

Zettai Tariki



by Akira Hata

In Pure Land teachings we hear a lot about "*tariki*," which is usually translated as "other power." *Tariki* is said to be the very basis of our Jodo Shinshu religion. Without *tariki* we would be lost and never able to attain enlightenment. Given this importance, I would like to delve into Jodo Shinshu, focusing on this idea of *tariki*, and use the term "*tariki*" interchangeably with its translation, "other power."

The term "*tariki*," or "other power," is opposite that of the Japanese term "*jiriki*," or "self power." It was first stated by the third patriarch, Donran Daishi, in his *Ojoronchu*. He wrote that the path of difficult practice is hard to follow because one uses only self power and not other power, while within the path of easy practice the Buddha's Vow power is there for us to use in attaining birth and reaching the level of the Rightly Established State. Donran used both terms, *jiriki* and *tariki*, and from then on they were used often by Pure Land teachers. Our founder, Shinran Shonin, also used them extensively and in his *Kyogyoshinsho* stated: "The other power is the power of Tathagata's Original Vow."

The power, or force, in the other power emanates from the Original Vow, or as in Japanese, "*hongan*." We are most familiar with the term as we are followers of the *Nishi Hongwanji* sect. "*Hongwanji*" here refers to the temple of the *hongan*, or Original Vow, and is therefore basic to us. It is in this sense that *tariki* is not properly used alone but is always tied to *hongan* and hence is known as "*tariki-hongan*," "the other power," or, "Buddha's saving power emanating from the Original Vow." The Original Vow refers to the 18th of the 48 Vows of Dharmakara Bodhisattva who became Amida Buddha.

Shinran brought the idea of *tariki* to its highest culmination when he stated his *nembutsu* teaching is not merely *tariki*, but is "*zettai-tariki*," which when translated is "absolute other power." In regard to salvation, "absolute *tariki*" means there are no conditions whatsoever imposed on the follower. It is not necessary to do this or that as the effort of salvation is all on the side of Amida Buddha's vow. This is something that is uniquely Shinran Shonin and it cannot be found in any other religion or sect.

In *tariki*, it is by the power of the Buddha that we are saved and are able to attain enlightenment. In *jiriki*, we are those who attain realization through the effort of our own power or strength. This is the path of difficult practice and is the "Teaching of the Sages Path."

The teaching of *tariki* focuses on the Pure Land Path, where we attain Birth in the Pure Land to attain enlightenment. Just off hand these two explanations are very clear-cut and seem to pose very little problem, but if we delve into the interpretations a little deeper the situation becomes much more difficult.

In September of 1980, I went on a two night, three day, back-packing trip with my daughter Tissa. We drove up to the shores of Convict Lake near Mammoth and slept at the campground there. About five a.m. we ate and then broke camp. We packed our back-packs and drove to the lake's parking area. From there we started to hike around the north side of the lake. The path was fairly easy, as it was nearly level, with an altitude of 7,500 feet elevation. Huge cliffs and peaks with pine, fir and scrub brush comprised the scenery. It was here, on the opening day of the trout season, that there was an earthquake of 5.7 magnitude and a tremendous amount of rock and sand slid down from the sheer cliffs. Consequently, we crossed many rock slides that obliterated the narrow paths. This is sometimes called "rock-hopping."

The early morning, the vim, zest, vigor and the inspiring scenery made us feel on top of the world. As we neared the other side of the lake the path started to swing away and we really started to go uphill. With time passing the sun got hotter, the body more tired, the back-pack heavier. Hiking now seemed much more of an effort. After a lot of hiking and rock-hopping we finally reached a grassy meadow at the first fork of Convict Creek. We rested there and ate an early lunch. We then changed shoes, forded the stream, and walked in this magnificent valley. With the elevation now at 8,500 feet it was much harder to breathe. We were going to 9,500 feet. It was really rough going. What a climb! At one point I got sick and had a headache. Altitude sickness. I got out my sleeping bag and crawled into it and slept for nearly an hour. I was then much better.

That night we camped right near the mountain pass. It seemed as if we had come about twenty miles. The following morning we were treated to one of nature's great spectacles; an earthquake (of 5.2 on the Richter Scale, we were to learn later). The shaking caused a minor landslide and we saw sand, dust and rocks come down a sheer cliff, looking like a waterfall. The feeling was that of awe at seeing nature's power at work. I was so moved that the *nembutsu* came out

from my lips.

