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Chapter 4

Shin Buddhism (Part One)[1]

—Daisetz T. Suzuki

Those of you who are accustomed to listening to the usual explanations of Pure Land Buddhism may find my lectures on this subject unusual and unorthodox, but I am willing to take that criticism. Ordinarily speaking, Pure Land doctrine is heavily laden with all kinds of what I call "accretions," which are not altogether necessary in order for modern people to get at the gist of the teaching.

For instance, Amida is the principal subject of Pure Land Buddhism. He is represented as being so many feet in height and endowed with the excellent physical features of a great man; he emits beams of light from his body, illuminating the world—not just one world, but many worlds, defying human calculation or measurement; and on every ray of light that comes out of his body, in fact, from every pore of his skin, there are so many Buddha-lands, decorated in a most extravagant manner. The descriptions almost exceed the imagination.

Of course this too is the product of man's mind, so I cannot really say it is beyond human imagination. But we can see how the Indian mind, more than any other, is richly endowed with the ability to create imagery. When you read the sūtras and listen to the old ways of explaining Pure Land doctrine, you will be surprised at how differently those people viewed such things, when compared with our modern way of thinking.

I am not going to touch upon these traditional aspects of the doctrine, so I am afraid my own explanations will be somewhat prosaic, devoid of the usual glamour and rich imagery. In a way, it will be Amida religion brought down to earth; but at the same time the doctrine is not to be treated from the intellectual point of view, on the relative plane of thought. It is after all altogether beyond human intellection.

The Pure Land and Amida are revealed on this earth, though not as is taught by orthodox preachers. The Pure Land is not many millions and millions of miles away to the west. According to my explanation, the Pure Land is right here. Those who have eyes to see it can see it right here, even in this very hall. Amida is not presiding over a Pure Land beyond our reach. His Pure Land is this dirty earth itself. When I explain things in this way I am going directly against the traditional or conventional Pure Land doctrine. However, I have my own explanations and interpretations, and perhaps after these lectures are over you will agree with them, though of that I cannot be quite sure!

A Japanese Shin Buddhist friend of mine in Brazil recently wrote to me, requesting that I write out the essential teachings of the Pure Land school in English for the Buddhists there, because they found it difficult to translate such things from Japanese into Portuguese. He wanted me to present it so as to make Amida and Pure Land doctrine appear somewhat similar to Christianity, at least superficially, and yet to retain characteristic features of the Pure Land doctrine. So I sent the following to him. Whether he agreed with my views or not, I do not know. You might say I wrote it for my own edification.[2]

First: We believe in Amida Butsu, Amitabha Buddha, as Savior of all beings. ("Savior" is not a word often used among Buddhists; it is a kind of condescension to the Christian way of thinking.) This Amida Buddha is eternal life and infinite light. And all beings are born in sin and laden with sin. (This idea of sin is to be specially interpreted to give it a Buddhist color, which I will do later on.)

Second: We believe in Amida Buddha as our Oya-sama. (Sometimes the more familiar "Oya-san" is used in place of "Oya-sama," but the latter is more generally used. Oya-sama, in this context, means love or compassion. Strictly speaking, there is no word corresponding to Oya-sama in English or any European languages. *Oya* means parent, and *-sama* is an honorific suffix. *Oya* can mean either father or mother, and can also mean both of them; not separately, but mother and father as one. Motherly qualities and fatherly qualities are united in Oya. In Christianity God is addressed as Father: "Our father which art in Heaven." But Oya-sama is not in heaven, nor is Oya-sama the Father. Oya-sama is neither a "he" nor a "she." I don't like to say "it," so I am at a loss what to say. Oya-sama is such a peculiar word, so endearing and at the same time so full of religious significance.)

Third: We believe that salvation ("salvation" is not a good word here, but I am trying to comply with my friend's request) consists in pronouncing the name of Amida in sincerity and with devotion. (This pronouncing the name of Amida may not be considered so important, but names have certain magical powers. When a name is uttered, the object bearing that name is conjured up.)

In *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, when the devil's name is pronounced, the devil appears. Among some primitive peoples, the name of the supreme being is kept a secret. It is revealed only to those who have gone through certain rituals. The initiate is led by one of the elders of the religion into a dense forest where there is no danger of being overheard by anybody. Then the elder reveals the name to him. By knowing the name, the initiate is now fully qualified as a leader himself. The name plays an important role in religious life.

Amida's name is pronounced in sincerity and with devotion. The formula is *Namu-amida-butsu*. *Butsu* is Buddha, *namu* means "I take refuge": I take refuge in Amida Buddha. Or we may take *namu* as meaning adoration to Amida Buddha. It is a simple formula. There is nothing especially mysterious about it, and you may wonder how this name or phrase could have such wonderful power.

Now I have to say something about *hongan*. *Hongan*, according to my interpretation, is the primal will. This primal will is at the foundation of all reality. *Hongan* as expressed in the *Sūtra of Eternal Life* consists of 48 different vows, but all 48 may be summarized in one basic vow, or *hongan*, which is: Amida wants to save all beings. Amida desires to have all beings brought over to his land, which is the land of purity and bliss. And those who earnestly, sincerely, and devotedly believe in Amida, will all be born in the Pure Land.

