ished to the northern province of Echigo for his heterodox teaching, Shinran openly married a woman and later had children by her. "If even good people can be reborn in the Pure Land," he said, "how much more the wicked man."

Despite his sweeping rejection of human effort, Shinran still retained the religious virtue of faith (shinjin). Instead of enlightenment, and even more than rebirth in the Pure Land, the objective in Shinran’s religion was to have faith in Amida’s power and compassion to save one despite oneself. The ideal believer was not characterized by doctrinal learning or religious discipline but by complete trust in Amida’s vow. Although Shinran understood that his ideal of pure faith was actually more difficult to hold to than it would be to perform some kind of practice, it still was a goal easily understood and propagated. In his own lifetime, Shinran did not attempt to organize a new sect, but he did establish numerous religious communities bound together by loyalty to him and his teachings.

Ippen studied in Kyoto under one of Hōnen’s leading disciples and later returned to his home in Shikoku, where he married and carried out his duties as both a monk and a head of a household. In 1263, at the age of twenty-five, he came to doubt the spiritual quality of his householder’s life and, thinking that he should go to the mountains to practice asceticism, set out on a pilgrimage that took him to Zenkōjī, a popular destination for pilgrims in what is now Nagano City. He returned home still imbued with the idea of becoming a recluse and thereafter set out on several more pilgrimages, mostly to mountainous areas. During his travels, he devised a means of propagating the nembutsu by asking people to recite the nembutsu just “once” (ippen) and, when they did so, giving them a fuda, a paper talisman on which was written the Chinese characters for “na-mu A-mida Butsu.” Like Ryōin before him, Ippen sought to propagate the nembutsu to as many people as possible, and the names in his registry numbered several hundred thousand.

The talismans distributed by Ippen signified assurance that the recipient was sure to be born in the Pure Land. Ippen’s standard appeal was to ask each person to accept the talisman, awaken one moment of faith, and utter the nembutsu. While at the Kumano Shrine on one of his many travels, Ippen made his appeal to a monk, but the monk surprised Ippen by refusing the offer on the grounds that he did not feel the arising of faith. Ippen insisted that the monk accept the talisman even if he lacked faith, and the monk obliged, but Ippen wondered whether what he had done was effective and legitimate. That night, the Kumano deity appeared to him and told him that rebirth was not determined by his act of propagation or the faith of the recipients but by the decisive power of Amida. Thereafter, Ippen distributed his talismans without regard for whether people had faith. Ippen thus represents the furthest point of development among the Pure Land innovators: Hōnen rejected all practices but the nembutsu; Shinran rejected the nembutsu of self-power but retained the importance of faith in Amida’s other-power; and Ippen, in a supreme act of faith, dispensed with faith as a spiritual requirement. During the last days of his life, Ippen burned the sutras that he possessed and declared that all of the Buddha’s teachings were epitomized in the nembutsu.

The tendency to reduce Pure Land Buddhism to its barest essentials challenged those who tried to institutionalize paths that rejected organized rituals and practices. Ippen’s heirs successfully developed his Time (Ji) sect of Pure Land Buddhism through a strict system of loyalty to the head of the school, who was regarded as the incarnation of Amida and therefore could grant—or deny—salvation. As Amida, he also was the object of faith and gratitude. Of Shinran’s lineal descendants who organized the True Pure Land Sect (Jodo Shinshū), the most important was Rennyo (1415–1499), who, in an age torn by conflicting feudal loyalties, attracted adherents with his clear explanation of Shinran’s teachings, specific rules to live by, and loyalty. Shinran had urged his followers to make every act an act of thanksgiving to Amida, and now this sense of obligation was redirected to Shinran’s heirs, who were not, however, seen as incarnations of Amida.

Blessed with the charisma of a good preacher and effective leader, Rennyo also won the respect and allegiance of many for his common touch characterized by a personal openness and skill at explaining things clearly. His teaching emphasized an egalitarianism that recognized no fundamental difference between men and women, young and old, upper and lower classes, and good and evil. Even hunters and fishermen, who, according to Genshin’s Essentials of Salvation, were condemned to hell for taking life, were saved by Amida’s universal compassion. Rennyo held true to Shinran’s teaching that reciting the nembutsu was not a means for gaining salvation and emphasized that it was an expression of gratitude for the salvation already granted by Amida despite one’s faults and through no merit of one’s own. But unlike Hōnen and Shinran, who felt that the nembutsu and faith were exclusively sufficient, Rennyo’s reliance on Amida’s broadly applicable compassion allowed him to tolerate social and religious conventions that his predecessors did not think necessary. Rennyo’s Rules codified this tolerance and simplicity for his followers and laid a practical foundation for what is today the largest institutional system of temples in Japan.

