

# **AMIDA ORDER**

## **PRECEPTS**

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## **FROM THE PREFACE TO THE ESSENTIALS OF THE VINAYA TRADITION**

**by Gyo'onen**

The great Vinaya Pitaka assembles all the teachings and cannot be fathomed. The broad practice of the Buddha's ethics embraces all the perfections and is difficult to calculate. The five realms of delusion are quickly extinguished by means of the practice of the precepts. The mental entanglements of the two kinds of death are cut off by means of the path of purity.

The precepts are a jewelled boat to cross the river of desire. They are a divine carriage to traverse the mountain of hatred. They are an immediate cause of entering the citadel of awakening. They are a direct path leading to the realm of the Buddhas. It is because of the precepts that the sustaining power of the Three Jewels, leading all beings to enlightenment, is forever fresh and new. The means of training thus provided for all kinds of beings has great saving virtue.

The spreading across the world of the sutras and their explanations comes solely through the power of the Vinaya. The cutting off of doubts through meditation and wisdom is exclusively a product of the power of practising the precepts. The precepts are the essentials by which the Dharma is protected and the Sangha remains harmonious. They are the model for teaching and saving all sentient beings. They are the level path of enlightenment and nirvana. They are an excellent model of the four wisdoms and the three manifestations of the Buddha.

## PRECEPTS

### The Resolution of All Ordained Members of the Order

It is my firm resolve to adhere to the precept

1. **to live under the protection of the original and sacred Vows of Amida Tathagata.** <sup>1</sup>
2. to keep in mind that Amida made seventeen vows before the great primal vow, and, in honour thereof, to endeavour to be part of Amida's work of creating conducive conditions for others before thinking of my own salvation.
3. to keep in mind and deeply revere the Eighteenth Vow, according to which one will naturally and immediately become a citizen of the Pure Land by listening to the Name in settled faith, dying to one's old life.
4. to understand the Eighteenth Vow as the foundation for and source of the virtue of all the other Vows.
5. to not "be foolishly attached to one's earthly body." <sup>2</sup>
6. whether one's death comes sooner or later, to be at ease and willing to depart leaving one's destination in the hands of the Tathagata.
7. to endeavour to live one's daily life with the same sincerity that one hopes to enjoy in one's last days, completely free from affectation. <sup>3</sup>
8. to not be shallow but to honestly realise one's prithajana (bonbu) nature and to contrast it with Amida's pure Light. <sup>4</sup>
9. to allow one's heart to be converted to the Land of Bliss as one's true home and to dedicate one's now redundant personal merit that others may similarly have the opportunity to be reborn. <sup>5</sup>
10. in accord with the Thirty Fourth Vow, to be mindful of Amida Tathagata in all that one does.
11. to hear Amida's call in all the occasions of life.
12. to open oneself to grace; to enjoy the sun, the sky, the clouds and storms that nature sends and to treat all occurrences, fortunate or unfortunate, as occasions for awakening.
13. to not perform any spiritual duty in one's own right but to rely upon the Other Power of Amida Tathagata which shall be courage enough. <sup>6</sup>
14. **to make the calling of nembutsu one's religious practice for all occasions.**
15. to not allow a waking hour to pass without uttering the nembutsu.
16. to recite at the very least one rosary of nembutsu every day.

17. to endeavour to keep the intention to utter nembutsu always in mind and actually to say it as often as one can.
18. to say nembutsu out loud whenever it is possible and appropriate to do so and to say it inwardly at other times.
19. to not assert that the efficacy of the nembutsu is dependent upon any other practice but only upon the innocence and purity of heart with which it is uttered.
20. as far as one's own practice is concerned, and without criticism of others, to view all other Buddhist practices as forms of nembutsu and as having no other principal function.<sup>7</sup>
21. to express gratitude for having been called by saying nembutsu, making bows, making offerings, and other appropriate tokens, symbols and rites.
22. in accord with the Nineteenth Vow, dwelling in faith, to naturally cultivate all virtues, while remaining aware of one's measureless short-comings.
23. in accord with the Twentieth Vow, with the Contemplation Sutra and with the example of Queen Vaidehi, while dwelling in faith, to naturally open the mind to the image of the Pure Land, even in the midst of affliction and misfortune.
24. **to follow the bodhisattva path within the Pureland tradition.**
25. mindful of the Twenty Second Vow, to learn to be unselfish so as to serve and minister to all, even at the expense of eternal life.
26. **to be contrite and make time to search one's own heart.**
27. to continually reflect upon one's prithajana (bonbu) nature.
28. to not hide one's failings, but, whenever one acts thoughtlessly and unskillfully, to seek to remedy harm done and make amends.
29. to learn one's true nature through contrition
30. through contrition to give rise to fellow feeling and to soften one's heart toward others.
31. **to have a correct attitude toward the precepts, understanding them as an expression of faith.**
32. to study the precepts.
33. to use the precepts in one's inward reflection.
34. to revere the precepts as Buddhakaya.
35. to not be attached to the precepts as dogma, but to see them as "a finger indicating the moon".