This birth does not take place after what is called death. To sincere followers of the Pure Land, instead of being born in the Pure Land, the Pure Land itself is created or comes into existence when we sincerely pronounce *Namu-amida-butsu*. Therefore, instead of going over to the Pure Land, the Pure Land comes to us. In a way, we are carrying the Pure Land within us all along, and when we pronounce that magic formula *Namu-amida-butsu*, we become conscious of the presence of the Pure Land around us, or rather, in us.

The *hon* of *hongan* means original or primal, and *gan* is generally translated "vow." But I have misgivings about using vow as an equivalent for *gan*. Sometimes it is translated "prayer." *Gan* means literally "wish" or "desire." Philosophically speaking, it may be better to say "will," so that *hongan* would be rendered "primal will." Why *gan* cannot properly be translated as "vow," "prayer," "wish," or "desire" will become clearer later. I am just trying to give you an idea now of how I interpret some of these terms.

I

I wrote a little book called *A Miscellany on the Shin Teaching of Buddhism* which was published in Japan in 1949. It contains rather fragmentary explanations of the Shin teaching, but parts of it may be helpful in gaining a general view of Shin Pure Land Buddhism.

The Pure Land teaching originated in China, but it reached its full development in the Japanese Shin school of Pure Land Buddhism. The Shin school is the culmination of Pure Land thought, and that culmination took place in Japan. The Japanese may not have very many original ideas to contribute to world thought or world culture, but in Shin we find one major contribution Japanese can make to the outside world. There is one other major Buddhist school that developed in Japan, the Nichiren sect. But all the other schools more or less trace their origin as well as their form either to China or to India. Nichiren is more or less related to the nationalistic spirit of Japan and is often confused with nationalism. But Shin is absolutely free of such connections; in that respect, Shin is remarkable.

Shinran, the founder of the Shin sect, was born in Kyoto about eight hundred years ago. He is generally made out to be of noble lineage, but that I suspect is fiction. His family was probably relatively cultured and may well have belonged to the higher levels of society, but their connection, if any, to the aristocracy

was I think remote. In any case, his real religious development took place when he was exiled to the country, far from the capital, the center of culture in those days. He was a follower of Hōnen, founder of the Pure Land (Jōdo) school in Japan. Hōnen's influence was very great at the time, and priests belonging to the older established schools did not like that. Somehow they contrived to have Hōnen banished to Tosa, then a remote area of the country. Shinran was also exiled, to the northern part of Japan. His decisive religious experience really took place during this exile, while he was living among the common people. He understood well their spiritual needs. In those days Buddhism was somewhat aristocratic, and the study of Buddhism was mainly confined to the learned few, who were rather addicted to learning. But Shinran knew that mere learning was not the way to religious experience. There had to be a more direct way that did not require the medium of learning or ritual. In fact, to experience a full awakening of the religious consciousness, all such things must first be cast aside. Such mediums would only interfere with our attempts to directly attain this full awakening, which is the consummation of the religious life. Shinran came to realize this himself, and he finally found the most direct way to the attainment of this awakening.

Let me read a bit now from *A Miscellany on the Shin Teaching*:

> Of all the developments Mahayana Buddhism has achieved in the Far East, the most remarkable one is the Shin teaching of the Pure Land school. It is remarkable, according to my judgment, chiefly for the reason that geographically its birthplace is Japan and historically it is the latest and highest evolution the Pure Land teaching could have reached. The Pure Land idea originated in India (because the sūtras used by this sect were originally compiled in India, the ideas must have developed first in India) and the sūtras devoted to its exposition were compiled probably about three hundred years after Buddha (that is, about one or two centuries before the Christian era). The school bearing its name, however, started in China towards the end of the fifth century when the White Lotus Society was organized by Hui-yüan (334-416) and his friends in 403. The idea of a Buddha-land which is presided over by a Buddha is probably as old as Buddhism, but a school based upon the desire to be born in such a land in order to attain the final end of the Buddhist life, did not fully materialize until Buddhism began to flourish in China as a practical religion. It took the Japanese genius of the thirteenth century to mature it further into the teaching of the Shin school. Some may wonder how the Mahayana could have expanded into the doctrine of Pure Land faith, which apparently stands in direct contradiction to the Buddha's supposedly original teaching of self-reliance and enlightenment by means of *prajñā*.[3]

II

[Dr. Suzuki explains the following Shin terms at the blackboard]

Amida is standing on one side, and on the other side is *bombu* (or *bompu*), the ordinary people, just as we all are. We sometimes see this term rendered as "all beings" in English. Amida Buddha is the *hō* (Dharma), and we *bombu* are *ki*.

Hō and *ki* are difficult terms to translate. *Hō* is on the other side and *ki* is on this side. Religious teachings start from the relationship between them. *Hō* might be considered as corresponding to God or Christ, and *ki* is this sinful person. *Hō* is the other-power, and *ki* is self-power. Other-power and self-power stand in contrast; and in order to be born in the Pure Land, self-power is to be altogether abandoned and other-power embraced. In fact, when self-power is embraced by other-power, self-power turns into other-power; or, other-power "takes up" self-power altogether.

