



Study on the Latter Part of the Tannisho: Chapter XIV

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 over by the disciple Yui-en, one of the leading followers of Shinran's Sangha.

The first part of the *Tannisho* (Chapters 1 through 10) 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 is laid down by scrutinizing the important matter of faith (*shinjin*). Standing on this groundwork, the latter part goes into the critical matter of studying the nature of faith (deep trust) in the Main Vow of Amida Buddha.

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

For the second issue of the *Pacific World Journal* the text and author's appreciation on Chapter XIV are presented. Also in this issue, Professor Kakue Miyaji presents his views on Chapter XIII which will appear in three installments.

CHAPTER XIV

The point emphasized in this chapter is that at the very moment of our acceptance of Amida's Primal Vow we are totally embraced and thus reside at the level of the rightly established state. Birth in Jodo, therefore, is settled. This chapter also reiterates the important stand of Jodo Shin Shu wherein the calling of the Buddha's Name is done of one's deep gratitude and with no intention of attempting atonement for evil actions. In traditional Jodo Shin Shu expressions this utterance of the Buddha's Name, done with the awareness of deep gratitude, is an awareness of being embraced by the wisdom and compassion of Amida Buddha.

There are some who say that with one utterance of the Buddha's Name, one's grave sins of eight billion kalpa are eradicated.

This seems to be related to the passage which applies to the following situation: A sinful person who had led a life of ten evils and five deadly sins, and who never uttered the *Nembutsu* in all his life, meets with the truthful friend (teacher) for the first time at the last few moments before his demise. In accordance with the guidance of the teacher, this person calls the Buddha's Name just once and realizes birth in Jodo with the sins of eight billion kalpa extinguished. It is further said that by ten utterances the grave sins of ten times eight billion kalpa are extinguished.

It should be noted that this passage says "one calling," "ten callings," etc., with the intent to show us the serious nature of the ten evil actions and the five deadly sins. It brings out the benefits in the extinction of one's sins. This view is far short of what we believe.

These passages were compiled to shatter the belief existing at the time that man's evil can be eradicated by the oral recitation of the *Nembutsu*. The compiler, the priest Yui-en-bo, had to make a special emphasis in upholding the basic teaching of Jodo Shin Shu wherein absolute trust (faith) is the cause of Birth and the calling is not the cause but the expression of one's deep awareness of gratitude.

The reason is that, at the very moment, when the one thought of faith arises in us, because Amida's light shines upon us, we are endowed with the Diamond Faith and reside at the Rightly Established State. Then when the time for our demise comes all of our passions and evil hindrances are turned into virtues and we are enlightened to the Truth of Birthlessness. Without the Compassionate Vow, how can we paltry sinners ever be freed from the repetition of Birth-and-Death? Thus thinking, we should bear in mind that the Nembutsu we utter is done only for the acknowledgement of our indebtedness to the Tathagata's Great Compassion and express deep gratitude for Amida's Benevolence.

This section again establishes that in Jodo Shin Shu the believer is totally embraced by Amida's compassion at the moment of trust in the Primal Vow and once this is estab-

lished birth is to be realized regardless of place or time. The need to put one's trust in Amida's Vow is also reemphasized.

In this regard it should be noted that in Shin Shu the Buddhist term *mu-sho-nin* [無生忍 (full awareness of non-birth and non-death)] has two meanings: One points to the rightly established state while in this existence and the other is to realize that all is *sunyata* (空), and thus realize Buddhahood. Both meanings apply here. Nevertheless, this state can only come about when one entrusts one's self to the Primal Vow.

Upon seriously reflecting into his inner self the author realizes that but for the Power of the Primal Vow there can be no way to achieve enlightenment. This thought, as in many instances, turns into deep gratitude and appreciation.

One important point is the matter of *Nembutsu* and *Ōjo* in Shin Shu Buddhism. Historically, the practice of the *Nembutsu* by the Master Zendo in China was faithfully adhered to by Hōnen Shonin in Japan. The term applied has been called *Nembutsu Ōjo*, meaning to realize *Ōjo* by the practice of the *Nembutsu*. Our founder, Shinran, is also considered to have followed this tradition. It is interesting to note that one of the pillars of Shin Shu faith is *Shinjin Shōin*, meaning the proper (right) cause of *Ōjo* is *shinjin* (pure faith in Amida's Vow). However, when this same religious attitude is restated it becomes *Nembutsu Ōjo*, meaning realizing *Ōjo* by the practice of *Nembutsu*. This attitude was misinterpreted and molded into the attitude of *Shomyo Shōin*, meaning the utterance of the Name is the proper cause. This later became the most serious heretical view regarding Shin Shu faith. Needless to state, the masters in China and Japan who stressed the importance of practicing the *Nembutsu* (*Nembutsu suru*) had presupposed pure faith as the basic condition and did not pinpoint *shinjin* as did our founder, Shinran.

Another point of great importance is that the Shin Shu attitude of deep gratitude is once again emphasized here. This is in regard to the passage: "Thus thinking, we should bear in mind that the *Nembutsu* we utter . . .," which stresses the importance of deep gratitude and, even more, sets the tone for one's attitude in so doing. Unlike the other passages which were in the form of instructions regarding Shin Shu doctrine, this specific section takes on a definitely different attitude which states in essence; "This is the way it is to be understood and appreciated." To restate, it is instructing the reader to understand that the utterance of the Name is to be considered an act of response, in deep gratitude, and brings out the importance of the follower having the right mental attitude in regard to the utterance of the Name. The emphasis is not on what is important but, rather, on how one is to appreciate and respond to this.

