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## **Possible Roots of the Pure Land Buddhist Notion of Practice in Light of Some Early Buddhist Sources**

### ABSTRACT

Many constitutive ideas of Pure Land Buddhism can be found even in the earliest strata of Buddhist texts, such as the Pāli canon. They concern the characteristics of the Buddha, descriptions of some idealised lands as well as a set of practices and attitudes leading to rebirth in such lands. I will illustrate that several seminal ideas of these practices and attitudes, like faith (p. *pasanna*, *saddhā*), vows (p. *paṇidhi*) or recollections (p. *anussati*), are connected in the Pāli canon with householders or with monks of minor abilities and are oriented towards the goal of reaching heaven instead of attaining nirvana. The development of practice in the Pure Land tradition may thus be seen as a consequence of (a) putting emphasis on Early Buddhist practices leading to easy rebirth in heaven as well as (b) adapting these to new ideas in cosmology, thus replacing heavens with pure lands.

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### KEY WORDS

Buddhism, pure land, pali, pāli, Amida, practice, rebirth, faith

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

There was, and to certain extent still is, a problem with positioning Pure Land Buddhism within a wider context. The root of this problem seems to be the perceived singularity of this tradition, especially as coloured by Shinran’s

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most unconventional interpretation, which led Arthur Lloyd in 1910 to doubt whether Shinshū fits the definition of Buddhism. He preferred to reserve for it “a category by itself as a quasi-Buddhist religion which contains in it elements which are apparently not of Buddhist origin.”<sup>1</sup> Naturally, the Pure Land tradition is much more than Jōdo Shinshū, but the case of the latter is instructive. Some see in it germs of Christian Gospel, some use it for comparative theology, delving into the meaning of grace, faith, salvation, etc. For others it is uninteresting precisely because of the perceived Christian affinities. These perceptions are opposed by some of those who belong to the Shinshū tradition and strongly oppose its Christian colouring. For them Shinshū is squarely within Mahāyāna, and not only that – it is perceived as the fullest possible realisation and consummation of the Mahāyāna ideal, something unequalled in other Buddhist traditions. For some then, Jōdo Shinshū is non-Buddhist,<sup>2</sup> for others it is the ultimate consummation of Buddhism. Both positions set it quite apart from the other Buddhist movements. Jōdo Shinshū being the most popular Pure Land Buddhist movement today, those judgements influence the perception and reception of the tradition as a whole. Many accounts on the Pure Land tradition are in fact accounts on the Shinshū lineage that do not go beyond it; translations of the fundamental sutras are coloured by the Shinshū interpretations. If one desires a fuller account of Pure Land Buddhism, with a deeper, more objective and poly-dimensional picture of this tradition (including Shinshū), it must be analysed in a wider setting, alongside other Buddhist strands.

It is the belief of this author that the Pure Land tradition should be analysed chiefly as one chapter in the general history of Buddhism and in close

<sup>1</sup> A. Lloyd, *Shinran and his Work*, Tokyo 1910, p. 14. He also states: “To this doctrine of salvation by Faith the Shinshu sect has remained constantly faithful. I have often been told that Shinran was acquainted with Christian doctrines when he framed the system of Jōdo Shinshū. From what I have been able to put before my readers in the course of this history, I think we may say that the probabilities are that he was.” See: idem, *The Creed of Half Japan*, London 1911, p. 274. The affinities between Shinran’s thought and Christianity were noted and engaged with by many scholars also more recently, see e.g. P. O. Ingram, *Shinran Shōnin and Martin Luther: a soteriological comparison*, “Journal of the American Academy of Religion” 1971; idem, *Faith as Knowledge in the Teaching of Shinran Shonin and Martin Luther*, “Buddhist-Christian Studies” 1988; idem, *On the Practice of Faith: A Lutheran’s Interior Dialogue with Buddhism*, “Buddhist-Christian Studies” 2001, Vol. 21, No. 1; F. Buri, *The Concept of Grace in Paul, Shinran, and Luther*, “The Eastern Buddhist” 1976, Vol. NS09, No. 2. It needs no mention, though, that perceiving similarities – deep or superficial – is one thing, and proving direct transfer of ideas, quite another.

<sup>2</sup> There are of course many variations of this basic position from “non-buddhist” to “not typical Buddhism”.

relation to it. Notwithstanding the possible external influences,<sup>3</sup> it is clear that the framework of reference for Pure Land proponents was always a Buddhist one, through and through. In any case, there is nothing illogical or counter-factual that precludes us from viewing the Pure Land tradition as an effect of the internal development of Buddhism. An ability to emit light, which is one of the defining features of Amida Buddha (one of his names in Sanskrit is – to be recalled – Amitābha, “Immeasurable Light”) is also attributed to buddha Gotama in the Nikāyas, albeit to a lesser extent. There are also clear similarities between Amida’s land – Sukhāvātī, and king Mahāsudassana’s capital Kusāvātī (DN 17).<sup>4</sup> Luckily the research methodology that re-integrates Pure Land Buddhism with Buddhist history in general is entering the mainstream. The number of works is too long to list here so an interested reader might consult the bibliography listed by Tanaka;<sup>5</sup> just as an example I could mention important texts by Nattier,<sup>6</sup> Harrison,<sup>7</sup> and (naturally) Fujita.<sup>8</sup> The majority of research, however, links the Pure Land tradition to Mahāyāna (which is only natural), and does not extend it further back in time.<sup>9</sup> The present study attempts to show similarities extending further – into the Nikāya literature. It is focused on the aspect of Buddhist practice, its goals and characteristics of practitioners, and attempts to show that the similarities extend beyond mere

<sup>3</sup> Concerning this, see the remarks by Tanaka (commenting on Fujita) in *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine: Ching-ying Hui-yuan’s Commentary on the Visualization Sutra*, Abany 1990, pp. 8–9.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. R. Gethin, *Mythology as Meditation: From the Mahāsudassana Sutta to the Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra*, “The Journal of the Pali Text Society” 2006, Vol. 28.

<sup>5</sup> K. Tanaka, *Bibliography of English-Language Works on Pure Land Buddhism: Primarily 1983–1989*, “Pacific World” 1989, Vol. NS 5. He also lists three earlier bibliographies. Ibidem, p. 85.

<sup>6</sup> J. Nattier, *The Realm of Akṣobhya: A Missing Piece in the History of Pure Land Buddhism*, “Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies” 2001, Vol. 23, No. 1; eadem, *The Indian Roots of Pure Land Buddhism: Insights from the Oldest Chinese Versions of the Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha*, “Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies” 2003.

<sup>7</sup> P. M. Harrison, *Buddhānusmṛti in the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Sarmukhavasthita Samādhi-Sūtra*, “Journal of Indian Philosophy” 1978, Vol. 6.

