

The Inner Structure of a Divine Name

—A Study of Hōnen's Nembutsu—

Shō-on Hattori

Man's self-understanding is essential for man to be man. The ultimate transformation¹ seems to be our major concern, when the religious meaning of human existence is brought under examination. One's significant change from illusion to truth, suffering to peace, ignorance to enlightenment, finite to infinite may be realized when man becomes perfectly aware of himself and the world in which he lives. Religious teachings and practices are the means by which the change may be accomplished. The transformation may be achieved either individually or collectively, at present or after death. In the Buddhist tradition there are at least two ways² through which this transformation can be realized. One is the way of self-effort, in which man can attain enlightenment through the practice of Buddhist teachings such as meditation and precepts. The other is the way of other power of Amida Buddha by which one can attain Rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida and thus become enlightened.

Nembutsu³, one of the major religious practices in Mahāyāna Buddhism, is considered to be a means of ultimate transformation, delivering man to the perfect state of Buddhahood. According to Hōnen(1133-1212), a Buddhist saint and the founder of Pure Land Buddhism in twelfth century Japan, Nembutsu is the recita-

¹ Regarding the meaning of "transformation" in the religious context, see F. Streng, *Understanding Religious Man* (Belmont, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1969) p.4 f. and the same author's *Way of Being Religious* (Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p.7.

² Buddhist teachings can be classified various ways such as Mahayana and Hinayana (or Theravada), the Esoteric and the Exoteric and so on. What is referred here is related to what we call *jiriki* and *tarikī*, the fundamental classification of Buddhism in the Pure Land tradition.

³ The term "Nembutsu" consists of two Chinese characters "nen" and "butsu". The term "nen" in Japanese, "nien" or "ning" in Chinese, which is used in the Buddhist scriptures is derived from the following three Sanskrit terms: *smṛti*, *manasikāra*, and *citta*. For a detailed study of "nen", see R. Fujiwara, *Nembutsu Shisō no Kenkyū* (A Study of Nembutsu Thought) (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1957), and the same author's *Development of the Practice of Nembutsu* (San Francisco: Buddhist Church of America, 1962). The term "butsu" on the other hand is the Japanese counterpart of Buddha in Sanskrit. This is an object of "nen" and refers to various Buddhas, such as Shakyamuni, Tathagata Baishajyaguru (Yakushinyorai), Amida and so on.

tion of the sacred name of Amida Buddha such as *Namu Amida Butsu*, and it is believed to be the ultimate religious discipline by which man can be brought into the perfect realm of the Buddha. The recitation of Amida's name is regarded as the only way for devotees to attain salvation. However, there have been various disciplines in the name of Nembutsu throughout the history of Buddhism. Nembutsu was already found in an early form of Buddhism in the trust in Shakyamuni Buddha or in adoration of his virtues. Many Buddhist scriptures and masters have given us variant practices in terms of Nembutsu. Some simply enumerate them, and others try to show them in chronological order.

In searching for the meaning of Nembutsu as the religious expression of Buddhist truth, we can find several forms as follows:

(1) The Nembutsu through which man can attain ultimate oneness with the Buddha. Nembutsu sometimes refers to concentration on the Dharmakāya, or the Body of Truth. In the profound state of concentration, one can experience that he is the Buddha and aware of the true nature of Buddhahood.

(2) The Nembutsu by which man can attain the experience in which he may enjoy living with the Buddha or living in the state of Buddhahood. By meditating upon the image of the Buddha, man can visualize the Buddha in Samādhi, and thus realize the Buddhist truth.

(3) The Nembutsu by which man can be born in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha. This is closely related to the Original Vow⁴ of Amida. Buddha's compassion, expressed in his Vow to save all beings in his land, is manifested through the recitation of the name. Therefore the only discipline he should practice is to recite the name of Amida Buddha with faith in Amida's Original Vow. Thus Nembutsu is conceived as the expression of Buddhist truth in terms of the great compassion (*mahā-karuṇā*). This is the type of Nembutsu that Hōnen tried to present.

(4) The Nembutsu as a gift of Amida Buddha. In this teaching Nembutsu is not the way for man to gain birth in the land of Buddha. It is the dynamic aspect of Buddha's power of wisdom and compassion. Amida himself participates in man's efforts in reciting the name. This represents Shinran's Nembutsu.

