RUNNING TIDE 2018

NEMBUTSU

DHARMAVIDYA SUSTHAMA KASPALITA
SATYAVANI ANANDA

Edited by
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AMIDA U.S.A.

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FOREWORD

Aloha Friends,

Here is the much delayed 2018 issue of Running Tide. I have formatted it as an e-journal in hopes that it will be more accessible.

The theme for this issue is Nembutsu, which is the heart of pure-land practice. Inside you will find two articles from Dharmavidya. The first is a reflection on Nembutsu. The second is a short commentary on the Sattipatthana Sutra, the sutra on "mindfulness."

I have provided a brief article on how we can understand the Nembutsu as a concise reflection on the Four Noble Truths.

Satya shares a lovely and insightful personal reflection on the tension between Many Nembutsu and One Nembutsu.

Kaspa offers a delightful interview with Japanese lay Shin Buddhist practitioner Kazuo, whom he visited with earlier in the year.

Susthama reviews the Nembutsu in the context of Dharmavidya's understanding of the four noble truths.

Finally, this will be my first and last issue as editor of Running Tide. 2018 has been a year of tribulation. This year in Hawaii we have experienced an Incoming Nuclear Missile Warning, a multi-month Volcanic Eruption, and a Hurricane. My wife and I have endured lava, ash fall,

earthquakes, and toxic air. We have been flooded onto our property. We have held hands before the buddha while waiting for nuclear death.

Trauma, when not crippling, can be transformative. It has certainly hit the reset button for me, unearthing priorities long buried under the sediment of daily life. Reminded that life is both precious and limited, I have been cutting away projects and commitments. Running Tide is a good project, it just should not be my project.

May all beings find peace and joy. May each of us play a role in transforming this world into a Pureland.

Namo Amida Bu!

Ananda

December 2018

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NEMBUTSU

BY: REVEREND DHARMAVIDYA, HEAD OF THE ORDER OF AMIDA

Nembutsu means to have Buddha in mind. Nembutsu, therefore, is Buddhism and Buddhism is nembutsu. Everything else - if there is anything else - is auxilliary. Therefore, the message of Buddhism, one way or another, is to choose nembutsu and give up conceit. Only nembutsu is real and true. Every other refuge is a chimera.

The mind is conditioned by its object. The best object is Buddha. To see one Buddha is as good as to see all Buddhas. The essence of the nembutsu way is that I, even I, who have no worth, am cherished by all the Buddhas past, present and future, in all worlds. And in being so cherished I must be also the most worthy, the golden child, for I am the beloved and, therefore, the angels will protect and save me. This being so, I need not fear where I tread. Nembutsu, therefore is liberation. It is the path of one who need not fear the world nor its undoubted perils. Even if the whole world be on fire, with the nembutsu one will pass through that fire and, though the flesh be peeled from the bone, no spiritual harm can possibly befall.

To see the Buddha is to see the Dharma, therefore, nembutsu is to have in mind the Dharmas of all the Buddhas. This is vast and unfathomable. Therefore, fathoming it is not essential. It is enough to turn

toward. Those who turn toward will necessarily enter. As the mind of a being is, so the future of that being unfolds.

This is like putting down one's small light in order to be a reflection of a greater light. One might be a grubby or cracked mirror, but the light reflected is the same light. When we look into a mirror the inside appears to have great depth, but when we look behind the mirror we see only a dark side. When we look at the mirror a second time we realise that the depth is actually not in the mirror at all, but is the whole world reflected, extending even to the vastness of space. In the same way, the bright moon of the Dharma is reflected in one, even though one be the tiniest dewdrop. But only in darkness does this occur.

If one thinks about this idea of reflection, one can realise that the depth of wisdom does not depend upon any personal attribute other than transparency, since the reflection of the moon even in a dewdrop is as deep as the moon is high. The depth depends upon the Dharma, not upon the self. Depending upon self one can never be very much, but depending upon the Dharma one participates in a mystery of cosmic proportions.

Nembutsu is like this. Not a matter of cultivating one's personal depth, but, rather, of darkening the self so that the Dharma may be naturally reflected. This is the nature of humility. In simplest form, it is to take the position of the bombu being. This is the myokonin ideal of the pureland way. The myokonin takes the part of the foolish being, the incompetent, the vulnerable, the poor in spirit; they shall enter the Pure Land.

This is the special character of the nembutsu way - to be free from self-aggrandisement. Can anybody doubt that such is the teaching of Buddha? The idea that Buddhism consists of techniques for self enhancement is like trying to ride a horse backwards. Whatever enhancements may come, come as by-products of dealing with life in a straightforward way.

Shakyamuni Buddha is said to have given 84,000 teachings, one each for the 84,000 types of beings. In fact, Shakyamuni did not need to give any teachings at all. He merely shared his life. He responded to whatever came before him, just like a mirror. If there were 84,000

beings then there would automatically and necessarily be 84,000 teachings. All those teachings were fulfilled in him lifting his foot.

After several years of asceticism in which he explored every possibility for spiritual self-development, he finally gave up that conceit. He received the daughters of Mara and they turned into celestial flowers. Those flowers continued to fall throughout his life and he gave them all away. Nembutsu is such flowers in the sky, appearing out of empty space, unearned, unmade, unpossessed: blessings without limit, yet no more and no less than each situation warrants.

Although Shakyamuni suffered for us until his ribs stuck out, still most people do not understand the message. They continue to follow in the steps of the path he followed before his illumination. How many hours of sitting cross-legged does it take? How long do you have to polish a clay tile to make a mirror? Did he, therefore, suffer in vain? There will be some few who will understand.

Nowadays there are innumerable people doing meditation or mindfulness without the least idea of renunciation, yet if you follow a path of physical practice, physical renunciation is essential. This kind of popular practice, therefore, has but little relationship to the practice of Shakyamuni Buddha. I myself am, in any case, incapable of it. If enlightenment depends upon sitting cross-legged, what of those of us who have weak legs? Therefore wise sages, such as Honen Shonin, asked, is there an alternative?

If one cannot do the yogic exercise to perfection, can one at least do something in one's heart? This is nembutsu! To turn one's heart and mind toward the source of the light, even without fully knowing what one is doing. The clumsy fool somehow knows the direction just as a person letting go of the side of the swimming pool discovers, if he does not thrash about, that he can float. This is not intellectual knowledge.

Shakyamuni was like that. The knowledge came to him as and when needed. It was not something he concocted, not a samskara. He lived each day in trust, responding to its miscellaneous circumstances and doing whatever was necessary. We can say he was completely willing. How was it possible to be completely willing? Only by living the nembutsu.

