***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.***

There are roughly 5,000 - 6,000 languages spoken around the world, which is a good indicator for how many cultures there are in the world. In Ottawa, I was aware of such diversity, as my family were part of a small Korean community, and most of my friends’ families were from somewhere else too. It led me to want to go and see these other places first hand. As soon as I could, I travelled to Europe. I spent one year in France during my third year at university and fell in love with Europe.

One of the things that I love about living in Europe, as opposed to a melting pot like Canada, is that you can travel to another country in a matter of hours and be completely immersed and exposed to a different set of customs and a different language. I grew up speaking Korean at home and then learned French and English at school, and gradually, English became my spoken language. Although I was speaking less Korean as a child, I remember feeling east Asian at home, western at school and slightly exotic in French class.  I continued to learn different languages as I travelled the world and loved the art of becoming someone different when I did.

Not too long ago, I read that learning a different language may be a dying art and may not be necessary in today’s digital world. However, part of the pleasure of learning a different language is to experience life in a different culture. Each culture, and language itself, has a quality and characteristic that arises from the environment and people in that place, so to immerse oneself in that world will bring out a different part of us, to the extent that we will think and communicate our thoughts differently. To be multilingual is to appreciate the multiple aspects in us and will make moving in and out of the different cultures less shocking and more interesting. Learning different languages multiplies our lives. We can never live enough lives.

In the Buddhist canon, there are references to other Buddhas living in their own realms with unique cultures, using their local language. These Buddha lands have the qualities and characteristics of an ideal realm. In each religious tradition, you will find a place that, for all intents and purposes, is a Buddha land, though they are called and known by different names in different languages.

Amida’s Pure Land is one of many. We could extrapolate this idea and say that there are just as many Pure Lands as there are Awakened beings. If enlightenment is unconditional, then anyone in any tradition can be awakened at any time, in any religion, anywhere in this universe. These Buddha lands may seem like islands on their own, however, if you go below the water you will see that deep down these islands are connected.

These islands are both separate *and* yet connected by the Dharma. The Dharma is a measureless power that operates in the same way as Amida’s light. How we embody this power depends on our parents and their genetic make-up. Our parents' chosen lifestyle will depend on their own upbringing, their outlook, and cultural background. The outlook, language, and cultural background will depend on the principles and value system of that society, and that society will depend on the nation which in turn depends on where they are geographically and historically in the world.

These vows that I am writing about were made by a monk named Dharmakara. In this Vow, Dharmakara expresses a wish to recognise and acknowledge the diversity that appears before us. His vow isn’t narrow in scope. It isn’t about our Pure Land being in the light but that all of them are equal in the same light. On some of the Japanese images of Amida, you will see rays of light extending in all directions. This is because Amida is the Buddha of infinite light (Amitabha) and life (Amitayus) combined into one. The light and life are represented by these rays that seem to be emanating out of his body and outwards as well as into him. Amitabha is Sanskrit for ‘amit’ which means *without measure*and ‘abha’ which means *glow*.

Amida is a source of light not an object lit up by light like we are. Amida Buddha casts no shadow because they are pure and radiant. Humans can only shine in reflected light. However, when we are lit up by a bright light we also cast a shadow. The brighter and stronger the light shining on us, the darker the shadow. We can’t have Amida without our shadow. More importantly, Amida’s light is there for us because of it. Amida accepts and loves our dark side even if we can’t, and so is inviting us to look into it and to do some shadow work.

We can use Amida’s light to help us to dance with our shadow which in turn can create wonderful Pure Lands wherever we are.