareness of its relevance to one's life; 3) Affirming the interplay of light and darkness in our every thought, speech, and action. 4) Responding to the Name-that-calls in meeting every challenge; 5) Maintaining the balance of humility and gratitude.

²³ Watanabe even cites the views of some schools representing traditional scholarship, such as Sekisen and Bizen, to show that even they approved of carrying them out because the attitude is in line with that of Shinran. (*Anthology*, 237 #21)

²⁴ This is based on the interpretation of Zonkaku (1290-1372), the son of the third Monshu of the Hongawanji Branch.

²⁵ He is also professor emeritus of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto.

²⁶ Sueki, first of all, believes that less weight should be given to *Tannishō*, for it is merely a recording of what a disciple had heard from Shinran, and instead should give greater weight to what Shinran actually wrote, particularly his magnum opus, the *Kyōgyōshinshō*.

²⁷ Saitō further takes up the doctrine that sees persons of Shinjin being “the same as Bodhisattva Maitreya” (*bendō miroku* 便同弥勒) or “equal to Tathagata or Buddha” (*nyorai tōdō* 如来等同). Of course, Shinran did not see that persons of Shinjin were the same as Maitreya or be equal to a Buddha because of their *inner qualities* but due to the fact that *they were assured* of becoming Buddha in their next life.

Nevertheless, these descriptions present a different view of what it is to be ordinary foolish beings of blind passions. Essentially Saitō is arguing that persons of Shinjin are bodhisattvas. And because bodhisattvas are dedicated to working for the benefit of others, Shin Buddhists are duly equipped with a doctrinal justification for actualizing our concerns for others. And I believe Saitō is supported in his assertion by Shinran’s citation of this passage, which sees a person of Shinjin as bodhisattva. “Buddha-nature is great Shinjin. Why? Because through Shinjin the *bodhisattva*-mahāsattva has acquired all the parāmitas from charity to wisdom.” (Quoted from the *Nirvana Sutra*, CWS, p. 99)

²⁸ “Awakening” differs from “belief.” The eminent scholar of religion, Wildred Cantwell Smith, described belief as, “... the holding of certain ideas. Some might see it as the intellect’s translation (even reduction?) of transcendence into ostensible terms.” *Faith and Belief* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1979), p. 12. I find that it is the act of agreeing to a creed or belief only with one’s head, but without much feeling or commitment.

²⁹ And one of my books in Japanese is entitled, *Mezameru shūkyō* (目覚る宗教, *Religion of Awakening*), and the response to the title has been quite positive. The book is on American Buddhism in general, but it, of course, includes Shin Buddhism.

³⁰ Uchiyama Junkō, *Tōgoku ni okeru jōdo-shinshū no tenkai* (The Development of Jōdo-Shinshū in the Eastern Provinces) (Tokyō Shuppan, 1997), pp. 17-22. I have “adjusted” the numbers in consultation with Sumio Kameyama, Prof. Emeritus of Tokyo Univ. of Agriculture and a specialist in ethics, but the main thesis has not been altered. I wish to also note that we should take into account the limitations of Uchiyama’s sources, which are from the Tokugawa period approximately 400 years after Shinran.

³¹ I believe that the importance of the Six Paramitas has to do partly with the need to provide religious education for the youth in Dharma schools. This, as you many know, has not been stressed in Japan. In religious education, the teachings need to be presented within a process of ethical and spiritual development for the children and even for adults. For this purpose, the Six Paramitas and other basic teachings, such as the Eight-fold Noble Path have taken on great importance in the U.S.

³² The use of the word “love” in the “Golden Chain” also contributes to its appeal, which, in my view, fosters positive awareness of others and a call to action.

³³ The second question had to do with the Pure Land. The laypersons were asked, “What does the Pure Land mean to you?” and the ministers, “How would you explain Pure Land to those who are new to Buddhism?” The four answers were: a) A place that lies a billion Buddha lands to the west; b) Not a place but a state equal to nirvana for attaining Buddhahood; c) An expression of the state

when the mind is purified; d) A place where deceased persons go. Both the lay and the ministers responses indicated the same tendency as with regard to Amida. They preferred b) and c), which are more immanent, this worldly, and non-dual in nature, while a) and d) were far less preferred.

³⁴ A talk sponsored by the Center for Buddhist Education: Kenneth Tanaka, speaker, given on January 30, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZoHnpD5VvE&t=35s>

³⁵ It has won numerous prizes, including the Rosalyn Carter Caregiving Award. <https://www.projectdana.org/about>

³⁶ <https://www.rafu.com/2020/07/bca-joins-calls-against-racism-for-inclusion-equality/>

³⁷ <https://www.youngbuddhisteditorial.com>

³⁸ But as the cultural and social needs have waned among the younger generation, the numbers to support the central pole have weakened thus becoming more difficult to hold up the tent. And that trend will continue for two reasons. There will be less young Japanese Americans who feel the need to turn to the temples to primarily to fulfill their cultural and social needs. The second reason is that, regardless of ethnicity or religion, all Americans who are younger than 40 are no longer affiliating themselves with organized religion. The latest survey shows that 40% fall under that category, a dramatic increase from under 4% in 1970.

³⁹ Taitetsu Unno, trans. *Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic*. Buddhist Study Center Press, 1984, p. 10.