When we trust the nembutsu, we no longer take refuge in

ourselves, no longer search for personal strength. The modern idea is that when the world does not love you, you should take refuge in loving yourself. This is a gospel of despair. To be alive is to be loved already - that is nembutsu. Blessed are those who grieve for they shall be comforted. Nembutsu is comfort in the midst of the dukkha of this conditional world. Here, everything is impermanent, but nothing is ever lost. This is the no-birth teaching of all the Buddhas.

In the middle period of his ministry, Buddha expressed the prajna paramita: the colourful life is empty, the emptiness is a colourful life. Shakyamuni has a colourful life because he comes from emptiness, which is to say, from the nembutsu. He had tried running up and down on this shore looking for emptiness - looking for relief from the terrible grief of having no mother, of, in fact, having destroyed her life by his own birth. How ardently and desperately he sought relief! How much did he have to suffer in order to redeem the sin? There is no limit. This kind of practice is endless.

Then he turned. He realised, "It is not about me." Body and mind fell away, as they say. The aim of self achievement was seen through. Emptiness cannot be grasped. All that is needed is to turn around, which is to have faith. He saw the circularity of the world of constructions: vanity, vanity, all is vanity. One who has become empty in such a way might well seem generous, good, patient, energetic, mindful and wise, but no amount of cultivating such qualities will construct that emptiness. This religion is not a bribe toward good citizenship, simply a liberation. Those who hear of the nembutsu way either laugh out loud and think it ridiculous or else experience a most profound sense of relief. Both are right to do so.

The emptiness that he found was not the conquest of grief but its acceptance, not the redeeming of sin, but the realisation of being loved anyway. I cannot undo the vast accumulation of karma that I have build up wandering through the delusive triple world, but I can give thanks for the love light and let it do its work. Nembutsu is thank you for the Dharma already present.

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A NOTE ON SATIPATTHANA

BY: REVEREND DHARMAVIDYA, HEAD OF THE ORDER OF AMIDA

Much contemporary practice of Buddhism is based on the Satthipatthana Sutta. I would, therefore, like to comment upon what the sutta says.

As is well known the sutta has four sections. The four sections are applications of mindfulness. They are not definitions of mindfulness, nor are they instructions for cultivating mindfulness. The sutta assumes that mindfulness is already established. It tells you what you can do next - what you do when you are already mindful. The idea that mindfulness consists of being conscious of the here and now is wrong.

Mindfulness is nembutsu. When Buddha speaks of mindfulness he is speaking of what one should have in mind which means the spiritual truth that one carries within that acts as protection and guide. When you have the Buddha and his Dharma in mind, then you can do these exercises and if you do not have such mind-fullness established then they are pointless.

So, establish nembutsu. Then, the first section is about contemplating the body. Buddhism, as we know, offers many ways of investigating the body, ranging through studying the breath, being aware of actions, meditating on the four elements, contemplating the stages of decay of the body, and so on. These exercises all show us our depen-

dent, transitory, bombu nature in its physical manifestation. This is the path - to have Buddha in mind and contemplate one's own frailty.

The second set of exercises is concerned with feelings. The message is the same. Feelings are fickle and unreliable. This is our bombu nature in its emotional manifestation. The third set is concerned with consciousness. The message is the same again. Actually the second and third sections are difficult to separate. Studying lust, for instance, falls into the third section. Classification does not matter much because the point is to destroy our arrogance by contemplating our actual dependent nature, but not merely that, because the whole thing is done within a frame of mindfulness, which is to say, of having a mind full of the Tathagata.

So the spirit of this is: While holding to my faith in the tathagata, I observe the dependent and unreliable nature of my body and mind, I see in direct experience that I am a bombu creature. This is the basis upon which one can be overwhelmed by gratitude. One can cry out the nembutsu as a heartfelt thank you.

Those who want to reduce Buddhism to a psychological mental training misconstrue this sutta by assuming that mindfulness refers to the content of these exercizes rather than the context in which they are to be performed. The practice of Buddhism is first to establish mindfulness of the three Jewels and then to investigate one's existential condition. This investigation demonstrates one's dependent nature, which is what Shakyamuni discovered. Arriving at ever greater personal humility then opens one more and more to the unimpeded light.

Dwelling in the context of nembutsu and realising one's bombu nature in these experiential ways, one is then in a position to contemplate the other teachings of Buddha which form the content of the fourth section of the sutta. Established in settled faith, one can observe the hindrances: sensuality, anger, sloth, agitation and doubt; one can see the skandas functioning; one can be aware of the senses playing their games; one can appreciate the seven factors of enlightenment.

Indeed, the seven factors recapitulate this same process. They begin with the setting up of mindfulness and continue with investiga-

tion, just as the whole sutta does. This then yields energy, joy, peace, concentration and equanimity. Why equanimity? Because this is a process of ever deepening faith. It is not a static doctrine, but a dynamic practice.

Most importantly, this settled faith enables one to observe that dukkha is a truth for noble ones, that samudaya is a truth for noble ones, that nirodha is a truth for noble ones and that when this is the case one is necessarily upon a noble path. When one sees that all this functions quite naturally then one has done what needs to be done.

The contemporary misreading of the nature of mindfulness amounts to a co-option of it into the materialistic culture of our times. No doubt this will continue unabated, but those who seek the salvation that Buddha offers need to realise the true intent which is quite different.

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NEMBUTSU AND THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

BY: REVEREND ANANDA

Nembutsu is to Amida Buddhism what Zazen is to Zen. It is the heart of our tradition. It is the expression of our shared religious life. It is our practice.

Traditionally, the Nembutsu is understood as a refuge prayer with the following formula, "I, a foolish (evil) being — Namo — take refuge in Amida Buddha."

This is a good, basic understanding. However, I argue that we can expand our understanding of the Nembutsu and enrich our spiritual practice by associating the three words of the Nembutsu, Namo Amida Bu, with the Four Noble Truths.

Namo is our life under the full sway of the First and Second Noble Truths. That life is then touched by Amida, the Third Noble Truth. Having awoken to the reality of Amida, we may then seek a more compassionate way to live. This is the Fourth Noble Truth, the Bu of the Nembutsu.

Namo and Bu both represent our lives. Namo is our life before being touched by Amida's light. Bu is our life as a response to encountering Amida.

Na — The First Noble Truth

Na, the first syllable of the word Namo represents the First Noble Truth. The Buddha chose the word *dukkha* to express this truth. Dukkha refers to the axel hole in a wheel.

