

Misunderstandings of Master Rennyō

by

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INTRODUCTION

by Paul Roberts

Following up his first book for Westerners, Understanding Jodo Shinshu, Professor Eiken Kobai has written a companion follow-up, Misunderstandings of Master Rennyō.

As the Shin Sangha in the West loses members and seeks for both meaning and mission, this volume has much to offer thoughtful people who care about the future of Jodo-Shinshu.

The “secret” of reviving the Shin Sangha, and restoring it to a viable vehicle for transmission of the True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way lies within its pages. By blowing away the dust of history, and finding once again the truth about Master Rennyō, we can see clearly what needs to be done today.

Rennyō became the eighth leader of the Sangha at a time when it was moribund and practically extinct. Because he had such a clear vision of the ESSENTIALS of Shin Buddhism, and worked to teach and preach the simple Dharma in temple after temple, the Sangha exploded with new life.

People who were karmically ready to listen to teaching about how to end their suffering, once and for all, listened deeply to Rennyō, a true teacher. Because Rennyō preached the Dharma clearly, thousands of people came to the same SHINJIN – the same True Entrusting – as him, and Master Shinran before him.

Today, the Western Shin Sangha is beset with so much adulterated teaching, and so much manifestly false teaching, that it is moribund once again. For example: leading Shin Buddhist teachers declare that Amida Buddha is a fictive character – a character like Santa Claus – rather than being a True Buddha of Reward Body, as Shinran so clearly states.

Too many modern Shin Buddhist teachers know about process theology and post-modernism, without knowing the reality of entrusting themselves utterly to the salvation freely offered by Amida Buddha. As Kobai boldly points out, their unfortunate comments and commentary make their lack of SHINJIN clear.

Too many modern Shin Buddhist teachers concentrate on teaching the dharma of the Path of the Sages – dharma about impermanence, about various meditative disciplines, about morality – while Shinran taught none of those.

It was not that Shinran didn't know these teachings. Of course, as a great scholar, he did...and so did Rennyō. But Shinran knew he was entirely incapable of using these teachings to further himself on the path of liberation – and so did Rennyō.

Shinran knew that he was helplessly strapped to the wheel of birth and death – and so did Rennyō.

Shinran knew that his intellectual ability to understand the various paths in the Buddha-dharma didn't translate into freedom from the anguish of our endless cravings and aversions – our blind passions, many below the level of our own awareness. And Rennyō knew the same.

Shinran knew that he was a man in a bad way – the very man described in Shan-Tao's *Parable of the White Path*. And Rennyō knew the same.

That is why Shinran preached and taught the radical dharma of total dependence on Amida's Personhood and Work – making the Vows and then fulfilling them – as his only hope for salvation from suffering at long last.

And Rennyō preached and taught the same.

For karmic reasons beyond my own understanding, various Shin teachers have muddied the waters around Rennyō, making it seem like his teaching was different from Shinran's, rather than the same.

Professor Kobai refutes that false view completely. He shows in an unequivocal way, how Rennyō was a true student of Shinran – not making up his own version of the dharma as some do today – but being faithful to the content of the Dharma he received from Shinran as his Dharma master.

By showing us how Rennyō stayed true to his Dharma master Shinran, Kobai points us in the correct direction for reviving the Sangha in our day as well. Our only hope is in what I call "The Shinran Manifesto": the call to return to the True Teaching of our True Teacher Shinran.

This is what Rennyo did, over 500 years ago and 200 years after Shinran's death. Because Rennyo was a faithful steward of a dharma gate that did not belong to him, the Sangha fulfilled its purpose in a mighty way.

Because Rennyo was a faithful steward, I stand here today – a western man, able to read the Letters of Rennyo, and the writings of Shinran, in translation.

Do you care about the survival of the Shin Sangha? Do you care about its mission to bear the final dharma for this age of Dharma Decline to a suffering world?

Then I invite you to read this volume by Professor Eiken Kobai – also a true teacher of the True Teaching of Shinran Shonin.

Namu Amida Butsu

Paul Roberts

FOREWORD

The year 1998 was when the Homba (Nishi) Hongwanji organization celebrated the 500th year since the passing of Master Rennyō (1415 - 1499 AD), the 8th Spiritual Leader of the Hongwanji.

Master Rennyō made the Hongwanji what it is today. That is why various titles have been given to him, including “master who restored (the Hongwanji)” and “master who revived (the Hongwanji).”

I believe Master Rennyō correctly received the teaching of the Venerable Master Shinran (1173 - 1262 AD), the founder of our Jodo-Shinshu teaching, and explained it so the people of his time could understand it. The Jodo-Shinshu teachings spread throughout Japan as widely as it did solely because of Master Rennyō’s efforts. I believe the titles, “master who restored (the Hongwanji)” and “master who revived (the Hongwanji)” are extremely suitable for Master Rennyō.

Unfortunately, however, some, including scholars, revile Master Rennyō as having twisted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teachings. I cannot help but believe that such people do not understand the most important aspect of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching.

In this book I will compare the Venerable Master Shinran’s and Master Rennyō’s teachings, and explain what I believe are the most important aspects of Jodo-Shinshu.

Chapter One, “Misunderstandings of Master Rennyō’s Teaching,” consists of six sections:

“Turning of the Mind/Heart”

Shinjin and Anjin

“Group of those Correctly Assured in the Present Life and “Matter of Greatest Importance in the Next Life””

Attitude Towards Authority

“Shinjin is the Correct Cause” and “Reciting the Name in Gratitude”

The Problems of “Merit-Transference in the Aspect of Returning”

As indicated above, in the first section of Chapter One, I take up the view of some that, while the Venerable Master Shinran had a “turning of the mind” (often referred to as “conversion” in English), Master Rennyo did not. Such scholars say Master Rennyo was born in a religious organization and did not experience a “turning of the mind.” They further say that he was not a pure religious leader and that religion was just a “business” for him.

In the second section, I take up the view that the Venerable Master Shinran’s shinjin and Master Rennyo’s anjin (these terms will be explained in that section) are different in nature, and that Master Rennyo taught a shinjin completely different from that taught by the Venerable Master.

In the third section, I take up the view that the Venerable Master Shinran emphasized this present world and life, while Master Rennyo emphasized the world after death.

In the fourth section I take up the view that while the Venerable Master Shinran was anti-authority, Master Rennyo flattered those in authority. I did so in terms of the problems of:

- “King’s Law is primary”
- The essence of shinjin in Jodo-Shinshu
- “Absolute truth” and “conventional truth”.

In the fifth section, I take up the view that, while the Venerable Master Shinran urged recitation of the Nembutsu before receiving shinjin, Master Rennyo urged recitation of the Nembutsu in gratitude after receiving shinjin.

In the sixth and last section of Chapter One, I take up the problem of “‘merit transference’ in the ‘aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)’”. This is in response to the view that:

- While the Venerable Master Shinran taught: the “merit transference” (*eko*) of the “aspect of going (to the Pure Land)” and the “aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)”, where he himself would attain complete enlightenment in the Pure Land, and emphasized the “aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)” in order to lead others to the Pure Land,

- That Master Rennyo was solely concerned with the “aspect of going” and did not concern himself with the “aspect of returning.”

Chapter Two, “The World of ‘Group of those Assured in the Present,’” also consists of six sections:

- The Essence of the Venerable Master Shinran and Master Rennyo’s teaching
- Being in the “‘Group of Those Assured’ in the Present”
- Essence of the General Preface to the “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment”
- The Essence of Article one of “Notes Lamenting Differences”
- World of Heizei Go jo
- The World of “Certainty of Birth in the Pure Land is Certainty of Salvation”

In this chapter I explain that what both the Venerable Master Shinran and Master Rennyo wished for us is that we become a “person assured of receiving shinjin” and live in the awareness of “assurance of birth (in the Pure Land).” I explain that those who criticize Master Rennyo for twisting or distorting the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching have no understanding of the world of “assurance of birth in the Pure Land in this life.”

Chapter Three, The Way to Shinjin, consists of two sections. The first explains what it means to have “settled shinjin,” and the second that the teaching of Buddha-dharma begins and ends with “hearing.” I use the Venerable Master Shinran’s and Master Rennyo’s words to explain how to resolve the great problem of becoming a “person assured of (receiving) shinjin.”

Chapter Four is a brief survey of Master Rennyo’s life and how he correctly transmitted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching of “settled shinjin” to the people of his time. This is just repeating myself from my earlier book, “Namo Amida Butsu: Understanding Jodo-Shinshu,” but if this book proves to be even the slightest help in your “tasting the dharma,” I can ask for nothing more.

CHAPTER ONE: MISUNDERSTANDINGS REGARDING MASTER RENNYO'S TEACHING

TURNING OF THE MIND/HEART

The phrase, "turning of the mind/heart" refers to an unenlightened person becoming enlightened. It refers to a fundamental change in the mind and heart through some "condition" or "circumstance."