These are some of the meanings of recitation in terms of the manifestation of truth. However, studying the meaning of Nembutsu, we often assert that one form is the only way of expressing truth and others do not reveal it. It is sometimes stressed that Hōnen's Nembutsu does not completely reveal Buddhist truth, but rather it is simply a stepping stone to Shinran's Nembutsu. It is possible that Hōnen's Nembutsu may be seen from a different angle or viewpoint such as Shin-

⁴ Hōgan in Japanese, *purva-praṇidāna* in Sanskrit. This Sanskrit term literally means a former prayer. See below for a detailed explanation.

ran's. But the real meaning of Hōnen's Nembutsu should be properly examined and understood in the light of Hōnen's religious experience itself.

To explore the real meaning of Hōnen's Nembutsu thought, we should take many elements into consideration, such as his views on man and his social milieu. But this paper is limited to the analysis of the inner structure of Hōnen's Nembutsu as an expression of Buddhist truth. Before analyzing the structure, however, we will examine the nature of Buddhist truth in order to establish a foundation for the discussion. Although Buddhist truth has been described in various terms,⁵ here it will be discussed in terms of *prajñā* or wisdom, and *karuṇā* or compassion, for these two terms are generally accepted as the key to understanding the nature of the truth.⁶

THE NATURE OF BUDDHIST TRUTH

While *prajñā* or wisdom is essential, *karuṇā* or compassion may be considered as the concrete manifestation of truth. These are, however, not separate entities, but simply two aspects of one reality. Without *prajñā*, there would be no real *karuṇā*, without *karuṇā* there would be no real *prajñā*. *Karuṇā* is important when truth becomes particularly involved in the soteriological problems of man. This is because the majority of people need something concrete by which they can attain salvation. In the following pages we will discuss the nature of *prajñā* and *karuṇā* briefly through the teachings of two leading Indian philosophers, Nāgārjuna (c.150-250) and Vasubandhu (420-500).

(1) *Prajñā* (wisdom) or *śūnyatā* (emptiness)

Nāgārjuna suggested *prajñā* in terms of *śūnyatā*. According to his theory, every existence has the meaning of existence in relation to others. This principle is called *pratītya-samutpāda* or "dependent-origination." In the *Mūlamādhyaṃī-kakārikās*,⁷ Nāgārjuna has critically observed the nature of existence in the world

⁵ D. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), pp.125-26. Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, (4 vols.; Cambridge: The University Press, 1932), I. p.130. S. Yamaguchi, *Dynamic Buddha and Static Buddha* (Tokyo: Risōsha, 1958), p.22. Sensho Murakami, *Bukkyō Tōitsuron: Genriron* (Consolidated Study of Buddhism: On Principle) (3 vol., 2nd. ed.; Tokyo: Kinkōdo Shoseki Kabushiki Kaisha, 1903), II, p.200.

⁶ D. Suzuki, *Bukyō no Taii* (A Outline of Buddhism) (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1962). S. Yamaguchi, *Kū no Sekai* (The World of *Śūnyatā*) (Tokyo: Risōsha, 1967), p.112. Yoshifumi Uyeda, *Bukkyō wo Dō Rikaisuruka* (How to Understand Buddhism) (Kyoto: Hongwanji Shuppan Kyokai, 1965).

⁷ A complete English translation of the original Sanskrit text can be found in the following books. F. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967), Appendix A, pp.181-220. Kenneth Inada, *Nagarjuna, A Translation of his Mūlamādhyaṃī-kakārikās with an Introductory Essay* (Tokyo: The Hoku-seido Press, 1970). Hereafter this text will be abbreviated as the *Kārikās*.

and concludes that going and goer, cause and effect, whole and parts, the senses, act and actor, desire and man, fire and fuel, origination and disappearance, existence and non-existence, the aggregates, identity and difference, as well as all the deepest doctrines of Buddhism, including suffering, the *Tathagata*, the four noble truths, the chain of causation, *nirvāṇa* itself and so forth, all are mutually dependent, and conditioned each other to exist. Through the teaching of the *prā-tītya-samutpāda*, he has proved that there is no self-existence, no thing-in-itself in any existence. Every existence is relative—relative not to some absolute, but relative to each other. This indicates that the reality of relative existence is denied and the duality of subject and object is negated. It is regarded as nothing or “empty” from the viewpoint of dependent-origination, and the wisdom of non-dualism is thus revealed. This is the wisdom of *śūnyatā* (emptiness). This idea of non-duality is found in the Eightfold Negation: There is no production nor extinction, no annihilation nor permanence, no unity nor diversity, no coming nor departure. The same sentiment is presented in many passages of the *Kārikās*. Furthermore, in order to express the nature of existence as *śūnyatā*, Nāgārjuna takes the negative dialectic.⁸ That is, the nature of existence is not “being” nor “non-being” nor “either being or non-being” nor “neither being nor non-being.”