As a prince, the Buddha probably spent quite a bit of time traveling in various types of chariots and carts. He knew from experience how travel in these conveyances could be a mix of comfort and discomfort. Depending on the terrain, speed of travel, and quality of the vehicle, a trip will be more or less pleasant. Likewise, life consists of ups, downs, and plateaus. Sometimes life can be unpleasant and difficult, at other times it can be ecstatic, and much of the time it is probably uneventful.

Our bodies are fragile and wonderful and therefore a source of both discomfort and pleasure. Life can be filled with joy, wonder, pleasure, and hope. Friendship, love, and birth can bring immense happiness. However, there is also, sickness, aging, and death. We experience pain, loss, and grief. We must deal with people and situations we'd rather not deal with. We may, sadly, be separated from the people and things we do love. Often, we don't really get what we want. This is the reality of dukkha.

Mo — The Second Noble Truth

Mo, the second syllable of Namo represents the Second Noble Truth. The Buddha chose the word *Samudaya* to express this truth. Samudaya means that which arises with dukkha. Samudaya is how we react to the bumps on our metaphorical road.

Most of our reactions arise unbidden and unwanted. We might say they are instinctual. We try to avoid the rough terrain of the road and seek out smooth, easy paths. Many of these reactions are quite sensible. We want to avoid situations which are harmful. We desire situations or relationships that are nurturing.

However, we also react to the simple reality that life is not always the way we want it to be. No one really wants to experience the

unpleasant states of mind associated with anger or frustration. Nevertheless, these unpleasant mind states seem to arise on their own. We might get angry standing in the checkout line behind a person who can't seem to complete their transaction. We would all rather just be happy and at peace, but agitation arises unwanted. We didn't seek it. We didn't think, "Now I will get angry." Anger just arose. That is the essence of the second noble truth. We are constantly reacting to the experiences of life.

Unfortunately, this means that most of us live in a constant state of reactivity, an unsettled inner churning. We are either trying to push things/situations/feelings away (aversion), get more of something we perceive as pleasurable (desire), or we are trying to escape (delusion).

This active interplay of dukkha and samudaya, the First and Second Noble Truths, is the Namo of the Nembutsu. Namo encapsulates "us" as reactionary beings. Experiences arise and we react. As Namo beings, we are stuck in cyclic reactionary-ness. We cannot free ourselves. We cannot lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We are trapped. We need help.

Amida — The Third Noble Truth

Amida, the second word of the Nembutsu, represents the Third Noble Truth. *Nirodha* is the word the Buddha uses to express this truth. It means unbound. Translated in the affirmative nirodha means boundless, which is a synonym for Amida. Amida Buddha is our *rupa*, or place holder, for the experiential relationship with the boundless.

There is more to life than the endlessness reactionary-ness of the dukkha-samudaya cycle, this is the Third Noble Truth. Dukkha is true. Samudaya is true. Nirodha — Boundlessness — is also true.

Nirodha is often synonymous with *nibbana*, which is better known in the West as Nirvana. The historical Buddha used many synonyms for Nirvana. Some of them are: the island; the shelter; the refuge; the unconditioned; the deathless; freedom; the truth; the other shore; the peaceful; the wonderful; the secure; the amazing; the subtle; and the

very difficult to see. In our tradition, we just call Nirvana, Amida. Alternatively, Nirvana is equated with *Sukahvati* — the Pureland.

Many of the traditional metaphors for Nirvana apply to descriptions of Amida and the Pureland. Amida as Amitayus is the deathless. Sukhavati is the true refuge. Amida's light reaches everywhere and is, therefore, amazing and wonderful, as well as subtle and difficult to see. If it were easy to see, we would not be stuck in the reactionary-ness of the dukkha-samudaya cycle.

Nirvana is not a static ultimate state that is completely separate from this world. Rather, it is always present and accessible. It is both inconceivably far to the West and imminent, experienced in the sounds of birds and insects, wind and rain. Amida is found in the smile of a child and the kind and comforting words of a stranger. Amida's boundless and unconditional compassion is expressed in every act of compassion. Every loving act is a manifestation of Amida's limitless love.

It is said that there are Buddhas in all the realms of existence, including the hells. Buddhas are present in the most miserable of situations. Encountering a Buddha in a hell realm or the depths of misery, we are unbound from the desolate, hellish vision. We rest, at least temporarily, in the Pureland. This is demonstrated in the Contemplation Sutra, where Queen Vaidehi, in-prisoned and facing death, is comforted by the Buddha.

This is not to make light of the very real and often horrendous suffering that people endure. It does not justify violence, privation, and racism. But it does offer hope. In certain people, it can inspire heroic compassionate action in the most hellish of situations. A good example is found in the martyrdom of Polish Franciscan Friar Maximilian Kolbe at Auschwitz Concentration Camp in Poland.

The Third Noble truth is hope. It affirms that there is more to life than the dreary reactionary-ness of the dukkha-samudaya cycle. Boundlessness can be encountered directly. Encountering Amida transforms our experience of Namo. Life still consists of ups and downs, pain and pleasure. Reactions still arise unwanted. Now, however, we realize they are all held within the context of boundless compassion and love.

Bu — the Fourth Noble Truth

Bu is short for Buddha. It is the fourth word of the Nembutsu and represents the Fourth Noble Truth. *Marga* is the word the Buddha chose to express this truth. It is generally translated as path or road, often a foot path. It also has a sense of track or trace of a path. It is, like so many words that Shakyamuni used, a practical word grounded in our shared experience.

Sometimes the path through life is broad, flat, and easy to navigate. At other times, the way is difficult to find because it is just the merest hint of a trail. It is easily missed. We wander off the path, lose our way and get caught up in all sorts of difficulties.

Fortunately, Shakyamuni Buddha has already marked a trail. That trail is called the Eightfold Path.

Traditionalist teach that the Eightfold Path is the way that leads to enlightenment. For them, enlightenment resides elsewhere It is a goal to be sought. The Eightfold Path is the means to attain their goal of enlightenment.

As Amida Buddhists, we are held within Amida's light. That is all the light we require. Therefore, we do not need to seek enlightenment as a goal of life. Rather, we simply try to navigate life skillfully and helpfully. The eightfold path laid out by the Buddha is an aid to living a beneficial life. Following the eightfold path we discover the Pure Land in this very world.

The Eightfold Path is usually divided into three areas: *sila*, *samadhi*, and *prajna*. Sila is often translated as morality or ethics and is primarily focused on our conduct in the world. I prefer to translate sila as Compassionate Action. We strive to live in such a way that we reduce the amount of suffering and confusion and increase the amount of happiness and wellbeing in the world.