36. to not abuse the precepts as a status symbol.
37. to not regard the precepts as a licence to make demands upon others.
38. to celebrate the precepts as an expression of our life together as a community.
39. to work for the continued refinement of ethical understanding and practice throughout the Buddhist community.
40. **to rejoice.**
41. to have faith that brings joy to others, like those described in the Forty Fourth Vow.
42. to stand in awe.
43. to rejoice with others.
44. to rejoice for the successes of others.
45. to be conscientious and live such that one's life declares the Dharma
46. **to keep the Pureland teaching as one's chosen vehicle.**
47. to respect, study and recite the teachings of the Three Pureland Sutras.
48. to respect all Buddhist teachings and sutras.
49. to revere the ancestors, teachings and traditions of the Pureland Way.
50. **to take refuge in the Three Jewels.**
51. to treat one's spiritual guide with utmost respect.
52. to open one's heart to spiritual guidance.
53. to learn discipleship.
54. to praise and honour those who do the work of the Tathagata and who live in his Light.
55. to assist those who do the work of the Buddhas and labour alongside them to bring a pure land into being where all will quickly awaken.
56. to be mindful of the Twenty Third and Twenty Fourth Vows and respect other sanghas and their ways and traditions. This shall, however, not prevent one from working for the improvement of the Buddhist community.
57. to support the cause of peace, friendship and co-operation between faith communities.
58. to be mindful of the Thirty First Vow and be willing to learn from all people of faith.

59. to not act in ways that undermine the faith of others. <sup>8</sup>
60. to revere the Dharma.
61. to cherish the sangha and its members.
62. **to foster the good order of the sangha community.**
63. to support the creation and development of sangha communities.
64. to do everything in one's power to avoid and to overcome discord within the sangha, viewing it as one far out in the ocean in a small boat would view a leak in that boat.
65. to not act in ways that might bring the sangha or the Buddhist faith or faith communities in general into disrepute.
66. to respect and defer to disciples senior to oneself without neglecting one's duty.
67. in relating to disciples junior to oneself, to have tender care and deep respect established upon an understanding of true spiritual equality.
68. to learn to be at ease in receiving instruction and serving others, and equally at ease in exercising authority and directing others, that one's actions in either capacity may be imbued with loving kindness.
69. to not abuse authority.
70. to not use authority invested in a spiritual role for personal gain, comfort or advantage but only for the benefit of those it serves and instructs. <sup>9</sup>
71. to always understand one's spiritual role as that of discipleship to Amida Tathagata and service to others.
72. to not punish, mindful that, by the First and Second Vows, there are no places of harsh retribution in Amida's Land.
73. to not blame, mindful that, by the Sixteenth Vow, one does not hear words of criticism in Amida's Land.
74. to have a tender care for others, especially when one believes them to be at fault or mistaken.
75. **to practise right speech.**
76. to speak well of others.
77. to speak of the Dharma, the good life, and of faith and virtue.
78. to use speech that is gentle and not arrogant.
79. to not be opinionated.

80. to not give teaching that has not been implicitly or explicitly requested.
81. to not speak to an unwilling or inattentive person.
82. to not give teaching beyond what is required.
83. to not teach in the presence of a senior without the consent of the senior.
84. to not say what is untrue.
85. to listen to others and seek to understand and appreciate the spirit of their lives.
86. to not be timid in offering teaching or advice when it is appropriate.
87. to acquire the eloquence of the Dharma as promised in the Twenty Ninth and Thirtieth Vows.
88. to not add energy to quarrels.
89. to not incite hatred, envy or harm toward others.
90. to not incite others toward behaviour that would offend these precepts, whether those others have taken these precepts themselves or not.
91. to not disparage, libel or slander others.
92. to not criticise other members of the Order in front of non-members of the Order.
93. to not criticise other members of the School in front of non-members of the School.
94. to not criticise people without their full knowledge.
95. in a case where one has criticised a person and it is found that the criticism is without valid ground, to apologise to that person and to all those before whom the complaint was made.
96. to learn to be a peacemaker and to help others to resolve conflicts.
97. **to be patient.**
98. to not allow one's own afflictions to become a cause of one acting harshly toward others.
99. when wrathful energy arises, to seek deeper understanding and, in the meantime, act with restraint.
100. **to practise right livelihood.**
101. to follow a vocation that is not harmful to sentient beings or to nature, but conducive to their protection and good cultivation.