<sup>8</sup> K. Fujita, *The Origin of the Pure Land*, “The Eastern Buddhist” 1996, Vol. New Series 29, No. 1; idem, *Pure Land Buddhism in India*, trans. T. Unno, [in:] *In The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development*, eds. J. Foard, M. Solomon, and R. K. Payne, Berkeley 1996; 藤田宏達 [Kōtatsu Fujita], 原始浄土思想の研究 [*Genshi Jōdo shisō no kenkyū*], 岩波書店 [Iwanami Shoten] 1970.

<sup>9</sup> The notable exception are the works of Fujita, quoted above.

terminology into similarly linked clusters of concepts. Obviously, many ideas of the Pure Land Buddhism were transformed, owing to the Mahāyāna turn; however, the similarity of the general pattern is – in my opinion – still visible, which lends support to the hypothesis that Pure Land Buddhism is the result of a conscious and quite conservative elaboration on a certain subset of Buddhist thought, already apparent within the Nikāya literature.

As is well known, the tradition of Pure Land Buddhism developed around the core of three sutras: the Larger and the Smaller Sukhāvāṭīvyūha<sup>10</sup> and the Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life.<sup>11</sup> The sutras are not always mutually congruent but what is important for the present discussion is the set of ideas they contain that became the foundation for the developed Pure Land tradition. The tenets were chosen and interpreted to support the vision of an easy path to emancipation (via the aid of Amida Buddha), much shorter than the regular one (through the intermediate goal of reaching rebirth in Amida's land – Sukhāvāṭī), and accessible virtually to anyone.<sup>12</sup> With time the trend progressed towards interpreting the easy path as designed especially for the least capable beings and the most difficult times, which culminated in Shinran's thought. Even the exclusion formula that barred those committing the five actions of immediate retribution was interpreted as in fact allowing trespassers to enter Sukhāvāṭī.

The fast track towards emancipation, via rebirth in the heaven-like realm of Amida, and the easy practice accessible to all, with the emphasis on the least capable beings seem to be the defining traits in Pure Land Buddhism. We will try to identify a similarly woven set of strands in the Nikāya literature. For the sake of analysis we will distinguish ideas describing external practices, as

<sup>10</sup> Historically the most influential versions were T 366 for the Smaller Sutra (SSV) and T 360 for the Larger Sutra (LSV). There is also a Sanskrit version, a Tibetan translation and another Chinese translation of the Smaller Sutra and even more extant versions of the Larger Sutra. For recent translation of the two sutras made independently from Sanskrit and Chinese versions see: *Land of Bliss: the Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light: Sanskrit and Chinese Versions of the Sukhāvāṭīvyūha Sutras*, ed. L. O. Gómez, 'Studies in the Buddhist Traditions', Honolulu 1996.

<sup>11</sup> T 365 (ADS). Sutra entitled *guān wúliángshòu jīng* (j. *kammuryōju kyō* 觀無量壽經) is supposed to be a translation, with reconstructed Sanskrit titles *\*amitāyurdhyāna sūtra* or *\*amitāyurbuddhānusr̥ti sūtra*. It is doubted, however, that there ever existed a Sanskrit root text for this "translation." For the English version with the (Chinese) original and commentary see: M. Yamada, *The Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life as Expounded by Śākyamuni Buddha*, Kyoto 1984.

<sup>12</sup> On the rationale behind this process in the Mahāyāna in general see e.g. P. M. Harrison, op. cit.; J. Nattier, *The Realm of Akṣobhya...*, op. cit.

well as the accompanying mental attitudes which Buddhism also considers as (internal, and – by far – the most important) acts. There will be also mention of the external circumstances and conditions for those acts, and finally, the descriptions of people undertaking the specified practices.

## ANUSSATI – MINDFULNESS OR RECOLLECTION

The most popular list of recollections in the Pāli canon includes six items: the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha (making a subset of three), virtuous behaviour, generosity, and the devas.<sup>13</sup> A slightly artificial inclusion of the other four – recollection of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), of death (*maraṇasati*), of the body (*kāyagatāsati*), and of peace (*upasamānussati*) – complete the list of ten objects.

I will discuss *buddhānussati* as an example, for it is this practice and its modifications (known in Eastern Buddhism as 念佛 – ch. *niànfǒ*, j. *nembutsu*) that gained enormous importance in Pure Land thought. It is mentioned repeatedly in the most crucial parts of the Pure Land sutras – for example in the 16<sup>th</sup> visualisation in ADS, where it is the suggested practice for the lowest rank of the lowest grade of people to be reborn in Sukhāvātī. In the 9<sup>th</sup> visualisation of ADS, those who practice *buddhānussati* are embraced by the light of Amida, never to be abandoned. Mindfulness of the Buddha is also recommended in the epilogue of that sutra.<sup>14</sup> Similarly in the LSV, all the three grades of beings who reach the rebirth in the Pure Land practice *nembutsu* as one of the preconditions for that goal.<sup>15</sup> SSV is specific in that the mindfulness of the Three Jewels is described as a kind of spontaneous practice cultivated by beings already born in the Pure Land, induced by hearing tinkling bells and singing birds.<sup>16</sup> There are, however, fragments in that sutra that directly prescribe some practices that can be seen as variations of *anussati*. Amongst them are hearing the title of the discourse itself, and remembering the names of buddhas mentioned there,<sup>17</sup> or hearing about the qualities of Amida and keeping in mind his name.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> AN 6.9; DN 33.9: ‘*cha anussatiṭṭhānāni — buddhānussati, dhammānussati, saṅghānussati, sīlānussati, cāgānussati, devatānussati.*’

<sup>14</sup> M. Yamada, op. cit., pp. 109, 59, 113.

<sup>15</sup> *Land of Bliss...*, op. cit., pp. 92–92, 187–188.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 17–18, 147.

<sup>17</sup> Sanskrit version, see *ibidem*, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Chinese version, see *ibidem*, p. 148.

In the Pāli canon, the Buddha speaks very highly of the results of various *anussatis*.

Bhikkhus, there is one thing that, when developed and cultivated, leads exclusively to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *nibbāna*. What is that one thing? Recollection of the Buddha.<sup>19</sup>

The recollection consists of calling to mind the epithets of the Buddha, which represent his unique characteristics and should also include calling to mind examples of events manifesting these characteristics.