Or again, on one side we have the Pure Land, and on the other side this world. "This world" is more commonly called *shaba* in Japanese and Chinese—it is a Sanskrit term originally. The other world is called Jōdo. (*Jō* means pure, *do* is land, or "Pure Land.") *Shaba* is, we might say, the land of defilement. So there is Jōdo, the land of purity, or the Pure Land, and *shaba*, the defiled land. The Pure Land is the realm of the absolute, and *shaba* the realm of relativity.

When we pronounce *Namu-amida-butsu*, Amida is on one side and *namu* is on the other. *Namu* represents self-power or *ki*; Amida is *hō*, the other-power. *Namu-amida-butsu* symbolizes the unification of *ki* and *hō*, Amida and *bompu*, self-power and other-power, *shaba* and Pure Land—they are unified, identified. So when *Namu-amida-butsu* is pronounced, it represents or symbolizes the unification of the two. "Unification" is not an adequate term, but its meaning will hopefully become clearer.

Now Amida is on the other side, the *bompu* is on this side, and *shaba* is where we are. The Pure Land reveals itself when we realize what we are, or, what Amida is. Other-power is very much emphasized in Shin teaching. When Amida and other-power are understood, the Pure Land will be understood too. When Amida's essential quality is understood, *hongan* and compassion, or love, also become known. It is just like holding a cloth at the central part; if you pull the middle up, all the rest comes with it.

Shin Buddhism (Part Two)[4]

In giving names to objects we commonly fall into the error of thinking that the names stand for the actual objects themselves. This is a danger that is always present in name-giving, but we cannot on that account disregard the importance of names. Names represent a form of discrimination; they help us distinguish one thing from another, and this enables us to know their nature to some extent. Without a name, an object could not be distinguished from other objects. Distinguishing or discriminating helps us in this way to understand the objects around us. But names are not everything.

Man is also distinguished from other beings in that he is a toolmaker. Names are also a sort of tool; we can put them to use to better deal with the objects around us. But there is also a tyranny of tools. We make and surround ourselves with tools of all kinds, whereupon the tools begin to tyrannize us. Instead of us using them, they turn against their inventor. We become the tools of the tools we make.

This situation is especially noticeable in modern life. We invent machines, and they in turn control human affairs. Machines, especially in recent years, have inextricably entered our lives. We now must try to adjust ourselves to machines, for once they are out of our hands they refuse to obey our will.

In our intellectual endeavors, our ideas can be despotic too. We cannot always be in control of ideas. We invent or construct ideas and concepts to make life more convenient. Then these very ideas which we intended to be so convenient become unmanageable and control the inventors themselves. Scholars invent ideas and then forget that they invented them in order to deal with certain realities. For instance, each of the branches of science, whether it is called biology, psychology, or astronomy, has its own premises, its own hypotheses. Each branch organizes the fields it has chosen—stars, animals, fish, and so on—and deals with those realities according to the special concepts its scientists have invented to enable them to handle the subjects of their research. Whatever situation comes along in the pursuit of their research or exercise of their ideas that does not happen to be amenable to those ideas, they drop. Instead of dropping the ideas and trying to create new ones in order to overcome the unexpected difficulties that arise, they stick to the old ideas they invented and try to make the new realities fit the old concepts. Or else they simply exclude those things which cannot easily be worked into the network of ideas they have invented.

I have heard that some scientists have themselves compared their methods to catching fish in a net with standardized meshes; those fish which fail to be scooped up in the net will be dropped and unaccounted for. They just take up those that can be caught in their net and try to explain their catch by means of their ready-made ideas. The fish that remain uncaught are treated as if they did not even exist. "These exist," say the scientists of those that have been caught in the net. All the other fish are nonexistent.

The same can be said of astronomy. Those stars which do not come within the scope of the telescope are usually neglected. Yet more powerful telescopes are developed to enable the astronomers to make more extensive and deeper surveys of the heavens. But when asked about the parts of space that lie beyond the scope of their present telescopes, they tend to disregard the question. Sometimes they go as far as to say that space is empty beyond a certain group of stars. Certain galaxies make up their astronomical maps, and beyond those, they say, there is a void.

But such conclusions are altogether unwarranted. If scientists would limit their conclusions to what they could survey or measure, and admitted that they

did not know beyond that, and did not venture any theory or any hypothesis, that would be all right. But blinded by their success within these boundaries, they try to extend that success beyond them, as if they had already surveyed and measured those unknown parts. Most scientists make this mistake, and, unfortunately, people tend to rely on what the scientists say.

To be truly scientific, they must always qualify their statements, because they always start from certain established hypotheses. Formerly scientists couldn't explain light, so they invented what they called "wave theory." But wave theory did not account for all the phenomena connected with light, so they then came up with what they called "quantum theory," which made explanations of certain other phenomena possible. But later they came to discover that to explain all the phenomena, they had to use both theories. The trouble with that, I am told, is that the two hypotheses contradict each other. If the wave theory is adopted, the quantum theory must be thrown out; if the quantum theory is taken up, the wave theory must be discarded. Yet the phenomena themselves exist, and scientists cannot deny their reality. So however contradictory it is on a logical plane, they have to adopt both theories, and somehow make them compatible.

