

Joint Gathering & Lecture Series (March 4, 8, 15, 22, 29)
(Higashi Honganji Mission of Hawaii)

The First Volume of the *Sutra of Limitless Life* (or the *Larger Sutra*)

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General Information about the *Larger Sutra*

A. Shinran and the *Larger Sutra*

1. Shinran (1173-62), the founder of Shin Buddhism (Jpn. *Jodo Shinshu*), systematized his teaching on the basis of the *Larger Sutra*: Shinran said, “To reveal the true and real teaching: It is the *Larger Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*.” (Cf. *The Collected Works of Shinran*)
2. Shinran’s main work is the *Kyogyoshinsho* (Teaching, Practice, Awakening, and Realization of Buddhahood). We can say that this work is Shinran’s study notebook (or commentary) on the *Larger Sutra*.
3. The name “Shinran” originally comes from the 2nd and 3rd patriarchs of Shin Buddhism (i.e., seven patriarchs: Ryuju [Nagarjuna], Tenjin or Seshin [Vasubandhu], Donran [T’an-luan], Doshaku [Tao-ch’o], Zendo [Shan-tao], Genshin, and Honen). Shinran gave himself the name “Shinran,” because he thought his mission in life was to study the *Larger Sutra* and share its teaching with others. The main works of the 2nd and 3rd patriarchs were commentaries on the *Larger Sutra*.

B. Five Chinese translations of the *Larger Sutra*

1. *Sutra of Salvation through the Perfect Enlightenment of Amida*, (*Taisho*, No.362), commonly called *Larger Amida Sutra*). This text was translated by Chih-ch’ien between A.D. 223-28. The number of Dharmakara’s vows in this sutra is 24.
2. *Sutra of the Immeasurable Pure Enlightenment of Equality*, (*Taisho*, No. 361). This text was ascribed to Lokakshema (who was in China A.D. 147-86), but actually was translated by Po-yen, ca. A.D. 258. The number of Dharmakara’s vows in this sutra is 24.
3. *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life*, (*Taisho*, No. 360). This text was ascribed to Samghavarman (K’ang Seng-k’ai), but was actually translated around A.D. 421 by Buddhahadra (359-429) and Pao-yun (376-449). The number of Dharmakara’s vows in this sutra is 48. This is the text that was used by the Sino-Japanese Pure Land masters, such as Shan-tao, Honen, and Shinran. We read the English translation of this text in our lecture series.
4. *Sutra of the Tathagata of Immeasurable Life*, (*Taisho*, No. 310 [5]). This text was translated by Bodhiruci between A.D. 706-713. The number of

Dharmakara's vows in this sutra is 48. This translation is close to the third translation above.

5. *Sutra of the Mahayana Adornment of Immeasurable Life*, (Taisho, No. 363) This text was translated by Fa-hsien in A.D. 980. The number of Dharmakara's vows in this sutra is 36.

C. Contents of the *Larger Sutra* that Consists of Two Volumes

1. First volume: Shakyamuni explains the Dharma's side (i.e., the liberator's side), such as the Buddha and the Pure Land, by telling the story of Dharmakara's becoming a Buddha.
2. Second volume: Shakyamuni explains human beings' side (i.e., the liberated's side)—how the Dharma (i.e., the Buddha and the Pure Land) saves human beings. He also explains the evil and corrupted nature of human beings.

The First Volume of the *Larger Sutra*

I. The Two Introductions of the *Larger Sutra*

A. General Introduction (Cf. pp. 21-25 of *The Three Pure Land Sutra*. Tr. by Hisao Inagaki)

1. First half of "General Introduction": Shakyamuni says that all the bodhisattvas in his audiences are no different from Buddhas—they all possess the eight marks of Buddhahood. (One of the important teachings of the *Larger Sutra* is that true bodhisattvas are Buddhas and vice versa.)
2. Second half of "General Introduction": Shakyamuni says that all the bodhisattvas in his audience perform the Samantabhadra practices (i.e., [a] travelling to the ten quarters, [b] worshipping a limitless number of Buddhas, and [c] enlightening a limitless number of sentient beings). (Later in the story of the *Larger Sutra* we see that Dharmakara performs the Samantabhadra practices.)

