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THE TANNISHO

(TRACT ON DEPLORING THE
HETERODOXIES)

An Important Text-book of Shin Buddhism
founded by Shinran (1173-1262)

Translated from the Japanese

by

TOSUI IMADATE

EASTERN BUDDHIST SOCIETY

OTANI DAIGAKU, KARASUMARU-DORI

KYOTO

1928

昭和三年七月廿日印刷

昭和三年八月一日發行

著作者 今 立 吐 醉
兵庫縣芦屋濱

發行者 鈴木 貞 太 郎
京都市上京區小山大野町三九

印刷人 島 連 太 郎

印刷所 三 秀 舍
東京神田美土代町

發行所 東方佛教協會
京都市上京區小山上總町大谷大學內

The present devotional tract which goes under the name of "Tannishō," was compiled by one of the immediate disciples of Shinran Shōnin (1173-1262), called Yui-embō. When he was quite old, that is, when some years passed after the death of the master, Yui-embō found that his master's teaching as he understood it being orally transmitted to him by the master, was so variously interpreted, and not always in the spirit of the master. He lamented the state of affairs, and decided to write this booklet quoting some of the most important sayings of Shinran Shōnin in order to put an end to the spreading of heterodoxies. The name of the author remained unknown for some time, because he did not leave any record of it. But after much laborious investigation on the part of scholars, it was finally discovered that the author was Yui-embō—the name referred to in the ninth and the thirteenth paragraph.

According to the postscript written by Rennyo Shōnin (1415-1444) which is generally found attached to *The Tannishō*, he advises not to show the booklet to those who have not accumulated enough stock of merit in the past, as the book contains the most important teaching of Shin Buddhism. It is only recently that the booklet came to be popularly studied.

Preface

In presenting *The Tannisho*, which is one of the most important books of Shin Buddhism, to our English readers, I humbly ask their indulgence to go over the following account of my personal experience in the great earthquake disaster and the fire which broke out immediately after it on September 1, 1923.

At the time of the earthquake, I happened to be in the great three-storied brick building of the Yokohama District Court, which fell literally to pieces in less than three seconds. It was a miracle indeed that I could escape from under the mountain of debris.

When I stood on the top of it, I was awe-struck at the tremendous destruction achieved by nature. The scene before me was beyond description—a field of devastation with not a house or godown in its proper form, for all the roofs and walls were levelled down to

the ground. I saw fire breaking out everywhere, and the whole city of Yokohama turned into a furious mass of smoke and flame. I had no conception at the time about the extent of the loss of human lives, and as that terrible mountain-range, as it were, of black smoke driven by the raging wind, was rapidly approaching where I was standing, the only thought I had was to choose a place of refuge; I ran toward the custom-house compound. This, however, was doomed to be devoured by the fire, and I had to make a further escape to one of the warehouses which seemed to be comparatively safe. By this time, refugees of all descriptions and from all directions, about two hundreds in number, were crowding into this one warehouse. The ground where we stood was only of a few yards in width occupying the extreme end of the wharf which had already been partly destroyed, and was being beaten by angry waves. The warehouses around us were all on fire, and the one which

was giving us shelter began to be enveloped in fire; I gauged from what I had already witnessed that it would take less than a quarter of an hour to get our last refuge consumed by the conflagration. A man standing by asked me in despair, "What will become of us now?" I could give him no better answer than this, "Our dates and places of birth are different, but that of death is probably the same."

We seemed now to be breathing our last, between the fast approaching fire and the angrily beating waves; death was everywhere, no life, no hope! All of a sudden, a chimney emitting lively smoke appeared at some distance from behind one of the steamers at anchor. "Life-boat," cried I, "let us call for it this way if possible." All eyes turned toward the boat, and all mouths joined in breaking out into "Banzai." The launch with a big lighter in tow, drew along the half-destroyed wharf. About two hundred souls, men, women, children, were now safely in the lighter,

which was now covered to keep off the burning embers. A few minutes later, the launch stopped, and the cover was removed, and found ourselves alongside a fine steamer. As soon as we were all aboard, I looked; the warehouse, our last shelter, was already gutted through.

It is not my intention to bore my readers with a personal account in this crisis, only I wish to remind them of the fact that just a minute's difference means life or death in this frail human existence. I am not sermonising, however; I just want to state that here is a profound truth and yet what forgetful mortals we all are! According to an American statistician, about 43,370,000 persons die every year in the world. With or without such a disastrous earthquake as we had in 1923, over one hundred thousand souls are wiped off the earth in one day not knowing where they went. This problem has been attacked from the very beginning of the world by so many philosophers and reflective minds, but so far no definitely satis-

factory answer has been given. It is to be answered by each mortal being himself, for no medicine is able to cope with death. The terrible fire behind us, and the devouring waves before, we must have a launch ready in time. At the time of my escape, I had a copy of *The Tannishō* in my pocket, and after recovering my poise of mind aboard the steamer, I took the book out, and my eyes fell upon the passage, "When the thought is awakened in your heart to say the Nembutsu, believing that your rebirth in the Pure Land is attained through the inconceivable power of Amida's 'Original Vow,' you come to share in His Grace which embraces all beings, forsaking none." How deeply I was struck by this at that moment! I appeal to the imagination of my readers.

The following translation in a language not my own, is the outcome of my pious desire to share my gratitude for the boundless mercy of Amitabha Buddha with those into whose hands this may fall.

In closing this prefatory note, I wish to tender respectfully my heartfelt gratitude to the late Reverend Gesshō Sasaki, President of Otani University, of Kyoto, for writing a life of Shinran Shōnin to be prefixed to this translation, and also for giving valuable suggestions while the work was in progress.