In regard to this negative dialectic, the Sanron school presents the explanation in terms of gradation of religious maturity. Professor J. Takakusu declares:

1. When the theory of being is opposed to the theory of non-being, the former is regarded as the worldly truth and the latter the higher truth.
2. When the theories of being and non-being are opposed to those of neither being nor non-being, the former are regarded as the worldly truth and the latter the higher truth.
3. If the four opposing theories just mentioned together become the worldly truth, the yet higher views denying them all will be regarded as the higher truth.
4. If the theories expressed in the last stage become the worldly truth, the denial of them all will be the higher truth.⁹

This approach indicates that the negation of the negation does not mean affirmation but progression to the higher truth by which the highest truth is realized in the ultimate state when every particular concept or theory is totally negated. If the denial is used as the denial against denial on the basis of mere metaphysical and conceptual argumentation, the true meaning of negation that is delivered by Nāgārjuna in order to express the ultimate nature of *prajñā* will never be apprehended. This approach of negation does not intend to create another theory or conceptual mode, but it does attempt to provide the way for one to reach the state

⁸ For instance, see the *Kārikās* chapters xv, 6,7: xviii, 10, 11; xxv, 3.

⁹ J. Takakusu, *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1947), p.104-05.

which is expressed in terms of *śūnyatā* (emptiness), which is beyond all modes of conception. Through this, we may realize that the negative dialectic is the means of apprehension of the ultimate nature of *śūnyatā* which is the wisdom of non-duality or non-discrimination.

Furthermore, Nāgārjuna reveals the true nature of *śūnyatā* as non-acquisition which is attained after the extinction of all dogmatic, conceptual arguments. He also emphasizes that we should be free from all attachments of self-centeredness.

From the discussion mentioned previously, we may realize that the negative expression indicates the ultimate nature of *prajñā* in terms of *śūnyatā*, which would be attained in the domain beyond that of reason or intellect (*buddhi*), by removing the obstacles of dogmatic misconception. This is the expression of the perfect wisdom which is attained when the cobwebs and clogs of narrow-minded thought-determination are completely eliminated. This is the supreme wisdom of non-discrimination which is beyond the limitation of a particular mode of thought or the discrimination of subject and object.

(2) *Karuṇā* (compassion)

While *prajñā* is the static aspect of Buddhist truth or Buddhahood, *karuṇā* is the positive or dynamic aspect of Buddhahood which is revealed to the phenomenal world. In order to understand the meaning of *karuṇā* as the revelation of *prajñā*, we turn to Vasubandhu. He developed the contents of Buddhahood on the basis of Nāgārjuna's thought of *śūnyatā*. That is, Vasubandhu positively interpreted the nature of Buddhahood in the light of "being" and defined the twofold wisdom, namely *prajñā* (wisdom of non-discrimination) and *jñāna* (wisdom of discrimination of non discrimination).¹⁰ Regarding the nature of *prajñā*, he stated that the ultimate nature of the three beings (the common people, the holy man, and Buddha) was "emptiness," so that there was no discrimination or distinction among them in their ultimate state. This is the same view advocated by Nāgārjuna. Examining the contents further, Vasubandhu also found another aspect of Buddhahood. He presented this in terms of "the nature of lubricating oil" which made relationship among sentient beings smooth, and thereby would lead them into ultimate peace. In this regard the nature of Buddhahood is expressed as *mahākaruṇā* or great compassion. This *mahākaruṇā* is based on *prajñā* and is called *jñāna*. *Jñāna* is the wisdom revealed in the finite world and directed toward sentient beings, but it is not considered to be the wisdom or knowledge of finite beings. *Jñāna* implies the pure wisdom of non-discrimination which manifests itself as a being or form in the finite world. Since the wisdom of non-discrimination is

