



# Study on the Latter Part of Tannisho

by Shojo Oi

The *Tannisho* is a recorded account of dialogues and discussions interacted between the Master Shinran and his disciples. The recorder's chore was taken on by Yui-en-bo, one of the leading disciples of Shinran's sangha.

The first part of the *Tannisho* records dialogues regarding the essential teachings of Jodo Shin Shu. In the first ten chapters the matter of pure trust and faith in the Vow of Amida is emphasized. In this part, the basis of the latter part (Chapters 11 through 18) is laid down by scrutinizing the matter of faith (shinjin). Based on this groundwork, the latter part goes into the critical matter of studying the nature of this faith in Amida Buddha.

The name of this book, *Tannisho*, can be explained into three parts: "Tan" literally meaning lamenting, "ni" or "i" meaning differences in the interpretations, and "sho" meaning a compilation of passages. In view of this, the real purpose of the book is more in the latter part, for in the special preface and the following eight chapters the matter of unorthodox views and interpretations are discussed by the Master and his disciples.

For the first issue of this *Pacific World*, the first two chapters of the latter part are presented. The other chapters will be studied in future issues.

## SPECIAL PREFACE

*Now, as we again consider that in by-gone days when our Master Shinran was still alive those who journeyed with great effort to the distant metropolis, with the same intention, and those who set their hearts on the future Land of Recompense, with the same faith, all received the Master's teachings at the same time. However, among the countless number of people, both young and old, who say the Nembutsu under the guidance of those followers, I hear that recently there are a great many who entertain heretical views which were not taught by the Master.*

*These matters will be clarified in detail.*

This Special Preface precedes the eight chapters which follow, compiled under the latter part of the *Tannisho*. This part also brings out the true meaning of the book, *Tannisho*, which literally means "lamenting the heretical and diversified interpretations of the instructions given us by the Master Shinran," whereas the first part of the *Tannisho*, including chapters I through X, clearly spell out the Master's instructions on the importance of the matter of "shinjin," or the deeply believing mind, in regard to the most essential

part of one's acceptance of Amida's Vow. The latter chapters bring out the lamentations on the part of the key disciples regarding these heretical views which were prevalent at that time. In short, within a relatively narrow span of time the interpretations and acceptance of the true intent of the Master had become extremely deviated. For these reasons it is apparent that the latter part had to be written to present the points of heresy and to elaborate upon, as well as attempt a critical analysis of, these points.

## CHAPTER XI

### *The Vow and Name are One*

*Upon meeting illiterate persons saying the Nembutsu, some tend to frighten them by asking, "Do you believe in the inconceivability of the Vow and say the Nembutsu, or do you believe in the inconceivability of the Name?" Without clearly explaining the details of these two "inconceivabilities" they confuse the minds of the people. This matter should be considered over and over and carefully discerned.*

The point in question here is that the "inconceivability" of the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha and the "inconceivability" (nature) of the Name are one and the same. Thus, when it is believed and when there is attachment to the idea that the Vow and Name are separate, this constitutes a heretical view regarding this matter.

The connotation in the words "illiterate persons" points to those sincere but illiterate persons who, prior to Kamakura Buddhism, were totally denied exposure to the teachings of the Buddha.

*Due to the inconceivability of the Vow, Amida realized the Name, which is easy to hold and easy to say, and also promised to receive those who would say the Name. Hence it is due to the Tathagata's compassionate means that we say the Nembutsu with the belief that we shall be released from Birth and Death by the inconceivability of the Great Vow of Amida's Compassion. If we are able to understand it in this way, our calculations or discriminations are not involved in the least. Thus we shall be born in the True Land of Recompense in accordance with the Vow. If we believe in the inconceivability of the Vow, within it is embodied the inconceivability of the Name. Therefore, the inconceivability of the Vow and Name are one and not two separate things.*

The passage, "those who with their own discriminations conceive that . . .," refers to those who tend to discriminate or even try to determine on their own such matters of good or evil in regard to the grave matter of birth in the Pure Land. These people are inclined to reason that by doing that which is good they gain a kind of aid to realize birth, and by indulging in evil actions they create more hindrances in realizing such birth. This, in essence, seems to indicate that their actions will become either good or bad (evil) in regard to their realization of birth. This reasoning shows that the very inconceivability of the Vow in realizing birth is totally disregarded, and that the Name is called (invoked) and becomes completely self-power inclined, and birth is believed to be realized by one's own efforts in calling the Name.

