

Bhakti and Nembutsu

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As in the case of any religion, there is a history of God-man conflict in Hinduism. The divine being, i.e. 'the sacred', and the human being, i.e. 'the profane', are opposed to each other and exist in a relationship of each negating the other. 'The profane', through negating itself, wishes to become 'the sacred' or to meet with it. On the other hand, 'the sacred', through negating 'the profane', wishes to reveal itself. Here, in this context, the key points are: the effort to secure 'the sacred' on the part of 'the profane' is religious practice, and the revealing of 'the sacred' is its becoming divine or the grace of 'the sacred'.

M. Weber maintains, while building up the types of religiosity, that there are various shades in accordance with people wishing to be released 'from somewhere (wovon)' and to be led 'to somewhere (wozu)'. This, in other words, is in accordance with how to understand the religious structure of 'the sacred' and 'the profane', and religious practice, i.e. the contents of effort to salvation or means to salvation, can be variously explained.

Taking Brahmanism and Hinduism in India for instance, we note that there is a self-reliance meditation type (held by Śaṅkara), i.e. one's becoming the Brahman, the ultimate reality, through knowledge of the uniqueness of the Brahman and the Ātman. But nembutsu, a means to salvation taken up in this presentation, has Amida Buddha as an object of worship. This is a personified transcendental Being (principle/God), and therefore God-grace types are matters of concern. Bhakti has personified Gods like Viṣṇu and Śiva as objects of worship, and therefore corresponds to nembutsu here. There are two types of bhakti-based salvation, (i) self-reliance grace type and (ii) other-power grace type (viraha-bhakti), and one (iii) tāntric type. In (i) God dispenses grace to bhaktas who are devotedly offering their deeds. In (ii) knowing

ineffectiveness of one's bhakti -based deeds, bhaktas surrender themselves to God as far as their salvation is concerned. In (iii) devotees perform positive deeds like sādhana and thereby let God come down to them or obtain the grace of God. This is sometimes called t̄antric bhakti.

We have a variety of nembutsu, viz. meditative nembutsu embutsu (meditative nembutsu), jiriki-nembutsu (self-reliance nembutsu) and tariki-nembutsu (other-power nembutsu). Meditative nembutsu embutsu corresponds to (iii) the t̄antric type *in a way*, jiriki nembutsu to (i) the self-reliance grace type and tariki nembutsu to (ii) the other-power grace type.

The tradition of meditative nembutsu was seen in seventh century China, during the T'ang Dynasty, from the very beginning of the Pure Land School. Saying the Name was advocated at a later time by three Chinese Masters, i.e. T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o and Shan-tao. In Japan it was the fourth Tendai-zasu, Ennin, who introduced it to Japan. After his return from the mainland China in the seventh cent., he set up Jogyo-zanmai-do at Mt. Hiei, where monks performed incessant nembutsu. In the Japanese of Pure Land School, incessant nembutsu thus brought from China was the only religious practice in those days. On Mt. Hiei, the Buddhist Tantrism which had been established before incessant nembutsu (i.e. meditative nembutsu) was practiced in the Jogyo-zanmai-do.

Incessant nembutsu is a nembutsu practice performed in the Jogyo-zanmai-do. An ascetic performs pradakṣiṇā, going around, the sitting Amida Buddha clock-wise for ninety days without any break. The aspirant/monk should not sit while eating, he cannot even lie down while sleeping. While engaged in pradakṣiṇā he never fails to say nembutsu. When his evils and demerits are removed and purified, Buddhas throughout ten quarters are manifested and give him a prophecy of birth in Amida's Pure Land and the attainment of Buddhahood. This is to say nembutsu but to try to materialize the Buddha. This meditative nembutsu is one of the self-reliance religious practices.

It is said that the nineteenth vow of the *Larger SŪtra* preaches birth in the Pure Land through religious practices of the self-reliance type. It is:

When I become a Buddha, if all beings throughout ten quarters have minds aspiring for enlightenment, gather merit, and sincerely aspire to be born in my Pure Land.

Here gathering merit signifies thirteen meditative practices and three non-meditative practices described in the *Contemplation SŪtra*. They are nothing but meditative nembutsu which has Amida Buddha as the object of worship. Though it seems other ascetic practices were included, as far as nembutsu is concerned, they should be called meditative nembutsu.