Samadhi is our vision and hope. It is our continual return to the vision of the Pureland. It is our constant reflection upon and remembrance of Amida Buddha. There is a reason one of Amida's names is

Amitabha, the Buddha of measureless light. The light of the Buddha helps us to see the world clearly.

Prajna, is wisdom. Wisdom comes through a combination of learning and experience. Our insight and understanding must be honed against real life experiences. Since the world is ever-changing, we are always growing and deepening our wisdom. Wisdom is never complete. Prajna, like *karuna* (Compassion), is dynamic. We may have profound insight into the boundless nature of reality. However, unless we can translate that insight into compassionate action — action that tangibly benefits others — it is not true prajna. Prajna cannot be perfected without sila, compassionate action in the world.

Conclusion

As Amida Buddhists, our life experience is mediated by Amida through the Nembutsu. The religious life of the Nembutsu is dynamic and responsive. Saying the Nembutsu — Namo Amida Bu — we move symbolically through the entire arc of the religious life. We begin as Namo beings, hemmed in by the reactionary-ness of the dukkha-samudaya cycle. Through the Nembutsu we encounter Amida — Boundless Awakening — also known as Nirvana. Amida awakens us to the hopeful Vision of the Pureland and provides respite from the reactionary-ness of the dukkha-samudaya cycle. Filled with awe and gratitude, we respond by striving to follow the path of compassionate living laid out by Shakyamuni Buddha.

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4

MANY NEMBUTSU OR ONE NEMBUTSU: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

BY: REVEREND SATYAVANI

I've always worked really hard to be a 'good girl'. When I was young, I received praise when I was clever or when I behaved as a little girl 'should' behave. When I was more chaotic or emotional or when I had inconvenient needs, I noticed that my parents withdrew or became distressed. Thus began a life of people-pleasing and self-control, and a sense of never quite feeling good enough.

This talent for self-discipline and organisation has had many benefits. It has allowed me to write six novels and a few other books whilst working a day job, and to combine building my own psychotherapy practice with other work. It helps me to juggle being a priest, landlord, gardener, mentor, and all the other roles involved in running the temple. I get stuff done! It has brought me confidence in my own abilities – a self-sufficiency. This compulsion to be a 'good girl' has also led to all kinds of trouble which has forced me to take refuge in things such as 12 step recovery and Buddhism, the most valuable resources in my life.

One of the things I've struggled with throughout my spiritual journey is how disciplined I should be about my spiritual practice. Should I force myself to practice every day, no matter what? Forcing

oneself to do spiritual practice can only be a good thing, surely? When I attended a Zen centre, I spent a whole year doing zazen every morning and night, religiously (!) – because that was what good Zen students did.

In my experience, when I have a strong 'ought' around any activity it has a propensity to deaden it. It sucks any meaning or nourishment out of it, and turns it into an empty gesture. As an example, I might invite a friend round for coffee even though I'm having a busy week, simply because it's my turn and 'that's what good friends do'. When I do this I find it almost impossible to enjoy seeing my friend – I become a split of the fake and compliant 'good girl' and a rebellious part which resents my forcing it along. I've made the choice to go, but it's as if I'm not really there of my free will. My invitation is motivated by fear – a fear of disappointing my friend, and ultimately of being abandoned by them.

I'm simplifying a complex situation for anecdotal purposes, but I want to give you a taste of how it is when I do my spiritual practice because 'that's what a good girl does'. The hours and hours of zazen were also motivated by fear – my ego needed to prop itself up and be seen by others (and myself) as a conscientious person firmly on the path to enlightenment. Which brings me on to the questions I'd like to reflect on in this article: how many nembutsu does a 'good Pureland Buddhist' do? Does the motivation of the practitioner matter? And finally, when it comes to practice, what is the best solution for this particular bombu being?

As a general rule, Honen emphasised that we should do as many nembutsu as we can, and his most famous disciple Shinran taught that one nembutsu said with faith was enough. When I read Honen, I do find him restating this 'many nembutsu is good' principle many times. When answering a question about whether one should keep count by a rosary when doing nembutsu or not, he said:

"The point is that you cannot repeat it too often, and so you need to repeat it continuously. It is not that a certain definite number is necessary at all, but that you keep repeating the Nembutsu. But we exhort to the repetition of a certain number of times, so that people will not give way to laziness." (p57 Honen the Buddhist Saint)

However, when explaining how Dharmakara became Amida Buddha, Honen reminds us that "...[Dharmakara] vowed that He would come from Paradise to welcome everyone who called upon His name ten times or even once, and that He would refuse to become a Buddha in case He failed to do this." (p45) Ten times, or even once. Honen also states "There is power enough in the Nembutsu, even if pronounced but once, to destroy all the sins whose effects have persisted through eighty billions of *kalpas*." (p46)

When I look at Shinran's position, he does seem to emphasise the singular moment of surrendering to Amida's Vow, as here in his translation of the Larger Pureland Sutra:

"Sentient being, say they hear the Name, realize even one thought-moment of shinjin and joy, which is Amida's sincere mind giving itself to them, and aspiring to be born in that land, they then attain birth and dwell in the stage of non-retrogression." (p32 Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling)

'Only one thought-moment of shinjin (settled faith) and joy' – there's no need here for counting many nembutsu. Although Shinran also says:

"Signs of long years of saying the nembutsu and aspiring for birth can be seen in the change in the heart that had been bad and in the deep warmth for friends and fellow-practitioners; this is the sign of rejecting the world. You should understand this fully." (p197 The Essential Shinran)

Here he seems to be acknowledging that, although one moment of settled faith is enough, repeated and ongoing repetition of the nembutsu does have a positive and deepening effect on the practitioner over the years. Both Honen and Shinran seem to say that once is enough, but many is also helpful. How can we reconcile these positions?

This question is addressed in the booklet 'Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling', which is a translation of Shinran's piece on this matter. In the introduction it says:

"But for one seeking to follow this apparently straightforward teaching, there naturally arises a basic doctrinal question: If the virtue of the Name resides with the Buddha's practice and not man's act, why

is one encouraged to say the Name continuously – especially since the sutras state that ten utterances, or even one, is enough to ensure birth?" (p6, Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling)

So far, my article has been looking at the question of one or many nembutsu from a position of self-power. What do our teachers expect us do? How can we be good Pureland Buddhists? What is guaranteed to get us into the Pure Land? What can I get away with? Here, we are reminded that the whole point of Pureland Buddhism is that we are foolish beings, continually tripped up by our own trailing egos. Amitabha's vow was necessary precisely for this reason – we can't reason it out and we can't get it right, even if we did know what 'right' is.

