

TRUTH AND TRADITION IN BUDDHISM

free translation from this, as well as a couple of others in the following pages:

THE WHITE LOTUS ODE ON THE "PURE LAND" IN THE WEST

"What words can picture the beauty and breadth
Of that pure and glistening land?
That land where the blossoms ne'er wither from age
Where the golden gates gleam like purest water—
The land that rises in terrace on terrace
Of diamond-clad steps and shining jade—
That land where there are none but fragrant bowers,
Where the Utpala-lotus unfolds itself freely.
O hear the sweet tones from hillside and grove
The All-Father's praise from the throats of the birds!

"And the ages fly by in an endless chain,
Never broken by summer's or winter's change.
The burning sun can never more frighten.
The icy storms' power long ago is subdued.
The clouds full of light and the green mantled forests
Now cradle all things in their endless peace.
Now the soul is set free from the haunts of darkness
And rests secure in the dwelling of truth.
See, all that was dim and beclouded on earth
Here is revealed, appropriated, secured.

"There ne'er was a country so brightened with gladness
As the Land of the Pure there far off to the West.
There stands Amitabha with shining adornments,
He makes all things ready for the eternal feast.
He draws every burdened soul up from the depths
And lifts them up into his peaceful abode.
The great transformation is accomplished for the worm
Who is freed from the body's oppressive sorrows.

THE PURE LAND SCHOOL

It receives as a gift a spiritual body,
A body which shines in the sea of spirits.

"And who indeed is it with grace in his tones,
Who sends his smile out to the dwellings of the suffering,
And who indeed is it whose glance is like the sun
Who shows his compassion on life and is victor?
Yes, it is God himself, who sits on the throne
And by his law, redeems from all need.
With gold-adorned arm, with crown of bright jewels,
With power over sin, over grief, over death.
None other is like to our God in his greatness,
And none can requite his compassion's great power!"

The following little verse from "Masses for the Dead" is of special beauty. It, also, is addressed to Amitabha.

"Thou perfect master,
Who shinest upon all things and all men,
As gleaming moonlight plays upon a thousand waters at the same
time!
Thy great compassion does not pass by a single creature.
Steadily and quietly sails the great ship of compassion across
the sea of sorrow.
Thou art the great physician for a sick and impure world,
In pity giving the invitation to the 'Paradise of the West.'"

At the evening mass the following poem is used, which on the one hand gives expression to that deep pessimism which characterizes the Buddhist society, and on the other hand makes reference to the three eternal values which fallen humanity can hold to in the strife of life.

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A few persons sing:

"One more day is ended
Of my quickly outrun span,
Like a fish dying in waterless caves
My day passed in joyless strife."

All join in singing:

"Ought we not all to make haste as one
Who has touched the glowing stone?
Let go pleasures, comfort, rest.
We hurry from this abode of vanity
And assemble our spirits in the old song:
'I dedicate myself to thee, *Amitabha*.
Would that all created things
Might understand the great life principle
And grasp the things that come from above!

"I dedicate myself to *the great life principle*.
Would that all creation might immerse itself
In the depths of the scriptures and attain that wisdom
Which is vast as the sea!

"I dedicate myself to *the holy society*.
Would that all creation might in great close ranks
Stride forward toward the great assembling
Of all the Saints!"

In connection with the evening mass, the full litany of the "Pure Land" is often read. We quote the following characteristic passage, written by the monk Yün-ch'í (雲棲):

"Thou great guiding master,
Who dost conduct all creatures over the happy land (at thy invitation),

THE PURE LAND SCHOOL

I bow my head in assent,
And I make this solemn pledge:
I will journey toward that land
In order to be born therein.
May thy mercy and compassion help me on."

(This introductory verse is called "The Desire for the Western Paradise," Hsi-fang-chieh, 西方偈).

Then it continues with the real "Pure Land's Prayer" (Ching'tu Wên, 淨土文):

"With all my heart I dedicate myself
To the life in the Western Paradise under thee, *Amitabha*.
May thy pure light enlighten me.
May thy merciful promises (of his forty-eight sworn pledges)
protect and fortify me.

"I have attained the right understanding
And that deep longing to be able to call upon God's name
As it should be done,
And I therefore pray most earnestly:
Let me be born in the pure land.

"My prayer is in accord with the precious promises of mercy
Which thou, *Amitabha*, has made:

"If there is any creature
Who desires to be born into my kingdom,
And who in glad assurance of faith
Dwells upon my name in tenfold invocation,
Not one of them
Shall be shut out from that great experience.
All shall attain to an understanding of my plans,
Yes, shall attain to God (tê-ju Ju-lai, 得入如來).

"Through these precious promises, as extensive as the sea,
All sinners may be able to gain the absolution of their sins,