All our surveys of reality are accomplished by means of our five senses. If we possessed another sense, or two or three more senses, besides the five we already have, then we might perceive an altogether different universe.

To say that what we experience via our five senses exhausts reality is a totally unfounded presumption on our part. We can say that within the limits of our five senses and intellect the world is understood so, explained so, interpreted so. But there is no way to deny the existence of something (though it may not be proper to call it a "thing") higher, deeper, and more pervasive which may lie beyond the ken of our five senses and intellect. If we do have some such extra sense within us, even though it is largely undeveloped—and some people do claim to have that kind of sense or faculty—then we may have another way of coming in contact with reality that is deeper and more extensive than our ordinary sensory and intellectual experience. It would be arrogant for someone to deny the existence of a higher and deeper "intuition," and declare, "Nothing can exist outside my sensory or intellectual perceptions."

Now let me write the six Chinese characters "Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu" on the blackboard. This is called the Nembutsu and is the cornerstone of the entire Pure Land teaching. Namu-amida-butsu is also known as the *Myōgō*, or Name of Amida Buddha, although it contains something more than the *Myōgō* itself. The efficacy of the *Myōgō* enables us to be born in Amida's Pure Land, to realize the highest reality, and fully grasp the ultimate truth. *Myōgō* does not work on the level of our senses and intellect, which are relative; it works on the part of our mind or being that lies beyond the senses and intellect. Those who are addicted to intellection would probably deny the efficacy of the *Myōgō* to explore those fields of human being which are beyond and cannot be surveyed by intellection, and deny as well the existence of such fields.

In religious life there is a phenomenon that we call "faith." Faith is a strange and wonderful thing. Ordinarily, we speak of "faith," or "belief," in a context of something beyond our ordinary comprehension that cannot be certified by our ordinary knowledge. Yet in religious faith there is something more to be considered. We have to venture into the life that is opened up by faith.

In the relative sense of faith, the one we use in ordinary life, we can say, "I cannot believe it unless I have seen it or heard it personally." We may nevertheless believe something not by means of direct personal experience but through the communication of our friends or books. And if we judge the basis of that belief to be strong and verifiable enough, we will accept it as true, even if the proof lies outside of our direct personal experience.

But in religious belief there is something more. Even if our intellect is unable to verify it objectively or scientifically, there is something in religious faith which somehow compels us to accept it as reality. Though we may not have experienced it, it still almost demands our acceptance, whether we will or not. Theologians talk about "accepting faith" as a kind of perilous decision we have to make. It is a venturesome deed or experience, a plunging into an unknown region and deciding to risk our faith and destiny.

I am afraid that people who accept such a theology are still on the plane of relativity. The fact is, we are compelled—there is no choice—to accept faith. All religions contain a similar element. Instead of Amida being taken into our life or being, we are carried away by Amida. This is how the *Myōgō* starts to live and become actual life within Shin devotees. Some people ask about the significance of the *Myōgō* and how it could possibly be so efficacious as to take us to Amida and make us be born in the Land of Purity. As long as a person has such doubt or suspicion or hesitancy in accepting the *Myōgō* in true faith, then he or she is not yet within its working.

The Indian sūtras tell of a mythical golden-winged bird of enormous size that eats dragons for its food. The dragons live deep in the ocean, but when the golden-winged bird soaring high above detects the dragons down at the bottom of the ocean, it sweeps down from the sky; the waves open up and it picks the dragons out of the deep and eats them. Of course the dragons are afraid of the approach of the bird and dread becoming its meal.

Someone once asked a Buddhist teacher, "What does the bird who has broken through the net eat?" The mythical bird who has broken through the net is perfectly free, absolute master of itself. We ourselves are caught up in various kinds of nets, mostly of our own making. They may not really exist, but we imagine ourselves caught in them. This bird—that is, one of us who has been spiritually enlightened—is one who has broken through all the nets and now enjoys perfect freedom. Now the question to the Buddhist teacher, "What food does such a bird eat?" is the same as asking, What kind of life does an enlightened man, one who is spiritually free, lead? Or, What kind of life would a person

lead who believes totally in the *Myōgō* and is possessed by Amida. What kind of person would he be?

Most people ask questions of this kind as if the question had nothing to do with them at all. What is the use of trying to know about such matters, when we should instead be such a person ourselves. But that is how we are made; this curiosity is a frailty of human nature. At the same time, this is what makes our lives distinguishable from those of the other animals—they don't ask these questions.

The master then said: "Come through the net yourself. Then I will tell you." Once through the net, no telling is needed. He will know for himself. Instead of asking idle questions about the life of the spiritually free, why not free yourself and see for yourself what kind of life it is? The same can be said of questions about the life of a Shin devotee. Americans sometimes ask me what significance the message of Buddhism has for our modern life. We may explain the kinds of benefits, advantages, material or otherwise, which come, for example, from belief in the *Myōgō*. But instead of being informed by someone else about the advantages that might accrue from accepting the *Myōgō*, they should just accept the *Myōgō*; and try … no, not try, just live it. Then they will know what it means.

