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V

Naturalness in Everyday Work

1

Those who have attained true spirituality have never talked in mournful accents of the sorrowfulness of life or of the bondage of Karma, for they have learnt to transcend it. Not that the bondage has ceased to exist for them, but that the bondage has become to them as the form of freedom incarnate. Indeed that they have got their being in the unbroken chain of causation is true beyond doubt, but that is an *outer* truth. The *inner* truth is: From the Eternal Love do all beings have their birth. The spiritually-awakened man delights in accepting the bondage, and does not seek to evade

it. He allows the *law of causality (inga),* moral as well as physical, to take its course, that is, he submits himself to it, he does not *sever* himself from it, he does not make any distinction between it and himself; he *identifies* himself with it, he becomes it, he *is* it. What distinguishes him most conspicuously from the ordinary man is his absolute passivity, his absolute submission to the law of cause-effect. What he has learned from his life is not that there is pain in this world, but that it is possible for him to transcend it into joy. This enables him to transcend the bondage. He simply goes along his way nonchalantly and fearlessly with the undying faith in his *inmost self* who is immortal, who is not afraid of death or sufferings, and who looks upon pain as only the other side of joy. He is thus in one way quite passive, but in another way altogether active because he is master of himself.

As this mastership is derived from a source beyond himself—from the Other Power, he is given full authority to use it as he wills; in truth there is no limit to his powers. Having lost the self-will in the Will of Amida, the Great Compassionate One, and leading the spiritual life in the bosom of Amida, he has life more abundantly than anyone else, with no self-seeking, no attachment; being equal to all circumstances, he is master of every situation. For it is Amida Buddha, and not his narrow self, that is operative here. Here is his *active passivity* or *passive activity*.

The ordinary man, on the contrary, has the law of causation separated from him. He thinks that there is an *external* agent known as Karma or causation, and that this visits him according as he is good or bad. He does not realize that he himself is the moral agent as well as the law, that the law is inherent in his action, that he is the law-maker himself. To *separate*, to *divide*,

to *discriminate,* to make a distinction is the work of the *intellect* or *understanding,* and where intellection prevails there is always the *dualism* of self and others. Indeed it is this dualism that weaves the net of Karma and catches us unawares. As long as we are on the plane of the intellect or the self-centered mind, we cannot help groaning under the heavy weight of Karma-hindrance.

The only and the most essential difference between the spiritual man and the ordinary man is that the former has that all-pervasive, selfsame, spiritual consciousness *(Prajna)—pure feeling*—which is *beyond* thinking, which transcends any form of distinction *(shabetsu)* or discrimination *(funbetsu),* while the latter has not yet attained the spirit's self-awakening. Living on the plane of the spiritual consciousness, however, does not mean abandoning or fleeing from the so-called worldly life. The spiritual life is not a *separate* existence of its own intellectual plane. The spirit does not ignore or negate

the intellect; what it does is to *transcend* it, in the sense that it has its own government within the intellectual boundaries; and as long as it keeps this in good order, it knows no *outside* bounds imposed upon it. True spirituality is calmly balanced in strength, in the correlation or rather in the *identity* of the within and the without. It is in the world of relativity and duality, and at the same time is above it. The spiritual world is *at once* of duality and of unity, of distinction and of non-distinction, and for this reason Karma is no-Karma *(akarma)* as well as Karma itself.

As for ourselves, it is only when we no longer separate ourselves from, but identify ourselves with the bonds of Karma that we fully gain the joy of freedom. And how? As does the string that is bound to the harp. When the harp is truly strung, when there is not the slightest laxity in the strength of the bond, then only does music result; and the string transcending itself in

its melody finds at every chord its true freedom. It is because it is bound by such hard and fast rules on one side that it can find this range of freedom in music on the other. While the string was not true, it was indeed merely bound; but a loosening of its bondage into the nothingness of inaction would not have been the way to freedom. The true striving in our daily life consists not in the neglect of action but in the effort to attune it closer and closer to the Eternal Harmony. That is to say, the self is to dedicate itself to the Universal Spirit through all its activities. This dedication is the song of humanity, in this is its freedom. Joy reigns when all work becomes the path to the union with Amida; when our self offering grows more and more intense. Then there is freedom. Then there is *naturalness* in our everyday work. We become no more troubled with Karma, for we identify ourselves with it. We never fall into causality, because we are already it. Indeed suffering is no

doubt suffering, but we have absorbed it in our spiritual consciousness where all such things as take place on the plane of sense and understanding find their proper meaning in harmony with the eternal scheme of the Universe. Joy expresses itself through the law of causality. The saving beam of Amida's smile of compassion is seen shining through the night of gloom. The world with all its sufferings, shortcomings, and dualities, becomes *one* with the spiritual world. Then in this world comes the Pure Land of Amida. This is the meaning of *Sukhavati-vyuha*—the embellishing *(vyuha)* of the Pure Land *(Sukhavati)*.