102. to not make fame, gain or self-indulgence one's aim.
103. to live simply.
104. to practice non-harm.
105. to not take the lives of sentient beings. <sup>10</sup>
106. to go unarmed in the world and not possess weapons.
107. to not be involved in the creation or maintenance of weapons nor profit from their use, manufacture or trade.
108. to not eat the flesh of sentient beings that have been killed or are alive.
109. to not trade in nor profit from products that have been obtained by slaughter of sentient beings.
110. to not purchase products obtained by slaughter of sentient beings. <sup>11</sup>
111. to not inflict injury upon sentient beings.
112. to not fight nor threaten by raising the hand or fist or by lashing out or any equivalent behaviour.
113. to not harm sentient beings by imposing harsh or oppressive conditions upon them.
114. to not harm sentient beings by depriving them of necessary resources.
115. to not harm vegetable life unnecessarily.
116. to not steal nor take what is not rightful to receive.
117. to not allow covetousness or envy to guide one's speech or actions.
118. **to be neither grasping nor possessive.**
119. to live have few wants and be content with what one has.
120. to appreciate the gifts one receives, both through others and through nature.
121. to cultivate gratitude.
122. to not give in to self-pity or bitterness.
123. to share with others and act generously.
124. **to not engage in sexual misconduct.**
125. to respect the family and relationship commitments of others.
126. to honour one's own family commitments.

127. to care for and protect any new life that results from one's actions from the time of its conception and throughout its young life.
128. to protect others from the damage caused by sexual misconduct.
129. to not go in public dressed in a sexually provocative way.
130. **to not consume intoxicants.**
131. to not use tobacco or equivalent substances.
132. to not encourage others to use intoxicants, tobacco nor other like substances, nor to profit from them doing so.
133. to overcome compulsive habits.
134. to not use cosmetics nor concern myself with vanity of appearance.
135. **to cherish others.**
136. to cherish all sentient beings in deep respect for their dignity and independence.
137. to create conditions in which others may hear the Name spoken, in their own language, secretly to their heart.
138. to be hospitable.
139. to be considerate and try to put others at ease, as all are put at ease by the Thirty Third Vow.
140. **to work for the improvement of society.**
141. to have a tender regard for those who are afflicted by disease, poverty, social oppression or misfortune.
142. to have a tender regard for those that are subjected to cruelty or deprivation.
143. to work for the liberation of all always using non-violent means.
144. to not be slow to assist beings in need of assistance where one has the means.
145. to oppose oppression and right the wrongs it causes.
146. to renounce class, caste, race, nationalism, patriotism and all forms of political partisanship seeing them as idolatry.
147. to act in ways conducive to the establishment of societies that are not built on privilege and oppression.
148. to seek to understand the oppressor and the oppressed alike and shall seek means of reconciliation and salvation for all parties.

149. to not become involved in coercive activities except where it is the only means to save a person from acting upon their own destructive impulses.
150. to support the freedom of others that they may peacefully and respectfully enjoy the whole world without confinement.
151. to work for peace.
152. **to offer pastoral care.**
153. to support the bereaved.
154. to support those who are in turmoil or distress without colluding in delusion.
155. to minister to, bear witness for, advise and assist the sick, the poor, and the oppressed.
156. **to hold ceaselessly to the vision of a Pure Land** and to make common cause with those seeking to bring forth an enlightened world where the three poisons no longer hold sway and all beings enjoy respect and find fulfilment. The vision of unimpeded light shining upon us from the future will always guide my steps.

## **Additional Precepts common to Novices and Amitaryas**

- 1. to be utterly guided by the nembutsu.**
2. to go forth in the Dharma, relying upon the original and sacred vows, that the light of love, compassion, joy and peace may boundlessly spread.
3. to completely entrust one's life to Amida Tathagatas grace.
4. though one's understanding may as yet be slight and one's merit meagre, to trust that through faith one's life will be transformed and become an example to others.
5. to feel shame at one's transgressions and hurtful actions and rejoice that it is especially to selfish beings such as oneself that Amida Tathagata reaches out.
6. to put others before oneself.
7. to not have "private projects".<sup>12</sup>
- 8. to renounce the conventional life of society.**
9. to not be separated from the robe for as much as a day.
10. to only wear outer clothes of red colour, save on allowed exceptional occasions.<sup>13</sup>
11. to become part of an Amitarya community and to make this one's refuge.
12. to renounce the pursuit of wealth and use whatever one has of property, talents, time and energy for the purposes of Amida Tathagata's great work.
13. **to willingly go wherever needed** among all manner of people and circumstance.
14. to not be attached to place, but to know that one's true home is henceforth in the Pure Land of Amitayus.
15. when travelling to, whenever practical, travel in company with one or more other members of the Order.
16. to learn that all manner of people are acceptable to the Tathagata and to often contrast this with one's own stubborn heart.
17. to respect the customs and conventions of the lands through which one travels insofar as these are not harmful to sentient beings.
18. to regard wherever one resides as a temporary stay.
19. **to live often in community:** to renounce private household life and live with other members of the sangha whenever possible.
20. to act on the principle that wherever amitaryas are gathered they shall form a community meeting regularly for the three foundations of our community life which are:

- a. reciting nembutsu together;
  - b. gathering for listening to one another; and
  - c. working as a team and rejoicing together.
21. to work with other members of the Amida School to create communities inspired by the Pure Land envisaged in the Tathagata's Vows.
  22. to be mindful of the Thirty Second Vow and ensure that wherever Amitaryas settle they shall there create from whatever is at hand, a place of beauty and delight giving particular attention to gardens, grounds and outdoor spaces where the Name can be heard and felt in the action of light, water, wind and natural life.
  23. to, by deliberate intention, encompass persons from different races and social backgrounds in Amidist communities, reversing the separatist trend of the world.
  24. to remember the third, fourth and fifth vows excluding negative discrimination and thereby know that those who are of Amida's Land are in spirit all of one radiant golden colour.
  25. to always, at heart, be part of the amitarya community even when we cannot reside together.
  26. **to protect the atmosphere and good order of the community** as a place of spiritual faith and practice.
  27. to renounce territory and not be attached to personal space.
  28. to hold territory in use not in possession: if one stays in a house for a time and occupies or shares a room. to not consider it as permanently one's own but to be willing to vacate it at any time.
  29. to keep spaces one occupies homely and welcoming.
  30. to keep the space that one is using or responsible for clean and tidy.
  31. to co-operate with keeping common spaces clean and tidy and free from noise.
  32. to not enter a space occupied by a senior without the consent of the senior, or of the most senior if there are more than one.
  33. to not disturb items that are in the use of a senior without consent.
  34. to respect the property and privacy of others.
  35. to not usurp a senior's authority.
  36. to be frugal, in general, without losing the ability to be profuse on appropriate occasion.
  37. to use material objects, such as clothing, tools, furniture, utensils or books carefully and respectfully.

38. to not treat objects in common use as any less important, valuable or irreplaceable than objects in private ownership.
39. to appreciate that objects have value as tokens of love and spiritual qualities and are not to be viewed solely from a utilitarian perspective.
40. to give priority to the collective activities in the community over one's own projects and devotions.
41. **to make mealtimes a time of religious practice.**
42. to ensure that others receive what they need at the meal ahead of concern for one's own needs.
43. to practice "not asking" at at least one meal every few days.
44. to not be greedy.
45. to appreciate the food we receive for its qualities and the sustenance it provides.
46. to reflect upon the work and the suffering involved in the production or the food we eat.
47. **to learn to take one's place in a team** and to be willing to accept whatever part in the team is most conducive to the realisation of the ultimate aim.
48. to learn to appreciate how all the tasks and contributions in a community form a whole, of which each of us is a part, and to appreciate the different parts, seeing beyond illusions of humble or great, mundane or sublime.
49. to not be attached to identity or status.
50. to accept whatever task, duty, rank, position or work may be necessary and regard the attempt to fulfil it as one's dharma training.
51. to complete one's own tasks and then assist others, but also to be willing to interrupt one's own task in order to help others when the need is pressing.
52. to value each community member for what they are capable of offering to the communal life and protect them from disparagement for things of which they are not capable.
53. **to learn to communicate appropriately** with other members of the community about spiritual and practical matters in a spirit of true friendship, expressive of underlying solidarity even when emotional commitments are at stake.
54. to learn to give and receive admonition in a spirit of loving care: to not give nor take offense, but help to create a climate in which honesty and deep kindness can prevail.
55. to notice when other members of the community are afflicted and do what one can to assist them.

56. **to care for and tend community members who are sick or dying.**
57. to not be squeamish in performing tasks of physical care.
58. in caring for the sick as in all things to have highest regard for the spiritual need.
59. to enquire of a sick member the nature of his or her symptoms whether they are mild or severe, painful or non-painful increasing or decreasing, to provide palliative care and remedies where possible and to seek medical assistance when appropriate.
60. to make a sick member comfortable in tranquil surroundings, neither too hot nor too cold, and protect him or her from undue disturbance.
61. to provide the sickroom with a Buddha image that can be seen by the sick person.
62. to ensure that a sick member is provided with an adequate supply of liquid and appropriate mild nourishment and that other bodily needs are attended to with tender care.
63. to converse with the sick person insofar as this benefits them and to not take advantage of their dependency nor burden the afflicted with lament about one's woes.
64. **to welcome visitors** ensuring that if a guest comes to our residence, at least one of us will cease other activity, receive them hospitably and attend to their needs.
65. to support the effort of the community to reach out hospitably into the surrounding society.
66. **to protect the integrity of the community.**
67. to not undertake any personal economic activity that is not specifically approved by the community and by one's spiritual guide and not to allow the pursuit of a profession, trade or career to become of importance nor let economic considerations take a higher priority than the needs of the community and the Dharma work.
68. to appreciate that in all dealings with non-community members one is acting as an agent and representative of the community as a whole and not merely on personal account and to have a proper care and restraint seeking assistance and guidance appropriately from other community members.
69. to not consult non-members over matters relating to other members in a manner that could be felt by the latter as a breach of confidence.
70. to not discuss community matters with others who are not responsible for them in a manner that leads those people to think that they are participating in a decision-making process that will determine those matters.
71. **to participate fully in the life of the Amida School.**
72. be mindful of the Thirty Sixth Vow, to regard Amida's sangha as a single assembly. <sup>14</sup>