Most religions have such an experience as their foundation. Shakyamuni Buddha became enlightened at the age of 35. Jesus is said to have heard a voice from heaven proclaiming him the Son of God when he was about 30 years of age (the conversion of his disciple Paul on the way to Damascus is also well known). Mohammed announced that he received a revelation from Allah at about the age of 40.

Closer to our Jodo-Shinshu teaching, Master Honen, who founded the Jodo denomination of Buddha-dharma, wrote the following in his "A Collection of Selections" (*Senjaku-shu*):

"Here, I, Honen, opened an ancient text (*Commentary on the Kangyo*) and as a result, stopped performing other religious practices and immediately relied on the Nembutsu."

This is said to have been during his 43rd year. As expressed in his own words, "I ... stopped performing other religious practices and immediately relied on the Nembutsu." That was when he discarded the way of "self-centered effort" (*jiiriki*) and accepted the way of "Buddha-centered power" (*tarikī*).

In our Jodo-Shinshu tradition, in the Chapter on Transformed Buddha-Bodies and Land of his "Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment" (*Kyogyoshinsho*), the Venerable Master Shinran wrote: "I, Gutoku Shaku Shinran, disciple of Shakyamuni, abandoned the sundry practices and took refuge in the Primal Vow during the 1st year of Kennin."

The 1st year of Kennin is 1201 AD, when the Venerable Master was 29 years of age. That was when he "abandoned the way of difficult practices and accepted the (way of Amida Buddha's) Primal Vow." In traditional Jodo-Shinshu terminology, this is referred to as turning away from the practice of "self-centered effort" and toward "Buddha-centered power."

The religious commentators and scholars who emphasize the differences between the Venerable Master Shinran and Master Rennyo say, “Rennyo, who made a profession of religion, did not experience anything like a ‘turning of the mind.’” They add that, “While it is true that Rennyo resolved to revive the Hongwanji, he was not a pure religious personality.”

It is true that Master Rennyo did not explicitly describe a “turning of the mind” such as Master Honen experienced at the age of 43 or that the Venerable Master Shinran experienced at the age of 29.

Still, there are mentions in his writings and in writings about him that can be taken for a similar type of experience. For example, in “Gleanings in ‘Heard and Recorded During Master Rennyo’s Lifetime’,” there is the passage:

“A person whose shinjin was settled said he had forgotten the year, as well as the month and day that he began relying on Amida Buddha. He asked Master Rennyo whether it was all right that he could not recall the exact time he began relying on Amida Buddha. (Master Rennyo replied) that the shinjin of some was determined far in the past and therefore they may have forgotten when it was. But even if sentient beings forget (the time/date), Amida never does. Once you are within Amida’s Vow,” he concluded, “you will never be abandoned.”

In other words, a person whose shinjin was settled asked Master Rennyo: “I have forgotten the year, month and day that I began relying upon Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow (received shinjin). Is it all right that I don’t recall the exact date?”

In reply, Master Rennyo said the shinjin of some was settled long ago, and therefore it is natural that they don’t recall the exact year, month and day it happened. But even if sentient beings (we) forget, the Buddha will never do so, nor will he ever abandon us.

If Master Rennyo did not have the experience of “turning of the mind,” he may well have replied to this question with, “Some may remember the year, month and day they began relying on Amida Buddha (received shinjin)...,” or “There couldn’t be any who remember such a time...” But Master Rennyo’s reply was, “The shinjin of some was settled long ago, and therefore natural that they don’t recall the exact year, month and day it happened,” i.e., that some may have forgotten. From this we can infer that at some point in his life, Master

Rennyō, like Master Honen and the Venerable Master Shinran, must have had a “turning of the mind” experience that would lead him to reply as he did.

Further, in Letter one of Facile one of his “Honorable Letters” (*Gobunsho*), Master Rennyō quotes a poem attributed to Kumagai Nyudo (1141 - 1208 CE):

Long ago,
My joy was wrapped in my sleeves—
But, tonight,
(I am so overwhelmed)
It’s more than I can contain.

Master Rennyō then explained this poem in the following way: The phrase “Long ago, my joy was wrapped in my sleeves” means that, in the past, we felt certain—without any clear understanding of sundry practices and right practice—that we would be born (in the Pure Land) if we just recite the Nembutsu. “But, tonight, it’s more than I can contain” means that the joy of reciting the Nembutsu in gratitude for the Buddha’s benevolence is especially great now that, having heard and understood the difference between the right and sundry (practices), we have become steadfast and single-hearted, and have thus undergone a decisive settling of shinjin. Because of this, we are so overjoyed that we feel like dancing—hence the joy is “more than I can contain.”

As this passage implies, before receiving “settled shinjin,” Master Rennyō was unable to differentiate between the “practice leading to birth in the Pure Land” and the “practice of the Path of Sages.” He thought he would be born in the Pure Land merely through reciting “Namo Amida Butsu.” After receiving “settled shinjin,” however, he was able to differentiate between the “correct practice” and “sundry practices”; specifically, he knew the difference between the Nembutsu recited with “self-centered effort” and the Nembutsu based on “Buddha-centered power.” His present state, in which he recites the Nembutsu in gratitude to the Buddha is very different from before his shinjin was settled.

I believe the only reason Master Rennyō could make such a clear distinction between before receiving shinjin and after receiving it, is because he had experienced a “turning of the mind.” There is much further evidence like this in other letters in his “Honorable Letters” and also in articles in “Heard and Recorded During Master Rennyō’s Lifetime.”

It is for such reasons that I cannot agree with those who say that although the Venerable Master Shinran experienced a “turning of the mind,” Master Rennyō did not, and that Master Rennyō was not a true religious personality.

But it was because Master Rennyō had the “true and real” mind of shinjin that what he taught was “true and real.” It was because he received the Venerable Master Shinran’s intent correctly that he was able to transmit the teaching of Amida Buddha’s Vow correctly. That’s the only reason he could respond to the desires of the multitudes, and why the Hongwanji as an organization was revived as a result.

The question then arises as to when Master Rennyō’s “turning of the mind” took place. In “Renjun’s Record,” written by his sixth son, Renjun, there is the following passage:

“From the time Master Rennyō was 15 years of age, he determined to revive the honorable Dharma teaching of the Venerable Master (Shinran), regardless of the difficulties.”

And in “A Record of Master Rennyō’s Meritorious Deeds” is the following passage:

“The intent to revive the (Jodo) Shinshu teaching arose strongly within the former Master (Rennyō) when he was 15 years of age.”

From statements such as the above, some feel that Master Rennyō’s “turning of the mind”—the time his shinjin was determined—took place at the age of 15.

I believe, however, that 15 is a little early for the shinjin experience, especially since the way of counting ages during that period was by what is known as “counting years.” In that way of counting age, you are a year old at birth, and your age is increased by one on New Year’s Day. A person born on December 31st was considered two years old the next day, New Year’s Day. Accordingly, Master Rennyō’s age when he resolved to revive the Hongwanji may have been a year, or even two years younger than 15, making it even less likely that that was when he resolved to revive the Hongwanji.

Actually, as I will relate in detail later, Master Rennyō’s birth mother left him and the Hongwanji when he was six years of age. In the work, “A Record of

Master Rennyo's Meritorious Deeds," when Master Rennyo's mother left, she said: "My desire is that (my child) revive the Venerable Master's (Shinran's) teaching during (my child's) lifetime."

I believe Master Rennyo's resolve to revive the Hongwanji was greatly influenced by these words of his mother. In regard to those words, however, resolving to revive the Hongwanji organization and a "turning of the mind" are not necessarily the same thing. Resolving to revive the Hongwanji is a worldly desire, but as already indicated, I cannot support the view that Master Rennyo did not have an experience of "turning of the mind" just because it is. I believe Master Rennyo did have a "turning of the mind" experience. I believe he had it before succeeding his father as the Eighth Spiritual Leader of the Hongwanji at the age of 43, and very likely much earlier than that.

I cannot help but believe that Master Rennyo's whole-hearted and profound study during what is referred to as his "room-living" period, when he did not have much authority or responsibility, was solely because of his joy in being in the embrace of Amida Buddha's Great Compassion—because of the sense of mission that he felt precisely because of a "turning of the mind" experience.

Those who say Master Rennyo did not experience a "turning of the mind" very likely have not had such an experience themselves. I believe that is why they are absolutely unable to understand Master Rennyo's passion and sense of mission that he brought to his efforts in reviving the Hongwanji. I cannot help but feel that such people have absolutely no idea what it means to awaken to Amida Buddha's Great Compassion, nor feel any great gratitude for it.

