

Other Power, Power Through Others, and the Broader Dimensions of Self

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I will in this place, discuss the concept of Other Power or Tariki a bit if I may. “Tariki” literally means “other power.” The concept was developed by Tan Luan [Donran] in the 5th Century of the Common Era [A.D.]. On his presentation “Other Power” referred to the help that Buddhist practitioners receive from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This synergistically melds with their own efforts or “self power”/Ji Riki on Tan-luan’s analysis.

Recently Mark Blum has translated “Tariki” as “Spiritual Power beyond the known self.” [“The Origins and Development of Pure Land Buddhism,” Mark L. Blum Oxford University Press, 2002, page 8] I think this is a very effective elaboration of what Tariki is meant to point to. Mark Blum is not affiliated with any particular Buddhist school or organization and we may trust that his translation is free of a specific agenda. The nature of personal identity remains a mystery. I sometimes hear other Jodo Shinshu ministers talk of the “ego” and I am not really sure what they mean. To some extent the Tariki in the background of our lives might be both the action of Amida Buddha and the manifesting of our own deeper selves. These broader and deeper dimensions of Self may be other than what we usually call “ego” but not external to ourselves. In any case, when we talk of Tariki we are talking of a “spiritual power beyond the known self.”

The institutionalized humility that we find in Japanese culture, particularly in Japanese Buddhist culture, does not translate well to an American context. To distrust our judgment, to see the selfish agenda behind our evaluations and actions, to recognize an ego-preserving filter to even our critical thinking must be balanced by a sense that this is not all that we are.

We each have Buddha-nature. This is not a soul or pure inwardness but simply a potential to awaken to great wisdom and compassion. This Buddha-nature is not external to ourselves but it does exist interdependently with the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha, with the illumination which comes from Amida Buddha through saying his Name. This is all part of “spiritual power beyond the known self.”

Please Consider the Following Questions: 1. Are there aspects of yourself outside your conscious knowing? 2. Are some of these aspects transpersonal? That is, are there dimensions of your self that are not only your self? 3. Don’t you need some degree of self-esteem to get by in this life? 4. What is the basis for your self esteem? 5. Are you connected so deeply to other persons or groups that they can be a source of self-esteem? 5. Do you have confidence in something or someone larger than yourself? 6. What is the basis of your personal identity? [Nietzsche once said that “the body is the abiding clue to personal identity”.]