73. to cherish sangha brothers and sisters alike whether they are amitaryas, ministers or lay members, recently admitted or of long standing and treat all with deep respect knowing that many streams shall flow together to make one river.
74. to regard the role of the amitarya within the Amida School as that of ministering to the ministers as well as reaching out to the world at large: to support all who perform the service of Amida's ministry.
75. to remember the Fourteenth Vow, and irrespective of the size of the actual group or community in which one resides, to feel oneself to be part of a vast assembly.
76. to support and contribute to the work of the Tathagata's disciples to reform society and do good in the world.
77. to always stay in communication with fellow amitaryas even when through happenstance or the requirements of mission or ministry one is alone in the world.
- 78. to die with the nembutsu.**

## **Chastity Vows**

1. to not seek or entertain new sexual involvement.
2. to neither make nor contemplate change in relationship status during the period of novitiate, understanding that the community should not be disturbed by divided loyalties and that an amitarya's service to all people should be free from any ambiguity of intention.
3. to not flirt or engage in any erotic behaviour outside of one's own marriage.
4. to have the shaven head of a shranana.

## **Celibacy Vows**

1. to not engage in sexual acts.
2. to avoid any behaviour suggestive of sexual availability.
3. to have the shaven head of a shranana.

## **APPENDIX: Amida's Forty Eight Great Vows**

[The First Vow - No Lower Realms] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, my Pure Land should include hellish, bestial, tormented or warring realms.

[The Second Vow - No Unfortunate Rebirth] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings born into my Pure Land should be liable to die from there and thereafter be reborn in hellish, bestial, tormented or warring realms.

[The Third Vow - No Colour Discrimination] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings born in my land should not all be of one colour, the colour of gold.

[The Fourth Vow - No Social or Beauty Discrimination] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, there should, in my Pure Land, be any discrimination of regard or privilege between humans and devas or between different individuals on such grounds as colour, relative beauty or other criteria, save the harmless kind of discrimination that is necessary for naming and keeping count of things.

[The Fifth Vow - Recall of Previous Lives] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land do not have full recall of previous lives.

[The Sixth Vow - Divine Eye] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should not have the divine eye that enables one to perceive myriad other Pure Lands.

[The Seventh Vow - Divine Ear] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should not have the divine ear that enables one to hear the Dharma simultaneously being taught in a myriad ways by myriads of Buddhas in myriads of Pure Lands, and if they should not have the ability to retain and comprehend those great teachings.

[The Eighth Vow - Empathic Understanding - Divine Mind] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should not have the ability to understand the workings of other people's minds, the minds of all the vast multitude of different kinds of people scattered through myriad worlds and circumstances.

[The Ninth Vow - Limitless Scope - Divine Feet] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should lack limitless ability to put themselves in other vantage points and perspectives, to instantly stand in any Pure Land and even to travel beyond it.

[The Tenth Vow - Neither Acquisitiveness nor Craving] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should have the least sense of property, even in regard to their own bodies or their very selves or if they should give rise to thoughts and feelings associated with craving for objects of desire.

[The Eleventh Vow - Irreversibility] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should not all be those for whom all is completely assured. They will definitely attain nirvana.

[The Twelfth Vow - Infinite Light] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the radiance of light I display should have a limit and not be able to penetrate the myriad Pure Lands.

[The Thirteenth Vow - Infinite Lifespan] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, my lifespan should have a limit.

[The Fourteenth Vow - Innumerable Shravakas] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the number of shravakas in my Pure Land were not so numerous as to be beyond the fathoming of ordinary beings even were they all to become pratyekabuddhas.

[The Fifteenth Vow - The Deathless] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should not have infinite lifespan except insofar as they choose to manifest in a mortal state in fulfillment of their holy vows.

[The sixteenth Vow - Unconditional Positive Regard] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my land should ever so much as hear the suggestion that someone is non-virtuous.

[The Seventeenth Vow - Hearing all Buddhas praise the Name] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, one cannot hear all the Buddhas throughout the cosmos praising and glorifying the Name.