TRADITIONAL PURE LAND BUDDHISM

GENSHIN: THE ESSENTIALS OF SALVATION

A monk of the Tendai school, Genshin promoted the practice of the nembutsu as an appropriate means for those who are not learned or wise enough to gain rebirth in the Pure Land. His Essentials of Salvation (Ojōyōshū) became popular for its graphic
descriptions of the glories of the Pure Land and the torments of hell. The following
excerpts are from the initial chapters in the first two divisions of the ten cited by the
author. The scriptural authorities cited by Genshin are deleted from the text.

The teaching and practice which leads to birth in Paradise is the most important
thing in this impure world during these degenerate times.\(^1\) Monks and laymen,
men of high or low station, who will not turn to it? But the literature of the
esoteric and the esoteric teachings of Buddha are not one in text, and the
practices of one’s work in this life in its ritualistic and philosophic aspects are
many. These are not difficult for men of keen wisdom and great diligence, but
how can a stupid person such as I achieve this knowledge? Because of this I
have chosen the one gate of the nembutsu to salvation. I have made selections
from the important sūtras and shāstras and have set them forth so that they may
be readily understood and their disciplines easily practiced. In all there are ten
divisions, divided into three volumes. The first is the corrupt life which one
must shun, the second is the Pure Land for which one should seek, the third
is the proof of the existence of the Pure Land, the fourth is the correct practice
of nembutsu, the fifth is the helpful means of practicing the nembutsu, the sixth
is the practice of nembutsu on special occasions, the seventh is the benefit
resulting from nembutsu, the eighth is the proof of the benefit accruing from
nembutsu alone, the ninth is the conduct leading to birth in Paradise, and the
tenth comprises questions and answers to selected problems. These I place to
the right of where I sit lest I forget them.

The first division, the corrupt land which one must shun, comprises the
three realms\(^2\) in which there is no peace. Now, in order to make clear the
external appearances of this land, it is divided into seven parts: (1) hell; (2) hun-
gn demons; (3) beasts; (4) fighting demons; (5) man; (6) Deva; and (7) a conclu-
sion. The first of these, hell, is further divided into eight parts: (1) the hell
of repeated misery; (2) the hell of the black chains; (3) the hell of mass suffering;
(4) the hell of wailing; (5) the hell of great wailing; (6) the hell of scorching heat;
(7) the hell of great scorching heat, and (8) the hell of incessant suffering.

The hell of repeated misery is one thousand yojanas\(^3\) beneath the Southern
Continent\(^4\) and is ten thousand yojanas in length and breadth. Sinners here
are always possessed of the desire to do each other harm. Should they by chance
see each other, they behave as does the hunter when he encounters a deer.
With iron claws they slash each other’s bodies until blood and flesh are dissi-
pated and the bones alone remain. Or else the hell-wardens, taking in their
hands iron sticks and poles, beat the sinners’ bodies from head to foot until they
are pulverized like grains of sand. Or else, with a sword of awful sharpness, they
cut their victims’ bodies in regular pieces as the kitchen worker slices the flesh
of fish. And then a cool wind arises, and blowing, returns the sinners to the
same state in which they were at the outset. Thereupon they immediately arise
and undergo torment identical to that which they had previously suffered. Else-
where it is said that a voice from the sky above calls to the sentient beings to
revive and return to their original state. And again, it is said that the hell-wardens
beat upon the ground with iron pitchforks calling upon the sinners to revive. I
cannot tell in detail of the other sufferings similar to those already told. . . .

Fifty years of human life is equivalent to one day and night in the realm of
the Four Deva Kings,\(^5\) and there life lasts five hundred years. The life in the
realm of the Four Deva Kings is the equivalent of one day and night in this
hell, and here life lasts five hundred years. People who have taken the life of a
living creature fall into this hell . . .