B. Doctrinal Introduction (pp. 26-27), **Where We Can See the Theme of the Sutra. (This is the only content of Shinran's *Kyo* [Teaching] Volume.)**

1. Ananda's "new" appreciation of Shakyamuni Buddha
2. Ananda's question about the power of Shakyamuni's brilliance/light
3. Theme of the sutra: "Buddhas contemplate each other (*butsu-butsu-so-nen*)." The term, *butsu-butsu-so-nen*, is the source of *nen-butsu* (contemplating-Buddha), one of the most important concepts in Shin Buddhism.

4. Ananda's two views of Shakyamuni: his yesterday's view of him and his today's view of him
5. Shakyamuni's joyous response to Ananda's question

II. The Story of Dharmakara's Becoming Amida Buddha

(Haneda's Notes)

1. Importance of meeting a teacher—having a teacher-student relationship
 - a. Doctrinal Introduction tells us that the most important thing in human life is having a teacher-student relationship where a student is moved by the teacher's (Buddha's) spirit.
 - b. In answering Ananda's question, Shakyamuni tells Ananda the story of Dharmakara (about his becoming Amida Buddha) in which Shakyamuni explains what is the nature of the Buddha's (or teacher's) power that moves a student and changes his life.
2. Definition of "Amida": A fictional character (like "Hamlet" or "Faust")
 - a. "Amida" is (i) not a god and (ii) not a historical person.
 - b. He is a symbol of the Dharma (or universal Buddhahood). (Cf. Nobuo Haneda, *Dharma Breeze*, pp. 19-30)
3. Outline of Dharmakara's practices: "The five gates of mindfulness" (*gonen-mon*)

Vasubandhu, in his *Pure Land Treatise* (i.e., a commentary on the *Larger Sutra*), discusses the five practices through which Buddhist practitioners seek to attain birth in the Pure Land. Vasubandhu calls the five practices "the five gates of mindfulness" that consist of (1) worship, (2) praise, (3) vow-making, (4) meditation, and (5) merit-transference (*eko*). Shinran thought that Dharmakara performed these five practices to become Amida Buddha. This lecturer reads the *Larger Sutra* by following Shinran who views the five practices as Dharmakara's practices.

A. The Fifty-three Buddhas of the Past (pp. 27-28 of Inagaki's book)

1. There were many Buddhas before the appearance of Buddha Lokeshvararaja (i.e., the 54th Buddha) and Amida Buddha (i.e., the 55th Buddha)
2. Among the fifty-three Buddhas of the past, many of them had names that contain the words, such as "light," "brilliance," and "lamp." This foreshadows the fact that one of the most important concepts taught in the *Larger Sutra* is "light" (or wisdom).

B. Dharmakara's Meeting with a Buddha by the Name of Lokeshvararaja

1. Importance of meeting with a teacher
2. The story of an insect called *kalaghula* in T'an-luan's *Commentary on the*

Pure Land Treatise

C. His First Practice: Worship (p. 28)

D. His Second Practice: Praise—*Tanbutsu-ge* or *Sanbutsu-ge* (“Verses in Praise of a Buddha”) (pp. 28-30)

1. First half of the *Tanbutsu-ge*: Dharmakara praises his teacher Buddha
 - a. Dharmakara’s praise of his teacher’s bodily features
 - b. His praise of his teacher’s speech action
 - c. His praise of his teacher’s spiritual qualities—the six *paramita* practices: his teacher is a “listener.”
 - d. His praise of his teacher’s “meditating (or contemplating) on Buddhas” (*nem-butsu*)
 - e. His teacher is a perfect bodhisattva.
 - f. He is deeply shaken by the power of his teacher’s light (wisdom).