I find Honen immensely reassuring in this regard. I love his pragmatic reply to a student's question about whether it was a sin to drink sake or not; "Indeed one ought not to drink, but (you know) it is the way of the world." (p56, Honen the Buddhist Saint) He also shares what happens after a visit from the Vicar-General, who confessed to Honen how difficult he found it to practice nembutsu without his mind becoming confused and full of evil thoughts. "As Honen went back into his room, he remarked, 'How hard it is to silence the mind, to prevent evil thoughts from arising, and to put one's whole soul into the calling upon the sacred name. It is like taking out one's eyes or cutting off one's nose.'" (p90)

In a recent article about once-calling or many-calling, Dharmavidya writes in a similar vein:

"The better world that we long for is one in which every act is completely clean, free of any attempt to generate personal merit or credit. Yet, we know, if we look honestly, that almost everything that we do actually do, drags along with it a shadow of self-serving, of counting. We simply can't help it and even our efforts to divest ourselves of this dreadful habit are themselves contaminated in the very same way. Such is our lot."

Honen gets it, and so does Dharmavidya. I am reading Honen, Shrinran and Dharmavidya through the obfuscating fuzz of my 'good-girl consciousness'. It's impossible for me to approach a decision about how much practice I should do without my own agenda infecting the

process. Oh, Shinran says once is enough and I'm already full of oughts, so no nembutsu for me. Oh, Honen says I should do lots of nembutsu, so I'll do that and then I'll feel really good about how virtuous I am. Oh, Dharmavidya says that I can't win anyway, so I'll just watch TV instead.

Thank goodness for Amida's Vow. Amida made his vow for people just like me, drowning in confusion and 'oughts', driven by foolish passions. Someone like me, yearning for clarity, for peace, and for refuge.

I'd like to go back to the question posed in the introduction to 'Once-calling and Many-calling'. "If the virtue of the Name resides with the Buddha's practice and not man's act, why is one encouraged to say the Name continuously?" The author goes on to offer us a quote from Honen as a solution:

"As to entrusting, you should believe that birth is settled with a single utterance; as to practice, you should continue throughout your life." (From Shinran's collection of the words of Honen, 'Guide to Birth in the Pure Land (Saiho shi-nan sho), SSZ IV, 216)

We should trust that one single nembutsu is enough to ensure our being seized by Amida – what a relief. And we should also carry on practising! But we shouldn't practice because we 'ought to', or think that it is a way of accumulating merit. We shouldn't start thinking that we are 'making something of ourselves' (Summary of Faith and Practice) – this is where we fall back into the trap of self-power. As Dharmavidya puts it in his article:

"Thus, we can perhaps understand that while Buddhism teaches us how to generate and accumulate merit, it also offers something else, something even more precious, something that does not involve counting. The Buddha Amida is so named for this reason. Amida is completely beyond counting. Every single nembutsu is itself equal to a million nembutsu. This is the crazy logic of the other shore."

Amida is completely beyond counting. Amida sees straight through my attempts at pleasing him, thank goodness. Yes, he's pleased when I do nembutsu, because when I chant it plugs me into the Buddha and helps me to remember the bigger picture. And yes, he also loves me on the days when I forget him completely and spend all

my time on the self-perfection project or on perfectly meeting my needs.

So where does this leave me, in terms of what practice I actually decide to do? I can't let go of the organised part of me just yet! I've come to a compromise with my good-girl, which is that I do five minutes of nembutsu, half a mala, every morning before I do anything else. This short length of practice feels very do-able and so doesn't activate the strong 'oughts' that get me tangled into knots. It also ensures that I touch in with the Buddha at the start of every day. I do find that it helps me focus on the day ahead in a different way.

I also say the nembutsu throughout the day (e.g. as a grace before eating), recite nembutsu as a part of our weekly services, and enjoy occasional immersive nembutsu sessions where we chant for hours on end. All of these ways of practising feel 'easy' (natural might be a better word) rather than being a self-power stretch. I try to remember that I am choosing to do this practice, rather than dragging myself along because it'll make me a good Buddhist. Sometimes I manage this, and sometimes I don't. Namo Amida Bu.

I love the teaching Ajahn Chah gave when he said that if someone's straying too far to the right they need to go to the left, and if they're straying too far to the left they need to go to the right. Practice is a very personal thing, and what's right for me might be left for you. Do you need to have more structure to encourage you to practice, or less? Do you find it more supportive to practice alone or with others? Is it the right time to stretch yourself with a target like a million nembutsu in a year, or a solitary nembutsu retreat? When you ask Amida what is best for you, what does he say?

As someone with an iron-strong self-will, I find other-power teachings necessary; they cut through my attempts at manipulation like a hot knife through vegan butter. Until I slip right back into self-power, of course. But, as Shinran said, there also seems to be a slow change in me over time. As I continue to be soaked in the Pureland teachings and in the nembutsu I feel my gratitude for these teachings increasing. As time goes on I find a greater proportion of the motivation for my practice is gratitude and not self-seeking, love and not fear. When my mentor Padma first suggested that we say 'Namo Amida Bu' as a way of

saying thank you to the Buddha, I didn't know what he meant – now I do. 'Faith and practice cannot be differentiated' (from the Summary of Faith and Practice), and as time goes on my practice flows more and more from my faith. Which is gifted to me by Amida, of course. Namo Amida Bu. Deep bow.

If you'd like to experiment with a five minute-a-day nembutsu practice or pick it up again after a break, you can find our free 30 day online course here: http://www.amidashu.org/30-days-of-nembutsu

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5

COMPARING APPROACHES TO NEMBTUSU

BY: ACHARYA KASPALITA

A few weeks ago I was walking through the snow leaden pines on Mt. Hiei with a Japanese friend, Kazuo Yamashita. We stepped carefully on the frozen paths, held tightly on to the cold railings at the side of the roads and talked about our foolish natures. Satya had wisely stayed in the warm visitor centre at Enjrakuji, a little way down the mountain. Kazuo and I had decided to walk on and visit the nembutsu hall that Shinran worked in during his time there.

When we reached the nembutsu hall it was closed. But we stepped up onto the platform around the wooden hall and placed our palms against the temple walls. How strange and wonderful to be walking where Shinran walked.

