

FOREWORD

To the Second Revised Edition

This is a completely revised version of my *Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic*, published in 1984, which was based upon an earlier work, *Tannisho: Lamenting the Deviations* (1977).

This work contains the sayings of Shinran (1173-1263), the founder of Jodo Shinshu or Shin Buddhism, which claims the largest following in Japanese Buddhism. Compiled several decades after his death by a disciple named Yui-en, this work consists of 18 sections. The first ten sections are the words of Shinran as remembered by Yui-en, and the next eight, preceded by a special preface, contains points of controversy current among the followers of Shinran. The prologue and epilogue to the 18 sections were written by Yui-en about whom little is known historically.

The *Tannisho* is one of the most widely read works in Japanese Buddhism, known not only as a religious but literary classic. It is impossible to translate such a work into English adequately and fully, but I have attempted to transmit some sense of its flowing style, religious content, and spiritual flavor. Among those who have guided me in my enterprise, I should like to gratefully acknowledge the comments and suggestions offered by two late teachers, Yoshifumi Ueda and Masao Hanada, whose words remain a constant source of inspiration.

Taitetsu Unno
Northampton, Massachusetts
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I

When the thought of saying the nembutsu erupts from deep within, having entrusted ourselves to the inconceivable power of Amida's vow which saves us, enabling us to be born in the Pure Land, we receive at that very moment the ultimate benefit of being grasped never to be abandoned.

Amida's Primal Vow does not discriminate between the young and old, good and evil — true entrusting alone is essential. The reason is that the Vow is directed to the person burdened with the weight of karmic evil and burning with the flames of blind passion.

Thus, in entrusting ourselves to the Primal Vow, no other form of good is necessary, for there is no good that surpasses the nembutsu. And evil need not be feared, for there is no evil which can obstruct the working of Amida's Primal Vow.

II

I believe that the reason you have come here, crossing over more than ten provinces at the risk of your lives, is solely to ascertain the path that leads to birth in the Pure Land. But if you suspect that I know ways other than the nembutsu to attain birth, or that I am versed in the scriptures connected with them, you are greatly mistaken. If that be the case, there are many eminent scholars in the monasteries of Nara and Mt. Hiei, so you should go see them and ask them in detail about the way to attain birth in the Pure Land.

As for myself, Shinran, I simply take to heart the words of my dear teacher, Honen, "Just say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida," and entrust myself to the Primal Vow. Besides this, there is nothing else.

I really do not know whether the nembutsu may be the cause for my birth in the Pure Land, or the act that shall condemn me to hell. But I have nothing to regret, even if I should have been deceived by my teacher, and, saying the nembutsu, fall into hell. The reason is that if I were capable of realizing buddhahood by other religious practices and yet fell into hell for saying the nembutsu, I might have dire regrets for having been deceived. But since I am absolutely incapable of any religious practice, hell is my only home.

If Amida's Primal Vow is true, Sakyamuni's teaching cannot be false. If the Buddha's teaching is true, Shan-tao's commentaries cannot be false. If Shan-tao's commentaries are true, how can Honen's words be empty of meaning? If Honen's words are true, what I, Shinran, say cannot be meaningless. In brief, such is the true entrusting of this foolish one. Now, whether you accept the nembutsu, entrusting yourself to it, or reject it, that is your own decision.

III

Even the good person attains birth in the Pure Land, how much more so the evil person.

But the people of the world constantly say, even the evil person attains birth, how much more so the good person. Although this appears to be sound at first glance, it goes against the intention of the Primal Vow of Other Power. The reason is that since the person of self-power, being conscious of doing good, lacks the thought of entrusting the self completely to Other Power, he or she is not the focus of the Primal Vow of Amida. But when self-power is turned over and entrusting to Other Power occurs, the person attains birth in the land of True Fulfillment.

The Primal Vow was established out of deep compassion for us who cannot become freed from the bondage of birth-and-death through any religious practice, due to the abundance of blind passion. Since its basic intention is to effect the enlightenment of such an evil one, the evil person who is led to true entrusting by Other Power is the person who attains birth in the Pure Land. Thus, even the good person attains birth, how much more so the evil person!

IV

There is a difference in compassion between the Path of Sages and the Path of Pure Land. The compassion in the Path of Sages is expressed through pity, sympathy, and care for all beings, but rare is it that one can help another as completely as one desires.

The compassion in the Path of Pure Land is to quickly attain Buddhahood, saying the nembutsu, and with the true heart of compassion and love save all beings completely as we desire.

In this life no matter how much pity and sympathy we may feel for others, it is impossible to help another as we truly wish; thus our compassion is inconsistent and limited. Only the saying of nembutsu manifests the complete and never ending compassion which is true, real, and sincere.

V

I, Shinran, have never even once uttered the nembutsu for the sake of my father and mother. The reason is that all beings have been fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth-and-death. When I attain buddhahood in the next birth, each and everyone will be saved.

If it were a good accomplished by my own powers, then I could transfer the accumulated merits of nembutsu to save my father and mother. But since such is not the case, when we become free from self-power and quickly attain the enlightenment of the Pure Land, we will save those bound closest to us through transcendental powers, no matter how deeply they are immersed in the karmic sufferings of the six realms and four modes of birth.

VI

It is utterly unthinkable that among the followers of single-hearted nembutsu practice there are arguments about “my disciples” and “others’ disciples.”

As for myself, Shinran, I do not have a single disciple. If I could make others say the nembutsu through my own devices, they would be my disciples. But how arrogant it is to claim as disciples those who live the nembutsu through the sole working of Amida’s compassion.

If the karmic condition for us is to come together, we shall be together; but if the karmic condition for us is to be separated, we shall be separated. How absurd it is that some people assert that if one goes against a teacher and says the nembutsu under another, that person cannot attain birth in the Pure Land. Are they saying that they will take back the entrusting which is a gift from Amida as if it belonged to them? Impossible is it that such a thing should happen.

When we live according to the truth of “made to become so by itself,” we shall know gratitude to the Buddha and to our teachers.

X

The Master Shinran said, "In the nembutsu no self-working is true-working; it is beyond description, explanation, and conception."

SPECIAL PREFACE

While the master was still living, those who journeyed together with great difficulty to the distant capital with the same aspiration and who, unified in true entrusting, set their hearts on the coming land of Fulfillment, all listened at the same time to his real thoughts. But now I hear that among the countless young and old people who live the nembutsu, following after them, there are some who frequently express erroneous views never taught by our master. Such groundless views call for careful discussion which follows.