¹⁰ The *Buśshō-ron* (A Treatise on Buddhahood). J. Takakusu *et al.*, (ed.), *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* (Taisho Edition of the Tripitaka in Chinese), (100 vols.; Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkyōkai, 1928), Vol. xxxi, p. 796.

free from all mode of limitation and conditionality, it cannot be conceived of in our finite consciousness; yet for the sake of finite beings, the absolute wisdom manifests itself in the phenomenal world through which every sentient being is brought to the state of the infinite, perfect wisdom. This manifested wisdom is called *jñāna* and apprehended as *mahākaruṇā*. Thus we may conceive both *prajñā* and *karuṇā* as two aspects of one reality, Buddhahood. For this reason Buddhahood is considered to have an dual character, having one foot in the infinite state in terms of *prajñā* and the other in the finite world in terms of *karuṇā*.

Regarding to the relationship between *prajñā* and *karuṇā*, Dr. S. Yamaguchi gives a detailed explanation by using the teaching of the Yuga Yuishiki school.

The Supreme Emptiness which transcends the discrimination of subject and object, works out as the being of non-being. Here the content of Supreme nature of Emptiness would be in two categories. One is non-being which transcends the discrimination between subject and object. The other is the being of non-being. These are not separate ones, but the latter is the complete form of the former. While the former is "emptiness" itself which is realized after denying the argumentation of subject and object matter, the latter is wisdom (*jñāna*) transformed from consciousness (*viñāna*). This is the unique interpretation presented by the Yuga Yuishiki school. The former means the *sūnyatā* or *prajñā*. The latter is not different from the former in the point that both of them contain the wisdom of non-discrimination (emptiness), but it is different in the respect that the *prajñā* works out as *jñāna* (compassion or being of non-being).¹¹

All this means that the ultimate nature of Buddhahood manifests itself through a certain form or mode, so that it comes in contact with our finite beings in worldly existence, and thus we sentient finite beings can apprehend the true nature of Buddhahood through this form by which the ultimate purpose of the Buddha, i. e., the salvation for all or attainment of *prajñā*, is accomplished. In this sense, the Yuga Yuishiki school claims "the latter (*karuṇā*) is the complete form of the former (*prajñā*)." In this regard we comprehend this form, being of non-being, as a "religious manifestation of Buddhist truth" which has the function of a mediator delivering one from the finite world to the infinite.

THE INNER STRUCTURE OF A DIVINE NAME

A means of the ultimate transformation delivering us from the finite into the infinite is, for Hōnen, the Nembutsu. This is possible because it depends on the true nature of *karuṇā*. In Hōnen's teachings *karuṇā* is expressed in terms of the Original Vow of Amida. Nembutsu is apprehended as the consummation of all the

¹¹ S. Yamaguchi, *et al.*, *Bukkyōgaku Josetsu* (Introduction to the Study of Buddhism) (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1963), pp.189-90, See also, S. Yamaguchi, *Dynamic Buddha and Static Buddha*, p.66 ff.

vows when he declares "The vow of Nembutsu must be the king of his vows."¹²

The Original Vow is a strong wish or aspiration which was established by a *bodhisattva* in order to become a Buddha. Regarding the sacred vow of the *bodhisattva* there are two kinds: the general and the specific. The general vow contains the following four elements: (1) to save innumerable sentient beings, (2) to remove innumerable evil, passionate desires (*klesā*), (3) to learn an immeasurable amount of the teachings of the Buddha and to attain supreme wisdom, and (4) to attain enlightenment.

In the above, the first vow is directed towards helping others attain enlightenment and the other three vows are for the attainment of enlightenment for oneself. This means that the religious aspiration of the *bodhisattva* in Mahāyāna Buddhism should first have the intention of saving others; and in order to accomplish this main purpose, he should engage in disciplines to eliminate the bondage of selfishness and to discover the reality of the universe. The spirit of self-restraint of the *bodhisattva* is, thus, comprehended to be different from that of Hinayana monks who simply emphasize self-salvation.