This is a classical case of self-power motivated Nembutsu, whereby the true meaning of "tariki," the power of Amida's primal Vow, is entirely forgotten and attainment is based entirely on one's own power.

For the Nembutsu followers who are so inclined, it is natural that they would believe that within the Nembutsu are the wondrous virtues of abstaining from evil and devoting oneself in the doing of good. In essence, the thought is that if good is done it will add to one's attainment of birth, and when an evil is committed it will become an obstruction in the attainment of birth. Thus, the way must be practiced sincerely.

Simultaneously, another thought usually occurs in the minds of those who are so inclined. It is, "Is it not that the complete practice of such actions are difficult indeed, if not outright impossible?" At this stage a great majority of the masses would, in response, harbor thoughts such as, "In the Nembutsu are inherent the virtues of achieving perfect purification and these virtues (in the Nembutsu) can be realized by the oral recitation of the Nembutsu." Moreover, those who practice the Nembutsu with this in mind are ever conscious of their self-power inclination at work, and as a result the practice of the Nembutsu itself gets to be self-power inclined, which is totally away from the Nembutsu based on Amida's Primal Vow. These followers of the Nembutsu literally have not only forgotten the inconceivability of the Name but have also forgotten the inconceivable nature of the Vow.

*However, even if they may not have pure faith, they shall be born in the Border Land, the Realm of Sloth and Pride, the Castle of Doubt, the Womb-palace; and by virtue of the Vow Accomplishing the Ultimate Salvation they shall finally be born in the Land of Recompense. This is due to the Power of the Name, inconceivable, and is at the same time due to the nature of inconceivability of the Vow. For these reasons the Name and the Vow are one.*

This chapter clarifies the workings of the 20th Vow. The aim of this vow is to direct those who are self-power inclined (as in the practice of the Nembutsu in the 20th Vow) in the practice of the Nembutsu toward the 18th Vow of sincere trust and faith in the power of the primal Vow (as established in the 18th Vow). Regarding the wording used here, i.e., the inconceivability of the Name, it should be noted that by the Name is meant the Nembutsu (Namo Amida Butsu), and since the essence of the Nembutsu is the Name, whether it is the matter of the inconceivability of the Name or that of the Vow, they are actually one and the same. Moreover, since the 18th Vow is none other than the way to birth by calling the Name, Namo Amida Butsu, the matter of the inconceivability of the Vow and that of the

Name are in essence one and the same. The emphasis here is to indicate that they are one, as substantiated by the above.

## CHAPTER XII

### *Intellectual Understanding and Birth*

*Some say that those who do not read or study the sutras and commentaries are not assured of birth. Such words are not worth even mentioning. All of the sacred books which expound the essentials of the truth of the Other Power clarify that by believing in the Primal Vow and saying the Nembutsu, we shall become Buddhas. Besides these, what other learning is necessary for birth? Anyone who may be confused about this teaching should indeed study and understand the purport of the Primal Vow. Even though one may read and study the sutras and commentaries on them, if the meaning of these sacred books is not understood it is, indeed, a pitiful thing.*

This section refers to one of the heretical views of that time which advocated that if a person lacks knowledge of the teachings he cannot realize birth in the Pure Land. A critical analysis follows in succeeding passages.

*Since the Name is easy to say for the illiterate who may not be familiar with the contexts of the sutras and commentaries, it is called the easy practice. The Path of the Sages makes learning and knowledge essential and is called the difficult practice. Besides, there is a testimonial passage (one of Shinran's letters to a disciple) which questions birth (in the Pure Land) of those who, while being engaged in studies of the teachings, mistakenly harbor the thought of gaining fame and wealth (by such studies).*

This section established that the contentions indicated above are none other than those which have taken on the form and flavor of the traditional way of the Sages and deviates from Shin Shu beliefs.