And because they are such people, I believe that even when they speak of "resolve to revive the Hongwanji," they can consider it only on a worldly level, and completely miss the religious feeling that underlies such a resolve.

What those who criticize Master Rennyo for twisting the Venerable Master Shinran's teaching have in common is that they have no understanding of what is most important: the world of salvation based on the Primal Vow, and worse, no personal experience of it.

I believe it can be said that such people not only do not understand Master Rennyo, they have absolutely no understanding of the Venerable Master Shinran either.

SHINJIN AND ANJIN

Shinjin, literally “faith mind,” is probably best expressed as “entrusting mind.” The Venerable Master Shinran indicated it should be understood as “true mind.”

Some scholars say that the shinjin that the Venerable Master Shinran spoke of and the anjin (literally “peace of mind”) that Master Rennyo spoke of, are completely different in nature. They further state that the shinjin Master Rennyo taught was different from the shinjin that the Venerable Master Shinran taught. But is that true?

This is what Master Rennyo is quoted as saying in Article 185 of “Heard and Recorded During Master Rennyo’s Lifetime”:

“Neither the term shinjin nor anjin is meaningful to those who are ignorant or illiterate. If we use such terms, they may feel the teaching of Jodo-Shinshu is something completely different from what it actually is. That’s why all we should teach such people is that we ‘ignorant beings filled with base passions’ (*bombu*) can become Buddhas. Just tell them to rely upon Amida regarding their birth in the Pure Land. If you do, they will receive shinjin no matter how ignorant or how illiterate. There is nothing to our Jodo-Shinshu teaching other than this.”

This is what Master Rennyo said. As can be determined from the above, although Master Rennyo used both the terms shinjin and anjin, he was not referring to two different things. These terms refer to complete reliance on Amida Buddha, and specifically, to the shinjin of “Buddha-centered power.”

Further, some say that the term anjin was used only by Master Rennyo and that the Venerable Master Shinran never used it, but that also is not correct.

To begin with, the term anjin was used by Zendo Daishi (613 -681 CE) to refer to the “three minds”, which are: “sincere mind”, “deep mind and “mind that transfers the merit of aspiring (for the Pure Land)”. It is a term that can often be seen in his writings. The Venerable Master Shinran quoted Zendo Daishi many times in his own writings, beginning with his masterwork, “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment” (*Kyogyoshinsho*).

Those who assert that the Venerable Master Shinran disliked the use of the

term anjin and did not use it, are those who misunderstand shinjin.

What Master Rennyo understood anjin to mean is expressed in many places, such as Article 19 of “Gleanings in ‘Heard and Recorded During Master Rennyo’s Lifetime’” where the following is found:

“Anjin means that by relying wholeheartedly on Amida you will be saved just as you are. That is why the character of anjin is written with the character meaning ‘easy’ and also ‘peaceful.’ (The jin character, also read shin, means mind.) Indeed, the term anjin refers to a peaceful and tranquil mind itself.”

Further, Master Zonkaku (1290 - 1373 CE) in his “In Praise of the Virtue (of the Venerable Master Shinran)” used the phrase, “the anjin of the karma determined in everyday life,” which refers to “the mind at ease due to absolute assurance of ‘birth in the Pure Land’.”

Those who consider the Venerable Master Shinran to have engaged in activities against those in authority more than concern about birth in the Pure Land, seem to consider his anti-authoritarian activities to be his shinjin. Such people may consider “the mind at ease due to absolute assurance of birth in the Pure Land” to be completely foreign to the Venerable Master Shinran’s thought, but if they do, they are completely mistaken in their understanding of his shinjin.

It goes without saying that the shinjin in Jodo-Shinshu (the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching) is the shinjin of the 18th Vow, which is:

“If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the ten directions who recite my Name even ten times with sincere mind, faith serene, and wish birth in my country are not born there, may I not attain the supreme and greatest Enlightenment. Those who commit the “five deadly evils” and abuse the Right Dharma are excluded.”

The 18th Vow expresses the desire to cause birth in the Pure Land of all sentient beings (all living things) in the ten directions. Accordingly, shinjin—the general term for the “three minds” expressed in this 18th Vow: “sincere mind,” “faith serene” and “wish birth in my country”—is the shinjin for “birth in the Pure Land” (*ojo*), nothing else.

As in the phrase, “shinjin is the true cause (for birth in the Pure Land),” the sole purpose of shinjin is birth in the Pure Land. In the Chapter on Faith of his

“Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” the Venerable Master Shinran said shinjin was a lack of doubt, using expressions such as the following:

- “Completely untainted by the hindrance of doubt”
- “No mixture of doubt”

and in his “On the One Recitation and the Many Recitations,” he wrote:

“Shinjin is hearing Amida Buddha’s Vow (to cause my birth in the Pure Land) without doubt. In other words, shinjin is not having doubt in the salvific power of the Primal Vow.”

As can be determined from the above, the shinjin that the Venerable Master Shinran taught is the cause of our birth in the Pure Land. It is the mind that accepts the truth of the Primal Vow. In Letter 15 of Fascicle one of his “Honorable Letters,” Master Rennyo discussed shinjin in the following way:

“And so if you ask what this shinjin is, (the answer is that) it is just (a matter of) relying single-heartedly and without worry on Amida Tathagata and, giving no thought to other buddhas and bodhisattvas, entrusting ourselves steadfastly and without double-mindedness about Amida. This we called ‘settlement of shinjin’.”

As can be determined from the above, Master Rennyo correctly received the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching of shinjin. In one of his letters, the Venerable Master Shinran wrote about the mind that accompanies shinjin:

“Those who consider their ‘birth in the Pure Land’ to be assured realize their indebtedness to the Buddha and recite the Nembutsu in gratitude.”

Accordingly the mind that feels unmistakably bound for the Pure Land is completely different from the mind that waffles in its feeling about whether it is bound there or not. The mind that feels unmistakably bound for the Pure Land is none other than the world of “assurance of birth in the Pure Land/guarantee of salvation” mentioned in the “Creed” (*Ryogemon*, written by Master Rennyo) so it is quite natural to also refer to it as anjin.

Those who insist that referring to shinjin as anjin is an error, misunderstand what shinjin is. I believe such people somehow consider shinjin to be something that causes a result. And very likely, those who make such an error are those who have no experience of shinjin/anjin. In other words, I believe that because they have no experience of the assurance that comes from the

absolute guarantee of birth in the Pure Land, they have absolutely no idea about what shinjin/anjin is.

GROUP OF THOSE CORRECTLY ASSURED IN THE PRESENT LIFE AND THE MATTER OF GREATEST IMPORTANCE IN THE NEXT LIFE

Some claim that while the Venerable Master Shinran emphasized the present, Master Rennyo emphasized the “next life,” and concentrated on the world after death. This is a great mistake. In his “Hymns on the Pure Land” (Jodo Wasan), the Venerable Master Shinran wrote:

“Those who receive the true and real shinjin
Immediately join the “settled group”
And enter the stage of non-retrogression
Where they are guaranteed nirvana.”

As can be determined from this wasan, the Venerable Master Shinran emphasized the benefit of being in the “group of those correctly assured (of birth in the Pure Land)” —which the Spiritual Masters and sacred literature outwardly seemed to indicate would be received after being born in the Pure Land, was actually received in our present life immediately upon receiving shinjin.

This wasan should be read together with the passage in Letter one of the “Lamp for the Latter Ages” (*Mattosho*) written by the Venerable Master Shinran:

“The doer of true shinjin, however, abides in the ‘group of those correctly assured (of birth in the Pure Land),’ for he or she has already been grasped, never to be abandoned. There is no need to wait in anticipation for the moment of death, nor to rely on Amida’s coming. The moment shinjin is settled, birth (in the Pure Land) is also settled; there is no need for deathbed rites to prepare for Amida’s coming.”

As can be determined from this passage, the Venerable Master Shinran emphasized salvation while we are still in this world. He even denied the extremely large problem in the Pure Land teachings at that time of “Amida Buddha coming to welcome us at death.” The orthodox Pure Land teaching then was that when our life in this world came to an end, Amida Buddha would

come from the Pure Land to escort us to his land.

To say, however, that the Venerable Master Shinran emphasized salvation in the present world while Master Rennyo emphasized the “importance of the next life” and talked only about what happens after we die, is absolutely not the case. Master Rennyo was very faithful in following the Venerable Master Shinran on this point about salvation in this world. There are many places in his “Honorable Letters” where this is indicated. For example in Letter 4 of Fascicle one is the following:

“Question: Should we understand being ‘correctly assured of birth in the Pure Land’ and attaining nirvana as one benefit, or as two?

“Answer: ‘Awakening the one thought-moment’ is being in the ‘group of those correctly assured (of birth in the Pure Land),’ and is the benefit in this defiled world. Nirvana is the benefit to be gained in the Pure Land. Hence we should think of them as two benefits.”