When Ananda asked me to write something for Running Tide on the nembutsu, one of his suggestions was to draw out the differences between Shinshu and Amida Shu Buddhism. Back in the UK that seemed like the perfect excuse to re-connect with Kazuo.

Kazuo and I first met at a conference in The Buddhist House, the old Amida Order community in Leicestershire. He presented on Shin based Person Centred Counselling (SPCA) and I was impressed by how deeply he described his connection to Amida.

Kazuo is a disciple of the late Gisho Saiko, a Jodo Shinshu priest, professor of psychology and founder of SPCA. Gisho Saiko met Amida Shu teacher and founder Dharmavidya in Japan, and inspired and encouraged him to bring Pure Land Buddhism to the West.

Kazuo is a lay Shin Buddhist, and as I was interested in the practice of Pureland Buddhism 'on the ground', rather than in a training temple, he seemed like the ideal person to talk too.

I asked him about his own faith and practice, as a Shin Buddhist.

"How often do you visit your local temple?" I asked.

"Not every day. Not every week," Kazuo replied.

Just a few times a year, it turned out, for special ceremonies and events. That chimed with my experience at Higashi Honganji – the mother temple of Shinshū Ōtani-ha (the smaller of the two largest Shinshu schools, it still has 5.5 million members).

Satya had been to a morning service in the Founders Hall, a large beautiful space at Higashi Honganji. There were a dozen or so priests attending the main altar, and leading the chanting. Filling the rest of the hall were perhaps fifty trainees or young priests, Satya, myself and two Japanese lay people.

In contrast, at the services here in Malvern, lay people usually outnumber the priests.

"What about home practice?" I asked.

Kazuo laughed and described himself as lazy. Most of the lay people connected to his temple have a daily practice. Kazuo's practice is more intermittent. "What does that home practice look like?" I asked. Kazuo said it was chanting some of Shinran's words from Shoshinge or his Wasan, and nembutsu. No meditation at all. He smiled, recalling hearing his Grandfather chanting nembutsu every morning, many years ago.

I was curious about a deeper sense of the practice. I asked some questions to try and draw out Kazuo's understanding of the purpose or meaning of nembutsu, and his framework for faith and practice.

"Do you practice in order to connect to the Buddha?" I asked, "Or in order to get something?"

"No." Kazuo replied.

He explained that Amida Buddha has already practiced for many

kalpas, that Amida Buddha created the nembutsu and directs it towards ordinary people. Kazuo said that he accepts this power of Amida, so he doesn't need practice to get him anywhere.

For Kazuo nembutsu is a reminder that he is already saved. "In daily life, I am conscious of outward life" he said. His mind is on his work, or on driving safely, or whatever practical matters are at hand. Having a deliberate chanting practice reminds him of the deep trust in his own salvation.

Much of this resonated with my own experience. When I first came to Pureland Buddhism my nembutsu was very much a calling to the Buddha, hoping that there was someone or something to receive my call, but without much confidence that would be the case. Now, as a person of faith in Amida, my nembutsu is a thank you for the reception the Buddha has already given me.

In my work with aspirants we regularly reflect on the precepts. Each month I send out a few of the Ministry precepts to the aspirants group, including a reflection of my own, and an encouragement for the aspirants to think about which precepts they already keep, which feel more difficult, and so on.

I wondered about Kazuo's relationship with the precepts.

"In Shin Buddhism," I asked "is there a connection between nembutsu and ethics?"

"Ahh," replied Kazuo, "that's a very delicate question." He paused, "I am afraid of some misunderstanding, of why I not pay attention to Buddhist ethics."

I promised that I'd reflect his words back, and he could check that I had understood them correctly. I understood his nervousness. Pureland Buddhism has been accused of 'licenced evil' in the past.

Kazuo said that as long as shinjin had happened in this lifetime he would be collected and taken to the Pureland after death, where he would become a Buddha just like Amida, and thus able to save many sentient beings.

In this way of thinking Amida is the ship to the Pureland, and shinjin is the way onto the ship. Shinjin is usually translated as awakening of faith. Kazuo translates it as 'turn about' which gives some of the flavour of the deep seated change that he experienced in his own

shinjin. In that 'turn about' Kazuo went from questioning the dharma, to deeply believing in it. He explained that even saying "the dharma is true" doesn't really get to the heart of it. It is not an understanding, Kazuo said, tapping his head as he struggled to put it into words. "It is..." he said, and made a gesture of grounding himself. If you are standing – bend your knees, bounce a little, feel the ground beneath you, get your hands and arms involved in the movement, and you will have some sense of what he was trying to communicate.

In an earlier conversation Kazuo had talked about Amida coming from below, compared to the Christian idea of God above. I detected something of this in what he was expressing now; a feeling of being ultimately supported.

"Amida's power is great, absolutely great. No words can describe it." he said. Sometimes, he explained, he has a sense of the Buddha's great power, coming up and into him, and then gratitude and joy appears.

This is the centre of Shinshu practice for Kazuo: shinjin and 'deep trust' in Amida carrying him to the Pureland after death.

Listening back to the recording it's clear that for Kazuo the experience of shinjin, or 'turn about', is *the* most important thing. My experience of Amida Shu is that we talk about faith – but we don't emphasise any particular moment of awakening. I remember Dharmavidya once using the image of snow melting and falling from the roof as an image for this awakening. Sometimes all of the snow comes down at once, and you cannot help notice the experience in that moment. Sometimes the snow comes down one drip at a time, and only later you look back and wonder, "Where did all of the snow go?"

I have experienced both of these in my own practice: moments of being absolutely sure I am held by Amida, in an embodied way, and a slowly deepening trust in the Buddha that I only really notice when I stop and look back across the whole of my life.

I remember chatting with a Jodo Shu minister years ago, who was ministering to elderly Shin Buddhists. Their main concern, he said, was whether they had had a genuine shinjin experience or not. Time was running out and they wanted to make sure they had got their ticket to the Pureland.

I find that I have some sympathy for Ippen in this area. He once wrote:

Everyone laments not awakening faith that their birth is decisively settled. This is completely absurd. No settledness is to be found in the hearts of foolish beings. Settledness is the Name. Thus, even though you lack faith that your birth is decisively settled, if you say the Name leaving all to your lips, you will be born.[1]

Perhaps that chimes with Kazuo's feeling that it is Amida's nembutsu at work, but the emphasis on shinjin – as experienced by the practitioner – seems to undermine this.

Personally I want to celebrate Kazuo's shinjin, and trust that those without shinjin, but with the name on their lips, will also be reborn in the Pure Land.