2. Second half of the *Tanbutsu-ge*: Dharmakara describes the contents of his Aspiration to attain Buddhahood and to create the Pure Land.
 - a. Dharmakara aspires to become a Buddha exactly like his teacher Lokeshvararaja.
 - b. He aspires to perfect his wisdom and compassion through the six *paramita* practices and the Samantabhadra practices.
 - c. He aspires to create the most wonderful Buddha Land (or Pure Land) where all sentient beings can be born.
 - d. He asks his teacher and all Buddhas in the ten quarters to become his witnesses.
 - e. He concludes the verses with his determination to save the worst type of people in a hell: “Even though I must remain in a state of poignant suffering (or in the worst type of hell), I will diligently work there and will not have any regret.” (Tr. by N. Haneda. Cf. p. 30 of Inagaki’s book)

(Haneda's Notes)

Two types of Buddhahood (i.e., “static Buddhahood” and “dynamic Buddhahood”) and two types of wisdom (i.e., “the basic wisdom” and “the subsequently acquired wisdom”) that we can see in Shakyamuni's life

1. Two types of Buddhahood (“static Buddhahood” and “dynamic Buddhahood”)

Preface: Shakyamuni's enlightenment experience

- a. “Static Buddhahood”: Shakyamuni's Buddhahood before his decision to teach
 - i. Leaving the world of samsara (i.e., human suffering) and going to the world of nirvana (i.e., peace)
 - ii. A loner Buddha (*pratyeka-buddha*), a Hinayana Buddha, who is sitting in isolation
 - iii. This is the Shakyamuni that Ananda was seeing yesterday. (Cf. Doctrinal Introduction)
- b. “Dynamic Buddhahood”: his Buddhahood after his decision to teach (*Tatha-agata* [one who has come from suchness])
 - i. Standing up, leaving the world of nirvana (i.e., peace), and returning to the world of samsara (i.e., human suffering)
 - ii. A Buddha as a perfect bodhisattva: a Mahayana Buddha. “Bodhisattva Dharmakara” symbolizes this Buddhahood.
 - iii. This is the Shakyamuni that Ananda is seeing today. (Cf. Doctrinal Introduction)

2. The two types of wisdom (i.e., “the basic wisdom [*prajna*]” and “the subsequently acquired wisdom [*jnana*]”)

Preface: “Wisdom” in Buddhism means “understanding the truth of conditional arising” within the context of the self

- a. “The basic wisdom”: the basis of static Buddhahood
 - i. This wisdom means that Shakyamuni understood the truth of conditional arising as the truth of “the emptiness of the self (*atman*).”
 - ii. When Shakyamuni attained this wisdom, he was happy, being immersed in the joy of selflessness. But he had a danger of becoming a loner Buddha (*pratyeka-buddha*), a Hinayana Buddha.
 - iii. This wisdom benefits the self alone.
 - iv. The six *prajna-paramita* (wisdom-perfection) practices (i.e., [1] giving, [2] disciplining, [3] patience, [4] continuous seeking, [5] meditation, and [6] wisdom [*prajna*]) are designed to perfect this *prajna* wisdom. The *prajna* wisdom is insight into emptiness of all things; it is a negative truth.
 - v. The six *prajna-paramita* practices are the contents of the first six stages of the Ten Bodhisattva Stages.
- b. “The subsequently acquired wisdom”: the basis of dynamic Buddhahood
 - i. This wisdom means that Shakyamuni understood the truth of conditional arising as the truth of oneness between the self and others.
 - ii. When Shakyamuni attained this wisdom, he could not be immersed in the joy of selflessness. Since he realized the real contents of the emptied self were all

things and people that existed outside the self. He could not help standing up and going back to the world of suffering to liberate the people there.

- iii. This wisdom benefits all sentient beings: it is synonymous with compassion.
- iv. The Samantabhadra practices (i.e., [1] traveling to the ten quarters, [2] visiting and worshiping all Buddhas, and [3] enlightening all sentient beings) are designed to perfect this *jnana* wisdom. (Cf. General Introduction [A.2.]) The *jnana* wisdom is a positive wisdom that transforms the negative into the positive.
- v. The Samantabhadra practices are the contents of the 8th, 9th, and 10th stages of the Ten Bodhisattva Stages.

