



JIRIKI (SELF-POWER) & TARIKI (REALITY POWER)

While other schools of Buddhism are primarily marathon swimming to the Other Shore, ours is basically one of being on a cruise ship. And even though we are intimidated by talk of having to “do it my way”, “having a set practice”, “pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps”, of “being relevant and attentive to everything in every waking hour”, etc.,etc., the sun, as Shinran Shōnin puts it, shines upon us nevertheless. Noticing and appreciating the warming rays of the sun is not an act of will. It is in fact just the opposite – the passive act of receiving. The language of Jōdoshinshū is very often expressed in the passive case – an almost un-American stance. When Jōdoshinshū uses terms like “to be made to see the light”, or “I was finally made to understand” – it sounds so much less than “I see the light” and “I finally understand”. We are aggressive by nature and conditioning, and passive is deemed a negative word.

The Pure Land religious experience however, is one of awakening in spite of myself, of being born anew in an intimately connective world in spite of all my efforts to achieve it on my own. Paddling upstream is a uniquely self-controlled, self-centered, purpose/goal oriented activity. It is focused on a particular, not

appreciative of a universal. The single image of floating downstream is already one of relaxation, enjoyment, appreciation, and effortlessness. Not doing something is equally as powerful as doing something. How do we stop the negative effects of using non-recyclable styrofoam? Don't use it. How do you get young people to join the temple? Don't tell them what to do when they come. How do you get them to take over? Leave the position.



Our tradition points out that we tend to rant and rave against styrofoam while holding a coffee cup made out of it. It points to our hidden hypocrisies. And in doing so, it allows us to rely on something other than our ego-self, which ushers in a new way of seeing, of glimpsing another reality, free of the grasping self – pure, as it is.

What do you do to get to this state? Nothing - but you must be thorough in doing it. Our incessant calculating and conniving must cease, and calculating how to do this is self-defeating. How is it done? By seeing that you can't. And when you give up completely – here it is. But you cannot connive to give up completely in order to get it. In this sense, Jōdoshinshū is, as Shinran Shōnin states, “the most difficult of difficult things”. And this most difficult of difficult things cannot be applied to our practical, calculating lives – it has no utility value, only truth value. Amida Buddha and the Pure Land is the beautiful reality of not having to paddle upstream – or even if we must habitually paddle, to know that even then, we are floating on a sea of beautiful tranquility.

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