[The Eighteenth Vow - Naturalisation by Faith] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, living beings inhabiting other worlds  
who conceive a longing for awakening,  
who listen to my Name,  
who set their heart upon being reborn in my Pure Land, and  
who keep me in mind with settled faith,  
are not assured of meeting me standing before them in full retinue and glory at the time of their death, such death thus being completely free of anxiety.

[The Nineteenth Vow - Naturalisation by Merit] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, living beings inhabiting other worlds  
who conceive a longing for awakening,  
who cultivate all virtues,  
who listen to my Name, and  
who resolve single-mindedly to be born in my land,  
are not assured of meeting me standing before them in full retinue and glory at the time of their death. Excepted are those who have committed the five heinous offenses as well as those who are obstructed by their own opposition to the Dharma.

[The Twentieth Vow - Naturalisation by Samadhi] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, living beings inhabiting other worlds  
who listen to my Name,  
who fix their minds upon my land, and  
who, having cultivated all virtues, dedicate all the merit thereof to rebirth in my land  
are not reborn in my Pure Land.

[The 21st Vow - Thirty two Marks of Bodhisattvas] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas born in my Pure Land are not each endowed with the 32 marks of a superior being.

[The 22nd Vow - Bodhisattva Path] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, all those reborn in my Pure Land are not only one more rebirth away from complete nirvana, except for those who choose otherwise and adopt bodhisattva vows:  
who don the armour of great vows for the welfare of the whole world,  
who are single-mindedly devoted to the well-being of all,  
who are dedicated to bringing all living beings to spiritual maturity,  
who travel freely to practise the bodhisattva practice in all worlds,  
who wish to serve and revere all Buddhas,  
who instruct, lead and transform beings as numerous as sand grains in the Ganges, and  
who cultivate the virtues of Samantabhadra.

[The 23rd Vow - Respect for Other Sanghas] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the bodhisattvas of my land, moved by the Buddha's power, cannot honour and revere all Buddhas everywhere in any part of the universe and do so in no more time than it takes to eat a morning meal.

[The 24th Vow - Respect for the Ways of Other Sanghas] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the bodhisattvas of my land should not manifest their roots of merit and offerings before other Buddhas in forms entirely conforming to what is acceptable and desirable to those Buddhas.

[The 25th Vow - Comprehensive Teaching] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the bodhisattvas of my land should not expound the Dharma with the same comprehensive knowledge as a fully awakened Buddha.

[The 26th Vow - Stamina] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the bodhisattvas of my land should not all acquire the adamant body of Narayana.

[The 27th Vow - Unmeasurable Splendour] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the devas and humans of my land should, even with the divine eye, be able to fathom and know, by name or number, all the vast extent and diversity of resplendent forms and appearances of objects in that land.

[The 28th Vow - Living in the Presence of the Tree of Life] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of my land, even those of slight merit, should not be able always to see my bodhi tree standing radiant and many millions of miles high.

[The 29th Vow - Eloquence] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of my land should not have eloquence and wisdom in sutras, learning, reciting and expounding them.

[The 30th Vow - Inspired Discourse] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of my land should not have the capacity for limitlessly inspired, wise and eloquent speech.

[The 31st Vow - Mirror of All Buddha Lands] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, my land does not have mirror purity such that the lands of all other Buddhas, inconceivably countless, throughout the ten directions, are completely reflected in it.

[The 32nd Vow - Transformation by Delight] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, in my land, from the ground up to the heavens, the palaces, pavilions, ponds, streams and trees, and all the myriad things of my realm, are not all made of substances of exquisite quality, like gems and aromatic wood, marvellous, refined, fragrant and surpassing all things human and celestial, and from these delights there does not issue an emanation such that all the bodhisattvas who encounter it adopt thereby the conduct of Buddhas spreading this effect throughout limitless numbers of world systems.

[The 33rd Vow - Solace of Light] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in all Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who are exposed to my light do not thereby experience a profound mental and bodily peace and replenishment, surpassing the pleasures of the heavens.

[The 34th Vow - Constancy] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in all Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my name do not thereby acquire the dharma of constancy, unarising and unceasing, the dharani-power, sufficient to sustain them to their ultimate spiritual goal.

[The 35th Vow - Liberation of Women] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, it is not then the case that women in all Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name, have serene faith and aspire to awakening, and who hate the forms and statuses imposed upon them as women, shall not, on entering my land, be liberated therefrom.

[The 36th Vow - Merging of Bodhisattva and Renunciant Paths] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, assemblies of bodhisattvas in all Buddha lands throughout the ten directions that listen to my name shall not, in future lives, be empowered to live the pure renunciant life until full awakening.

[The 37th Vow - Faith Inspires Respect] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in all Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my name, prostrate in faith, rejoice and adopt the bodhisattva way shall not be respected by humans and devas throughout all worlds.