In considering this aspect of the achievements of the masters of Jodo Shin Shu, it is generally stated that whereas the Master Kakunyo was primarily concerned with stressing the teachings of Shin Shu (e.g. his *Kudensho* and *Godensho*), the Master Rennyo was constantly stressing more the sincere response of the believer (the person of *shinjin*) through deep gratitude as brought out in the eighty passages of his *Gobunsho* (*Epistles*). This same attitude is the unique

characteristic of Chapter 14, through which the author, Yui-en-bo, emphasizes the believer's attitude in response to the teachings.

It is important to note that the Master Rennyo left a complete transcript (copy) of the entire *Tannisho*. This complete version is considered the most authoritative of all transcripts made by the many masters of the *Tannisho* and is preserved at our Kyoto *Honzan* (Headquarters). Rennyo cherished the *Tannisho* and stated, at the very end of the transcript, the following words:

It should be noted that this book is regarded as the most important of our Jodo Shin Shu tradition. This book should not be made accessible without discretion to those who have not yet been exposed to our faith.

To believe that when the Nembutsu is uttered it will erase our sins is in essence like extinguishing our sins as well as the ill effects of our bad karma and then realize Birth. If this is the case, Birth is possible only by uttering the Nembutsu continuously up to the moment of death, since every thought we may conceive as we live becomes a bondage tying us down to samsara. In the meantime, because the karmic effect is determined, we may die without abiding in the right thought for Ōjo as we experience an unexpected accident or be tortured by life's agonies, and pains of sickness. In such cases it would be quite difficult to utter the Nembutsu. How then can sins committed up at that time be eradicated? If our sins are not extinguished our Birth would be impossible!

This section brings out the truth that it is impossible to eradicate the effects of our sins and evil actions. The words, "because the karmic effect is determined, we may die without abiding in the right thought," mean that since all our thoughts are those of unenlightened beings, as indicated here, if and when the effects of our impure deeds are to be eradicated we must be practicing the *Nembutsu* continuously, at all times. This is an impossibility for all of us (today). Moreover, our karmic effects are limited. With life having so many unpredictables for us we may not be able to achieve what we hope to do even though we may think in our minds to do that which is good and pure. When sickness strikes, and while in pain and agony, it becomes impossible to concentrate one's mind and utter the Name. Then what becomes of the person (persons) involved since the evil deeds and the karma therein have not been eradicated? Does it mean that this person will not realize birth in the Pure Land?

This is where the *Tannisho* clearly points out the way of salvation by the Power of Amida's Vow. If a person is able to accept the Power of Amida Buddha, as presented in the 18th Vow, he will be entrusting himself totally into the hands of Amida's Vow. Once having done this, even if he were to commit impure deeds because of his human limitations, and even if he might never call the Name of Amida Buddha, he would realize birth without fail.

The last point indicated in this chapter is the state of mind with which a person does the *Nembutsu*. One state could possibly be as a prayer where an individual does the *Nembutsu* at the brink of death. The other could be the response of one who believes that now the end of one's human life is close at hand, and birth is in the hands of Buddha, the Name of Buddha will be uttered of a deep feeling of gratitude. This is a *Nembutsu* typical of the *Nembutsu* based on deep gratitude.

Many of our pioneers and masters agree that these passages refer to the 16th meditation of the *Meditation Sutra*:

*Let him be continually thinking of Buddha until he has completed ten times the thought, repeating the Name, "Adoration to Buddha Amitayus." On the strength of his uttering the Buddha's Name, he will, at each repetition, expiate the sins which involve him in births and deaths during eighty million kalpa.*¹

In the course of interpreting these words of the *Meditation Sutra* it was erroneously interpreted to mean that by the calling of the Name one's evils and sins would be eradicated, thus indicating the importance of calling (uttering) the Name. Incidentally, the situation in the *Meditation Sutra* refers to the wicked person who had committed the five deadly sins and who would be instructed by a good friend at the few moments before the former's demise to think on the Buddha and utter the Buddha's Name. Once again the important point in Jodo Shin Shu is that the utterance of the Name is done only in deep gratitude.

As indicated before, in the translated passage, that portion is clarifying the position that trying to eradicate the effects of evil actions by uttering the Name is an impossible proposition for an ordinary person. If a person were to devote himself to doing this it would inevitably mean that by uttering the *Nembutsu* a person would be eradicating the effects of his impure actions by himself. And if this were the case it would, in itself, become extremely difficult simply because as unenlightened beings our minds tend to flip from one thought to another, knowing no state of peace and quietude. Moreover, these flip-flop thoughts are all linked to our bondage to birth-and-death.

If we entrust ourselves to the Vow which "embraces all and forsakes none," we shall instantly attain Birth, even though we may, under unexpected circumstances, commit sins or die without uttering the Nembutsu. Moreover, granted we may utter the Nembutsu for the last time, we are only expressing our gratitude to Amida, trusting Him all the more as the time for our Enlightenment draws near. To think of extinguishing our sins is the mind of self-power. This is the intent of those who pray for the "right thought at the time of death," which is the indication that trust in the Other-power of Buddha is lacking.

This section discusses the two instances when *Nembutsu* is uttered at the time of one's demise. One is of pure gratitude and the other is of the right thought aspiring for birth by the utterance.

The last paragraph is directed to those who may at the last moment of their lives wish to do the *Nembutsu* with the intent of eradicating the adverse effects of their karma by intentionally saying the Buddha's Name. This is not pure faith in the Power of Amida's Vow, and will not enable one to realize birth by the Power of Amida's Vow. This is *Nembutsu* based on self-power consciousness and is considered valueless as far as realizing birth in Jodo by Amida's Power is concerned.

NOTES:

1. Shinshu Seiten, BCA, 1979. p. 46.

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