This is what distinguishes religious life from relative, worldly life. In the relative life we want to know beforehand all that may result from our doing this or that; then we proceed to take action expecting a certain outcome. But religious life consists in accepting and knowing, and at the same time living that which is beyond knowledge. So in knowing and living, living is knowledge, and knowing is living. This kind of difference sharply distinguishes the religious from the worldly life. In actual fact there is no such thing as spiritual life distinguished from worldly life. Worldly life is spiritual life, and vice versa. It is just that we become blinded and confused in our encounters with the world. Just as scientists are caught in the nets they weave for themselves, we too, in taking all our inventions for realities, are blinded by them. We have to fight these unrealities. Actually, to call them unrealities is not exactly correct, for they are, with reservations, real enough. That is something we frequently fail to recognize or acknowledge.

Now regarding the *Myōgō*, Shinran, the founder of the Shin sect, says, "One pronouncing of the *Myōgō* is enough to make you be born in the Pure Land." Birth in the Pure Land is not an event that happens after death, as is popularly assumed. It takes place as we are living this life.

I was reading a Christian book recently in which the author speaks about Christ being born in the soul. We generally think Christ was born on a certain date in history, at a certain place on earth. This occurred not in the usual biological way but through the miraculous power of God.

But this Christian author says that Christ is born in our soul. And when that birth is recognized, when we become conscious of Christ's birth in our soul, that is when we are saved. So Christ is born in the course of history, but that historical event takes place in our own spiritual life. Christ is born, and we must

become conscious of his birth in us. He is not born just anywhere, but in us, every day, at every moment; not once in history, but repeatedly, everywhere, at every moment.

And according to this author, his birth is dependent on our dying to ourselves. We must die to what we call the ego. When the ego is altogether forsaken and the soul is no more disturbed, there will be no anxiety, annoyance, or worries whatever, for all worries come from being addicted to the idea of the self. Therefore, when the self is completely given up, all the disturbances are quieted, and absolute peace prevails in the soul, which, he says, is "silence."

It is remarkable to see this Christian writer speak of silence. When silence prevails in the soul, that is the moment Christ is born in our soul. So silence is needed. When everything is kept in silence, that is the time, the opportunity, for spiritual being to enter our soul. Silence is attained when the self is given up; when the self is given up, the consciousness of dualistic thoughts is altogether nullified; that is to say, no dualism exists.

When I say dualism does not exist I do not mean that duality itself is annihilated. While the duality remains, an identification takes place; the two are left as two, and yet there is a state of identity. That is the moment silence prevails. When there are two ("two" means more than two, that is, multiplicity), noise of various kinds usually results, a disturbance which needs to be quieted. But this silence is not achieved by the annihilation of multiplicity. Multiplicity is left as multiplicity, yet silence prevails, not underneath, not inside, not outside, but here. The realization of this silence is simultaneously the birth of Christ. They occur synchronously.

Similarly, the *Myōgō* enters our active life when there is no longer any *Myōgō* but Amida; Amida becomes the *Myōgō* and the *Myōgō* becomes Amida. The last time, I spoke about the relationship between *ki*, we ordinary beings, and *hō*, Amida Buddha, or the Dharma. When the *Myōgō* is pronounced and we are conscious of saying Namu to Amida, and when Amida is listening to us say Namu, there will be no identity, no silence. One is calling out to the other, and the other is looking down or looking up. There is dualism or disturbance, not silence.

But when Namu is Amida and Amida is Namu, when *ki* is *hō* and *hō* is *ki*, there is silence. That is, the *Myōgō* is absolutely identified with Amida. The *Myōgō* ceases to be the name of somebody who exists outside the one who pronounces the *Myōgō*. Then a perfect identity, or absolute identity, prevails, but this identity is not to be called "oneness." When we say "one," we are apt to interpret that one numerically, that is, as standing against two, three, four, and so on. But this oneness is absolute oneness, and absolute oneness goes beyond all measurement. In absolute oneness or identity, the *Myōgō* is Amida, Amida is the *Myōgō*. There is no separation between the two; there is a perfect or absolute identity of *ki* and *hō*.

This is when absolute faith is realized. This is the moment, as indicated by Shinran, that "Namu-amida-butsu (*Myōgō*), pronounced once, is enough to save you." That "once," an absolute once, is something utterly mysterious.

Shin Buddhism (Part Three)[5]

Now, *jiriki* is self-power, and *tariki* is other-power. The Pure Land school is known as the Other-power School because it teaches that the other-power is most important in attaining rebirth in the Pure Land. Rebirth in the Pure Land, or regeneration, or enlightenment, or salvation—whatever name we may give to the end of our religious efforts—comes from the other-power, not from the self-power. This is the contention of the Shin followers.

The other-power is opposed to what is known in theology as synergism. Synergism means that in the work of salvation man has to do his share just as much as God does his. This is Christian terminology. The Shin school may therefore be called monergism, in contradistinction to synergism. *Syn* means together, and *ergism* (*ergo*) means work—"working together." Monergism means working alone. Thus in *tariki*, *tariki* alone is working, without self-power entering. The Other-power School therefore is monergism, and not synergism. It is all in the working of Amida, and we ordinary people living relative existences are powerless to bring about our birth in the Pure Land, or, in another word, to bring about our enlightenment.

