

Shinran's Other Power Nembutsu

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要 約

親鸞によれば、浄土に往生するための方法は念仏である。なぜならば、阿彌陀仏がかつて法蔵菩薩という修行者であった頃、念仏する者を必ず浄土に往生させようという誓願を立てた。この誓願は、現に阿彌陀仏の力によって実現されている。ゆえに、念仏する者は阿彌陀仏の力によって、必ず往生を遂げることができる。

このような阿彌陀仏の力を他力と呼ぶ。他力とは誓願に従って、一切の衆生を往生させる力である。阿彌陀仏は実は肉体を持つのではなく、他力そのもののことである。世界は他力で満たされており、一切の衆生は他力の中で生きている。この他力は念仏する者に働きかける。ゆえに、念仏をおこなうことは、他力に救い取られることである。

親鸞によれば、阿彌陀仏は究極の真理から出現した存在である。究極の真理とは、仏教において考えられている世界の真相である。真理においては、自己と他者、主体と客体といった対立や区別が存在しない。

しかし、人間は生まれつき世界を区別して把握するという分別的思考を持っている。この分別的思考のために、人間は真理をあるがままに知ることができない。そして、このような無知が全ての苦しみの原因である。

さらに、人間は自力で真理に触れる術を持たない。人間が真理を知るために努力しても、その努力は自己に基づいておこなわれる。この自己は分別的思考により成立したものである。ゆえに、自己に基づく努力とは、分別的思考に基づく努力であり、人間は自力の努力を行う限り、分別的思考から逃れることができない。

このように、人間は生来、真理から断絶している。しかし、そのような人間のために、ある時、真理そのものから法蔵菩薩が出現した。法蔵菩薩は一切の衆生を救うために誓願を立て、長い修行の末に誓願を成就した。その結果、法蔵菩薩は一切の衆生を救う力になった。この力を他力、あるいは阿彌陀仏と呼ぶ。

以上のような法蔵菩薩の物語は、真理そのものが衆生との接点を獲得してゆく過程を表している。阿彌陀仏とは誓願によって、衆生への働きかけを獲得した真理である。阿彌陀仏の名は、このような真理の最も具体的な現れである。人間は阿彌陀仏の名を聞き、称えることができる。人間は名を称えることで、阿彌陀仏と直接接触する。

したがって、念仏することは、真理の働きに摂め取られることである。このことはすなわち、真理を知ることであり、分別的思考から自由になることである。念仏において、自己と他者、主体と客体は消滅し、真理が現れてくる。そして、親鸞はこのような念仏を他力の念仏と呼んだ。

本 文

1. Nembutsu and Other-power

Shinran was a Japanese Buddhist in the Kamakura period. He belonged to the Pure Land school and his purpose was to obtain rebirth in the Pure Land after death. He believed all people must practice Nembutsu in order to be born in the Pure Land. Nembutsu is to chant the name of Amitabha Buddha, or to chant "Namu Amida Butsu".

Shinran believed Nembutsu was the special way to be born in the Pure Land based on the 48 vows. The 48 vows are the vows of Amitabha Buddha. According to "Sutra of Immeasurable Life" there was a bodhisattva [a Buddhist saint] named Houzou. He recognized that all beings were suffering because they didn't know the ultimate reality of the world. He had deep compassion for all suffering beings and made the 48 vows in order to save them.

Shinran said the main purpose of the 48 vows was to allow all beings practicing Nembutsu to be born in the Pure Land. The Pure Land is the land where all beings can know the ultimate reality and

become Buddhas very easily. Houzou swore to make such a land and to allow all beings to be born in this land. In this way he tried to save all beings. Houzou was doing religious practices for a very long time. At last he became a Buddha named Amitabha and accomplished all the 48 vows.

Houzou made the 48 vows to save all beings who were practicing Nembutsu. And now the 48 vows have been accomplished by the power of Amitabha Buddha, so people can obtain rebirth in the Pure Land if they practice Nembutsu through the power of Amitabha Buddha.

Shinran called this power of Amitabha Buddha "Other-power." Other-power is the power to cause all beings to be born in the Pure Land according to the 48 vows. Other-power is often represented as the eternal light. The world is filled with the light. Nothing can disturb this light and any sinner can be born in the Pure Land by it.

Shinran teaches that Amitabha Buddha is this light itself. This means Amitabha Buddha is not

the Buddha which has the flesh but the light, or Other-power itself. Houzou became Amitabha Buddha in order to accomplish the 48 vows. It can be said that the essence of Amitabha Buddha is Other-power.

Shinran said the world was filled with Other-power and all beings were living in Other-power. Such Other-power acts upon all beings who practice Nembutsu, so that to practice Nembutsu is to be saved by Other-power.