On the other hand, the specific vow varies according to the *bodhisattva*. According to the *Muryōjukyō*, one of the main scriptures of Pure Land Buddhism, the forty-eight vows are attributed to Amida Buddha. These vows fulfilled by Amida are divided into three categories. These are the vow by which to become a Buddha, the vow creating the Pure Land, and the vow by which to save all the sentient beings. This means that the forty-eight vows of Amida include Buddha's wisdom in order to become an enlightened one, and His compassion in order to save all beings. Furthermore when Nembutsu is apprehended as the supreme vow, this apprehension is based on the Buddha's compassion. That is to say, Amida provided the vow of Nembutsu because this held the closest relationship with sentient beings without which total salvation could not be accomplished. The Nembutsu, thus, becomes recognized as a perfect manifestation of the truth.

(1) The Inherent Nature

In analyzing the inner structure of the divine name presented by Hōnen, we find two presuppositions. One is the inherent nature of the name of Amida, and the other the practical value of Nembutsu itself. In regard to the former, the true nature of Buddhahood can be manifested through the sacred name of Amida. This idea can also be seen from two perspectives: one is the identity of name and reality, the other the all-inclusiveness of the name. According to the principle of the identity of name and reality, name is not merely a sound in the air but the revelation of reality itself. It has a mystical power to release the inner property

¹² Kyodo Ishii (ed.), *Shōwa Shinshū Hōnenshōnin Zenshū* (Showa Edition of the Collection of St. Hōnen's Literature) (Tokyo: Jōdo Shūmusho, 1955), p.326. Hereafter this will be abbreviated as SHZ.

it represents when it is mentioned.¹³ This type of name-cult can commonly be seen in the recitation of Vedic mantras, and in the name-taboo found in primitive man and modern man as well. Hōnen once said that the name of Amida had in its literal sense two virtues, Infinite life and Infinite light. The name Amida originally stemmed from *Amitābha* (infinite light) and *Amitāyus* (infinite life) in Sanskrit. Thus Amida is considered to have the property of infinity within itself. Furthermore we can see that the name, Amida, is also regarded as the expression of truth in other schools. Amida is identical with Threefold truth of the Tendai school, and the teaching of the character *A* as the ultimate source of existence (*A-ji Honpushō*) of the Shingon school. There are, however, fundamental differences between Hōnen and other schools. Hōnen said that Amida's name in this regard could be interpreted differently by each school, and that his approach was not the way of perfect apprehension of the meaning inherent in the name, but the way of simple recitation of the name. It might be said that the way the Tendai school and the Shingon school took in understanding the name was "the way of wisdom," whereas the way Hōnen followed was "the way of compassion."

If Buddha's name has supreme power because of its divine nature, then the name of all the Buddhas would have the same power. If so, there is no reason for Hōnen to have chosen Amida only. He admitted that each one of the Buddhas had two vows: helping others to attain enlightenment (*rita*) and enlightenment of oneself (*jiri*). But he further said that no Buddha but Amida could show the way of salvation for all through the name. He also said, "Yakushi Nyorai (*Bhaiṣaj-yaguru Tathāgata* or the Buddha of Healing) established twelve vows but did not have the vow of universal salvation, and Senju Kwannon (*Sahasrabhujāvalokiteśvara-bodhisattva*, the Kwannon with One Thousand Arms) established the vow of universal salvation but has not fulfilled it yet. Only Amida established the vow of universal salvation and has already fulfilled it.¹⁴ Thus he was convinced that among the Buddhist divinities only Amida assured us the ultimate salvation.

In regard to the name, he also mentioned that the superiority of Amida's name to others is dependent on the inner virtues of all-inclusiveness. He believed that the name of Amida included all the virtues of the Buddha. He understood the sacred name of Amida as the complete form which manifested itself through the accomplishment of the *bodhisattva's* vow. In the *Gyakushu Seppō*, he suggested.

The excellent virtues of the name are that the Buddha reveals in the sacred name all the virtues of his cause and effect in general and in particular. Therefore if we

¹³ Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, translated by Susanne K. Langer (New York: Dover Publication Inc., 1946), p. 53, 58.

¹⁴ SHZ., p. 414.

repeat the phrase *Namu Amida Butsu* even once, we will attain great benefit.¹⁵

In the *Tozanjō*, he stated the name in connection with the vow of Nembutsu.