[...] a noble disciple recollects the Tathāgata thus: “The Blessed One is an arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.”<sup>20</sup>

The practice is so beneficial because it fills the mind with very profitable content. Thus directed and engaged, the mind is blocked from taking an unprofitable object (based on the three roots of lust, hatred and delusion). The process is explained in the following fragment:

When a noble disciple recollects the Tathāgata, on that occasion his mind is not obsessed by lust, hatred, or delusion; on that occasion his mind is simply straight, based on the Tathāgata [*tathāgataṃ ārabha*]. A noble disciple whose mind is straight [*ujjugatacitto*] gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma [*dhammūpasamhitam pāmojjaṃ*]. When he is joyful, rapture arises [*pamuditassa pīti jāyati*]. For one with a rapturous mind, the body becomes tranquil [*kāyo passambhati*]. One tranquil in body feels pleasure [*sukham vediyati*]. For one feeling pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated [*cittaṃ samādhīyati*]. This is called a noble disciple who dwells in balance amid an unbalanced population, who

<sup>19</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, ed. Bodhi, seria ‘The Teachings of the Buddha’, Boston 2012, p. 116. AN 1.296: ‘*ekadhammo, bhikkhave, bhāvito bahulīkato ekantanibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati. katamo ekadhammo? buddhānussati.*’ The same is said about the other objects from the set of ten. The six recollections are counted among the factors conducive to the direct knowing of lust. AN 6.141: ‘*rāgassa, bhikkhave, abhiññāya cha dhammā bhāvetabbā. katame cha? buddhānussati, dhammānussati, saṅghānussati, sīlānussati, cāgānussati, devatānussati. rāgassa, bhikkhave, abhiññāya ime cha dhammā bhāvetabbā ti.*’

<sup>20</sup> Translation by ibidem, p. 862. AN 6.10: ‘*...ariyasāvako tathāgataṃ anussarati – itipi so bhagavā arahaṃ sammāsambuddho vijjācaraṇasampanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro purisadammasārathi sathā devamanussānaṃ buddho bhagavā ti.*’

dwells unafflicted amid an afflicted population. As one who has entered the stream of the Dhamma [*dhammasotaṃ samāpanno*], he develops recollection of the Buddha.<sup>21</sup>

It is to be noted here that this practice – as in Pure Land thought – is associated with joyful feelings (*pāmojja*, *pīti*, *sukha*) and concentration (one-pointedness of attention). The person undertaking it is compared with one who has entered the stream (*sotāpanna*), and thus is bound irreversibly to awakening. This is particularly important, as the Pure Land way is seen as an indirect path towards emancipation. The proximate goal is to easily reach the stage of irreversibility (s. *avaivartika*, *avinivartanīya*)<sup>22</sup> on the way to enlightenment, by being reborn in Amida's Pure Land. Being there, one also easily progresses towards the final goal with the certainty of ultimately reaching it. There is thus functional similarity (i.e. the aspect of irreversibility) between the three fruits of the Path in the Pāli canon (*sotāpanna*, *sakadāgāmīn*, *anāgāmīn*) and the non-retrogression stage the Pure Land sutras speak of.<sup>23</sup>

## MODIFICATIONS OF THE PRACTICE OF BUDDHĀNUSSATI

Two other prominent practices in Pure Land Buddhism – that is, visualisation and calling the name of the Buddha – should also be seen as variations in the practice of *anussati*. We have already seen such modification in SSV, where hearing about the qualities of Amida and keeping his name in mind is prescribed. This practice is structurally very much like the typical *buddhānussati*. Various names of Amida are substituted for the word “buddha”, and his qualities substitute the standard set of qualities known from the Pāli canon. A little bit more remote is the practice of keeping in mind the names of buddhas mentioned in SSV, as a way of ensuring their protection, but again, the dissimilarity is minor. ADS, in the description of the worst kind of people

<sup>21</sup> *The Numerical Discourses...*, op. cit., pp. 862–863, 1565. AN 6.10, 11.11–13.

<sup>22</sup> Ch. *bùtuìzhuǎn*, j. *futaiten* 不退轉; or ch. *ebibázhi*, j. *abibatchi* 阿鞞跋致.

<sup>23</sup> Obviously, the goal itself is redefined along the Mahāyāna lines. That is the reason why *arahants* (the stage of ultimate accomplishment in the Pāli canon) are to be seen in the Pure Land, practicing towards the higher state – s. *anuttara samyak sambodhi* (ch. *ānòuduōluó sānmǎo sānpútí*, j. *anokutara sammyaku sambodai* 阿耨多羅三藐三菩提; ch. *wúshàngdào xīn*, j. *mujōdō shin* 無上道心; ch. *wúshàng zhèngzhēndào yì*, j. *mujō shōshindō i* 無上正真道意). All three Pure Land sutras mention *arahants* or *sāvakas* (s. *śrāvakas*) in Sukhāvātī.

reaching rebirth in Sukhāvātī, presents some evidence as to the probable way of evolution from *buddhānussati* to the practice of recitation:

When the life of such a foolish person is about to end, he meets a virtuous and learned teacher who comforts him in various ways, expounds for him the exquisite teachings, and urges him to be mindful of the Buddha [念佛 *nembutsu*]. But this person is too tormented by pain to be mindful of the Buddha. Then the virtuous friend says, ‘If you cannot be mindful of the Buddha, you should say that you take refuge in the Buddha of Immeasurable Life.’ And so, with a sincere mind and an uninterrupted voice, this person says ‘Namu Amida Butsu’ [南無阿彌陀佛] manifesting ten moments of thought and because he says the Buddha’s name, with every thought-moment, the evil karma binding him to birth-and-death for eighty koṭis of kalpas is eliminated.<sup>24</sup>

The equation of *nembutsu* with the *Namu Amida Butsu* formula is often treated as a matter of course, as if the two practices were identical. They are *not*, but ADS provides some logic for this identification. Reciting *Namu Amida Butsu* is seen there as a functional substitute of *nembutsu* designed for the afflicted beings in difficult times. There are also precedents for this practice in the Pāli canon, where the Buddha, when remembered (*anussarati*) and honoured (*namo*) by beings in times of trouble, answers their plea for help, and becomes a powerful refuge (*saraṇa*). Thus he rescues supplicant gods from the hands of asuras.<sup>25</sup> This is only amplified in the Pure Land tradition. Its essence after all is defined as the easy path for all beings in the times of the Dharma decline (ch. *mōfā*, j. *mappō* 末法). One must note in this connection a very important fragment in LSV, declaring that this sutra will be accessible to beings for a hundred more years after all other Buddhist teachings disappear.<sup>26</sup>

All the above mentioned practices are thus “hybrid” versions of *buddhānussati*, based on the logic that whether we visualise some buddha, or hear (an aspect prominent in LSV), remember, or utter his name, we are keeping him in mind. As was said earlier, the practice of *buddhānussati* is seen in the Pāli canon as a blocker of harmful mind-content. ADS has a similar observation to make, although more pronounced:

Therefore, when you perceive a buddha in your mind, it is your mind that possesses the thirty-two prominent features and the eighty secondary attributes; your mind becomes a buddha; your mind is a buddha; and the wisdom of the buddhas – true, universal,

<sup>24</sup> M. Yamada, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. SN 2.9–10.