Master Genshin teaches meditative nembutsu as a practice for birth in the Pure Land and urges people to do the same in his *Essentials for Attaining Birth*. We have a masterpiece of a hanging scroll called the Pure Land Mandala. In there a practitioner sits saying the Name in front of the Pure Land Mandala and meditates on the Pure Land. We have come to know that such meditative practice was that of Buddhist Tantrism, and this Meditative nembutsu might have been influenced by Tantrism. We are reminded of Ramakrishna Paramahansa who did worship-services day after day to Kālī (called Mā, mother, by him) and saw his Mā finally. He is called a bhakta as well as a tantrist.

Now let us proceed to self-reliance nembutsu preached in the twentieth vow of the *Larger SŪtra*:

When I become a Buddha, all beings throughout ten quarters hear my Name, ponder over my Land, and gather Name-merit, sincerely aspiring to be born in my Pure Land with the Name-merit. I will let them accomplish this aspiration. If not, I will not reach salvation.

Gathering Name-merit (translated from 'tokuhon', not meaning 'root of good here'), they sincerely wish to be born in the Pure Land due to accumulated merit. This means laying much importance on saying the Name after setting aside various

self-reliance practices. The Name, Amida's direction to us, is fundamental to all merit.

Calculation, doubt, attachment etc. arise in the mind of a nembutsu practitioner. For instance, as I said the Name I gathered much merit—such is a mind of evil against virtue. Or, the more nembutsu, the more chance for salvation, like that.

As far as practice is concerned, saying the Name (=nembutsu) is a necessity, but it is an unstable nembutsu. Depending upon the mind-situation, one thinks, 'I am to be saved' at one time and at another time one thinks 'I am not', and despairs.

Though sundry practices are given up, one tends to see if salvation is possible or not, depending upon the good/bad mind. This is nothing but mind taking recourse to self-power. In *Note on Once-calling and Many-calling*, a man of self-power is described:

"Self-power characterizes those who have full confidence in themselves, trusting in their own hearts and minds, striving with their own powers, and relying on their own various roots of good."

Believing Name-merit to be superior to various practices, thinking that the more nembutsu the better in order to ensure birth in the Pure Land, gathering more merit and sincerely directing it, a practitioner aspires to be born in the Pure Land—this is the nembutsu preached in the twentieth vow.

Here let me see Master Honen's nembutsu:

"Namu-amida-butsu: as the act that leads to birth in the Pure Land, the nembutsu is taken to be fundamental"

"..... If you desire to enter the way of the Pure Land, of the two methods of practice, right and sundry, cast aside all sundry practices and choosing, take the right practice. If you desire to perform the right practice, of the two kinds of acts, true and auxiliary, further put aside the auxiliary and choosing, solely perform the act of true settlement. The act of true settlement is to say the Name of the Buddha. Saying the Name unfailingly brings about birth, for this is based on the Buddha's Primal

Vow.”

Thus, Master Honen maintains ‘Nembutsu is taken to be fundamental’ and ‘saying the Name to be the act of true settlement’. But his nembutsu to be born in the Pure Land is not to be born by saying the Name, but nembutsu should be preceded by believing the Primal Vow. That is why his nembutsu is really not self-reliance nembutsu. On the occasion of interpreting the Primal Vow, he says Shinjin is the cause of being born in the Pure Land but does not say that saying the Name is returning in gratitude like Master Shinran. He emphasizes devoting oneself to saying the Name.

Master Shinran puts more emphasis on Shinjin than Honen did, and says that Shinjin is the real cause of birth in Pure Land, so that saying the Name is the nembutsu after Shinjin is received and is the practice of returning in gratitude. On the contrary, Master Honen encourages aspirants to make more nembutsu all the while. He himself did so 60,000 times a day and 70,000 times in his later life. That 70,000-time nembutsu continued for nine years according to one record. This certainly gives us the impression that he admits the merit of saying the Name as the means to salvation. We know that Master Honen maintains other-power nembutsu, however. He says:

“Whosoever says nembutsu obtains birth in the Pure Land, tariki-nembutsu should be the way to birth in the Pure Land. But jiriki-nembutsu is not at all the way to birth in the Pure Land.”

“In the course of saying the nembutsu a threefold mind is naturally acquired.”

True, his nembutsu is said after Shinjin is received, but he may also hold that Shinjin may be obtained by an aspirant by saying the Name.