He (Hōzō Bosatsu) therefore decided he would go through all possible austerities himself, however painful, through countless kalpas of time on their behalf and in their stead, and pile up the merit of myriads of religious rigors so as to reach that perfect wisdom which would bring enlightenment to himself and to all sentient beings. Then concentrating in his own name every indefectible virtue, he would have all sentient beings appropriate the same by calling upon the sacred name, promising that whenever any would from their hearts so call on him, they would remember his vow and he would grant them birth into his land.¹⁶

The name of the Buddha represents Buddhahood which is attained as the result of the fulfillment of a *bodhisattva's* vow. This is the realization of Bodhisattvahood which contains the supreme wisdom of enlightenment and compassion to save all beings. The name, therefore, inherently embodies the supreme nature of the divine quality in the Buddhist tradition. Hōnen stated in the *Senchakushū*:

The Nembutsu is superior and all other practices are inferior, because all virtues are wrapped up in the one sacred name. These are four wisdoms, the three bodies, the ten faculties, the four fearlessnesses and all other virtues of the inner faculties, the external signs, light rays, sermons, the benefiting of others — indeed all outward activities. These, I say, are inherent in the name of the Buddha.¹⁷

Thus he proclaimed that the name contained in itself the perfect quality of Buddhahood. Therefore in presenting the absolute meaning of Nembutsu, Hōnen suggests, "One Nembutsu is supreme,"¹⁸ or "The devotee would attain Rebirth in the Pure Land by one repetition of Nembutsu."¹⁹

Here we should mention briefly the difference between Nembutsu and *dharani* of the Shingon school.²⁰ *Dharani* is also said to include various virtues and teachings within itself. Therefore as far as the all-inclusiveness of the name or a word is concerned, both practices seem to be the same. Hōnen, however, explicitly declared that *dharai* and Nembutsu were different in that the latter was found in the Original Vow of Amida, whereas the former was not. The recitation of *dharani* demands the concentration on its meaning and virtues on the part of the devotees. Enlightenment may be realized through one's own effort of concentration.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 428. H. Coats and R. Ishizuka, *Honen, the Buddhist Saint* (Kyoto: Chion-in, 1925), pp. 580-81. Hereafter this will be abbreviated as HBS.

¹⁷ SHZ., p. 319. (HBS., p. 343)

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

²⁰ The *dharani* we deal with here is related to a religious practice not to the expression of faith as advocated by Kakuban. Cf. H. Kaneoka, "Dharani and Nembutsu", *Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyū*, II-2 (4) (March, 1954), pp. 500-02.

and discipline. On the other hand the concept of the divine name asserted by Hōnen is based on the Original Vow of Amida. So it simply requests the recitation of the name with faith in Amida's Vow, rather than the difficult practices on the part of the devotees. The difference between the two depends on the different religious structure of each school.

(2) The Practical Value

First let us inquire into how Hōnen tried to understand the teaching of the Buddha. There seem to be two approaches. One is that every word in Buddhist scriptures and teachings must be a golden word of the Buddha. According to this view, the teaching of every denomination or school would be Buddhism. But this is a superficial meaning of Buddhism. Though he once admitted all the teachings were Buddhism, he continued to ask himself whether or not man could accomplish these teachings proclaimed by each school. This consideration leads us to the second approach. Buddhism, if it is real, should be the way by which all beings can be saved. The practical value of Nembutsu should be understood in this context, and thus closely related to the soteriological problem in Mahayana Buddhism.

What Hōnen was most concerned about is the teaching of the Buddha which leads every sentient being to the ultimate state of enlightenment. He emphasized that the true meaning of Buddhism should be conceived not merely from the theoretical but from the practical side. In other words, whether or not the people can achieve the final goal by the particular way that each denomination has established, is the important factor for understanding the meaning of the teaching of the Buddha. At the discussion session held in Ōhara, Hōnen stated, "The Tendai school, the Shingon school, the Kegon school, the Hossō school and the Sanron school present their profound teachings, and all contain the same supreme benefit, so if a devotee practices and fulfills all the religious requirements, he will attain the profound benefit of enlightenment."²¹ At the same discussion, it is also reported that the teaching of Pure Land Buddhism was as good as that of other schools, but Hōnen won the discussion regarding how we can complete the teaching.²² However excellent the teaching may be, if it is not actually fulfilled because of the devotee's ability, vacation, sex and so on, it should not be considered that which reveals the truth of Buddhahood. Thus what Hōnen was concerned about was the meaning of Buddhism in practice.