E. The Two Instructions of Dharmakara's Teacher (pp. 30-31)

1. Dharmakara's requests for the teacher's instructions and the teacher's response
 - a. Dharmakara's first request was rejected by the teacher: "You yourself should know by what practice you can establish a glorious Buddha-land." This means that "you (i.e., a teacher) can take a horse (i.e., a student) to the river, but you cannot make it drink."
 - b. His second request was granted by the teacher: the student understands what his teacher can and cannot do."
2. The first instruction: "bailing an ocean to obtain a wonderful treasure"
 - a. The teacher teaches the importance of continuous seeking (*virya*).
 - b. Two types of "treasure"—the goal of practice
 - i. The "treasure" (i.e., the spirit of a pro) that human beings usually desire to attain: "A small river becomes a huge lake."
 - ii. The "treasure" (i.e., the spirit of a beginner) that Dharmakara (who embodies the *Hongan* [Innermost Aspiration]) desires to attain: "A small river becomes a huge river that keeps on flowing limitlessly." Process is itself the goal in Buddhism
 - iii. The importance of aspiration (*gan*)
3. The second instruction: The teacher shows 21 billion Buddha-lands to Dharmakara—the importance of realizing all-encompassing mind.
 - a. Lokeshvararaja's challenge to Dharmakara; he shows him all kinds of evil and ugliness as well as all kinds of good and beauty.
 - b. The Pure Land that Dharmakara wants to create will incorporate all kinds of things, such as evil and ugliness. He wants to embrace even the most evil into his Pure Land.

F. Dharmakara's Five-kalpa Contemplation (p. 31)

After receiving his teacher's instructions, Dharmakara embarks on a five-*kalpa* contemplation to formulate his vows. The three desires that Dharmakara had in his five-*kalpa* contemplation (according to Shinran) were:

1. Desire to come up with the simplest (but most powerful) means of liberating all sentient beings. (This desire later becomes the 17th Vow.)
2. Desire to save all sentient beings including the most evil immediately with

the simplest means, without any moral or practical conditions. (This desire later becomes the 18th Vow.)

3. Desire to give them the highest attainment of Buddhahood. (This desire later becomes the 11th Vow.)

To use a metaphor of medicine, Dharmakara first desires to come up with the simplest (and most powerful) medicine, one that immediately cures an incurable sickness. Second, he desires that the incurably sick take the medicine and immediately experience the beginning of recovery. Third, he desires to give them complete recovery of their health.

G. The Vow-Making (Dharmakara's Third Practice): 48 Vows

1. The teacher encourages Dharmakara to proclaim his vows. (p. 32)
2. Forty-eight vows (pp. 32-39)
 - a. Vows about Dharmakara's own Buddhahood (12, 13, 17)
 - b. Vows about the Pure Land (31, 32)
 - c. Vows about the people in the Pure Land (1-11, 14-16, 21, 23-30, 38-40, 46)
 - d. Vows about the people outside the Pure Land (18-20, 22, 33-37, 41-45, 47, 48)

3. According to Shinran, among the 48 vows, the Three (i.e., the 17th, 18th, and 11th) Vows are the most important. Shinran calls them the "Selected Primal Vows." (*CWS*, pp. 634-635) The Three Vows are as follows:

- a. In the 17th Vow, Dharmakara desires to realize his Name (i.e., a calling voice, saying, "*Namu Amida Butsu* [Take refuge in limitless light/wisdom and limitless life/compassion!]) This Vow says,

"If, when I attain Buddhahood, the countless Buddhas throughout the worlds in the ten quarters do not all praise and say my Name, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment." (*CWS*, p. 13)

His twofold Name (*Amitabha* [Limitless Light] and *Amitayus* [Limitless Life]) is an expression of his limitless wisdom (light) and compassion (life). Further, the Name means a calling voice, saying, "*Namu-Amida-Butsu* ('Take refuge in limitless light/wisdom and limitless life/compassion!')." With this calling, the simplest (but most powerful) means, Dharmakara desires to connect all sentient beings with the Dharma and liberate them. He desires that all historical Buddhas say the Name (i.e., praise his virtues) so that all sentient beings can hear it.