This distinction between synergism and monergism may be described in this way: The mother cat when she carries her kittens from one place to another takes hold of the neck of each of the kittens. That is monergism because the kittens just let the mother carry them. In the case of monkeys, however, baby monkeys are carried on their mother's back; the baby monkey must cling to the mother's body by means of their limbs or tails. So the mother is not doing the work alone; the baby monkeys too must do their part. The cat's way is monergism—the mother alone does the work; while the monkey's way is synergism—the two working together.

In Shin teaching, Amida is the only important power that is at work; we just let Amida do his work. We don't add anything of our own to Amida's working. This other-power doctrine, or monergism, is based on the idea that we humans are all relative-minded, and as long as we are so constituted there is nothing in us or no power which will enable us to cross the stream of birth-and-death. Amida must come from the other side to carry us on his boat of "all-efficient vows"—that is, by means of his *hongan*, his *praṇidhāna* ("vow-prayer").

There is a deep and impassable chasm between Amida and ourselves, who are so heavily burdened with karmic hindrance. And we can't shake off this

hindrance by our own means. Amida must come and help us, extending his arms from the farther end. This is what is generally taught by the Shin school.

But, from another point of view, however ignorant, impotent, and helpless we may be, we will never be able to grasp Amida's arms unless we exhaust all our own efforts to reach that other end. It is all well and good to say the other-power does everything on our behalf and we just let it do its work. We must, however, become conscious of the other-power working in us. Unless we are conscious of Amida's doing, we will never be saved. We can never be certain of our birth in the Pure Land, or the fact that we have attained enlightenment. Consciousness is necessary. To acquire this consciousness we must strive, exhausting all our efforts to cross the stream by ourselves. Amida may be beckoning to us to come to the other shore where he is standing, but we cannot even see him until we have done our part to the limit of our power. Self-power may not ultimately carry us across the stream. But, at the same time, Amida cannot help us by extending his arms until we have realized that our self-power is worthless, is of no account, in achieving our salvation. Only when we have made use of our self-power will we recognize Amida's help and become conscious of it. Without this consciousness, there will be no regeneration whatever.

The other-power is all-important, but this all-importantness is known only to those who have striven by means of self-power to attempt the impossible.

This realization of the worthlessness of self-power may also be Amida's doing. And in fact it is. But until we come to the realization, this recognition—the fact that Amida has been doing all this for us and in us—would not be ours. Therefore, striving is a prerequisite for all realizations. Spiritually or metaphysically speaking, everything is ultimately from Amida. But after all we are relative beings, and so, we cannot be expected to arrive at this viewpoint without having first struggled on this plane of relativity. The crossing from the relative plane to the transcendental or absolute plane—or other-power plane—may be impossible, logically speaking, but it appears an impossibility only before we have tried everything on this side. So, the relativity of our existence, the striving or complete exhausting of ourselves, and self-power—these are all synonyms. In Japanese, this is known as *hakarai*. It is a technical term in Shin doctrine.

This may correspond to the Christian idea of pride. Christians are, in a way, not so philosophical as Buddhists and, except possibly the theologians, do not use such terms as self-power or other-power. Ordinarily, Christians use the word "pride," which exactly corresponds to the Shin idea of *jiriki*, self-power. This pride means self-assertion, pride in one's worthiness, pride in being able to accomplish something, and so on. To rely on self-power is pride, and this pride is difficult to uproot, as is self-power. In this relative world, we are constantly dependent on self-power. On the moral plane, especially, we are forever talking about individual responsibilities, making one's own choice, and coming to

a decision—all products of self-power. As long as we live in a moral world, individual responsibility is essential. If we went on without any sense of responsibility, society would be in chaos and end in self-destruction. Self-power in this sense is a necessary part of living in this world of relativity. Self-power, or pride, is all right as long as things are going on smoothly, when we do not encounter any hindrance, or anything that frustrates our ambitions, imaginations, or ideals. But as soon as we encounter something which stands athwart the way we want to go, then we are forced to reflect upon ourselves.

Such obstructions may be enormous, not only individually but collectively. Our society is getting more and more complex, the hindrances or obstructions are becoming more collective in nature and single individuals feel less responsible for them. But as long as a society is a community of individuals, each individual, whether conscious of it or not, will have to be responsible to some degree for what his society does, for what society imposes upon its members. When we encounter such hindrances we reflect upon ourselves and find we are altogether impotent to overcome them. The very moment we encounter insurmountable difficulties, we reflect, and soon find our self-power altogether inadequate to cope with the problem. We are seized with feelings of frustration, breeding in our minds anxiety, uncertainty, fear, and worry—familiar features of modern life. This is where pride fails to provide an answer. Pride has to curb itself; it must give way to something higher or stronger. Then pride is humiliated. As long as we live in our relative world, on this plane of conditionality, we cannot avoid obstacles and hindrances. We are sure to encounter them.

Earlier Buddhists used to say, "Life is suffering, life is pain." And we are compelled to try to escape from it, or to transcend the necessity of being bound to birth-and-death. They used to use the term "emancipation," or "liberation," or "escape." Nowadays, instead of such terminology, we say, "to attain freedom," or "to transcend," or "to synthesize," and so on.