<sup>26</sup> *Land of Bliss...*, op. cit., p. 221.

and ocean-like – arises from this mind. Therefore, you should single-mindedly fix your thoughts and clearly perceive the Buddha, Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha.<sup>27</sup>

A strikingly similar discussion is recorded in later layer of the Pāli canon – Milindapañhā text, where reflecting upon the Buddha’s qualities seems to be close to partaking in them or benefitting from them somehow, what can guarantee heaven even for an impenitent sinner on a deathbed:

The king said: ‘Your people say, Nāgasena, that though a man should have lived a hundred years an evil life [*yo vassasataṃ akusalaṃ kareyya*], yet if, at the moment of death, thoughts of the Buddha should enter his mind [*maraṇakāle ca ekaṃ budhaguṇaṃ satim paṭilabheyya*], he will be reborn among the gods [*so deveṣu uppajjeyyā*]. This I don’t believe. And thus do they also say: “By one case of destruction of life a man may be reborn in purgatory.” That, too, I cannot believe.’ ‘But tell me, O king. Would even a tiny stone float on the water without a boat?’ ‘Certainly not.’ ‘Very well; but would not a hundred cart-loads of stones float on the water if they were loaded in a boat?’ ‘Yes, they would float right enough.’ ‘Well, good deeds are like the boat.’ ‘Very good, Nāgasena!’<sup>28</sup>

It should be stressed that the physical form of a teacher, his everyday behaviour, the actions he would undertake or refrain from, were accepted in India as an important criterion for judging the truth of his teaching. The teacher and the teaching were treated as one and inseparable; the flaws in one were taken as the flaws in the other. The teacher could incite trust in the doctrine before the doctrine was actually learnt by the apprentice. He also served as the ultimate guide (i.e. example) for the dos and don’ts on the path. The crucial importance of a visual contact with the teacher, especially in the case of young, inexperienced students, was certainly clear to the Buddha.

Then, while the Blessed One was alone in seclusion, a reflection arose in his mind thus: “The Sangha of bhikkhus has been dismissed by me. There are bhikkhus here who are newly ordained, not long gone forth, recently come to this Dhamma and Discipline. If they do not see me there may take place in them some alteration or change. Just as when a young calf does not see its mother there may take place in it some alteration or change [...]”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Quoted from M. Yamada, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> T. W. Rhys-Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda. Part I*, Oxford 1890, Vol. 35, pp. 123–124. KN, Mil 3.7.2.

<sup>29</sup> Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Boston 2000, p. 918; SN 22.80. See also MN 67, *Cātumā Sutta*.

Such contact must have been sought after by many students. The most striking example is the story of Vakkalī, who was declared by the Buddha as chief among those resolved through faith (*saddhādhimutta*).<sup>30</sup> His only wish was to see the Buddha, as recorded in SN 22.87. This was simultaneously his only reason for remorse and regret, as – due to his illness – he was unable to do so. His love and devotion must have been so intense, that the Buddha saw fit to counterbalance it somehow, leading to the pronouncement of his famous equation: “One who sees the Dhamma sees me; one who sees me sees the Dhamma. For in seeing the Dhamma, Vakkali, one sees me; and in seeing me, one sees the Dhamma.”<sup>31</sup> From the preceding (“Enough, Vakkali! Why do you want to see this foul body?”), it is clear that in order to really see the Buddha, one must see beyond the physical form, and ponder his Dhamma, as that is what ultimately makes a buddha. However, taken out of context, this equation can serve as grounds for the belief that a visual contact with the teacher can in itself be a form of Dhamma teaching and even realisation. This contact was direct at first, established via the physical proximity of the Buddha. Those unable to meet the teacher in person, had to resort to the descriptions and stories about him, and most probably would try to picture him based on those stories. As time passed, the desire to meet, see and be guided by the Buddha became so pressing that an elaborate system of meditative practices leading to the visualisation of him and other buddhas was developed, as suggested by Harrison.<sup>32</sup> His argument, however, can be strengthened. Not only after Buddha’s death, but also during his lifetime, could the lack of his presence be heavily felt by many, as the story of Vakkalī suggests. The most striking example of this kind, that seems to describe visualisation practice is, however, the story of Piṅgiya, found in the very old layer of the Pāli canon, the *Suttanipāta*:

‘I see him in my mind as if with my eye [*passāmi naṃ manasā cakkhunāva*], vigilant, O Brāhmana, night and day; worshipping [*namassamāno*] I spend the night, therefore I think I do not stay away from him.’ ‘Belief and joy, mind and thought [*saddhā ca pīti ca mano sati ca*] incline me towards the doctrine of Gotama; whichever way the very wise man goes, the very same I am inclined to.’ ‘Therefore, as I am worn out and feeble, my body does not go there, but in my thoughts I always go there [*saṃkappayantāya vajāmi niccam*], for my mind, O Brāhmana, is joined to him [*mano hi me brāhmaṇa tena yutto*].’<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., p. 110; AN 1.208.

<sup>31</sup> Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., p. 939; SN 22.871.

<sup>32</sup> P. M. Harrison, op. cit., pp. 37–38. Harrison quotes there one striking passage from EĀ, that clearly shows *buddhānusr̥ti* as both reminiscence and visualisation practice.

<sup>33</sup> Sn 1148–1150. The quotation is from V. Fausbøll, *The Sutta-Nipāta*, Oxford 1881, p. 212.

Fausbøll translated the phrase “*passāmi naṃ manasā cakkhunāva*” as “in my mind and with my eye” which seems wrong, given the context that is precisely about Piṅgiya’s inability to follow the Buddha due to his frailty. I have corrected it to “in my mind as if with my eye.” This reading is confirmed by the commentary (SnA) also: “*passāmi naṃ manasā cakkhunāvāti taṃ buddhaṃ ahaṃ cakkhunā viya manasā passāmi.*” In my opinion, this fragment clearly mentions a successful attempt at visualising the Buddha.

The practice of *anussati* also has unmistakable affinities with the development and characteristics of faith (*saddhā, pasāda*), as will be shown next.

## ATTITUDES – FAITH, REVERENCE, GENEROSITY

Given the crucial role of faith (or trust) connected with Amida and his vows in the Pure Land sutras, and the enormous impact of this tenet on the development of the Pure Land tradition, it is important to note some similarities with the Pāli canon.

Faith in the Pāli canon is understood as a root factor, being a necessary precondition for undertaking any further practice. It is because of faith that clansmen go forth from the home life into homelessness (*ekacco kulaputto saddhā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajito hoti*).<sup>34</sup> Apart from being a necessary impetus for entering the path, faith also has a prominent place within the path itself. It is listed as the first factor within the *indriyas* and *balas* (the others being energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom), and is thus included twice within the very important list of 37 dhammas associated with awakening (*bodhipakkhiya dhammā*). The first position again stresses the point of departure in practice, but – rightly applied – any of them could be a guide in leading all the factors to the same goal.<sup>35</sup> In AN 11.14 we find an unequivocal statement that the ultimate manifestation of faith is liberation itself. More common, however, are situations that – something being missing – faith does not progress so far. In that case, faith guarantees the eventual attaining of liberation through the intermediate fruit of stream-entry<sup>36</sup> or – at the very

<sup>34</sup> Bodhi, Ñāṇamoli, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A [New] Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya: Translated from the Pali*, Boston 2009, p. 218; MN 21. Also MN 29, MN 67, AN 4.122, etc.