This practical meaning of Buddhism is suggested in Hōnen's thought in terms of "ease." In this context he found the meaning of Nembutsu and stated, "The Nembutsu is easy to practice, while all other disciplines are hard to practice."²³

²¹ SHZ., p. 473.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 452.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

But the term "easy" used here does not imply "lazy" but rather it is the expression of ultimate concern. That is to say, Nembutsu represents the non-discriminatory nature of Buddhahood which saves all beings. From the basic thought of "easy", Hōnen reviewed Amida's Original Vow and described it as follows:

If the Original Vow required the making of images and the building of pagodas, then the poor and destitute could have no hope of attaining it. But the fact is that the wealthy and noble are few in number, whereas the number of the poor and ignoble is extremely large. If the Original Vow required wisdom and great talents, there would be no hope of that birth for the foolish and ignorant at all; but the wise are few in number, while the foolish are very many. If the Original Vow required the hearing and seeing of a great many things, then people who heard and saw little could have no hope of that birth; but few are they who have heard much, and very many are they who have heard little. If the Original Vow required obedience to the commandments and the Law, there would be no hope of that birth for those who break the commandments or have not received them; but few are they who keep the commandments and very many are they who break them. The same reasoning applies to all other cases.²⁴

In this manner, Hōnen apprehended Amida Buddha who, in his compassion for all sentient beings, did not vow to require the making of images or the building of pagodas as the condition for Rebirth in the Pure Land, but the one act of reciting his sacred name.

According to Genshin(942-1017), one of the most influential saints before Hōnen, Nembutsu was recognized as the central work for attainment of Rebirth in the Pure Land, but in its highest sense, Nembutsu was conceived as that work to attain oneness with the supreme "emptiness."²⁵ In this connection, Nembutsu was understood to be an excellent way. However, according to Hōnen the Nembutsu of this kind could not fully reveal its real meaning, because not every one can attain such a profound experience of oneness with the ultimate reality as Genshin or other devotees of the Holy Path attain. Thus Hōnen understood the true meaning of Nembutsu as the way of salvation for all. He said:

When we say that Pure Land school is superior to all other schools, and that the Nembutsu is superior to all other religious disciplines, we mean that it provides salvation for all classes of sentient beings.²⁶

The apprehension of the meaning of Nembutsu as the way of salvation for all indicates the compassion (*karuṇā*), the nature of Buddhahood, through which wisdom of non-discrimination (*prajñā*) manifests itself in the finite world by which all sentient beings will be saved without exception. Therefore in relation to the "ease" of Nembutsu, Hōnen explicitly stated:

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.320. (HBS., p.344.)

²⁵ The *Ōjōyōshū*, chapter x.

²⁶ SHZ., pp.632-33. (HBS., p.734.)

The Nembutsu is common to all because of its "ease," while other various practices are not common to all because of their "difficulty." Therefore it seems that Amida Buddha established the Original Vow of Nembutsu in terms of the path of "ease" by forsaking that of "difficulty" in order that all sentient beings may equally attain Rebirth in the Pure Land.²⁷

He also gave a detailed explanation of this matter dealing with the Original Vow.

By the Original Vow, I mean the forty-eight Vows which were made by Amida Buddha long ago, when he was called Hōzō Bosatsu. With a view to the creation of a purified Buddha Land, and of all the sentient beings therein, he made these forty-eight vows in the presence of the Buddha, Sejizaiō Nyorai. It was with the object of providing Rebirth in the Pure Land for all sentient beings, that Hōzō made that one of the forty-eight vows which is called the Original Vow of Nembutsu Ojō.²⁸

These indicate that through the Nembutsu the infinite realization of Buddha's compassion is manifested.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In order to discuss the meaning of a divine name in relation to Hōnen's religious thought, we have first examined the nature of Buddhist truth and found that *karuṇā* (compassion) is the positive aspect of the truth. Then we analyzed the inner structure of a divine name in terms of Nembutsu from two aspects—the inherent nature of the name and its practical value. From the former, we have found that a divine name is the expression of the truth because of its divinity. The name represents the totality of the reality named, thus Amida's name expresses the true nature of Buddhahood. From the latter—the practical value of the name—we have realized that the name reveals the Buddhist truth in terms of *karuṇā* because it is the solution of the soteriological problem in Buddhism. It is regarded as the ultimate way of salvation for all. Thus we have made clear that a divine name is the religious expression of Buddhist truth.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 320. (HBS., p. 744.)

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 507-08. (HBS., pp. 462-63.)