[The 38th Vow - The Clothes of Enlightenment] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings of my land do not all acquire the great and wondrous clothes of enlightenment, formless yet embracing every treasure, clothes that do not require to be sewn, washed, mended, bleached or dyed and that appear instantaneously in the twinkling of a thought, praised by the Buddha, endlessly unfolding his teaching.

[The 39th Vow - Peace of Mind] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings of my land do not experience the same peace and happiness of mind as that of an arhat, free from the fever of selfish desire.

[The 40th Vow - The Know How to Create a Pure Land] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of my land shall not have the ability to recognise in detail, reflected in the jewel trees of my land, the good and bad reserved for humans and devas in billions of Buddha lands, gross and subtle alike, just as they might see their own reflection in a mirror

[The 41st Vow - Spiritual Faculties] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my name should, from that point on until arrival at complete awakening, suffer any deficiency in their spiritual faculties.

[The 42nd Vow - The Samadhi in which All Buddhas and Buddha Lands Stand Before One] <sup>15</sup>  
\*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my name should not be able to attain the auspicious samadhi in which all the Buddhas and Buddha lands stand before them and they experience themselves making offerings to them all.

[The 43rd Vow - Noble Rebirth] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name should not in all their future lives be reborn in noble families.

[The 44th Vow - Spiritual Joy] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name should not dance with joy and enthusiasm, practise wholeheartedly and correspondingly gain immense merit.

[The 45th Vow - Samadhi of Universal Equality] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name should

not attain the Samadhi of Universal Equality, and, in that state, be conscious of the innumerable, inconceivable Tathagatas.

[The 46th Vow - Spontaneous Access to Dharma] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of my land cannot hear the Dharma spontaneously just as they wish.

[The 47th Vow - Non-retrogression] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name should not dwell in the state of non-retrogression.

[The 48th Vow - Commitment to Ultimate Buddhahood] \*

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name should not immediately attain serene acceptance of the Dharma and cross a threshold of nonretrogression in their commitment to seeking the qualities of a Buddha.

## NOTES

1. This is the fundamental precept of which all the others are simply elaboration of detail. The precept does not mean that one has taken the same vows as Dharmakara took. Rather it means that our life is shaped in the service of and in reliance upon the vows he made. We have faith in the original and sacred vows. This is our refuge. They are, for us, the measure of all things and an object of worship. We do not, for instance, take refuge in our own opinion or in social custom. Those things occur, but they are not ultimate for us.
2. The quotation is from Honen in his famous *Letter to a Dying Nun*.
3. This precept corresponds to the first of the Three Minds (sanjin): sincerity. This is thought to derive from the Sanskrit term shraddha, which was rendered into Chinese as hsin. In Japanese, sincere mind is shijoshin.
4. This corresponds to the second of the Three Minds: profound mind. Profound mind is jinshin in Japanese. Jinshin and shinjin are alternative renderings of the Sanskrit term prasada. Shan Tao explains hsin chieh (jinshin) as having two components: first the realisation of our own nature as foolish beings of blind passing and second our awakening to the saving grace of Amida Tathagata. The key to Pureland spirituality rests in the fact that Amida chooses foolish sinful beings and it is not a matter of becoming something that one cannot become.
5. This precept corresponds to the third of the Three Minds: eko-hotsuganshin. This means a mind of complete confidence. It is the mind of the person who does not need to claim credit and is not looking for reputation. It derives from the Sanskrit term adhimukti meaning faith that comes through complete understanding of non-self.

Eko means conversion or turning around in one's heart. Conversion in Pureland means awakening in faith and dying to one's old outlook, thus becoming a citizen of the Pure Land. One then partakes of the merit of Amida Tathagata as one is living within his life not within one's own old life. Whatever (small) stock of merit one has left over from that life is, therefore, now redundant, like old furniture in a new house. Similarly, as one continues on the path, as a Pureland Buddhist, one has no need of personal merit, so incidental merit that accumulates through good actions may similarly be turned over to some other purpose.

Hotsuganshin means the mind that vows. Just as Dharmakara turned over his merit to the creation of the Pure Land, so we, in our small way, dedicate our merit to the benefit of others. Merit means moral credit. The practical import is that we do not claim credit. If something good happens we attribute it to others or to the community. If something bad happens we take responsibility ourselves or, at least, do not attribute it to anybody else. We might say, "We made a mistake," rather than "Fred made a mistake."

We can see there is a deep principle here. One does not even look for credit for not having claimed credit because one realises that on the Pureland path personal merit (credit) is actually an obstacle. One wishes to live on Amida's great merit not on one's own small merit.

The Third Mind is adamant. It is the kind of complete faith that can hardly even have the name of faith because it has become completely naturalised.