<sup>35</sup> T. W. Rhys-Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda. Part I*, op. cit., Vol. 35, p. 62. Mil 2.1.15.

<sup>36</sup> ‘[...] those bhikkhus who are Dhamma-followers or faith-followers are all headed for enlightenment.’ Bodhi, Ñāṇamoli, op. cit., p. 236. MN 22: ‘...ye te bhikkhū dhammānusārino saddhānusārino sabbe te sambodhiparāyanā.’

least – rebirth in heaven.<sup>37</sup> It is worth mentioning that both fruits intertwine in Pure Land Buddhism, where one reaches a state of irreversibility<sup>38</sup> by attaining rebirth in the Pure Land.<sup>39</sup>

The connection between the faculty of faith and the fruit of stream-entry is unmistakable:

‘And where, bhikkhus, is the faculty of faith to be seen? The faculty of faith is to be seen here in the four factors of stream-entry.’<sup>40</sup>

‘What are the four? Here, bhikkhus, the noble disciple possesses confirmed confidence [*aveccappasāda*] in the Buddha thus: “The Blessed One is an arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.”’ ‘He possesses confirmed confidence in the Dhamma’ [...] ‘He possesses confirmed confidence in the Sangha’ [...] ‘He possesses the virtues dear to the noble ones – unbroken, untorn, unblemished, unmottled, freeing, praised by the wise, ungrasped, leading to concentration.’<sup>41</sup>

Speaking to householders, Buddha may substitute virtuous behaviour for the virtue of giving.

Here, chamberlains, a noble disciple possesses confirmed confidence in the Buddha [...] in the Dhamma [...] in the Sangha [...] He dwells at home with a mind devoid of the stain of stinginess, freely generous, open-handed, delighting in relinquishment, one devoted to charity, delighting in giving and sharing. A noble disciple who possesses these four things is a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination.<sup>42</sup>

There are these points to be noted: First of all, the practice of the first three recollections is defined in exactly the same terms as the three faiths, thus leading to the conclusion that the practice of *anussati* and the developing of

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<sup>37</sup> ‘[...] those bhikkhus who have sufficient faith in me sufficient love for me, are all headed for heaven.’ Ibidem, p. 236, 1211 n. 247. MN 22: ‘...*yesaṃ mayi saddhāmattaṃ pemamattaṃ sabbe te saggaparāyanā ti.*’

<sup>38</sup> The fruit of entering the stream is defined in the Nikāyas as the first accomplishment associated with irreversibility.

<sup>39</sup> Pure Lands as purified buddhakṣetras possess both nirvāṇic and paradisiac characteristics.

<sup>40</sup> Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., p. 1670; SN 48.8.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, pp. 1788–1789; SN 55.1–3. Sometimes only one factor is mentioned – that is, the faith in the Buddha. See e.g. ibidem, p. 1671; SN 48.9–10.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, p. 1795; SN 55.6.

faith go hand in hand; in fact, they might be seen as two aspects of the same mental attitude. Secondly, faith as *saddhā* (and naturally *anussati* as well) is identified with *pasāda* – the term having a connotation of brightness (light), clarity, and tranquil satisfaction, and very important in Pure Land Buddhism (e.g. *prasannacittā* in the 18th vow of Amida in the LSV). That association of faith and light (clarity), has a counterpart in the strong link between doubt and obscurity. It shows yet another early source for Pure Land thought – this time revolving around the darkness-dispelling light of Amida, allowing light (faith) to manifest itself. This theme is most prominent in Shinran’s thought. In DN 33 we read the following definition: ‘Three obscurations (*tamā*): One hesitates (*kankhati*), vacillates (*vicikicchati*), is undecided (*nādhimuccati*), is unsettled (*na sampasīdati*) about the past, the future, the present.’<sup>43</sup>

He who has faith in the Buddha does not engender doubts, and thus has no hesitation as to the proper course of action. Certainty has a tranquillising effect on the body, and thus allows concentration to develop. This process is seen in the previously quoted description of the effects of the practice of recollection.<sup>44</sup> Here is one more fragment stating the direct relationship between *saddhā* and *pasāda*.

The king said, ‘Venerable Nāgasena, what is the characteristic mark of faith [*saddhā*]?’ ‘Tranquillisation [*sampasādanalakkhaṇā*], O king, and aspiration [*sampakkhandana-lakkhaṇā*].’ ‘And how is tranquillisation the mark of faith?’ ‘As faith, O king, springs up in the heart it breaks through the five hindrances – lust, malice, mental sloth, spiritual pride, and doubt – and the heart, free from these hindrances, becomes clear [*accham*], serene [*vippasannam*], untroubled [*anāvilam*].’ [...] ‘And how is aspiration the mark of faith?’ ‘In as much as the recluse, on perceiving how the hearts of others have been set free, aspires to enter as it were by a leap upon the fruit of the first stage, or of the second, or of the third in the Excellent Way, or to gain Arahatship itself, and thus applies himself to the attainment of what he has not reached, to the experience of what he has not yet felt, to the realisation of what he has not yet realised – therefore is it that aspiration is the mark of faith.’<sup>45</sup>

The fourth factor of stream-entry, is defined as either generosity or the “virtues dear to the noble ones.” As shown above, the former seems to be equivalent to the latter in the case of (most) householders, thus constituting something of a “minimal set” of virtues or foundation for them.

<sup>43</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, ed. M. O. Walshe, ‘The Teachings of the Buddha’, Boston 1995, p. 484.

<sup>44</sup> See also e.g. Mil 3.7.7

<sup>45</sup> T. W. Rhys-Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda. Part I*, op. cit., Vol. 35, pp. 54–55. Mil 2.1.10–11.

Giving (generosity) to the various mendicants is praised by the Buddha as a virtuous deed. The more accomplished the receiver, the more merit the giver accrues. Of course the best ‘field of merit’ (*puññakkhetta*) is the Buddha and the Sangha of Nobles.<sup>46</sup> In Pure Land sutras there are ample examples of the practice of giving, and the Pāli canon is no different. The acts of generosity may – although rarely – bring great fruit even in this life.<sup>47</sup> In general, however, the recompense for the act of giving is manifested in the quality of rebirth.