Returning to the precepts, Kazuo explained that ethics play no great part in this lifetime. In the Pureland one becomes a Buddha and is able to help all beings, in this lifetime one concentrates on getting to the Pureland. In Kazuo's words, "Amida's great power – other power – turns around my karmic evil to karmic goodness. It's beyond my thinking. I totally take refuge in other power. It' s great! If shinjin is realized in me, Amida's great ship takes me to Jodo [the Pure Land] and I become a Buddha the same as Amida. This shinjin is the source of my joy."

"[In this lifetime] Amida's wisdom directing his virtue to me always shows me how keeping Buddhist ethics is difficult. It's impossible. Amida is giving me this reflection."

I was reminded of Shinran's words in the Tannisho:

Concerning compassion, there is a difference between the Path of Sages and the Pure Land Path.

Compassion in the Path of Sages is to pity, commiserate with, and care for beings. It is extremely difficult, however, to accomplish the saving of others just as one wishes.

Compassion in the Pure Land Path should be understood as first attaining Buddhahood quickly through saying the nembutsu and, with the mind of great love and compassion, freely benefiting sentient beings as one wishes.

However much love and pity we may feel in our present lives, it is

hard to save others as we wish; hence, such compassion remains unfulfilled. Only the saying of the nembutsu, then, is the mind of great compassion that is thoroughgoing.

Thus were his words.[2]

In our own school there is a much closer marrying of faith and ethics in this lifetime. In *Mysticism and False Dichotomies,* Dharmavidya writes:

The spiritual apostle goes forth for the benefit of the many. This does not mean that such people are opposed to the practise of a mystical discipline. Nothing could be further from the truth. I was taught by my Zen Master that "Service to humanity is another name for Zen training". For "Zen" one can read "mysticism", the deeper experiences of the spirit that arise through the discipline of religious prayer, reflection and meditation.

A hallmark of spirituality, as I understand it, is the bringing together of two dimensions of religious life: the socially engaged and the direct seeing into the heart of reality. Tearing these two apart does profound damage to the human spirit. Nonetheless it is common and many people fail to see how the two come together as one.[3]

Within the teachings of Amida Shu there is an exhortation to look to this world as well as to the Pure Land. In the *Summary of Faith and Practice* we are encouraged to "use your secondary faculties, your knowledge and skills and accumulated experience, as tools for helping all sentient beings."[4]

In *Precepts or Not?* Dharmavidya addresses the question of ethics and faith directly: "If you have faith, then the behaviour that precepts recommend comes naturally."[5]

He goes on to write, "Precepts simply describe the life of a person of deep faith. This is another example of how what is commonly taken as a means is actually an outcome."[6]

A person of complete faith follows the precepts completely; naturally their actions are ones which are good for all beings. They are spontaneous, lively and work for the sake of others.

I can see this at work in my own life. The deeper and more wholehearted my faith, the more relaxed I become, and the more naturally I

keep the precepts. The precepts emerge from the practice of nembutsu like a lotus flower from mud.

At the same time the way we honour the precepts and hold them as an ideal has inspired me to restrain myself from harmful actions, and to push myself towards more ethical behaviour. Sometimes this leads to good results in the world and in my own practice, and sometimes it leads to a greater awareness of my foolish nature, as I struggle with ideals or fail to meet them.

I asked Kazuo if he had changed at all since his 'turn about' experience. He was more joyful, he replied, and smiled more. Kazuo is often smiling and laughing and has a light-heartedness that I admire. When we spent time with him in Japan he was a gracious and generous host. He is warm and full of faith, and curious about life. He does good work as a counsellor and in training other counsellors, and I am pleased and privileged to call him a dharma friend. Despite his lack of conscious focus on ethics, could some of these good qualities be the gifts of faith?

At one point in our conversation Kazuo mentioned that part of his current practice was "checking out his shinjin": asking himself if he still feels that visceral connection to and support from Amida. Perfect faith becomes the mirror in the way that the precepts are in Amida Shu practice.

But there is a difference in this checking. The emphasis in Shinshu is on rebirth, and there is little conscious thought given to how faith becomes action.

In my own practice, and in my experience of Amida Shu, there is a creative tension between faith and action. We are accepted by Amida and loved just as we are, and exhorted to work for the benefit of all, which tests us, challenges us and trains us.

Now gratitude is overflowing
Going forth, returning richly,
I offer gifts of Dharma
Buddha's path bliss bestowing.[7]

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NOTES

5. Comparing Approaches to Nembtusu

1. Ippen, p 83
2. Shinran v4
3. Brazier, *Not Everything is Impermanent* p193
4. Brazier, Summary of Faith and Practice
5. Brazier, *Questions in the Sand* p177
6. Ibid
7. Brazier, *Eight Verses on Practice*

6

THE IMPORTANCE OF NEMBUTSU

BY: ACHARYA SUSTHAMA

It is hard to imagine what life must of have been like before modern technology let alone 2,500 years ago. The problems that they had to deal with feel so foreign and far removed from the problems that we have in modern western society and yet, the Buddha's struggle and his discovery seem to be just as relevant and essential now as they did back then.

We are very fortunate that his disciples decided to write down as much of his and others teachings as they could remember into a collection called the Tripitaka, or three baskets. Back in those days "books" were bundles of pages and they were kept in baskets. In addition to these early texts, we also have commentaries and later texts and teachings from other teachers up to the present. The tripitaka consists of three main texts; the vinaya, or code of ethics, the abhidharma, which could easily be said to be one of the world's first psychology textbooks, and the sutras, or teachings. It is no wonder that Buddhism is often taken by some to be a religion, for others a psychology, as well as a philosophy, or a way of life that has a great deal to say about morals and ethics.

From this collection of writings we know that the Buddha taught for roughly forty years. His teachings varied widely depending on who

he was talking to and he would always try to inject a new and different meaning in the local language and understanding of terms and ideas that were common and mainstream at the time. It is no surprise then that there is a huge variety of Buddhist groups and schools as well as different manifestations or models of Buddhist communities and sanghas.

Some may feel that the Nembutsu was a later development but if we take the approach that the Buddha struggled with one question and thus taught essentially one thing but presented it in 84,000 different ways then we can see and appreciate the important place that the Nembutsu has in the history of Buddhism and in the psychological and spiritual transformation of the practitioner.