- b. In the 18th Vow, Dharmakara desires that all sentient beings (including the unsavable) hear the Name that is said by all Buddhas, understand its meaning, and have awakening (*shinjin*) experience. He desires that all sentient beings be immediately born in the Pure Land and attain the stage of nonretrogression. This Vow says,

"If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme

enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma.”

(The 18th Vow in the *Larger Sutra*. CWS, p. 80)

“If, when I have realized the supreme enlightenment, living beings in other Buddha-lands should hear my Name, I will with sincere mind direct all my roots of good to them. Aspiring to be born in my land, they shall say my Name perhaps even ten times. If they should not be born there, may I not attain enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit evil acts that condemn them to Avici hell and those who slander the right dharma or the sages.”

(The 18th Vow in the *Sutra of the Tathagata of Immeasurable Life*. CWS, p. 80)

- c. In the 11th Vow, Dharmakara desires that all sentient beings immediately attain the stage of nonretrogression (or the truly settled) and eventually attain the great Nirvana. This Vow says,

“If, when I attain Buddhahood, the human beings and devas in my land do not dwell among the settled [i.e., those who attain the stage of nonretrogression] and necessarily attain nirvana, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment.”

(CWS, p. 153)

(Summary of the Three Vows)

The realization of the 17th Vow is like the realization of a wonderful medicine; the realization of the 18th Vow is like realization of sick people’s taking the medicine; and the realization of the 11th Vow is like the realization of sick people’s complete recovery of their health.

H. *Sansei-ge* (“Verses of the Three Vows”) or *Jusei-ge* (“Verses of the Repeated Vows”) (pp. 39-40): Dharmakara Again Emphasizes the Importance of Realizing His Name (i.e., a Calling Voice, Saying, “*Namu Amida Butsu* [Take Refuge in Limitless Light/Wisdom and Limitless Life/Compassion!]”)

1. “The Three Vows” that Dharmakara repeats in the *Sansei-ge* are: the 12th Vow (in which Dharmakara desires to realize his limitless light/wisdom), the 13th Vow (in which he desires to realize his limitless life/compassion), and the 17th Vow (in which he desires to realize his Name). Shinran calls these Three Vows “the [Three] Vows of Great Compassion.”
2. The Three Vows and the verses of the *Sansei-ge*
 - a. The 12th Vow (in which Dharmakara desires to realize his limitless light/wisdom [*amitabha*]): *Sansei-ge* verses (1, 4, and 9) talk about the realization of limitless light/wisdom (i.e., *prajna*—the basic wisdom).
 - b. The 13th Vow (in which he desires to realize his limitless life/compassion [*amitayus*]): *Sansei-ge* verses (2, 5, 6, and 10) talk about the realization of limitless life/compassion (i.e., *jnana*—the subsequently acquired wisdom).
 - c. The 17th Vow (in which he desires to realize his Name (i.e., a calling voice, saying, “*Namu Amida Butsu* [Take refuge in *Amitabha* and *Amitayus*]!”): *Sansei-ge* verses (3, 7, and 8) talk about the realization of the Name.

3. Among the three vows, the 17th Vow is the most important; two other vows (i.e., the 12th and 13th Vows) talk about wisdom (or *prajna*) and compassion (*jnana*) that are the contents of his Name. Transferring the Name to the sentient beings in the historical context is Dharmakara's fifth practice of "transferring merits (*eko*)."
4. Dharmakara says that he will shake the whole universe with the power of his light (or wisdom) just like his teacher.

I. Meditation (i.e., the Fourth Practice)

Having proclaimed his 48 vows and summarizing them with the three vows (i.e., the 12th, 13th, and 17th Vows) in his *Sansei-ge*, Dharmakara performs various practices to fulfill these vows. His practices are designed to fulfill the 48 vows: They are like construction of a building on the basis of a drawing or blue prints. Specifically, his practices are designed to fulfill the 12th and 13th Vows (or limitless wisdom and limitless compassion), because they are the contents of the Name that he desires to transfer to the sentient beings in the historical context.