2

The following incidents in the life of Shomatsu (1799-1871), popularly known as Shoma, will give us an example of naturalness in everyday work. Shoma was one of the great devotees of Shinshu. He was a

poor laborer working for others, and lived in Sanuki in the island of Shikoku. His anecdotes are recorded in a little book, the *Shoma-arinomamano-ki ('Shoma As He Was')*. The following are taken from it.[1]

When Shoma was returning home to Shikoku from Kyoto, he had to cross an arm of the sea. While in the sailing boat with his companions, a storm arose, and so fierce was the sea that it seemed the boat would sink. The others lost their all-important faith in the Nembutsu and invoked the aid of Kompira, the god of the sea. But Shoma slept on until his friends waked him up. And, asked how he could sleep so soundly in the face of such calamity, Shoma queried back rubbing his eyes, "Are we still in this world?" We can say that he was not aware of his being in which world, this world of suffering, or that world of perfect bliss—the Pure

Land. He was in all probability living in his own world of the spirit. Life and death were like floating clouds in the sky. They were not at all a matter of much concern for him.

Shoma once visited a Buddhist temple in the countryside, and as soon as he entered the main hall where Amida was enshrined, he proceeded to stretch himself out before the shrine and made himself comfortable. Asked by an astonished friend why he was so lacking in respect for Amida, he said. "I am back in my *parent's* home, and you who make this kind of remark must be only a step-child." This is an attitude of mind which reminds us of a child sound asleep in its mother's breast. He was so happy in the embrace of the Great Compassionate One that the world of social formalities vanished altogether out of his mind. "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Amida's Boundless Love for us and our absolute confidence in his Love are often compared to the relations between mother and child and have been specified by Gido (1805-1881; sometimes called Iriki-in), a Shinshu scholar as follows[2]:

1. As the child makes no judgments, just so should the followers of *Tariki* (Other Power) be free from thoughts of self-assertion.

2. As the child knows nothing of impurities, so should the *Tariki* followers never have an eye to evil thoughts and evil deeds.

3. As the child knows nothing of purity, so should the *Tariki* followers be unconscious of any good thoughts they may cherish.

4. As the child has no desire to court its mother's special favor by giving her offerings, so should the *Tariki* devotees be free from the idea of being rewarded for something they give.

5. As the child does not go after any other person than its own mother, so should the *Tariki* devotees not run after other Buddhas or Bodhisattvas than Amida himself.

6. As the child ever longs for its mother, so should the *Tariki* followers think of just one Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light.

7. As the child ever cherishes the memory of its own mother, so should the *Tariki* followers cherish the thought of the One Buddha, Amida.

8. As the child cries after its mother, so should the *Tariki* followers invoke the Name of Amida.

9. As the child, thinking of its mother as the only person whom it could absolutely rely on, wishes

to be embraced by her on all occasions, so should the *Tariki* followers have no thought but to be embraced by Amida alone even when in peril.

10. They should have no fears, no doubts, as to the Infinite Love of Amida, the One Buddha, whose Vow is not to forsake any beings in his embrace. When once embraced in his Light, no one need entertain the idea of being deserted by him.

Though somewhat repetitious, the above sums up what the Shinshu Faith is, and why it is called "Other Power Faith". Our "self', mortal, finite, imperfect, Karma-bound, sinful, and bound for hell, can *live* only in the losing of itself in the Other (Amida).

On another occasion, when he had been working in the rice-field and was tired, Shoma came home to rest. When he felt a cool refreshing breeze, he thought of his Amida-image in the home-shrine. Thereupon he took it out and set it beside him, saying, "You too will

enjoy the breeze." This may seem an abnormal act, but in the world of *pure feeling* everything that needs one's care has life, just as a child makes a living being out of a doll. In the world of *pure feeling* there is no consciousness of a process of personification. It is only the intellect which makes the distinction between animate and inanimate, sentient and non-sentient. From the spiritual point of view, all is alive and is the object of affectionate regard. Nor is this a case of symbolism, but a taking of actualities *as they are.* This is the life of naturalness.

When Shoma was ill while travelling, his friends carried him home in a palanquin and told him, "Now that you are back in your home, be at ease and grateful for Amida's Compassion." Shoma said, "Thank you, but wherever I may be lying sick, the Pure Land is always just next to my room."

3

From these we can say that Shoma's world was not the same with that of the ordinary people. He did not see things around him in the same light as they do. His eyes were fixed on a world beyond this, though not in the sense of a separate world. To the mind of Shoma, the Pure Land was not somewhere beyond this world, but right here. His life in this world was life in the Pure Land, where the sea is always calm and boats are steady. In the midst of turmoil, therefore, he had no cause to be afraid of anything. When he was sleepy he slept; when he wanted to sit up, he sat up; when the boat was tossed up and down, he too was tossed up and down; for he identified himself with the turmoil, and accepted whatever came as though unconcerned with consequences. Even amid the rising waves he felt the loving arms of Amida, the Great Compassionate One, and he

slept in the boat even as he laid himself down before the image of Amida in the country temple. He was so happy in the embrace of the Great Compassionate One that he was *natural* in his every action, never being disturbed by any circumstances.

4

In truth, where is the further shore of no Karma? Is it somewhere else than where we are? Is it to take rest from all our work, to be relieved from all the responsibilities of life? No, in the very heart of our activities, now at this very moment, we are reaching our end. In our own work is our joy, and in that joy does the Joy of our joy abides. Of our own work is Amida the fount and the inspiration, and at the end thereof is He, and therefore all our activity is pervaded by peace and good and joy.

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