One of the first teachings that the Buddha taught after his enlightenment was the four noble truths. If we take the Buddha's quest and search for the problem of dukkha to be his main struggle then this is the discovery that occurred to him on the night of his enlightenment. In David Brazier's book the Feeling Buddha, he looks closely at the Sanskrit word and translates the word literally and directly so that we have the following understanding:

The first noble truth is dukkha. Dukkha is the opposite of sukha which is close to the word sugar, so if sukha means sweet then Dukkha is the opposite of sweet. The Buddha taught that birth, ageing, sickness, death are all dukkha. When we enter into a bad space we are experiencing dukkha and no one is exempt from it. Dukkha happens.

The second noble truth is dukkha samudaya. Samudaya, is translated as arising or something coming up. When we enter a bad space, feelings come up. At this point, many things can happen. Buddha's teachings on this matter are written in the sutras and the abhidharma. All of us will experience dukkha because it is a fact of life. No one is immune to it. The same is true of the second noble truth. No one can stop the energy from arising in us when we encounter affliction. David Brazier also taught that another way of phrasing these truths could also be that these are truths for noble ones. So we could say that the second truth for noble ones is that we see and feel the feelings that arise when we are faced with something awful. Feelings are not something to be ashamed of. They are to be felt by someone noble.

The third noble truth is nirodha. In the Feeling Buddha, David Brazier describes Rodha as an earth bank and Ni as down. So the word implies going down by or behind an earth bank. If what we feel when we encounter affliction is like a burning fiery feeling inside of us then what is being implied is that the noble ones know that they need to make it go down behind an earth bank and contain it so that it doesn't get out of control. This is an ancient way of controlling a fire. While the first and second noble truths are true for everyone, the third and fourth truths are only true for noble ones who can protect themselves from the fire spreading and getting out of control.

It is between the second and third noble truths that the Buddha's many teachings become crucially important. These teachings include observations about how the mind works and how we build an identity or sense of self that then feels permanent. In the Majjhima Nikhaya, the Middle Length Sutras, the Buddha stresses the importance of guarding our sense doors. He teaches that each of our senses has a mind of its own, while the mind itself is understood to be a sense door with a mind of its own, and will grasp at certain objects that will eventually lead to delusion and a cognitive conclusion that one has a permanent self with permanent aspects and traits. For the ignoble ones, they cannot let go of this grasping nature and will crave to become something that they feel will make them stronger to cope or not cope with affliction but eventually they will find it hard to accept reality as it is and so seek oblivion or they will reject life and the world.

In addition to the many observations and teachings about the psychological processes, Buddha also taught many different ways that we can experience nirodha. Often these teachings take the form of a list or sequence of factors. For instance, there is the list of "common factors" which belong to the ordinary, unenlightened mind and a corresponding list of rare factors belonging to the developed mind. As with most of the lists to do with the mind and the creation of the self, they can also be taken as a cycle or a process of how one thing can lead to another. However, the most important aspect here is that the common factors can be transformed into rare or enlightened factors.

So, if we think about how the ordinary, unenlightened mind works, we can see that, most likely, from a very young age, when we encoun-

tered dukkha, we probably will have naturally sought comfort or distraction with an object of pleasure or pain of some sort. As we grow and age we probably will not even be aware that our ways to handle dukkha have become habit patterns that have started to define us. And before long, we will have developed a strong sense of the kind of person we think we are. We begin saying things like, I am the sort of person that does this, or likes that, or something of that nature. As we start to identify with the habit patterns, they in turn reinforce our senses to be attracted to particular objects that then reinforce the type of person we think we are in a permanent and unchanging kind of way.

The Buddha breaks the cycle down into a list of five steps, each step has a specific role and function that then conditions the next step:

Sparsha or contact

Vedana or reaction

Samjna or entrancement

Chetana or seeking mind

Manaskara the vested interest that seeks to reinforce one's identity

How we can transform these factors into a rare and enlightened mind?

If we understand that each sense door has a mind of its own and is seeking to find comfort in a sense of identity that is permanent then what the Buddha is saying is that we need something bigger than ourselves to entrust ourselves to. If we are stuck with the common factors we shall just go round in circles. If we can have faith in a measureless Buddha, then instead of contact, we experience smriti, or mindfulness of the Buddha, in other words, the nembutsu. If we practice the Nembutsu then that provides the conditions for samadhi, or a clear and loving state, where we are able to see a bigger picture. Samadhi then provides the conditions for prajna, or wisdom, so that we say and act in ways that are wholesome and wholehearted. Prajna then provides the conditions for chanda. Chanda is a mind that aspires and longs to do the Buddha's bidding. It is like the vow mind of the practitioner. And that in turns provides the conditions for adhimoksha, adhi means best, and moksha means liberation.

Thus:

Sparsha transforms into *smriti*

Vedana transforms into *samadhi*
Samjna transforms into *prajna*
Chetana transforms into *chanda*
And *manaskara* transforms into *adhimoksha*

Once again the list is presented in five unique steps. Each step has a specific function and one conditions the next. The only mystery is how the common factors can transform into the rare factor, and the answer is faith that connects with a greater wisdom than our own..

My sense is that if we were to slow down our experience as a human being and observe each of the common factors as they occurred and paused it, and then as a whole cycle and paused it, then we would see that they all occur during the second noble truth. As dukkha samudaya strikes we perform this quick knee jerk reaction without even knowing it and so our ability to practice nirodha is lost. If we could stop and do what the Buddha is urging us to do, which is to guard our sense doors before or after our senses have made contact with our desired object, just as we begin to feel a huge craving or longing, and place ourselves in some sort of refuge, then perhaps all that energy would transform itself into one of the rare, enlightened factors.

We can't pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We are not going to save ourselves and liberate the mind by misplacing faith and trust in our own efforts and thinking that we can be a refuge unto oneselves. To liberate the mind, and experience adhimoksha, one must have faith in something greater, like the measureless Buddha, Amida. The Sanskrit equivalent of Nembutsu, is smriti, the Buddha was constantly urging his disciples to remember and be mindful of that which is wholesome and loving. Calling out, with a longing to be saved, the nembutsu is the key to transforming the ordinary mind into an enlightened mind. Amida Buddha loves us just as we are; trusting that Amida has saved us leads to one feeling liberated.

In the very earliest texts, there are descriptions of monks paying homage to the Buddha by chanting his name, and walking around him with their robes over their left shoulders. The practice of the nembutsu is very old. It permits the practitioner to stop the grasping nature. It leads us to live a spiritual life, or marga, which is the fourth truth for noble ones.

The fourth noble truth is the middle path. It is a path where we foolish beings can continue to experience all the feelings that exist in the human spectrum without burning out of control and harming countless others, because we have faith, and thus, are held and supported by Amida's love and gifted with grace that comes every time we utter Namo Amida Bu.

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