When we say *jiriki*, or self power, I think of this back-packing trip which seemed like mountain climbing in spots. As our third patriarch, Donran Daishi, has stated, it was like going over a long arduous mountain road. At one stage every step was torture. But when we examine my back-packing, did I really do it alone? In a sense I did, but actually I was aided by many things tangible and intangible. My socks and shoes were most important. The clothes I wore protected me from the elements. The pack frame I had enabled me to carry many things. The food I brought with me helped with my hunger. The water out of the river slaked my thirst. The car and gas enabled me to drive both ways. The weather and the sun were most favorable. Many persons had also made the mountain path on which I hiked. In thinking of all these things we could hardly say that the hike was "self power." Did I do this all by myself? I would have to say, "No. Emphatically, no!" I was, in fact, assisted by many things. So even my so-called *jiriki* had a lot of *tariki* in it when we examine it more closely.

Last March, 1982, I was invited to speak at the Honolulu Betsuin for their Spring *Ohigan*. I was most happy to accept and looked forward to it with some anticipation. I corresponded with *Fuku-rinban* Ama and made preparations. Finally the day came to depart. My wife drove me to the airport and I boarded a World Airlines plane. My seat was next to the aisle, and as there was no one in the next seat, for which I was deeply grateful, I could stretch out a little. The ride itself took about 5½ hours and I had to turn back my watch two hours. I leisurely ate the lunch given me and looked at my sermons again and relaxed a bit. Then we were over the Hawaiian Islands. It was raining as I exited the plane. Typically Hawaii. Happily, *Rinban* Nagao and his son were waiting for me at the airport. We exchanged pleasantries as I waited for my baggage. I was scheduled to speak five times over the weekend.

Thinking of that plane ride I thought, "Why, that is just like *tariki*, the other power." *Okage sama de*, all I had to do was get on the plane and it did all the work without any effort at all on my part. How very easy it was. In looking at it more closely, though, I realized even though the plane did most of the work, I had to do many things that were self power. I had to buy a ticket. I had to work for the money. My wife drove me to the airport. I had to check my baggage. I had to check in and then go to my seat. I ate lunch. So interwoven with the *tariki* ride were many things of self power.

What we come to see is what we call "*jiriki*," and what we call "*tariki*" has many elements of the other interwoven with it. This is the kind of *jiriki* and *tariki* that was spoken of by the Pure Land teachers before Shinran Shonin. In general, the *jiriki* teachings were not all *jiriki*, but in the final essence relied on the Buddha for assistance to attain enlightenment. In the Pure Land teachings one had to utter the *nembutsu*, rely on the Buddha, and practice a certain amount of virtue and discipline. One had to start with an earnest *jiriki* spirit. To this condition, the Buddha's power was added. These two came together to result in birth in

the Pure Land. All one can say is the Pure Land teaching had a greater amount of *tariki* in it while the Path of the Sages' teaching had a greater amount of *jiriki* in it. A greater amount of OTHER POWER, however, implies that there still are certain conditions to be met, so it was not pure *tariki*. It was Shinran Shonin who started to read between the lines and find deeper meaning in the *Amida Sutra* than was apparent to those before him. He stated that the intent of the Buddha and the Great Compassionate Vow were most important, and brought out the idea of ABSOLUTE *TARIKI*. Absolute, pure *tariki* means salvation without any conditions to be met by the person.

One wrong interpretation of absolute *tariki* is that the Buddha will save us just as we are, even if we make no effort, do nothing, stand idly by. This kind of interpretation was also taken by the general public to be *TARIKI HONGAN*. Their interpretation said that the answer would come from someplace, without us doing anything. However, if we just stand idly by and never lift a finger it is apparent we will never find salvation.

Another interpretation of ABSOLUTE *TARIKI* is that reliance on the Buddha is necessary. The phrase, "reliance," in Japanese is "*tanomu*." If one relies, then there will be salvation. If one does not rely (*tanomu*), then there will be no salvation. This is salvation by the Buddha's power but it is not ABSOLUTE *TARIKI* as it inserts a condition, a demand on the person. If it is not, then what is true ABSOLUTE *TARIKI*? It is a salvation power in which the workings are all on the side of the Buddha.

We are those who come to realize the great depths of our own sinfulness. It is as Shinran Shonin states in Chapter Two of the *Tannisho*: "But since I am incapable of any practice whatsoever, hell would definitely be my dwelling anyway."

The compassion of Amida Buddha's *hongan* must save even this kind of person. Amida's will of great determination is in His vow that wishes somehow to save us and is working on us twenty-four hours a day. As I become aware of His compassion, the *nembutsu* comes from my lips. It is Amida's *hongan*, His compassion, that vowed it must somehow save us. It is not a salvation that tells us that we must practice this or that, however easy that practice may be. If the vow did lay down some kind of condition, then it would not be applicable for we sinners bound for hell. In this absolute saving power of Amida, Shinran Shonin has stated: "*TARIKI* can be expressed as the Power of the Vow of Amida Buddha."