Outside the four gates of this hell are sixteen separate places which are
associated with this hell. The first is the place of excrement. Here, it is
said, there is intensely hot dung of the bitterest of taste, filled with maggots
with snouts of indestructible hardness. The sinner here eats of the dung and all
the assembled maggots swarm at once for food. They destroy the sinner’s skin,
devour his flesh and suck the marrow from his bones. People who at one time
in the past killed birds or deer fall into this hell. Second is the place of the
turning wheel. It is said that iron walls ten yojanas in height surround it and
that a terrible and intense fire constantly burns within. The fire possessed by
man is like snow when compared to this. With the least of physical contact, the
body is broken into pieces the size of mustard-seeds. Hot iron pours from above
like a heavy rainfall, and in addition, there is a forest of swords, with blades of
exceptional keenness, and these swords, too, fall like rain. The multitude of
agony is in such variety that it cannot be borne. Into this place fall those who
have killed a living being with concupiscence. Third is the place of the burning
vat. It is said that the sinner is seized and placed in an iron vat, and boiled as
one would cook beans. Those who in the past have taken the life of a living
creature, cooked it, and eaten of it fall into this hell. Fourth is the place of
many agony. In this hell there are a trillion different numberless tortures
which cannot be explained in detail. Those who at some time in the past bound
men with rope, beat men with sticks, drove men and forced them to make long
journeys, threw men down steep places, tortured men with smoke, frightened

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\(^1\) A reference to mappō, the last of the three periods of Buddhist Law, that of degeneration
and destruction of the Law that extends for countless years. The first period, ashō, the period
of the true Law, lasted for one thousand years. The second period, zōbō, the period of
the simulated doctrine, endured for five hundred years.

\(^2\) Past, present, and future.

\(^3\) The distance that an army can march in one day.

\(^4\) India and adjoining regions.

\(^5\) The lowest of the six heavens in the world of desire.
small children, and in many other ways brought suffering to their fellow man fall into this hell. Fifth is the place of darkness. It is said that here is pitch blackness that burns constantly with a dark flame. A powerful and intense wind blows against the adamantine mountains, causing them to grind against each other and to destroy each other, so that the bodies of the sinners in between are broken into fragments like grains of sand. Then a hot wind arises which cuts like a sharply honed sword. To this place fall those who have covered the mouths and noses of sheep or who have placed turtles between two tiles and crushed them to death. Sixth is the place of joylessness. Here, it is said, is a great fire which burns intensely night and day. Birds, dogs, and foxes with flaming beaks whose intensely evil cries cause the sinner to feel the greatest of fear come constantly to eat of the sinner, whose bones and flesh lie in great confusion. Hard-nosed maggots course about inside the bone and eat of the marrow. Those who once blew on shells, beat drums, made frightening sounds, or killed birds and animals fall to this hell. Seventh is the place of extreme agony. It is located beneath a precipitous cliff where a fire of iron burns continuously. People who once killed living creatures in a fit of debauchery descend to this hell.

The second division is the Pure Land towards which one must aspire. The rewards of Paradise are of endless merit. Should one speak of them for a hundred kalpas or even for a thousand kalpas, one would not finish describing them; should one count them or give examples of them, there would still be no way to know of them. At present, ten pleasures in praise of the Pure Land will be explained, and they are as but a single hair floating upon the great sea.

First is the pleasure of being welcomed by many saints. Second is the pleasure of the first opening of the lotus. Third is the pleasure of obtaining in one’s own body the ubiquitous supernatural powers of a Buddha. Fourth is the pleasure of the realm of the five wonders. Fifth is the pleasure of everlasting enjoyment. Sixth is the pleasure of influencing others and introducing them to Buddhism. Seventh is the pleasure of assembling with the holy family. Eighth is the pleasure of beholding the Buddha and hearing the Law. Ninth is the pleasure of serving the Buddha according to the dictates of one’s own heart. Tenth is the pleasure of progressing in the way of Buddhahood. . . .

[Among these] first is the pleasure of being welcomed by many saints. Generally when an evil man’s life comes to an end, the elements of wind and fire leave first, and as they control movement and heat, great suffering is felt. When a good man dies, earth and water depart first, and as they leave gently, they cause no pain. How much less painful then must be the death of a man who has accumulated merit through nembutsu! The man who carries this teaching firmly in his mind for a long time feels a great rejoicing arise within him at the approach of death. Because of his great vow, Amida Nyorai, accompanied by many bodhisattvas and hundreds of thousands of monks, appears before the dying man’s eyes, exuding a great light of radiant brilliance. And at this time the great compassionate Kanzeon, extending hands adorned with the hundred blessings and offering a jeweled lotus throne, appears before the faithful. The Bodhisattva Seishi and his retinue of numberless saints chant hymns and at the same time extend their hands and accept him among them. At this time the faithful one, seeing these wonders before his eyes, feels rejoicing within his heart and feels at peace as though he were entering upon meditation. Let us know then, that at the moment that death comes, though it be in a hut of grass, the faithful one finds himself seated upon a lotus throne. Following behind Amida Buddha amid the throng of bodhisattvas, in a moment’s time he achieves birth in the Western Paradise.