The two benefits that we receive in the present and in the future are clearly expressed here:

- the benefit we gain in this defiled world—joining “the “group of those correctly assured (of birth in the Pure Land),” and
- the benefit to be gained in the Pure Land—attaining nirvana.

(Note that in the above discussion, sometimes the term “settled group” is used, sometimes “correctly assured”, and sometimes “group of those correctly assured (of birth in the Pure Land).” Essentially, they all refer to the same thing. “Settled group” and “correctly assured” are partial combinations of the kanji characters used to write “group of those correctly assured (of birth in the Pure Land),” *sho* , *jo* and *ju*.)

Further, regarding the matter of Amida Buddha coming to welcome us at death, that same Letter 4 of Fascicle 1 contains the following passage:

“As for ‘not waiting for Amida to meet us at the moment of death,’ when we realize that with the ‘awakening of the one thought-moment,’ we join the ‘group of those correctly assured (of birth in the Pure Land)’ (receive shinjin), there is no longer a need to anticipate Amida’s coming. Waiting for ‘Amida to meet (us at the moment of death)’ is a matter of concern only to those who perform various other practices. Doers of true and real shinjin no longer need wait for (Amida’s) coming to meet (them) because with the awakening of the

one thought-moment, they immediately receive the benefit of being in the ‘light that embraces and never abandons.’ As expressed here, those with true shinjin join the group of those whose birth in the Pure Land is correctly determined. They are protected by the ‘light that embraces and never abandons,’ and therefore there is no need to await Amida Buddha coming to welcome them at the moment of death.”

Again, in that same Letter 4 of Fascicle 1 is the following:

“Completing the cause (of our birth in the Pure Land) in everyday life” (means hearing and fully understanding this principle, and being assured of birth (in the Pure Land). This is variously referred to as ‘joining the group of those (whose birth in the Pure Land is) truly settled’ by awakening the one thought-moment, ‘completing the cause (of our birth in the Pure Land) in our everyday life,’ and ‘immediately attaining birth (in the Pure Land) from which there is no retrogression.’ This passage points out that ‘completing the cause of our birth in the Pure Land in everyday life’ means that the moment we receive shinjin in our ‘everyday life,’ our ‘birth in the Pure Land where we will become a Buddha is settled’ and emphasizes that this begins from the present.”

The above are examples of how faithfully Master Rennyo transmitted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching, which emphasized salvation in the present world. And yet Master Rennyo is criticized for having twisted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching, that he taught a completely next-world attitude, and that he was solely concerned about birth in the Pure Land after death.

How could such mistaken views of Master Rennyo’s teaching arise? I assert positively not long after the special 500th Memorial Service for Master Rennyo: I believe those who criticize Master Rennyo in these ways are those who have absolutely no awareness of the world of being in the “group of those correctly assured (of birth in the Pure Land) in the present life” that the Venerable Master Shinran took such pains to explain to us.

As the Venerable Master Shinran wrote in his “Hymns of the Pure Land” (Jodo Wasan):

“Those who attain true and real shinjin
Immediately join those correctly assured
(of birth in the Pure Land)....”

I believe those who say Master Rennyo distorted the Venerable Master Shinran's teaching have absolutely no awareness of the world in which they are among the "group of those correctly assured (of birth in the Pure Land) in the present," which is the blessing of true and real shinjin. And it is because they have no understanding of the world of "salvation in the present" that, regardless of how clearly Master Rennyo expressed his understanding, they are unaware of what he actually said; that rather than the salvation in the present that Master Rennyo taught, they criticize him for speaking solely of, "this matter of greatest importance in the next life," and that salvation takes place in the next world after death in this world.

Using Master Rennyo's own words, those who have such an absurd misunderstanding must be referred to as, those "who have not undergone a decisive settling of shinjin" (Letter 3, Fascicle II); "those lacking in shinjin" (Letter 11, Fascicle V); and "those in whom the 'settled mind is yet to be realized'" (Letter 9 Fascicle III and Letter 7, Fascicle IV). I believe that while such people may be aware of the words related to the world of "salvation in the present," they have absolutely no experience of what those words mean.

Those who criticize Master Rennyo—who was always so concerned about being in the "group of those correctly assured (of birth in the Pure Land) in the present" that the Venerable Master Shinran emphasized—and consider this benefit to come in the future, must be said to be extremely ignorant about the subject. I cannot help but feel that such opinions about shinjin must be by those who have absolutely no experience of that wonderful world.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THOSE IN AUTHORITY

Some individuals criticize Master Rennyo by asserting that he ingratiated himself with those in authority while the Venerable Master Shinran's position was anti-authority. They further assert that Master Rennyo incorporated the thought of "the two truths of the absolute and the conventional" which is not found in the Venerable Master Shinran's thinking, into the Jodo-Shinshu teaching.

According to such persons, although the Venerable Master Shinran indicated that there is a distinction between "absolute truth" (the way to Enlightenment through birth in the Pure Land) and "conventional truth" (the secular or moral path), they are actually the same. These scholars say that Master Rennyo

erroneously divided the secular or moral path into two:

- “king’s law is primary”
- “take the secular path”

“The king’s law is primary” urges making the laws of the land the basis for living your life. “Take the secular path” urges following the conventional ways of making a living, and is solely concerned about ingratiating yourself with those in authority, but both these positions are very much mistaken.

Both the Venerable Master Shinran and Master Rennyo emphasized the way of transcending the world of life and death, in other words, leaving the world of delusion and moving towards the world of enlightenment (the Pure Land). They were not concerned about political movements and attitudes such as being anti-authority or flattering those in power. Their concerns were not so petty.

What “Making the King’s Law Primary” Refers To:

In Letter 12, Fascicle III, of the “Honorable Letters,” dated 27th day of the 1st month during the 8th year Bummei (1476 AD), is the following passage:

“First of all, make the laws of the state fundamental and follow generally-accepted customs, giving priority to the principles of humanity and justice. Maintain the settled mind of our tradition deep within yourself and conduct yourself so the transmission of the dharma you have received will not be evident to those of other Buddhist denominations.”

This is the attitude that Master Rennyo recommended to his followers. It expresses the attitude of “making the king’s law primary” and “common sense first”.

Further, in the fourth of the six articles of Letter 10, Fascicle III, dated the 15th day of the 7th month during the 7th year of Bummei (1475 AD), and in Letter 11, Fascicle III, dated the 21st day of the 11th month during the same 7th year of Bummei, he wrote:

“Further, (the Venerable Master Shinran) carefully stated that we should observe the principles of humanity, justice, propriety, wisdom and sincerity. He stated that outwardly we should honor the laws of the state but that deep within, we should consider the shinjin of “Buddha-centered power” based on the Primal Vow to be fundamental. And in Article 141 of “Heard and Recorded

During Master Rennyo Lifetime” is the passage: “obey the king’s law in your outward actions but cultivate the Buddha’s Law in your heart.”

The reason Master Rennyo urged the principle of “king’s law is primary,” was the sudden increase in the political power of his followers. He made statements such as the above in order to keep his followers from attacking governmental institutions, but some scholars take this position of “king’s law is primary” to be a conspiracy to curry favor with the authorities. Such scholars quote the Venerable Master Shinran’s Postscript to the Chapter on Transformed Land of his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment” in which he wrote: “The emperor and his ministers, acting against the Dharma and violating righteousness, became enraged and embittered.”

These scholars assert that Master Rennyo’s position is different from the Venerable Master Shinran’s criticism of the Emperor and denial of governmental authority, and that Master Rennyo distorted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching as well as the content of the Venerable Master’s shinjin.

I cannot agree with such criticisms of Master Rennyo.

Although, as just indicated, Master Rennyo expressed the principle of “king’s law’ is primary” in several places, in Article 157 of “Heard and Recorded During Rennyo Shonin’s Lifetime,” he expressed the “Buddha’s law is primary” point of view as being, “Make Buddha-dharma the master and worldly matters the guest.”

Further, just half a month before leaving this world, on the 9th day of the 3rd month during the 8th year of Meio (1499 AD), Master Rennyo said the following to his five sons, Jitsunyo, Renko, Rensei, Renjun and Rengo (it is recorded in “Items Agreed Among Brothers”):

“The Buddha is, of course, central in our teaching. The purpose of following the ‘king’s law’ in the secular world is to allow the ‘Buddha’s Law’ to be primary. Unfortunately, many people make the ‘Buddha’s Law’ secondary and the ‘King’s Law’ primary. This should not be allowed.”

Because it was so close to the end of his life, this can be considered Master Rennyo’s last words to his children, and his true intent regarding the “Buddha’s law” and the “king’s law.” As he indicated, “ The purpose of following the ‘king’s law’ in the secular world is to allow the ‘Buddha’s law’ to

be primary.” Saying the “king’s law is primary” is only a means to establish the primacy of “Buddha’s Law.” In other words, his purpose was to establish Buddha-dharma as the central focus of our lives.