My cordial thanks are also due to Professors Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki and Shugaku Yamabe; the former for his assistance in the translation itself, and the latter for writing an introduction to the text, and explaining to me many difficult passages. Further, I must not forget to mention the name of Mr. Motozo Matsutani as one without whose encouragement both moral and substantial, this humble work would never have seen the light.

TOSUI IMADATE

Ashiya, January 1928

Introduction

The Tannishō consists of some of the sayings of Shinran Shōnin, the founder of Shin Buddhism, and of the compiler's commentary notes. The reason why this booklet has recently gained popularity in preference to the several other works written by Shinran Shōnin himself is that it not only breathes the spirit of the Shōnin in a most characteristic manner, but illustrates his influence on his disciples.

From the historical point of view it may require a great deal of arguments and demonstrations to show how Shin Buddhism came to form an independent sect of Buddhism in Japan, after some sixteen hundred years since the Nirvana, and, above all, how this almost insignificant booklet as far as its size is concerned, came to be considered one of the most representative works in the teaching of Shin Buddhism, in which the true spirit of its founder is clearly transmitted. The following in short is

my line of argument to establish the thesis.

(1) *What is Buddhism?*

Etiologically it may be said that Buddhism owes its origin to the fact that the Buddha attained his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree more than two thousand years ago in India. All the sutras are the compilations of his teachings which were given from time to time to different persons under different circumstances whenever such were needed. They, therefore, embody in beautiful words the instructions of the Enlightened One (i.e., the Buddha), given in accordance with requirements of the day. Before he attained his enlightenment, he was an ordinary person, though a prince he was, of the world, and destined to ultimate death. When he attained enlightenment, he became conscious of his immortality. The new state into which he was ushered, was so exalted and sublime, that it was impossible to express it in human language.

Consequently, he wished to remain silent, but at his second thought he resolved to open the way of salvation for all mankind. Tradition says that, during this period of silence, Brahma, the highest god worshipped by the Hindus, appeared to him from heaven, and persuaded him to propagate the highest wisdom he had now gained, and said, "If you should remain silent, all the world would be engulfed in a chasm of destruction." From this we can see that this aim of the Buddha who came down from his high position of enlightenment, was to achieve universal salvation, and at the same time to gain true signification by being expressed and imparted to all mankind.

If we examine the early steps taken by the Buddha in order to impart the benefit of his enlightenment to the world as are recorded in the Āgamas or Nikāyas and Vināyas which are generally regarded as the earliest sutras, we find that his teaching consisted in telling his disciples and followers to

cease from worshipping Brahma as the creator of the world, from making all kinds of religious sacrifices which were required by Brahmanism, then the existing religion of India, and from following the doctrines of sophists and ascetics; he taught, on the contrary, to cultivate and elevate our minds through a regulated life based on sound conscience. Accordingly, his disciples left their homes and joined the teacher for the purpose of learning and practicing the "Fourfold Noble Truth" and leading a pure and charitable life. The "Fourfold Noble Truth" is (1) suffering, (2) accumulation, (3) annihilation, and (4) path.

As suffering results from the assertion and accumulation of worldly passions, the latter must be annihilated in order to attain enlightenment. The path leading to this end is made up of the Eightfold Right Path, such as right view, right thinking, etc., which were taught to the disciples who put them into practice in order to attain en-

lightenment. The lay-followers were told to find their spiritual refuge in the "Three Treasures" (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) and to observe their morality which consists in abstention from murder, theft, adultery, falsehood, and liquor, while they were engaged in the ordinary affairs of their lives, and were only asked to believe in the teaching of the Buddha. Though these two classes of Buddhists, Bhikshus and lay-disciples, differed in their mode of life, they are said to have equally attained the Dharma of immortality leading to a high spiritual state free from sin and ignorance.

The foregoing brief exposition may serve to furnish the reader with a general idea as to what Buddhism is. Even in our days, we have almost as many false religions as there were in the time of the Buddha. Some of them teach to pray and make offerings to the gods in order to gain some material advantages by doing so, while others waste their time in subtle hair-splitting discussions,

or in performing all sorts of religious austerities, or in worshipping a despotic god as the creator and organiser of the world. All these religions are from the Buddhist point of view not in the right track of religion in its true sense.

(2) *The Mahayana and the Hinayana.*

Even according to the earlier sutras of primitive Buddhism so called, every careful reader will notice that the teaching of the Buddha as aforesaid was a quite reasonable religion, it was universally meant for all kinds and all classes of people regardless of caste, sex, social position, mode of living, that is to say, that Buddhism was a religion for all people. Unfortunately, this fact remained unobserved for so many years, and I am afraid that even now there are some people who regard Buddhism as meant only for the special class of Bhikshus and Bhikshnis. This made the Buddha a mere author of monastic discipline, and an advocate of solitari-

ness. But at the same time there was another class of Buddhists who saw in the master a great philosopher, a profound mystic, who was an incarnate of the Dharmakāya. These two currents of thought ran through the history of Buddhism; the one is known as Hinayana, and the other, Mahayana. The latter, as far as we can judge from the Buddhist literature now extant, is supposed to have started in the second century of the Buddha. I am not going to discuss in detail the problem of the origin of Mahayana Buddhism. I wish to say only this, that the dividing line between the Hinayana and the Mahayana is represented by one between conservatives and liberals. The one appeared to cling to the literal tradition of the Brotherhood neglecting to accommodate itself to the changing spirit of the time, whereas the other, being progressive and liberal in spirit, knew how to adjust itself to the demand of the growing generations. The original teaching so called of the Buddha was