Dharmakara visits innumerable Buddhas in the ten quarters. This practice is the "visitation (*kuyo*) practice," one of the Samantabhadra practices, in which he visits innumerable Buddhas in the ten quarters and learns wisdom from them. It is the most important practice by which he fulfills the 12th Vow and realizes limitless light/wisdom. Limitless light/wisdom (*amitabha*) becomes his Name.

1. Dharmakara's Practice Is Called "Eternal Practice."

"Then, Ananda, after proclaiming and establishing those universal vows in the presence of the Buddha Lokeshvararaja before the multitude of beings..., the *bhiksu* Dharmakara was solely intent on producing a glorious and exquisite land. The Buddha-land he sought to establish was vast in extent, unsurpassed, and supremely wonderful, always present and subject neither to decay nor to change. *During inconceivable and innumerable kalpas, he cultivated the immeasurable meritorious practices of the bodhisattva path.*" (The *Three Pure Land Sutras*, [9], p. 41)

2. Two Types of Bodhisattva Practice (See above "Two Types of Wisdom")

- a. Six *prajna-paramita* practices (i.e., [1] giving, [2] disciplining, [3] patience, [4] continuous seeking, [5] meditation, and [6] wisdom [*prajna*]) that are designed to perfect the *prajna* wisdom.
- b. Samantabhadra Practices that are designed to perfect the *jnana* wisdom. (Cf. General Introduction [A.2.])
 - i. Traveling to the ten quarters
 - ii. Visiting all Buddhas and learning wisdom from them, i.e., the visitation (*kuyo*) practice

(The 6th verse of the *Tanbutsu-ge*)

Even though there are zillions of Buddhas
And great sages as many as the sand grains of the River Ganges,
I will visit all of them and study under them.
Nothing is greater than seeking the way,
Continuously advancing and never retreating.
 - iii. Enlightening all sentient beings, i.e., the *kaige* practice

(The 7th verse of the *Tanbutsu-ge*)

Even though the Buddha countries are
As innumerable as the sand grains of the River Ganges,
And other lands are also without number,
My light will illuminate all those countries and lands,
Spreading all over them.
Such will be the way I will make continuous efforts,
And my power will be limitless.

(*The Three Pure Land Sutras*, pp. 29-30, with modification by N. Haneda)

3. Dharmakara's Realization of Limitless Light (or Wisdom) That Transforms Limitless Number of Sentient Beings into Limitless Number of Buddhas through His Visiting and Learning Wisdom from Innumerable Buddhas
 - a. (According to Shinran) "Dharmakara collected the light (or wisdom) from all Buddhas." (*CWS*, p. 452)
 - b. Realization of "Buddhas' thinking of Buddhas mutually (*butsu-butsu-sonnen*)"—the theme of the *Larger Sutra*—in Dharmakara's life. (Cf. p. 54)
 - i. Fulfillment of the 12th Vow to realize limitless light (or wisdom): Dharmakara has become a person who can do nembutsu toward all Buddhas. This means that he has now perfected "active" aspect of "Buddhas' thinking of Buddhas mutually."
 - ii. Fulfillment of the 17th Vow to realize limitless light (or compassion): Dharmakara has become a person toward whom all Buddhas do nembutsu. This means that he has now realized "passive" aspect of "Buddhas' thinking of Buddhas mutually."

J. Fulfillment of Dharmakara's Vows: the Adornments of Dharmakara's Buddhahood and His Buddha-land

The *Larger Sutra* talks about all kinds of adornments in Dharmakara's Buddhahood and his Buddha-land. The word "adornment" means the "symbolization/verbalization in concrete forms" of Dharmakara's wonderful virtues (or spiritual qualities) that are beyond words.