The Essence of Shinjin in the Jodo-Shinshu Teaching

As indicated in the previous section, although Master Rennyo accepted “king’s law as primary,” it was only as a means to allow the teaching of Buddha-dharma to grow, and that his real intent was “Buddha’s law is primary.” Because of the differences in attitude towards those in authority by the Venerable Master Shinran and Master Rennyo, however, some people assert that their shinjin is fundamentally different.

As indicated previously, those who make such assertions base their position on passages such as the following:

- In the Chapter on Transformed Land of his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” the Venerable Master Shinran wrote, “the emperor and his ministers, acting against the Dharma and violating righteousness, became enraged and embittered” and criticized them for suppressing the Nembutsu teaching.
- In Letter 7 of “Collection of (Shinran’s) Letters” “Do not try to use those in authority (the Bakufu feudal government) to spread the Nembutsu,” and “I did not say that we should consider using those in authority to spread the Nembutsu.”

But the Venerable Master Shinran’s statement, “the emperor and his ministers, acting against the Dharma and violating righteousness, became enraged and embittered,” expresses anger at prohibition of the Nembutsu teaching and not anger at the authority of the feudal Bakufu government.

If the Venerable Master Shinran’s anger was indeed towards governmental authority itself, then his anger would necessarily also be directed towards Shotoku Taishi (574 - 622 AD), who shaped much of the structure of the feudal government, and whose influence is felt in Japanese governmental circles even today. But the Venerable Master has referred to Shotoku Taishi as “Master of the Teaching (Dharma) in our country (Japan).” Further, in “Hymns on the Three Periods” (Shozomatsu Wasan), he included 11 wasan titled “In Praise of Shotoku Taishi,” and a separate work also titled, “In Praise of Shotoku Taishi” that contains 75 wasan praising Shotoku Taishi. The Venerable Master would not have written the above works if he did not respect Shotoku Taishi, and by extension, the government.

Further, I believe the passage, "Do not try to use those in authority (the Bakufu feudal government) to spread the Nembutsu," was made to warn his followers against compromising with the authority that suppressed the Pure Land teachings because that governmental body could not understand the significance of the Nembutsu based on "Buddha-centered power."

I believe those who criticize Master Rennyo and assert that he distorted the Venerable Master Shinran's teaching—that he corrupted it—are unable to understand the essence of the Venerable Master's teaching. They seem to believe that the essence of the Venerable Master's shinjin is simply being anti-establishment and critical of governmental authority. How sad.

If we misunderstand the Venerable Master Shinran's teaching in the above way, it would mean that Master Rennyo's shinjin was different from the shinjin of the Venerable Master's. It would mean that Master Rennyo's assertions really are a distortion of the Venerable Master's because Master Rennyo took the position that "king's law is primary," and tried to avoid conflict with authority in order to allow Buddha-dharma to spread.

I believe, however, that such a point of view is the view of those who do not understand not only Master Rennyo's teaching, but also the teaching of the Venerable Master Shinran.

As I touched on in the previous section (Shinjin and Anjin), the shinjin of our Jodo-Shinshu school is the shinjin of the 18th Vow. It goes without saying that the intent of the 18th Vow is to cause the birth of all sentient beings in the Pure Land based solely on shinjin. This is expressed in the phrase, "Shinjin is the proper cause (of our birth in the Pure Land)."

Regarding shinjin, in the Chapter on Faith of his "Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment," the Venerable Master Shinran used the phrase "no mixture of doubt," and in "on the one Recitation and the Many Recitations," he expressed it as, "shinjin is hearing the Tathagata's honorable Vow without doubt." As these phrases indicate, shinjin is the absence of doubt regarding the power of the Primal Vow to cause our birth in the Pure Land.

As indicated in the following wasan in "Hymns on the Three Periods," shinjin is the correct cause for our birth in the Pure Land, in other words, is the cause for us to transcend this world of delusion and be born in the world of enlightenment:

"Accepting the marvelously mysterious Buddha-wisdom
Is the cause of our birth in the fulfilled land.
Realizing the true cause (shinjin),
Is among difficulties the most difficult."

This sort of explanation of shinjin by the Venerable Master Shinran is of a completely different dimension than the problem of governmental authority in the secular world (world of delusion).

I believe this is extremely important in correctly understanding the Jodo-Shinshu teaching.

“Ultimate Truth” and “Conventional Truth”

The term “ultimate truth” is understood using phrases such as “superior principle” and “first principle,” and refers to truth itself.

“Conventional truth” is understood to mean “secular truth,” and refers to truth from a secular or worldly point of view.

“Ultimate truth” is also understood as “trans-worldly truth (dharma)” and “conventional truth” as “worldly truth.”

As previously mentioned, among the views of those who assert that Master Rennyo distorted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching is the problem of “the two truths of the ultimate and conventional.” (In this case, the “ultimate truth” of “the two truths of the ultimate and conventional” is considered to be “trans-worldly truth” – the way of birth in the Pure Land - and “conventional truth” to be “worldly truth” - moral and legal laws).

Those who consider the essence of the Venerable Master Shinran’s shinjin to be abandonment of governmental authority emphasize Master Rennyo’s use of phrases such as “king’s law is primary” and “take the secular path.” They assert that Master Rennyo’s statements such as:

- “outwardly maintain the ‘king’s law’ of the five Confucian virtues of benevolence, justice, courtesy, wisdom and sincerity, and inwardly rely on ‘Buddha-centered power’”
- “Do not neglect (the rules established by) the “inspector supervisor” (shugo) and the “lords of the district”

are expressions of “the two truths of the ultimate and conventional” that the Venerable Master Shinran never spoke of, and therefore is completely different from the Venerable Master’s teaching. They criticize Master Rennyo for kowtowing to those in authority.

And even when it comes to the Venerable Master Shinran at the age of 84 having to disown his son, Zenran, such scholars assert that the basic reason the Venerable Master did so was that Zenran associated himself with those in power, and not because of differences in how birth in the Pure Land could be attained.

Such assertions are absurd. In the letter to Zenran in which the Venerable Master Shinran disowned him, is the following passage:

“It is distressing to hear that you have lied and that you have petitioned the Rokuhara and Kamakura magistrates concerning those lies. Falsehoods of this kind are worldly matters and may thus be dismissed as such; still, lying is wretched. But how grievous is it to mislead others regarding the great concern of birth in the land of bliss and confusing Nembutsu followers in the Hitachi and Shimotsuke areas....”

In other words, the Venerable Master wrote his son that lying and petitioning the Rokuhara Court in Kyoto and the Bakufu government in Kamakura is regrettable, but because such lies relate to this world, however, they are not truly important. Even so, lying is a wretched thing to do. How much more wretched, then, would it be to lead others astray when it comes to the greatest matter of birth in the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy?

As can be determined from the above, the Venerable Master made a clear distinction between “worldly matters” and “the great concern of birth in the land of bliss.”

As indicated, regarding Zenran’s petition to the Rokuhara Court in Kyoto and the Bakufu government in Kamakura, the Venerable Master wrote, “Falsehoods of this kind are worldly matters and may thus be dismissed....” In other words, associating yourself with those in power is not particularly important. Lying and misleading others regarding birth in the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy, however, is an extremely grave matter.

From the above, it is quite clear that the following are erroneous understandings of the Venerable Master’s position:

- Considering breaking with governmental authority is basic to shinjin
- There is no idea of “the two truths of the ultimate and conventional” in his thought
- The primary reason for disowning Zenran was because of Zenran’s desire to associate himself with those in secular power.

What we can understand from the above is that criticism of Master Rennyō for separating “the Buddha’s Way” and “the king’s way” and speaking of “the two truths of the ultimate and conventional” as being opposed to the teaching of the Venerable Master Shinran is clearly incorrect.

Further, the Venerable Master Shinran quoted the following passage from “Lamp for the Last Dharma Age” (Mappō to Myō-ki written by Saichō) in the Chapter on Transformed Land of his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment”:

“The Dharma-king cultivates all to the state of oneness. The Virtue-King shines that oneness on the four seas (So it pervades the universe). The Virtue-King and the Dharma-king work together in guiding all beings. ‘Ultimate truth’ and ‘conventional truth’ rely on each other to spread the Dharma.”

Although the purpose of this quotation is not to explain “ultimate truth” and “conventional truth,” it nevertheless does contain those two terms and implies that the Venerable Master Shinran accepted the thought of “the two truths of the ultimate and conventional.”