Now, next is the eighteenth vow, i.e. the Primal Vow

“If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of ten quarters, with sincere minds entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain supreme

enlightenment.....”

Salvation in Shin Buddhism is to receive Shinjin from Amida Buddha and that the Name reaches all beings in the form of a threefold mind (a sincere mind, entrusting oneself, aspiring to be born).

At the moment of receiving Shinjin the Name comes up to the lips to the devotees. That is saying the Name (or nembutsu). When the Name established through the seventeenth vow reaches the mind, it becomes Shinjin. And when Shinjin comes up to the lips, it is nembutsu. Shinjin is something directed through the Amida/power of the Primal Vow/other-power. And nembutsu is something conferred by Amida Buddha. This is other-power nembutsu.

Thus nembutsu is uttered after receiving Shinjin—this situation is called ‘Saying the Name is practiced for the sake of Returning in Gratitude’. The nembutsu is practiced after the aspirant receives Shinjin. Thus other-power nembutsu does not work as a means to salvation. On the contrary, the working of the Name which is the power of the Primal Vow is effective. Master Shinran says in this regard that the Name is the Great Practice.

Here with a view to receiving Shinjin, surrendering oneself and entrusting the Amida Buddha is indispensable as a precedent. Surrendering oneself means that the aspirant realizes the impotence of self power for birth in the Pure Land, for one is entangled by deep rooted evils, and trusting the Amida is to entrust all to the Amida Buddha without any doubt. Preceded by surrendering oneself and trusting the Amida Buddha and with a mind free of doubt, taking recourse to the power of Primal Vow of Amida, the aspirant receives Shinjin directed through Amida. This is salvation according to Shin Buddhism.

This idea is shared with bhakti of ‘love of mother-cat’, which means giving up efforts on the part of individuals and trusting the grace of God. By means of preman (negating oneself and dedicating one’s love to Viṣṇu) God enters into oneself or comes down to oneself. And one in oneself is full of God. When Dr. Daisetsu

Suzuki once made a lecture in USA (perhaps in New York) he used the simile of the cat and monkey. He felt the difficulty of explaining Tariki to Americans.

When a crisis takes place, see how mothers take babies away from danger. A mother-monkey carries away the baby which clings to her neck, while a mother-cat takes the kitten by the scruff and moves away from the danger. In this simile a monkey-theory conveys the requirement of effort on the part of the baby-monkey, while a cat-theory conveys no need of effort on the part of the kitten. The aspirant does not require any effort to be saved for Amida Buddha has already saved him/her. The religious attitude that negates any effort on the part of beings and trusts God as far as salvation is concerned is other-power (tariki) grace type

The power of the primal vow is the direct cause of salvation. It is said "The other-power is nothing but the power of the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha", that is, it is the power of Amida Buddha. No religious practice is the means to salvation for beings, on the contrary we face a personified, and confronting transcending being whose name is Amida, directing the Primal Vow to us.

Thus, Amida, the power of the Primal Vow, the Name, Shinjin, nembutsu— all signify the working of salvation, and just differ in the stages where it works. Other-power nembutsu is 'Shinjin conferred on us by Amida' (*A Record in Lament of Divergences*), 'Shinjin directed from the power of the Primal Vow' (*The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way*) assures us that salvation is due to the grace of Amida. Here nembutsu is not the means to salvation. Nembutsu as a religious practice on the part of individuals is not evaluated. Religion, if indulged in at all, should have a practice, and that is the working of the Name. By means of grace on the part of the savior salvation is assured. This is nothing but a grace-type of religion.

Hindu tradition

Śaṅkara's self-reliance meditation

Brahman(Abtract)

Negation of the world



Bhakti

(1) **Self-reliance Grace type**

Bhakti of Rāmānuja / *Gītā*

Personified God (Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa)



(2) **Other-power Grace type**

Viraha Bhakti

Personified God

Affirmation of the world

{ more for grace }

...

(3) **Tantrism**

Sādhana

Personified God (Śiva)

Affirmation of the world

{ more for self-power }



Caitanya



Rāmākṛṣṇa Paramahansa

Shin Buddhism

Nembutsu

Amida Buddha(Personified)

Affirmation of the world

③ **Self-reliance Various Practice**

meditation, ascetic practices,
meditative nembutsu



① **Self-reliance Nembutsu**

Master Honen's nembutsu

② **Other-power Nembutsu**