1. Adornment of Dharmakara's Buddhahood and People
 - a. The perfection of Dharmakara's Buddhahood (p. 42)
 - b. His western Buddha-land a hundred thousand *kotis* of lands away (p. 42)
 - c. Realization of his Buddhahood ten *kalpas* ago (p. 43)
 - d. Ananda's question about the meaning of the adornment of Dharmakara's Buddha-land (pp. 43-44)
 - e. Realization of his limitless light (12th and 33rd Vows) (p. 44-45)

Among all the fulfillments of Dharmakara's virtues, the fulfillment of the 12th Vow (i.e., Dharmakara's limitless light/wisdom) is the most important. The sutra says that Dharmakara receives twelve Names that show various aspects of his wisdom.
 - f. Realization of his limitless life (13th, 14th, and 15th Vows) (p. 45)
 - g. Innumerable *sravakas* and bodhisattvas at the first assembly of Amida's sermon (pp. 45-46)

2. Adornment of the Things in His Buddha-land
 - a. Trees of seven jewels (pp. 46-47)
 - b. Bodhi tree (pp. 47-48)
 - c. Music (p. 48)
 - d. Buildings such as lecture halls (p. 48)
 - e. Jewel ponds (p. 48-49)
3. Happiness in His Buddha-land
 - a. Virtues of those born in in his Buddha-land (pp. 49-50)
 - b. Analogy of a beggar (pp. 50-51)
 - c. Joy of heavenly beings (pp. 52)
 - d. Comfort and radiance of his Buddha-land (pp. 52-53)

K. Transferring Merits (*Eko*)—the Fifth Practice: Transferring of Dharmakara’s Virtues, such as Wisdom and Compassion, to the Sentient Beings in the Historical Context

When Dharmakara fulfilled his vows and became Amida Buddha, he perfected his virtues, such as wisdom and compassion, which various “adornments” symbolize. (Vasubandhu in his *Pure of Land Treaties* [i.e., a commentary on the *Larger Sutra*] talks about the 29 kinds of adornments of the Pure Land.)

Dharmakara desires to transfer all his virtues, such as wisdom and compassion, to the sentient beings in the historical context. The 17th Vow (in which he desired his Name called [or praised] by historical Buddhas [or teachers]) is the specific way he wants to transfer his virtues to the sentient beings in the historical context. The Name (or *Namu Amida Butsu* [Take refuge in limitless wisdom!]) represents all his virtues.

According to Shinran, the most important virtue contained in the Name was the Buddha’s wisdom. By giving the Buddha’s wisdom to the sentient beings in the historical context, Dharmakara wanted to liberate them. That’s why Shinran often teaches us that the Name is an expression of the Buddha’s wisdom. By giving the Name to sentient beings Dharmakara desires to fulfill the three (17th, 18th, and 11th) Vows and liberate all sentient beings.

The End of the First Volume of the *Larger Sutra*

The Second Volume of the *Larger Sutra*: The Teaching Concerning the Side of the Liberated (or Patients)

At the out set of the second volume of the *Larger Sutra*, Shakyamuni says that the Three Vows (i.e., the 17th, 18th, and 11th Vows that Shinran calls “the Three Selected Primal Vows”) are already fulfilled.

Shakyamuni says that all [historical] Buddhas are now calling the Name (or praising the virtues) of Amida Buddha. Having heard the Name being praised by the Buddhas, sentient beings experience shinjin (deep spiritual awakening) and joy. All of this takes place because Dharmakara has transferred his virtues (i.e., wisdom and compassion) to all sentient beings in the historical context. When those sentient beings aspire to be born in

the Pure Land, they are immediately born there and attain the stage called “nonretrogression.”

I. The Three-Vow-Fulfillment Statement, the Most Important Textual Basis of Shinran’s Teaching

Fulfillment of the 17th, 18th, and 11th Vows

The Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters, countless as the sands of the Ganges, are one in praising [“saying the Name” is implied in this “praising”] the majestic power and the virtues, inconceivably profound, of the Buddha of immeasurable life. *All sentient beings, as they hear the Name [that is being said by all Buddhas in the ten directions], realize even one moment of shinjin and joy*, which is directed to them from Amida’s sincere mind. Being commanded to aspire to be born in that land, they then [or immediately] attain birth [in the Pure Land] and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.