Further, in the Chapter on Practice, the Venerable Master quotes the following passage from the “Commentary on the Ten Bodhisattva Stages”:

“... the Worldly Path is traveled by the “ignorant filled with base passions” (bambu) and does not lead to nirvana. Rather, it leads to ceaselessly coming and going in birth-and-death; hence, it is called Worldly Path. The Trans-worldly Path refers to the way by which we can leave the “three realms”; hence it is called the “transcendental (supermundane) path.”

Here, again, the Venerable Master points out the two ways of the Worldly Path, the way for the ignorant, filled with base passions, to follow and the Trans-worldly Path. This Worldly Path is the same as “conventional truth” and the Trans-worldly Path is the same as “ultimate truth.”

Again, in “A Record of Genealogical Matters” (Ketsu-Myaku Monju) it states:

“The ignorant speak falsely about the secular world. It is unfortunate that they also speak falsely about the transcendental world about which they know nothing, but that is understandable. But that they lie so mightily about this secular world about which they should be knowledgeable is indeed regrettable.”

From the above, we see that the Venerable Master Shinran accepted the “transcendental world” (ultimate truth) and the “secular world” (conventional truth), which are considered in the thought of “the two truths of the ultimate and the conventional.”

Those who criticize Master Rennyo because of the problems of “the two truths of the ultimate and the conventional” and “anti-authority,” also frequently criticize the Hongwanji organization for acquiescing to Japanese governmental policies during World War II. It is natural to consider the responsibilities of an organization in the past, but I believe it to be a grievous error to assert that the basis for such a position is contained in Master Rennyo’s teachings.

As I have repeatedly said, I do not believe Master Rennyo distorted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching. While I am at it, I might add that those who blame Master Rennyo for the attitude of the Hongwanji during World War II, do so because of statements in his “Honorable Letters,” such as, “... do not hold any of the kami (deities), buddhas or bodhisattvas in contempt” (Letter 13, Fascicle Three), and “Do not hold Shinto shrines in contempt.”

They criticize Master Rennyo for distorting the Venerable Master Shinran’s acceptance of the one Buddha Amida, and currying favor with the authorities by urging worship at Shinto shrines.

Letter 15, Fascicle one, however, contains the following passage by Master Rennyo:

“And so if you ask what shinjin is, it is just single-mindedly accepting Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow without having two minds about it, giving no thought to other buddhas and bodhisattvas....”

As can be determined from this, Master Rennyo’s position is “...accepting Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow without having two minds about it.”

This is also made clear by the following passage in Letter 1 of Fascicle Five: “... sentient beings who rely on Amida Buddha deeply and with singleness of mind are saved without fail.”

I believe it goes without saying that there are many things the Hongwanji as an institution must reflect on regarding its responsibility during World War II. But to consider that responsibility goes back to Master Rennyō is a great misunderstanding. I further believe that sort of thinking comes from not understanding the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching, which is the “way of (stepping out of the round of) birth and death,” and “the great importance of (birth in) the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy.”

As I have already mentioned, the thought of “the two truths of the ultimate and the conventional” also exists in the Venerable Master Shinran, even if it is expressed in the form of quotations from his predecessors. He also used terms like “ultimate truth” and “conventional truth,” “transcendent world” and “this world,” and “great matter of birth in the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy” and “matters of this world.” all of which are related to the “ultimate truth” and “conventional truth” of the “two truths of the ultimate and the conventional.”

In spite of this, however, more than a few scholars assert that there is absolutely no indication of “the two truths of the ultimate and the conventional” in the Venerable Master Shinran, and that Master Rennyō taught such a point of view in order to curry favor with those in authority and thus distorted the Venerable Master’s teaching. I believe such a position is completely mistaken.

Using the terminology of “the two truths of the ultimate and the conventional,” such scholars consider the Venerable Master Shinran’s thought only in terms of “conventional truth.” That’s why they discuss the essence of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching in terms of establishment (authority) and anti-establishment. They have absolutely no understanding of the world of “ultimate truth.” In other words, they consider the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching only from the point of view of “conventional truth,” that of morality and ethics, rather than from the way of transcending the world of birth and death (delusion). How can they be expected to have a point of view that even approaches that of the Venerable Master Shinran’s?

I will repeat myself in order to avoid any misunderstanding: There are many problems about the responsibility of the Hongwanji organization during World War II which the Hongwanji must reflect upon very carefully. But I absolutely cannot agree with those who assert that the essence of the Venerable Master

Shinran's teaching is anti-establishment, that Master Rennyo taught "the two truths of the ultimate and the conventional" which does not exist in the Venerable Master Shinran's thought, in order to curry favor with the authorities, and that therefore Master Rennyo distorted the Venerable Master's teaching.

If, for some reason, Master Rennyo did try to curry favor with the authorities, then why was he pressured by the soldier/monks of Mt. Hiei and been in such discord with local authorities?

I believe those scholars who criticize Master Rennyo do so because they are able to speak about religion only from the "conventional truth" position, i.e., from a level of ethics and morality. I have no problem in saying that because they have no experience of the Primal Vow, they are absolutely unable to understand the world of "ultimate truth." Criticizing Master Rennyo for expressing "the two truths of the ultimate and the conventional" with absolutely no understanding of "ultimate truth" is absurd.

I cannot help repeating that I believe these are the views of those who have no "turning of the mind" experience which is what shinjin is.

SHINJIN IS THE CORRECT CAUSE AND RECITING THE NAME IN GRATITUDE

Here I would like to express my thoughts regarding those who criticize Master Rennyo for urging recitation of Amida Buddha's Name (reciting "Namo Amida Butsu") in gratitude after the shinjin experience, although the Venerable Master Shinran urged reciting the Name before the experience of shinjin.

Recently, the view that "shinjin is the correct cause" and "recitation of the Name in gratitude"—which are contained in the Hongwanji "Statement of Doctrine"—does not appear in the Venerable Master Shinran's works and is a distortion of the Venerable Master's teaching by Master Rennyo, has been expressed.

That is a terrible error.

Master Rennyo expressed the thought of, "reciting the Name in gratitude" in various places. A typical expression is found in Letter 10, Fascicle V of the

“Honorable Letters”:

“What is taught by the Venerable Master (Shinran) and in his school is that shinjin is fundamental. When we discard sundry practices and single-heartedly take refuge in Amida, birth in the Pure Land is assured by the marvelously mysterious working of the power of the Primal Vow. This state is also expressed as ‘joining the group of those assured (of birth in the Pure Land)’ through awakening the one thought-moment (of entrusting). Saying the Name of the Buddha (saying “Namo Amida Butsu”) should then be understood as gratitude for Amida’s benevolence.”

Further, the following is found in the “Creed” (Ryogemon): Casting aside all auxiliary/mixed practices and the mind of self-centered effort with singleness of mind/heart, I rely upon Amida Tathagata for enlightenment in the life to come. I believe that at the moment of entrustment, my birth in the Pure Land is absolutely assured. Any Nembutsu recited thereafter only expresses gratitude to Amida....”

Both these passages are widely known by those who follow the Jodo-Shinshu teachings. They refer to the fact that we are included among the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” and are guaranteed birth there when our shinjin is settled. The Nembutsu that we recite after that is a Nembutsu we recite in gratitude. This is, of course, also the Venerable Master Shinran’s position, as for example in the following passage from the “Hymn of True Faith” (Shoshinge):

“The moment we accept Amida’s Primal Vow,
We are naturally brought to enter the stage of the definitely settled;
We respond with gratitude to the universal vow of great compassion
By constantly reciting Amida Buddha’s Name.”

In other words, because of its power, the moment we accept Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow, we become part of the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” and are absolutely guaranteed birth in the Pure Land. That is when our shinjin is settled and why we recite the Nembutsu in gratitude.

The reason Master Rennyo emphasized recitation of Amida Buddha’s Name (reciting “Namo Amida Butsu”) in his “Honorable Letters” and elsewhere, is because he relied so much on this passage from the Venerable Master Shinran’s “Hymn of True Faith.”

I repeat, saying that Master Rennyō's teaching of "recitation (of Amida Buddha's Name) in gratitude" is a distortion of the Venerable Master Shinran's teaching, is a great mistake.

It goes without saying that the Venerable Master Shinran's teaching is that, regardless of how deeply evil we are, the power of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow will save us solely because of shinjin. Further, when our shinjin is settled, we will be placed in the "group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land from which there is no retrogression," just as we are, with all our base passions (bonno).

Within the Pure Land teachings, it was the Venerable Master Shinran who first made the above clear (please refer to my previous work, "Understanding Jodo-Shinshu," for details regarding this; I will not go into details here). I believe the Venerable Master Shinran encouraged us to receive shinjin because he wished even one more person to experience the reality of the world of salvation—joining the "rightly-established group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in this present life" (gensho sho jo -ju)—that he himself had experienced.