In opposition to the terms "relativity," "striving," "self-power," "*hakarai*," and "pride," we have "transcending," "making no efforts." This relative world of ours is characterized by all kinds of striving. Unless we strive we can't get anything—that is the very condition of relative existence. However, in religious life, effortlessness prevails—there is no striving. Self-power is replaced by other-power, pride by humility, *hakarai* by *jinen hōni*.

Here are a few more translations or paraphrases of what Shinran, the founder of the Shin school, says about *jinen hōni*, that is *anata-makase*, or "Let thy Will be done." It is somewhat scholastic, but it may interest you.

"*Ji* of *jinen* means 'of itself' or 'by itself.'" *Ji* literally means "things as they are," or "self," as it is not due to the designing of man but Amida's vow that man is born in the Pure Land. Man is led naturally or spontaneously—this is the meaning of *nen*—to the Pure Land. The devotee does not make any conscious self-designing efforts, for self-power is altogether ineffective to achieve the end

of being born in the Pure Land. *Jinen* thus means that because one's rebirth in the Pure Land is wholly due to the working of Amida's vow-power, the devotee is simply to believe in Amida and let his vow work itself out.

When I say "birth in the Pure Land" I wish this to be understood in a more modern way. That is, going to the Pure Land is not an event that takes place after death, but while alive. We are carrying the Pure Land with us all the time. In fact, the Pure Land surrounds us everywhere. This lecture room itself is the Pure Land. We become conscious of it, we recognize that Amida has come to help us only because we have striven and come to the end of our strivings. It is then that *jinen hōni* comes along.

"*Hōni* means 'It is so because it is so.'" We cannot give any reason for our being here. Why do we live here? The answer will be, "We live because we live." Explanations for our existence will inevitably result in a contradiction. When we come face to face with such a contradiction we cannot live on even for a moment. Fortunately, however, contradiction does not get the better of us, we get the better of contradiction.

In this connection, with the *tariki* and *jiriki*, other-power and self-power, idea, it means this: It is in the nature of Amida's vow-power that we are born in the Pure Land. Therefore, the way in which other-power works may be defined as "meaning with no-meaning." This is a contradiction or a paradox. When we talk about "meaning" we wish the word to signify something, but in religious experience "meaning" is a meaning of no meaning. That is to say, its working is so natural, so spontaneous, so effortless, so absolutely free, that it works as if it were not working.

*
* *

"In order for the devotee to be saved by Amida and be welcomed to Amida's Pure Land, he must recite the *Myōgō*, *Namu-amida-butsu*, in all sincerity. As far as the devotee is concerned, he does not know what is good or bad for him. All is left to Amida. This is what I, Shinran, have learned."

This is what Shinran says. He does not know good from bad, for all is left to Amida. This may seem to go directly against our moral consciousness, or what we call conscience. But from the religious point of view, what we think is good is not necessarily good all the time, or absolutely good. For good may turn into bad at any time and vice versa. So we cannot be the absolute judge of moral good or moral evil. When by Amida's help we go beyond all this, and everything is left to Amida's working, when we realize or become conscious of Amida's working in everything we do, whether it be good or bad, then all is good. As long as we live on the relative plane, this will remain a paradox, inexplicable and incomprehensible.

"Amida's vow," Shinran continues, "is meant to make us all attain supreme Buddhahood." As I said before, when supreme enlightenment is attained, we realize the actual existence of the Pure Land, the fact that we are right in the midst of the Pure Land. Supreme Buddhahood, which is the same as supreme enlightenment, is realized when we find we are in the Pure Land itself.

Shinran goes on: "Buddha is formless, and because of his formlessness he is known as 'all by itself.'" All physical things have forms, and ideas have something to designate, but when Buddhists say "formlessness," they mean neither physical form nor intellectualization. We are in the world of "formlessness" when we go beyond the materiality of things and our habits of intellectualizing. The Buddhist term "formlessness" is also known as *jinen*, "all by itself," "to exist by itself."

"If Amida had a form he would not be called Supreme Tathāgata, *Nyorai*. He is called Amida in order to let us know his formlessness. This is what Shinran has learned. Once you have understood this you need not concern yourself with *jinen* any longer." This is important. When we realize that we are really in the world of "formlessness," we need not talk about *jinen*, "being by itself," any more.

Shinran goes on: "When you turn your attention to it, the meaningless meaning assumes a meaning, defeating its own purpose." When we talk about "being by itself," we no longer are "being by itself"; there is no more "meaningless meaning." Meaning has something to mean; it points to something else. When we are that meaning itself, we need not talk about meaning any more. When we are *jinen* itself, there is no more need to discuss it because we are *jinen*. As soon as we begin to think, all kinds of difficulties arise, but when we don't think, everything is all right. By "not thinking," I don't mean that we must be animal-like; we must remain human and yet be like "the lilies of the field," or "the fowls of the air." Shinran says, "All this comes from *butchi* (*Buddhajñā*; Buddha-intellect, or Buddha-wisdom)." *Butchi* is something that goes beyond our relative way of thinking; it is the "other-power." The term other-power is a more dynamic conception; while *butchi* is more dialectic or metaphysical.

