Shin Buddhism

Part III

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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

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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 unsurmountable 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.

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"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 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 Tathagata, *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?"
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> "I don't know," she said.
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> "Why don't you know?"
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> "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."
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> The doorman went to Meister Eckhart and said:
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> "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?' "
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> Meister Eckhart did so, and she gave him the same reply she had made to the doorman. Then Meister Eckhart said:
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> "My dear child, what you say is right and sensible, but explain to me what you mean." She said:
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> "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."