A man, for example, though his hands and feet are cut off, if he gave [*datvā*] to the Blessed One merely a handful of lotuses, would not enter purgatory for ninety-one Kalpas.<sup>48</sup>

In *Vimānavatthu* and the commentary there is a plethora of material describing happy rebirth as the consequence of an act of generosity. I want, however, to put greater stress on the state of mind connected with generosity, which can be defined as a reverence toward the receiver. Just after his awakening, the Buddha is said to have declared that it is ill to live without revering anything. However, not able to find anyone more accomplished than himself, he decided to hold in reverence the Dhamma through which he awoke. This is advisable to anyone.

Then a certain brahman’s slave girl, going along with a jar of water, saw the Blessed One surrounded by the Order of monks, realized that they were tired and thirsty, and having a mind of faith [*pasannacittā*], wanted to give them water. “Even though these people of this village have resolved that nothing at all is to be given to the recluse Gotama and not even a show of respect is to be made,” she said to herself, “Yet, if after I have found these supreme fields of merit [*puññakkhetta*] and worthy recipients

<sup>46</sup> There was contention in the early Buddhist schools, as to the relation between the Buddha and the Sangha. Different opinions arose (thus engendering disputes) as to whether the Buddha is included within the Sangha or not, who is actually the recipient of the gifts, and how to count the amount of merit collected. This does not concern us here. Of course not only the quality of the recipient is important for the amount of merit gained, but also of the giver: ‘Four purifications of offerings (*dakkhinā-visuddhiyo*): there is the offering purified (a) by the giver but not by the recipient, (b) by the recipient but not by the giver, (c) by neither, (d) by both.’ (*The Long Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., p. 493).

<sup>47</sup> *Mil* 4.1.37 and *Mil* 4.8.25 report seven people who have been recompensed in the present life for their gifts, and four who visited heaven of the Thirty-three while living. They are Sumana, Ekasātaka, Puṇṇa, Mallikā, Gopālamātā, Suppiyā, Puṇṇā (of the first category), and the musician Guttīla, and kings Sādhina, Nimi, and Mandhātā of the second. See T. W. Rhys-Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda. Part 1*, op. cit., Vol. 35, p. 172, and idem, *The Questions of King Milinda. Part 2*, Oxford 1894, Vol. 36, pp. 145–147.

<sup>48</sup> Idem, *The Questions of King Milinda. Part 1*, op. cit., Vol. 35, p. 129. *Mil* 3.7.7.

of meritorious giving, I do not make a support for myself by a mere giving of water, when hereafter shall I be released from a life of woe? Gladly let my master and everyone who lives in the village beat or bind me, still I will give a gift of water to a field of merit such as this.” When she had made this resolve, though the other women carrying water tried to stop her, without regard for her life she lifted down the water-jar from her head, placed it on one side, approached the Blessed One full of joy and happiness [*sañjātapītisomanassā*], greeted him with the five-fold veneration [*pañcapatiṭṭhitena vanditvā*], and offered him water. The Blessed One recognized the faith of her mind [*cittappasādam oloketvā*], and as a favour to her washed his hands and feet and drank the drinking water. The water in the jar was not diminished. The girl saw this, so next, having faith of mind [*pasannacittā*], she gave to one after another of the monks, then to all of them. The water was still not diminished. Joyful and elated [*hatṭhatuṭṭhā*], and with her water-jar as full as ever, she went home.<sup>49</sup>

We see here a relation between the mind of faith, reverent attitude, experience of joy and the act of generosity itself. There is also an awareness of the good consequences this entails. The act of merit should be kept in one’s heart and recollected, for recalling the goodness of some act or a state of mind is conducive to repeating it in the future.

She kept that deed of merit in her heart [*sā taṃ puññaṃ hadaye ṭhapetvā*], thinking of it from time to time [*antarantarā anussarantī*]. Afterwards she died and was reborn in the realm of the Thirty Three.<sup>50</sup>

However, the merit can be gained even without the act of generosity. That is the proof that what really matters is the act of reverence itself. This is clearly visible in a story about the Caṇḍāla woman, who – otherwise destined for hell – was established in heaven without offering anything to the Buddha, except for honouring him.

And at that moment the Caṇḍāla woman was coming out of the city leaning on a stick; she saw the Blessed One approaching, and when she was opposite him, she stopped. The Blessed One also stopped and stood in front of her as if hindering her from going on. Then the venerable Mahā-Moggallāna, because he knew the Teacher’s mind and that the woman’s span of life was over, spoke urging her to veneration [*vandanāya*] of the Blessed One: “Caṇḍālī, honour [*vanda*] the feet of Gotama, widely famed. Out of compassion for you yourself the supreme seer stood (in front of you). Incline your mind favourably [*abhippasādehi maṇaṃ*] towards one who is worthy and steadfast as he. Make haste, honour him with clasped hands [*pañjalikā vanda*], for brief is your

<sup>49</sup> I. B. Horner, H. S. Gehman, *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon: Part IV*, Pali Text Society, 1974, pp. 14–15; VvA 1.1.8.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 10; VvA 1.1.6.

life.” And she listened to him, and with emotion she came to have faith in the Teacher, paid homage with the five-fold veneration, and with mind become one-pointed through joy in the Buddha she stood with head bowed [*satthari pasannamānasāva hutvā pañcapaṭiṭṭhitena vanditvā añjaliṃ katvā namassamānā buddhagatāya pītiyā ekaggacittā hutvā aṭṭhāsi*]. The Blessed One saying, “This is sufficient for her attainment of heaven,” entered the city with the Order of monks.<sup>51</sup>

Reverence can be thus seen as an aspect of faith, and giving simply as an external manifestation of the reverential mind. All four factors of stream-entry are thus unmistakably associated with faith.

## VOW

For the Pure Land thought, the resolve, or vow, is one of the necessary pre-conditions for rebirth in Sukhāvātī, complementing, as it were, the vows of Amida. In the Pāli canon, a vow is understood as a powerful agent, able to bend natural laws, and remain active long after the author of the resolve passes from existence, even in an absolute sense, as in the case of arahants. It is stated in *Milindapañhā*, where three causes are given as the reason for the wondrous manifestations at the cetiyas built over the remains of arahants. Two of particular interest are the “steadfast resolve” (*adhiṭṭhāna*) concerning the miracles made by a certain arahant before his passing, and a similar resolve made by a woman or man of “believing heart” (*saddho pasanno*), “able, intelligent, wise, endowed with insight”, who may bring some gift to the cetiya.<sup>52</sup> There seems to be, however, an ambivalent position concerning the vows. Some of them, as in the example above, are definitely beneficial, not for the agent, but for the intended receivers, stimulating their progress along the path. In this function, the vows in the Pāli canon have similar structure to the vows of Amida. An even more positive valorisation must be given to the resolve to reach awakening.

However, in most cases the subject and object of the vow is the same person, and the desired goal concerns the material conditions of life, here on earth or in heaven, so it is definitely a distraction from the ultimate goal of Buddhism. One example is AN 8.35, where eight types of rebirth thanks to generosity (and a resolve) are listed. The process is limited to virtuous people,

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, p. 48; VvA 1.2.4.