*In these days the followers of the exclusive practice of the Nembutsu and the followers of the Path of the Sages are engaged in disputes over doctrinal matters, each claiming his teaching to be superior and the others' inferior. This brings out opponents of Buddhist doctrines and leads to abuse of the Dharma. Does this not lead to the slandering of the Dharma itself?*

*Even if all other schools may ridicule us by saying that the Nembutsu is for the worthless people and that our doctrine is shallow and contemptible, we must avoid dispute and simply say we believe because we are taught that ungifted and illiterate people like ourselves will be saved through Faith. This teaching may appear worthy of contempt to the gifted, but for us it is the highest teaching.*

*Even if other teachings may be superior, we cannot abide by them since they are beyond our capacity. Since the intent of all Buddhas is that both we and others should be freed from samsara, please do not disturb us. Moreover, we should remember that there is a testimonial passage:*

*Where there is dispute, various evil passions arise. The wise, therefore, should avoid such an act.*

The passages, "In these days, the followers of the exclusive practices of . . .," up to the words including, ". . . even if other teachings may be superior," point out the inadequacies of the individuals who are unable to follow the traditional ways of the Path of the Sages. Again, the words, "Since the real intent of all Buddhas is that both we and others . . .," through, ". . . who would harm us?" indicate that if we do not assume such an attitude, then the words, "If we treat them thus without spite, who would harm us?" are given. The words of caution continue, "Where there is dispute, various evil passions arise. The wise therefore should avoid such an act."

*The late Master said, "The Buddha foretold that some would believe in this teaching, while others would ridicule it. I believe in it while others slander it. Hence I know that the Buddha spoke the truth. For this reason, we should believe that our birth is all the more certain. If, by chance, there were no one to slander the teaching, we might come to wonder why there were no slanderers even though there were believers. By this, however, I do not mean to say that the teaching must necessarily be slandered, but rather that the Buddha anticipated that there would be slanderers as well as believers; and thus he advised the people to doubt the teachings.*

*In the world today, people seem to study in order to suppress others' criticism and to engage solely in disputes and arguments.*

As in any teaching, when there are those who believe in it, there are sure to be those who will slander it. In one of Shinran's wasan we find:

*The time has come, when impurities intensify,  
For there are many who doubt or slander  
Even teachers and followers lack accord,  
And even the sincere followers are criticized.*

*The more one studies, the more one will be able to realize in his mind the true intent of the Tathagata and the greatness of Buddha's compassionate Vow as well. Thereby, to those who might doubt whether they,*

*ungifted men, would be born, one would be able to explain that the Original Vow is not concerned with good or evil, pure or impure. Only then will one deserve to be considered a scholar. Whosoever threatens those who happen to say the Nembutsu in accordance with the Vow by saying, "You ought to study," or other similar things, is a devilish hindrance to the Dharma and is a deadly foe of the Buddha. Such a person not only lacks Faith in the Other Power, but also misleads others. We should cautiously restrain ourselves lest we should go against the will and wishes of our late Master. Again, it is truly a pitiful thing to think that they are taking an attitude to be contrary to the Vow of Amida Buddha.*

The point Shinran wished to make in this part of the dialogue with his disciples is to bring out the fallacy and even the outrage of such extreme thoughts which prevailed at the time of recording, specifically that which advocated that the realization of birth in the Pure Land (ojo) was unthinkable if there were not efforts made to study the teachings and fully understand them.

Another emphasis this chapter makes is that in order to fully understand the teachings of Buddha, a sincere and serious study of the teachings of the Buddha must be made. Only right understanding of the Buddha's teachings can enable one to realize the true intent of the Buddha and the Vow.

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#### FROM THE TEACHING OF BUDDHA:

Both delusion and Enlightenment originate within the mind, and every existence or phenomenon arises from the functions of mind.

The activities of the mind have no limit, they form the surroundings of life. An impure mind surrounds itself with impure things and a pure mind surrounds itself with pure things; hence, surroundings have no more limits than the activities of the mind.

Just as a picture is drawn by an artist, surroundings are created by the activities of the mind. While the surroundings created by Buddha are pure and free from defilement, those created by men are not so.

A single picture is capable of an infinite variety of details. So the human mind fills in the surroundings of its life. There is nothing in the world that is not mind-created.

Buddha has a right understanding of all things as fashioned by the human mind. Therefore, those who know this are able to see the real Buddha.