The language with which he expressed the unparalleled joy of being included in the "rightly-established group in this present life" is found in the General Preface to this "Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment":

"How joyous I am, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Sakyamuni! Rare is it to come upon the sacred scriptures from the western land of India and the commentaries of the masters of China and Japan, but I have now been able to encounter them. Rare is it to hear these works, but I now am able to hear. Reverently entrusting myself to the teaching, practice and realization of the true teaching, I am especially aware of my indebtedness to Amida Buddha."

Here the Venerable Master Shinran says he was able to enter the world of salvation because of the contact he had with the sutras from India, and the commentaries of the Seven Eminent Scholar/Monks in India, China and Japan.

In the Postscript to the same "Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment," he considered the joy of salvation through "'Buddha-centered power' of the Primal Vow" (hongan tariki) to be entering the ocean of the Primal Vow which is absolutely unbounded. In that same Postscript, he wrote:

“How joyous I am! My heart and mind are rooted in the Buddha-ground of the Universal Vow, and my thoughts and feelings flow within the dharma-ocean, which is beyond comprehension! Only after receiving shinjin do we realize the depths of our indebtedness to Amida Buddha.”

In the Chapter on Transformed Land of his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” the Venerable Master Shinran expresses this as follows:

“Having entered the ocean of the Vow, I deeply realize the Buddha’s benevolence.”

Here the Venerable Master relates that because he was able to enter into the spirit of the 18th Vow (because his shinjin based on “Buddha-centered power” was settled), he realizes the depths of his indebtedness to the Buddha.

Again, in “Hymns of the Three Periods” (Shozomatsu Wasan), he wrote:

“Through the compassion of Sakyamuni and Amida,
We are brought to realize the mind that seeks to attain Buddhahood.
By entering the wisdom of shinjin
We respond in gratitude to the Buddhas’ benevolence.”

In other words, when we receive shinjin, we enter the wisdom of shinjin. Only then are we in a position to express our indebtedness of the Buddha. Essentially, only when our shinjin is settled, are we able to truly know our indebtedness to the Buddha.

As expressed in his “Hymns to the Eminent Monks” (Koso Wasan), those without single-mindedness, in other words, those without settled shinjin, do not have the “heart that responds in gratitude to the Buddha’s benevolence”:

“Performing “helpful” and “right” practices together
Is referred to as performing “miscellaneous practices”;
Those who endeavor in this way have not attained the mind that is single,
So they are unable to respond in gratitude to the Buddha’s benevolence.”

Those without the “single” mind, in other words those without shinjin, are unable to realize their indebtedness to the Buddha.

I believe those who assert that:

- Although the Venerable Master Shinran urged recitation of Amida

Buddha's Name before receiving shinjin in order to receive it,
· Master Rennyo urged only the Nembutsu of gratitude after receiving shinjin and therefore distorted the Venerable Master's teaching, are those whose own shinjin is not settled, and have not personally experienced the world of true salvation in the Jodo-Shinshu teaching, i.e., have not experienced being in the "group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in this life."

Let me give an example of what I mean by the above. There is a Japanese proverb: "Aware of indebtedness to our parents only after having children of our own." In other words, only after having children do parents know how dear they are. And because of that feeling they fully realize for the first time how their own parents must have felt towards them. That causes them to be even more indebted to their parents. I believe that is the feeling of "reciting the Name in awareness of our indebtedness."

I believe those who make absurd statements such as Master Rennyo's Nembutsu of indebtedness differs from the Venerable Master Shinran's Nembutsu, or that he distorted the Venerable Master's teaching, do not have any experience of "Buddha-centered power" shinjin.

They do not have a mind that feels indebted to the Buddha because their shinjin is not settled, and further, have no idea what such a world of indebtedness is like. With no awareness of the Nembutsu of indebtedness, they criticize Master Rennyo and hold up their lack of awareness for all to see. I cannot help but feel that is absolutely unpardonable.

THE PROBLEM OF MERIT TRANSFERENCE IN THE ASPECT OF RETURNING

Another matter, which those who criticize Master Rennyo bring up, is the problem of "merit-transference in the aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)."

Regarding this matter, the Venerable Master Shinran wrote the following at the very beginning of the Chapter on Teaching of his "Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment":

"Reverently contemplating the 'true teaching of the Pure Land' (jodo-shinshu),

I see that Amida's directing of virtue to sentient beings has two aspects: the aspect of going to the Pure Land and the aspect of returning to this world."

And in his "Hymns of the Eminent Scholar/Monks," he wrote:

"Amida has fulfilled the directing of virtue
Which has two aspects: going (to the Pure Land) and returning.
Through these aspects of the Buddha's directing of virtue,
We are brought to realize both the mind and the practice."

As can be determined from these two quotations (there are many others), the teaching of Jodo-Shinshu considers two "merit-transferences" (eko):

- the "merit-transference in the aspect of going (to the Pure Land)" and
- the "merit-transference in the aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)."

The term translated as "merit-transference" above, has also been variously translated as, "directing of merit," "directing of virtue," "endowment," "giving itself," "to be transferred," "to impart," etc. It is not an easy term to find an English equivalent for, but basically it refers to offering something. As used here, it has the meaning of Amida Buddha giving something to us sentient beings, as in "merit transference of Primal Vow power."

"Aspect of going" refers to the birth of sentient beings in the Pure Land, and "aspect of returning" refers to becoming enlightened after being born there and then returning to save sentient beings in this world. Those who criticize Master Rennyo regarding this matter say that:

- Although the Venerable Master Shinran discussed "merit-transference in the aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)" as taking place in this world after receiving shinjin,
- Master Rennyo emphasized "this matter of greatest importance in the next life," which is the same as emphasizing only the "aspect of going" to the Pure Land and leaving out the "aspect of returning."

They claim that is only half of the meaning of "birth in the Pure Land." In doing so, they claim, Master Rennyo completely ignored "saving" others, which is the aim of "merit-transference in the aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)." This is, of course, a completely mistaken idea of Master Rennyo's teaching.

Master Rennyo's Position Regarding "Merit-transference in the Aspect of Returning."

Master Rennyo wrote about the "merit-transference in the aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)" in many places. For example, in Letter 38 of the "Chogai Honorable Letters," he wrote:

"Truly, what receiving the treasure of the true and real world, long life, birth in the Pure Land of Peace and Happiness where life is immeasurable and without bounds, and where we will not grow old or even die, occurs when our shinjin is quickly settled and we are guaranteed life in the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy. Further, when we return to this defiled world, we will be able to freely save family members with six-blood relationships through the free exercise of transcendent power."

The reference to the "six-blood relationships" in the above passage is quite interesting and brings to mind the current idea of the "six degrees of separation" by which we are related to everyone in the world. At any rate, after our shinjin is settled and our birth in the Pure Land is guaranteed, we will be born in the Pure Land where we attain Enlightenment and then return to "this world which is dirtied with ignorance and base desires," to save the people with whom we are related by "six-blood relationships."

Again, in "Essence of the 'Hymn of True Faith'" (Shoshinge Tai'i), Master Rennyo wrote:

"The merit transference in the aspect of returning from the Pure Land is what '... Manifesting transcendent powers while cavorting in the forests of blind passions

They assume suitable forms to guide others in the garden of birth and death...' refers to."

If we go to Amida Buddha's Pure Land, we will then return to this shaba world and freely benefit sentient beings using transcendent powers.

As expressed in this passage, the essence of "'merit-transference' in the 'aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)'" is being born in the Pure Land and then returning to this shabaworld (world of delusion in which we must put up with all sorts of suffering) where we can benefit all sentient beings through divine power.

Following the above passage in "Essence of the 'Hymn of Truth Faith'" is the following:

What the passage "... Without fail they reach the land of immeasurable light/And universally guide sentient beings to enlightenment" means is that when the Venerable Master Shinran speaks of Amida's True Land, he means: "The Buddha is 'marvelously mysterious' light, itself, and his land is the land of 'immeasurable' light." And once we reach that land, we immediately return to this "defiled world" where we set about transforming the sentient beings here.

As indicated by the passage, "And once we reach that land, we immediately return to this 'defiled world' where we set about transforming the sentient beings here," Master Rennyō does discuss "merit transference in the aspect of returning."

As we can see from the above passages, Master Rennyō clearly discussed "merit-transference in the aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)." That is why I cannot help but feel that those who make statements such as the following have absolutely no foundation on which to base assertions such as: "Master Rennyō emphasized 'this matter of greatest importance in the next life,' which is tantamount to emphasizing only the 'merit-transference in the aspect of going' of 'birth in the Pure Land', and completely ignores the 'merit-transference in the aspect of returning' which is the aspect of 'saving' others."

This is a completely mistaken point of view.

"Aspect of Returning" After Receiving Shinjin.