<sup>52</sup> T. W. Rhys-Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda. Part 2*, op. cit., Vol. 36, pp. 174–175; Mil 5.3.7. The third cause for miracles is due to the gods who have pity for beings and want to establish them in true faith.

excluding immoral ones (*tañca kho sīlavato vadāmi no dussīlassa*), and consists of fixing the mind (*taṃ cittaṃ adhiṭṭhātī*) on the desired goal. As a consequence, the “heart’s wish of one who is virtuous succeeds because of his purity [*ijjhatāvuso, sīlavato cetopañidhi visuddhattā*].”<sup>53</sup> What is important to note is that this practice is evidently directed to the common worldling, and explicitly described as “what is inferior [*hīne*], not developed higher” therefore clearly deviating from the proper goal of Buddhist teachings. Sometimes, however, the Buddha deepens his message, even when asked about precisely this, an inferior, type of goal, as seen in the following:

Master Gotama, we have such wishes [*kāmā*], desires [*chandā*], and hopes [*adhippāya*, intention] as these: “May we dwell in a home crowded with children! May we enjoy Kāśian sandalwood! May we wear garlands, scents, and unguents! May we receive gold and silver! With the breakup of the body, after death, may we be reborn in a good destination, in a heavenly world!” As we have such wishes, desires, and hopes, let Master Gotama teach us the Dhamma in such a way that we [...] might be reborn in a good destination, in a heavenly world.<sup>54</sup>

Again, the request comes from the householders, so the Buddha teaches them some basic morality (three bodily and four verbal aspects of wholesome conduct – *kusala kammaṃpatha*) together – as is relevant to the present discussion – with the four factors of stream entry.<sup>55</sup>

When, householders, the noble disciple possesses these seven good qualities and these four desirable states, if he wishes he could by himself declare of himself: “I am one finished with hell, finished with the animal realm, finished with the domain of ghosts, finished with the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world. I am a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as my destination.”<sup>56</sup>

The person truly pursuing the ultimate goal should refrain from making a resolve about a future birth. The only advised method would be reaching heaven as a consequence of attaining one of the fruits of the path, thereby gaining the certainty of liberation, and that is precisely what the Buddha suggests in the above fragment.

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<sup>53</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., p. 1168. See also DN 33.11 (*aṭṭhakam*).

<sup>54</sup> Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., p. 1797; SN 55.7.

<sup>55</sup> The fourth being in this case “virtues dear to the noble ones” not generosity.

<sup>56</sup> Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., p. 1799; SN 55.7.

The question that remains is how to explain the discrepancy between unambiguously positive assessment of making the vow to be reborn in the Pure Land tradition, and the ambivalent treatment in the Pāli canon, where on the one hand godly and human beings are advised to evoke right resolution (*attasammāpaṇidhi*),<sup>57</sup> while on the other, the monks should refrain from making a vow (*paṇidhi*) concerning renewed existences, here or there.<sup>58</sup> The key factor responsible for the difference is, in my opinion, the transformation of the Buddhist cosmology. Although in the Pāli canon we already have some notion about the Buddhist path being practicable and practiced in heavens, the general idea is that heavens are just the pleasurable planes of existence gained as a reward for karma with the very limited potential for any spiritual progress. Moreover, long as it is, the heavenly existence will ultimately end, and consequently, a being will fall into lower planes. In the traditional picture, a heavenly rebirth is therefore simply an inhibitor, an interruption, a pause in the process of progressing along the path.

With the advent and evolution of an idea of “buddha fields” (s. *buddhakṣetra*),<sup>59</sup> especially their purified versions (s. *parisuddha kṣetra*; ch. *guótú qīngjīng*, j. *kokudo shōjō* 國土清淨) or “pure lands” (ch. *jìngtǔ*, j. *jōdo* 淨土; ch. *jìngguó*, j. *jōkoku* 淨國) this picture changes radically. As we remember from the above quotation, Buddha recommends rebirth in heaven only as accompanying the state of one of the first three fruits of the path, which means the certainty of ultimately reaching awakening. This state of irreversibility is mirrored in Mahāyāna by the state of *avaivartika* – the certainty of ultimately

<sup>57</sup> Fausbøll translates *attasammāpaṇidhi* in Sn as “a thorough study of one’s self” (V. Fausbøll, op. cit., p. 44). Similarly Walshe (“perfect development of one’s personality”) in DN 34 (*The Long Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., pp. 513–514). Bodhi renders it as “right resolution” in AN 4.31 (*The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., p. 419). In all fragments the term appears in the same context. I follow the latter interpretation.

<sup>58</sup> KN 5.43 (Sn, *aṭṭhakavaggo*, *paramaṭṭhakasuttam*): *yassūbhayante paṇidhīdha natthi, bhavābhavāya idha vā huraṃ vā. / nivesanā tassa na santi keci, dhammesu niccheyya samug-gahītaṃ*. Translation in V. Fausbøll, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>59</sup> For the discussion concerning the buddha fields see e.g. the three instalments of Teresina Rowell’s work: *The Background and Early Use of the Buddha-Kṣetra Concept. Introduction and Chapter One*, “The Eastern Buddhist” 1934, Vol. OS06, No. 3; *The Background and Early Use of the Buddha-Kṣetra Concept. Chapter Two and Three*, “The Eastern Buddhist” 1935, Vol. OS06, No. 4; *The Background and Early Use of the Buddha-Kṣetra Concept. Chapter Four; with Appendices and Bibliography (Concluded)*, “The Eastern Buddhist” 1937, Vol. OS07, No. 2. Concerning the development of Buddhist cosmology see also W. R. Kloetzli, *Buddhist Cosmology: Science and Theology in the Images of Motion and Light*, Delhi 2007.

reaching unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment (s. *anuttara samyak sambodhi*). This is precisely what the eleventh vow of the LSV<sup>60</sup> as well the confirmation formula for the eighteenth vow<sup>61</sup> promises to beings reborn in Sukhāvātī. Making a vow to be reborn in a Pure Land is encouraged, because it replaces the heavens as a heaven-like place without the disadvantages of heaven. Existence in Pure Lands has the same blissful characteristics as existence in the heavens. The rebirth in both types of abodes is contingent on the same factors: faith, reverence, generosity. Pure Lands, however, are a “mahāyānized” version of the heavens, promising a state of *avaivartika* for the inhabitants, a fast track towards buddhahood once there, and a pleasurable existence in the meantime. They are no more an obstacle to progress on the path, but rather a stepping stone and an infinite acceleration.