From his commentary on *Jinen Hōni* ("Being by Itself"), we can see what understanding Shinran had of the working of Amida's vow-power, or of the other-power. "Meaningless meaning" may be thought of as something devoid of sense—literally, meaningless, without any definite content whereby we can concretely grasp its significance. But the idea is this: there was no teleology or eschatological conception on the part of Amida when he made those forty-eight vows. All the ideas expressed in them are the spontaneous outflow of his great infinite compassion, his great compassionate heart, embracing everything and extending to the farthest and endless ends of the world. And this infinite compassion is Amida himself. Amida has no ulterior motive. He simply feels sorry for us suffering beings, and wishes to save us from going through an endless cycle of birth-and-death. Amida's vows are the spontaneous expression of his

love or compassion. This "going beyond teleology," or "purposelessness" may sound strange at first, for everything we do in this world usually has a purpose. But religious life consists in attaining this "purposelessness," "going beyond teleology," "meaningless meaning," and so on. This is what is called *anata-makase*, or "Let thy Will be done," "going beyond self-power and letting Amida do his work through us or in us." Thus there are no prayers in Buddhism in the strict sense of the term. For when you pray to gain something you will never get anything; when you pray for nothing you gain everything.

During the Tokugawa era, there was a man in Japan called Issa who was noted for his haiku. Issa expressed his idea of "Let thy Will be done," but in his case it has no religious implication. In fact, he was being pressed by worldly affairs, and it was out of his desperate situation that he uttered this haiku at the end of the year. I still remember when I was very young we paid everything we owed to the tradespeople at the end of the year. In my day it was twice a year, once in July and once at the year end. If we could not pay by mid-July, we left it to the end of the year, and if we could not pay then, we went broke. Issa was in a similar predicament. I will give his verse first in Japanese. Those who understand Japanese might appreciate it:

Tomokaku mo
Anata-makase no
Toshi no kure

Issa was obviously in great distress: "I, being at the end of the year, having no money whatever to pay my accounts, have no choice but to let Amida do his Will." If indeed Amida could look after Issa's problem, all would be well, for Issa was really desperately poor. In fact, worldly poverty and spiritual "poverty" often have a great deal to do with each other, going hand in hand.

In reading Eckhart, I found a story you might like to hear. It is entitled "Meister Eckhart's daughter":

> A daughter came to the preaching cloister and asked for Meister Eckhart. The doorman asked, "Whom shall I announce?"
>
> "I don't know," she said.
>
> "Why don't you know?"
>
> "Because I am neither a girl, nor a woman, nor a husband, nor a wife, nor a widow, nor a virgin, nor a master, nor a maid, nor a servant."
>
> The doorman went to Meister Eckhart and said:
>
> "Come out here and see the strangest creature you ever heard of. Let me go with you, and you stick your head out and ask, 'Who wants me?'"

Meister Eckhart did so, and she gave him the same reply she had made to the doorman. Then Meister Eckhart said:

"My dear child, what you say is right and sensible, but explain to me what you mean." She said:

"If I were a girl, I should be still in my first innocence; if I were a woman, I should always be giving birth in my soul to the eternal word; if I were a husband, I should put up a stiff resistance to all evil; if I were a wife, I should keep faith with my dear one, whom I married; if I were a widow, I should be always longing for the one I love; if I were a virgin, I should be reverently devout; if I were a servant-maid, in humility I should count myself lower than God or any creature; if I were a man-servant, I should be hard at work, always serving my lord with my whole heart. But since of all these I am neither one, I am just a something among somethings, and so I go."

Then Meister Eckhart went in and said to his pupils:

"It seems to me that I have just listened to the purest person I have ever known." (Blakney translation, pp. 252-3).

This is quite an interesting story. But I have something to say here: This strange daughter said, "Of all these, I am neither one." That is, she is not any of all those enumerated above. She mixes the worldly sense with the spiritual sense; that is, for example, "if I were a husband, I should put up a stiff resistance to all evil." This may be taken in a worldly or in a spiritual sense, I believe. If one were engaged in spiritual life, or otherwise, there will be some end to perform. If you designate this or that, if you have some work to accomplish, some role to perform, you will have *something*. But she says, "Since of all these I am neither one, I am just a something among somethings … "

I wouldn't say this. I would say, "I am just a nothing among somethings, and so I go." "So I go" is *jinen hōni*. It is *sonomama*. It is "Let thy Will be done."

NOTES

[1] This is the first of a series of talks given by D.T Suzuki before the members of the New York Buddhist Academy in the spring of 1958. We wish to thank the Matsugaoka Library, Kamakura, for permission to publish it here.—*Ed.*

[2] The portions in parentheses in the following three paragraphs contain Dr. Suzuki's comments on the original written statement he sent to his friend.—*Ed.*

[3] The text given here has been revised to include several revisions written into the author's personal copy. The remarks set off by brackets are comments made during the lecture.—*Ed.*

[4] This is the second of a series of talks given by D. T. Suzuki at the New York Buddhist Academy in the spring of 1958. We wish to thank the Matsugaoka Library, Kamakura, for permission to publish it here.—*Ed.*

[5] This is the third and final installment of a series of talks given before members of the New York Buddhist Academy in the spring of 1958.—*Ed.*

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