6. It is by Other Power that we are able to stand up before a crowd and speak, not by our own ability. It is by Other Power that we perform a holy office, not by our own virtue. Our own stock of merit is puny and inadequate to any such great task. Only the sacred spirit of Other Power can do such things. Sometimes we say, "Let the robe do it."
7. This attitude springs from the primacy of the Eighteenth Vow. Pureland Buddhists do not reject the practices of other Buddhist Schools, they see them in a different light. Where self-power schools see the many sundry practices as means to achieve enlightenment, Pureland sees them as outcomes of faith and part of the process of naturalisation.
8. This does not refer to false or pernicious beliefs. People all have their faith invested in something and some of those things are not wholesome. It may be wise to undermine such false faith but this should not be done in a way that undermines a person's fundamental confidence in what is right and good.
9. It is crucially important to recognise the difference between helping another person spiritually and getting one's own needs and wants satisfied. In relation to the latter, one has no more authority than anybody else, even if one is surrounded by others who are junior to oneself in the sangha. Ideally, nobody who cannot recognise this distinction and act accordingly should be given any authority in the sangha. In practice, we are all foolish beings and mistakes are made. There are very few mistakes more serious than this, however, for it threatens the integrity of the whole sangha.
10. The precept specifies that one shall not kill. In modern society there is a complex issue about killing by proxy either by providing the means by which others kill or by creating a demand for products that can or are in practice only obtained by killing. This is a matter that each person must think about carefully for themselves. Precepts 108, 109 and 110 also relate to this question.
11. The note to precept 105 about killing by proxy has application here. The situation is complicated by the fact that many modern farming methods are routinely inhumane. For instance, a cow's natural lifespan could be 25 years but most modern dairy cows are slaughtered at about 5 years old, after only three or four lactations because they are considered purely from an economic perspective. Does this make the person who purchases milk somebody in breach of this precept? Similar considerations apply to other animal products such as honey and eggs. In commercial production queen bees are often artificially inseminated with sperm obtained from decapitated bees and queens are slaughtered every two years because over time their egg producing ability declines. For every hen hatched for egg laying there is a cock chick that is killed as soon as it is hatched and, in the UK, most egg-laying hens are slaughtered after one year of egg production. Buddhists will be opposed to such practices and, because they are so common, many want to minimise their own use of animal foods. Shakyamuni did not specifically require his disciples to be vegan, but it is clear that he was deeply sensitive to animal cruelty issues and would want them to minimise support for and actively oppose practices that commonly or routinely involve cruelty. In China a whole style of vegan cookery developed in Buddhist temples. It is not possible to live a life in this samsaric world that does not implicate one in cruel practices to some degree and some remove, but Buddhists will wish to reduce and minimise these consequences when they can.

12. This means that one no longer acts on one's own account. Everything that one does is part of the life of being a member of the amitarya community. If one has a mind to start some undertaking, one first thinks whether this is for the good of the community and conducive to its aims and life of faith and, if so, then one discusses with other members of the community "Is it good for me to do this?" in a spirit of genuine enquiry with willingness to be affirmed, guided or come to new insight as the case may be.
13. Allowed exceptions are:
- i. work clothes and overalls for manual or dirty jobs;
  - ii. situations where the Dharma work requires one to pass incognito;
  - iii. situations where the sangha has agreed that it would cause unnecessary offense to wear red.
14. In non-Amidist Buddhism there are four assemblies: monks, nuns, laymen, and lay women, and they tend to be considered in this order of status. In Amida's sangha there is only one assembly. Gender is ignored and roles such as lay and ordained are instituted for practical purposes and to support the practice of individuals. Honen notably said that you should adopt the role that helps you devote yourself to nembutsu. If you cannot practise as a monk, become a layperson. If you cannot practise as a layperson, ordain. If you cannot practise in company, become a hermit. If you cannot practise alone, join a community. If you cannot practise because of poverty, seek assistance. If you cannot practise because of riches, give them away. If you cannot practise because you are idle, get a job. If you cannot practise because of responsibilities, resign. Nembutsu is the central concern. If possible, have no worldly hidden agenda. If you find that in truth you do have a worldly agenda, let this discovery instruct you about your prithajana nature and hurry to recite the nembutsu, which is the only practice for somebody like you and I. Nembutsu is the practice of all acceptance, all joy and all equality.
15. This 42nd Vow corresponds to the Pratyutpanna Samadhi Sutra and extends the ability to enter the samadhi described in it to all bodhisattvas who attend to Amida's name irrespective of whether they dwell in Amida's Pure Land or not. The Pratyutpanna Samadhi Sutra was the first Pureland sutra to be translated into Chinese and it was used by the early masters such as Hui Yuan of Mount Lu who established the first Pureland White Lotus Society in China in the year 401. The Sutra describes the method of salvation by samadhi and so stands in parallel with the Contemplation Sutra. See also the Twentieth Vow and corresponding footnote above. The Pratyutpanna Samadhi Sutra does not especially single out Amida Buddha, but describes a state in which buddhas as numerous as the stars of the night sky confront one throughout life.