## CLASSES OF BEINGS

The last topic here is the question of the classes of beings to whom the above mentioned practices and attitudes are recommended. In the Pure Land sutras, relying on Amida is seen as a path open to everyone, though there are some who are excluded, like the beings who commit the five sins of immediate retribution. The developed Pure Land tradition (or at least one strand of it, culminating in Hōnen’s and Shinran’s thought) is characterised by an ever increasing concentration on the least spiritually gifted beings, making them the prime concern of Amida, to the point that even the above mentioned exclusion formula is interpreted inclusively.<sup>62</sup>

It appears to be very similar in the Pāli canon. As we have already seen, the set of practices and attitudes is analogously entwined in both traditions. This similarity also extends to the characteristics of beings to whom those practices and attitudes are directed. Among many typologies of beings in the Pāli canon, there is the following hierarchy:

Seven persons worthy of offerings: The Both-Ways-Liberated [*ubhatobhāgavimutto*], the Wisdom-Liberated [*paññāvimutto*], the Body-Witness [*kāyasakkhī*], the Vision-Attainer [*diṭṭhippatto*], the Faith-Liberated [*saddhāvimutto*], the Dhamma-Devotee [*dhammānusārī*], the Faith-Devotee [*saddhānusārī*].<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> T0360\_12.0268a11-a12. Translation in *Land of Bliss...*, op. cit., p. 167.

<sup>61</sup> T0360\_12.0272b11-b14. Translation in *ibidem*, p. 191.

<sup>62</sup> The influence of the *mappō* thought is the chief reason for this shift.

<sup>63</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., p. 502; DN 33.

Trying to relate this list to the best known list of four fruitions (arahant, non-returner, once-returner, stream-winner) and four corresponding entry levels,<sup>64</sup> one must note that the faith-devotee and the Dhamma-devotee are considered to be on the entry level to the fruit of the stream-winner (the faith-devotee being the lowest). This is clearly said in SN 48.24, where fruits of the path are related to the mastery of the five faculties. There, those two classes are said to have weaker faculties than the ones that are to be reborn seven times, and this is the lowest category of stream-winners.

Bhikkhus, there are these five faculties. What five? The faculty of faith [...] the faculty of wisdom. These are the five faculties. One, bhikkhus, who has completed and fulfilled these five faculties is an arahant. If they are weaker than that, one is an attainer of Nibbāna in the interval; if still weaker, an attainer of Nibbāna upon landing; if still weaker, an attainer of Nibbāna without exertion; if still weaker, an attainer of Nibbāna with exertion; if still weaker, one who is bound upstream, heading towards the Akaniṭṭha realm; if still weaker, a once-returner; if still weaker, a one-seeder; if still weaker, a clan-to-clanner; if still weaker, a seven-lives-at-moster; if still weaker, a Dhamma-follower; if still weaker, a faith-follower.<sup>65</sup>

On the other hand, the faith-liberated might be on the way anywhere from the fruit of the stream-entry to the entry stage to the goal of arahantship. It is safe to presume though, that in most cases, the fruit was the winning of the stream. In any case, being guided by faith is considered as the lowest entry level, and also the lowest fruition. The stream-winners are elsewhere compared to the calves and feeble cattle – presumably sick or old that manage, however, to cross the Ganges and reach the other bank. Even more tender and defenceless are faith- and Dhamma-followers, compared to the newborn calf that crossed the Ganges only with the help of its mother.<sup>66</sup>

Those classes of bhikkhus are very close to the householders. The acts advised to those monks can also be undertaken by the householders, so they cannot be too demanding. And so householders ask the Buddha: ‘Bhante, with all our various engagements, how should we dwell?’<sup>67</sup> The Buddha praises the possession of the five indriyas (faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom), which seem to be understood in a mundane sense, and then advises the same set of six *anussatis* as he did for the monks. They are clearly

<sup>64</sup> Ibidem, p. 503; DN 33.

<sup>65</sup> Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., p. 1677; SN 48.24.

<sup>66</sup> Bodhi, *Ñāṇamoli*, op. cit., p. 321; MN 34.

<sup>67</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha...*, op. cit., pp. 1565, 1569. AN 11.11, 11.12, 11.13.

understood as acts practicable by anyone, under any circumstances. ‘[...] you should develop this recollection [...] while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. You should develop it while engaged in work and while living at home in a house full of children.’<sup>68</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have attempted to show – using examples from the Pāli canon – that the evolution of Pure Land Buddhism into the path for the most needy, and spiritually inept beings, consistently uses a set of ideas already formed in a much earlier history of Buddhism. To summarise everything:

1. There is strong interlinking in the Pāli canon between the ideas that play a crucial role in Pure Land Buddhist practice: that is between (a) *anussati* with its variations (uttering the name and visualising), (b) reverence with giving, and (c) faith proper. We may call it a ‘faith-set’.
2. The faith-set mentioned in point 1 is strongly connected with the least capable beings on the noble path. *Saddhānuserin* is the lowest entry-category, and *saddhāvimutta* the lowest fruition category. The first is a candidate for stream-entry, and the second might be (according to the commentaries) anyone from a stream-enterer to a candidate for arahantship; however, it is safe to presume that the majority of cases consisted of stream-enterers. This is supported by observations that (a) the same set of practices, based on faith, was directed for the householders, and (b) the goal of these practices was also declared to bring about the limited goal of rebirth in heaven.
3. A very important act in the Pure Land practice is making a resolve or vow to be born in Sukhāvātī. In the Pāli canon, making a vow to be born in heaven is a factor hindering one’s progress along the path, while making no such vow speeds this process up. The concept of a Pure Land synthesises the idea of a heavenly abode with the realm conducive to enlightenment, or enlightenment itself. Thus, in Pure Land thought one can and should make the resolve to be reborn, and that does not slow one’s progress, but – on the contrary – brings it closer to completion.

Thus, the vision of practice in Pure Land Buddhism revolves around a traditional set of ideas, already apparent in the Pāli canon. Obviously, these ideas were transformed according to a new perception of the Cosmos and

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, p. 1568; AN 11.12.

redefinition of buddhahood. However, in pure land Sukhāvātī, in the Buddha Amida, there is nothing striking or shocking; it is a vision (with its own peculiarities of course) that is common to all Mahāyāna. Pure Land Buddhism may therefore be more conservative, than is commonly thought.

I would like to finish with one of the most striking examples of the similarity between Pure Land thought and ideas contained in the Pāli canon:

Here some bhikkhu progresses by a measure of faith and love. In this case bhikkhus consider thus: “Friends, this bhikkhu progresses by a measure of faith and love. Let him not lose that measure of faith and love, as he may if we take action against him by repeatedly admonishing him.” Suppose a man had only one eye; then his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, would guard his eye, thinking: “Let him not lose his one eye.” So too, some bhikkhu progresses by a measure of faith and love [...] “Let him not lose that measure of faith and love as he may if we take action against him by repeatedly admonishing him.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Bodhi, Ñāṇamoli, op. cit., p. 548; MN 65.

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