Second is the pleasure of the first opening of the lotus. After the believer is born into this land and when he experiences the pleasures of the first opening of the lotus, his joy becomes a hundred times greater than before. It is comparable to a blind man gaining sight for the first time, or to entering a royal palace directly after leaving some rural region. Looking at his own body, he sees it become purplish gold in color. He is gowned naturally in jeweled garments. Rings, bracelets, a crown of jewels, and other ornaments in countless profusion adorn his body. And when he looks upon the light radiating from the Buddha, he obtains pure vision, and because of his experiences in former lives, he hears the sounds of all things. And no matter what color he may see or what sound he may hear, it is a thing to marvel at. Such is the ornamentation of space above that the eye becomes lost in the traces of clouds. The melody of the wheel of the wonderful Law as it turns flows throughout this land of jeweled sound. Palaces, halls, forests, and ponds shine and glitter everywhere. Flocks of wild ducks, geese, and mandarin ducks fly about in the distance and near at hand. One may see multitudes from all the worlds being born into this land like sudden showers of rain. And one may see a throng of saints, numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges, arriving from the many Buddha lands. There are some who climb within the palaces and look about in all directions. There are those who, mounted upon temples, dwell in space. Then again there are some who, living in the sky, recite the sutra and explain the Law. And again there are some who, dwelling in space, sit in meditation. Upon the ground and amid the forests there are others engaged in the same activities. And all about there are those who cross and bathe in the streams and those who walk among the palaces singing and scattering flowers and chanting the praises of the Tathāgata. In this way the numberless celestial beings and saints pursue their own pleasures as they themselves desire. How indeed can one tell in detail of the

6. The pleasure of being first born in this land.

Why do you discard the other practices and speak only of reciting Amida’s name?

**Answer:** There are three ways of understanding this: (1) all of the other practices were explained so that they could be discarded in favor of reciting Amida’s name; (2) all of the other practices were explained in order to assist the practice of reciting Amida’s name; and (3) all of the other practices were explained in order to establish each of the three classes of people according to the two approaches of reciting Amida’s name on the one hand and of all the other practices on the other.

1. When I say in the first case that the other practices were explained so that they could be rejected in favor of reciting Amida’s name, I am following the interpretation of Shandao in the second volume of his *Commentary to the Sūtra on Meditation:* “Although the benefits of both meditation and moral actions have been taught since ancient times, the intention of the Buddha according to his original vow was to make people recite the name of Amida Buddha with single-minded devotion.” Let me explain this further. Although the other practices such as making a vow to become enlightened were explained for the superior class of people, the intention of the Buddha in accordance with his previously mentioned original vow was simply to make all people concentrate on reciting the name of Amida Buddha. There are no other practices in the original vow. All three classes of people together rely on the original vow, and therefore they call on the Buddha of Infinite Life with single-minded devotion.

“Single-minded” is a word used in contradistinction to double-minded and triple-minded. This is much like, for example, the three kinds of temples in India. In the first type of temple, there is only the single-minded practice of the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna); the Buddhism of the Small Vehicle (Hinayāna) is not taught there. In the second kind of temple, there is only the single-minded practice of the Small Vehicle, and they do not study the teachings of the Great Vehicle there. The third type of temple has the Great and the Small Vehicles; and since both types of Buddhism are studied there, they are called temples for joint practices. You should take note that in the Great Vehicle and the Small Vehicle temples, the word “single-minded” is used, but in the temples for joint practices the word “single-minded” is absent.

This is the same manner in which “single-minded” is used in the sūtra. If we add the other practices to the recitation of Amida’s name, it would no longer be single-minded, and following the example of the temples, we would have to refer to it as a joint practice. It is clear, then, from the reference to it as a single-minded recitation that we cannot add to it the other practices. These other practices were explained in the beginning, but in the end there is only the single-minded devotion of recitation. Clearly, we know that since all other practices...