2. The ultimate reality and discriminating thought

Amitabha Buddha was a bodhisattva named Houzou firstly. Houzou made the 48 vows and after that became Amitabha Buddha. This story was written in "Sutra of Immeasurable Life." In addition to this story in "Sutra of Immeasurable Life," Shinran wrote his original thoughts about Houzou in his work called "Yui Shin Syou Mon No I."

According to Shinran, Houzou is the existence that appeared from the ultimate reality. The ultimate reality is the reality of the world in Buddhism. This has neither self nor others, subject nor object. It is to say that there is no confrontation or discrimination between self and others, subject and object in the ultimate reality.

But ordinary people are ignorant of the ultimate reality because they have discriminating thought. Discriminating thought is the way of thinking that all people do naturally and unconsciously. For example when people recognize the world they necessarily discriminate self from others, or this thing from that thing. This way of thinking is discriminating thought. Because of discriminating thought people can't know the ultimate reality as it is. And this ignorance brings every suffering to people.

About the ultimate reality Shinran wrote as follows in "Yui Shin Syou Mon No I."

The ultimate reality has neither color nor form. So that people can't express it by words or think it by the mind.¹

The ultimate reality has neither color nor form, because color and form are a result of discriminating thought. The ultimate reality rises above any discrimination or confrontation, so the ultimate reality rises above color and form too. Furthermore, the ultimate reality can't be expressed by words and can't be conceived by the mind, because discrimination is the essential function of words and the mind.

The ultimate reality is the reality of the world. It exists as the true nature of all beings. However people have discriminating thought naturally. As a result of this they can't know the ultimate reality as it is.

In addition to that Shinran believed people didn't have any way to reach the ultimate reality by themselves. Whatever efforts they make in order to know the ultimate reality are done based on the self, and the self is originated in discriminating thought. Therefore it can be said that efforts based on the self are efforts based on discriminating thought. People can't avoid discriminating thought in these efforts, and they can't reach the ultimate reality through these efforts. Shinran called such efforts "Self-power efforts" and criticized them very strictly.

3. Other-power and the name of Amitabha Buddha

People are ignorant of the reality of the world and have no way to reach it. Shinran called them sinful and evil people. For Shinran, sin and evil meant being separated from the ultimate reality. However in order to save these sinful and evil people Houzou appeared from the ultimate reality.

Thus Houzou made the 48 vows and became Amitabha Buddha. This Amitabha Buddha is not a different being from the ultimate reality. Shinran wrote as follows.

Amitabha Buddha is the light and has neither color nor form. Amitabha Buddha is the same as the ultimate reality.²

However it can be said that there is a difference between Amitabha Buddha and the ultimate reality itself too.

Before Houzou's appearance the ultimate reality existed only as the true nature of all beings. It had no contact with all beings because of discriminating thought. But at some point Houzou appeared from this ultimate reality. He made the 48 vows to save all beings. After a long period of religious practice, Houzou accomplished the 48 vows and became the power to save all beings. This power is called Other-power, or Amitabha Buddha.

That story of Houzou represents the process of the ultimate reality establishing contact with all beings. It can be said that Amitabha Buddha is the ultimate reality which has become able to save all beings through the 48 vows.

Amitabha Buddha saves people who practice Nembutsu. Salvation through Amitabha Buddha

is always possible under the name of Amitabha Buddha. The ultimate reality became able to save all beings because of the 48 vows, but it has neither color nor form as mentioned. People can't establish contact with Amitabha Buddha directly.

Therefore the name of Amitabha Buddha is necessary. The name of Amitabha Buddha is the most concrete manifestation of the ultimate reality. People can hear and chant the name of Amitabha Buddha. The name of Amitabha Buddha can come in contact with people directly. By chanting this name people make contact with Amitabha Buddha. Thus Amitabha Buddha saves people who practice Nembutsu.

To chant the name of Amitabha Buddha is to make contact with Amitabha Buddha. That is to

know the ultimate reality or to free themselves from discriminating thought. In practicing Nembutsu, both self and others, or subject and object, vanish and the ultimate reality is revealed.

People are naturally ignorant of the ultimate reality. And they can't free themselves from discriminating thought by their Self-power efforts. But the ultimate reality became able to save people. It began to cause people to know the ultimate reality as Amitabha Buddha or Other-power. To practice Nembutsu is to be saved by Amitabha Buddha or Other-power.

注

1. 「真宗聖典」 柏原祐義 法蔵館 1935年4月1日 p621
2. 「真宗聖典」 柏原祐義 法蔵館 1935年4月1日 p621

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