(Cf. The *Three Pure Land* Sutras, section [22], p. 54; CWS, pp. 154, 474-6 with modification by N.Haneda)

The Traditional Reading of “The Fulfillment of the 18th Vow” That Shinran Ignored

When sentient beings hear the Name, say it even once in trust and joy, sincerely turn over their merits [toward the attainment of birth], and aspire to be born in that land, then they shall attain birth and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression. (CWS, p. 474, in the footnote)

A. The Fulfillment of the 17th Vow to Realize the Name: “Realization of Medicine”

This means the coming into being of historical teachers (i.e., “all Buddhas-tathagatas in the ten quarters”) and their teachings (i.e., “praising of Amida’s virtues”).

B. The Fulfillment of the 18th Vow to Realize Shinjin: Realization of “Taking Medicine and Experiencing a Sign of Recovery”

This means the realization of shinjin, the humble and dynamic spirit of the continuous seeker—the cause of Buddhahood. It means the realization of the true self in all sentient beings.

C. The Fulfillment of the 11th Vow: “Complete Recovery”

This means the realization of the twofold attainment: the stage of the truly settled (i.e., the true beginning) and the eventual attainment of *parinirvana* or the highest Buddhahood (i.e., the true ending).

II. Conclusion

With the story of Dharmakara’s becoming Amida Buddha, Shakyamuni has answered Ananda’s questions about who Shakyamuni was and what his radiance (or light) was. Shakyamuni told Ananda that the universal basis of human liberation was the Three Vows (i.e., the 17th, 18th, and 11th Vows). He told him that he was one of the Buddhas who

were mentioned in the 17th Vow. He also told that Ananda was one of the sentient beings who were mentioned in the 18th Vow and were going to be liberated by hearing the Name.

Shinran who identified himself with Ananda and Honen with Shakyamuni believed that the Three-Vow-Statement described the universal way all human beings are liberated—how human spiritual liberation is realized between a student and a teacher. Thus Shinran thought the Three-Vow-Statement was the most important text in entire Buddhist literature; he constructed his Shinshu doctrine on the basis of it.

Thus we can see that the first volume of the *Larger Sutra*, with a story of Dharmakara's becoming Amida Buddha, explained the Dharma's (i.e., the liberator's or curing party's) side. The second volume talks about sentient beings' (i.e., the liberated's or patients') side as we have seen in the Three-Vow-Fulfillment Statement.

Appendix: The Structure of Shinran's *Kyogyoshinsho*

Shinran structured the first four volumes of his *Kyogyoshinsho* on the basis of the "Three-Vow-Fulfillment Statement."

The First Volume, "Kyo (Teaching)"

In this volume Shinran quotes only the Doctrinal Introduction of the *Larger Sutra* and says that the *Larger Sutra* is the true and real teaching.

The Second Volume, "Gyo (Practice)"

In this volume Shinran talks about the fulfillment of the Name (i.e., the 17th Vow)—the medicine. At the outset of this volume, Shinran places the 17th Vow and its Fulfillment Statement.

This volume consists of a collection of passages that explain the meaning of the Name (i.e., the calling voice of Amida). Shinran quotes the words of all seven patriarchs and other Buddhist masters.

The Third Volume, "Shin (Awakening)"

In this volume Shinran talks about the realization of shinjin, awakening of the true self through hearing the Name, the fulfillment of the 18th Vow—sick patients taking medicine and experiencing a sign of recovery.

At the outset of this volume, Shinran places the 18th Vow and its Fulfillment Statement.

The Fourth Volume, "Sho (Attainment)"

In this volume Shinran talks about the fulfillment of a dynamic life that has a true beginning (i.e., the stage of the truly settled) and a true ending (i.e., *parinirvana*), the fulfillment of the 11th Vow—a complete recovery of health.

At the outset of this volume, Shinran places the 11th Vow and its Fulfillment Statement.