Another big mistake is that:

- Although the Venerable Master Shinran emphasized the "aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)" and was not afraid of criticizing governmental authority,
- Master Rennyō emphasized the "aspect of going (to the Pure Land)" and did not speak of the "aspect of returning" which has as its goal helping others.

In the Chapter on Attainment of his "Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment," the Venerable Master Shinran wrote the following about "merit transference in the aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)":

"Returning (from the Pure Land)' means that after being born in that land, receiving tranquility, concentration and right views, and gaining the power of compassionate means, we return and enter the thick forests of birth-and-death, teach and guide all sentient beings, and bring together all to follow the way of the Buddha. As this passage indicates, the 'aspect of returning' refers

to returning to this world to ‘save’ all sentient beings ‘after being born in that land’.”

Again, in the Chapter on Faith of his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” the Venerable Master quotes the following from Sanzengi, Zendo Daishi’s comments on the “Sutra on Meditation on (the Buddha of) Immeasurable Life”:

“Further, eko refers to being born (in the Pure Land) and returning (to this shaba world), and through Great Compassion, entering the world of life and death and ‘teaching and transforming’ the sentient beings here.”

Here, the phrase, “being born (in the Pure Land) and returning (to this shaba world),” points out that after first being born in the Pure Land, we return to save the sentient beings in this world.

Again, the Venerable Master Shinran’s “Hymn of True Faith” contains the passage (which also appears in Master Rennyo’s “Essence of the Shoshinge”):

“Reaching that world where lotuses are stored,
They immediately assume the body of suchness/dharma-nature.
Manifesting transcendent powers,
While cavorting in the forests of blind passions
They assume forms to guide others in the garden of birth-and-death.”

As expressed here, we are born in the “world where lotuses are stored” (the Pure Land) and “assume the body of suchness/dharma-nature” (body that is enlightened). We then return to the “garden of birth-and-death” (world of delusion because of ignorance and base passions) in order to “save” the sentient beings there.

Again, immediately following the above, is the passage:

“Without fail they reach the land of immeasurable light
And universally guide sentient beings to enlightenment.
After being born in the ‘land of immeasurable light’
(the Pure Land) and becoming a Buddha,
They then return to ‘save’ deluded sentient beings.”

As expressed in the above ways, the “aspect of returning” that the Venerable

Master spoke of takes place after being born in the Pure Land and becoming enlightened. He does not refer to it as taking place after receiving shinjin in this world.

And in Article Four of the “Notes Lamenting Differences” (Tannisho), the Venerable Master is quoted as saying:

“Compassion in the Pure Land Path should be understood as first attaining Buddhahood quickly through saying the Nembutsu and then, with the mind of Great Love and Great Compassion, freely benefitting sentient beings as we wish.”

We become a Buddha after our birth in the Pure Land, and with a mind of Great Compassion, return to this world to “save” sentient beings “as we wish.” That is the “merit-transference in the aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)” that the Venerable Master spoke of.

Again, in Letter 20 of “Lamp for the Latter Ages,” the Venerable Master Shinran wrote:

“Moreover, in explaining the ‘mind of sincerity’ (the ‘Notes on the Pure Land’) teaches us to keep a respectful distance and not becoming familiar with those who give themselves to wrongdoing. Rather, it teaches us to draw close to and become companions of our teachers and fellow-doers. As for being friends with wrongdoers, we can become close to and friendly with them only after we go to the Pure Land and return to benefit sentient beings. That, however, is not our own design; only by reliance on Amida’s Vow can we act as we wish.”

As expressed above, while accepting the “mind of sincerity” taught by Zendo Daishi, the Venerable Master said we should “keep a respectful distance” from those who do evil, that approaching those who do evil should be done only after being born in the Pure Land and becoming enlightened. In other words, we should consider saving others only after returning to this world.

This way of expressing it may seem negative, but it absolutely is not. Just before the passage in Article Four of “Notes Lamenting Differences” quoted above, is the passage:

“Compassion in the Path of Sages is to pity, commiserate with, and care for others. It is extremely difficult, however, to save others exactly as we wish.”

As expressed above, even if we pity others in this world and wish to save them, since our true nature is ignorance which fuels selfishness, we are absolutely unable to “save” others as we wish. Only from deep self-reflection can we realize how powerless we are to truly help others. Saving others as we wish can be accomplished only after being born in the Pure Land and becoming a Buddha. That is why “returning (from the Pure Land)” becomes so important. This does not, however, mean that we should not try to help others while we are still in this world. Actually, only by trying to help others do we realize how trivial our efforts really are.

At any rate, as indicated above, it clearly is a great error to say that Master Rennyo twisted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching. Those who make this mistake say:

- By emphasizing “This great matter in the next life,” Master Rennyo stressed only the “aspect of going (to the Pure Land),” and thus
- Did not speak about the “aspect of returning (from the Pure Land).”

Those who make this mistake say the Venerable Master Shinran taught that the “aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)” is what happens after receiving shinjin.

The reason this error regarding “merit-transference in the ‘aspect of returning (from the Pure Land)’” comes about is because those who make this criticism do not understand the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching correctly.

Article 12 of the “Notes Lamenting Differences” contains the passage:

“... (those) who accept the Primal Vow and recite the Nembutsu attain Buddhahood.”

This is the essential point of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching. After our shinjin is settled and we are placed in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land,” our life changes to one of gratitude for the Nembutsu. And when we are born in the Pure Land, we attain the same Enlightenment as a Buddha. We must consider moral and ethical questions, and how we can actively participate in bettering society, but as expressed in Letter 2 of “Collection of (Shinran’s) Honorable Letters”, the first thing we must be concerned about with is resolving “the certainty of our own birth (in the Pure Land)”:

“Mindful of the Buddha’s benevolence, those whose birth (in the Pure Land) is completely settled should hold the Nembutsu in their hearts and respond in gratitude to that benevolence with the wish, ‘May there be peace in the world and may the Buddha’s teaching spread!’”

In other words, our primary concern should be settlement of our shinjin and being in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land.” Only after our shinjin is settled should we be concerned about “peace in the world” and spreading the Buddha’s teaching.

Master Rennyo correctly received this teaching. For example, in Letter 10 of Fascicle V is the following passage:

“What is taught by the Venerable Master (Shinran) and in his school is that shinjin is fundamental. When we discard sundry practices and single-heartedly take refuge in Amida, our birth (in the Pure Land) is assured by the Buddha through the marvelously mysterious working of his Vow. This clearly expresses the teaching in which our shinjin is determined and we enter the ‘group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land’ while still in this world.”

I seem to keep repeating myself but, while the problems of ethics and morality and the betterment of society are very important, they come only after the determination of our shinjin. First, last, and always, it is settlement of our individual shinjin and dwelling in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” that should be our primary concern. This is the essential point of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching, which Master Rennyo correctly transmitted to us.

The above are my opinions about what I have recently heard regarding criticism of how Master Rennyo distorted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching. As I mentioned in the beginning, criticism of Master Rennyo develops from the fact that those who do so have no experience with the most important aspect of what the Venerable Master Shinran taught, namely, receiving “settled shinjin,” and joining the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land,” in other words, residing in the world where we are “saved” by the Primal Vow. That is why such absurd views develop.

On the other hand, another criticism of those who accuse Master Rennyo of distorting the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching is that they are overly concerned about the doctrinal aspects of the Venerable Master’s teaching and forget the practical application of those doctrines. I believe, however, that

rather than concern about doctrine, such persons have no experience in what the Venerable Master emphasized most, namely, receiving “settled shinjin” and being in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land.”

CHAPTER TWO: THE WORLD OF THE GROUP OF THOSE ASSURED IN THE PRESENT

THE ESSENCE OF THE VENERABLE MASTER SHINRAN’S AND MASTER RENNYO’S TEACHING

As related in my previous book, “Understanding Jodo-Shinshu,” I believe the most important aspect of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching is the salvation of being in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in our present life”, which, superficially is expressed in the sacred literature as what we receive in the next world after being born in the Pure Land.

Regarding this point, prior to the Venerable Master Shinran, the Pure Land teaching seemed to speak of salvation only in the next world, but because of the Venerable Master’s insight, it became a teaching of salvation from the present. The Venerable Master Shinran’s reading into the sutras was that being in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” was not what happened in the next world, but rather our condition in the present world when our “shinjin is settled”.

This was not an arbitrary determination by the Venerable Master. Rather, it came from his deep introspection and the joy that resulted from awareness of the salvation that he experienced in this world.

And I believe that what the Venerable Master Shinran wished for us was that same “settled shinjin” and abiding in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land.”

The “Hymn of True Faith” (Shoshinge) expresses the essence of the Venerable Master Shinran’s “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment.” Part of this work states:

“Shakyamuni Tathagata appeared in this world

Solely to teach the ocean-like Primal Vow of Amida;
We, an ocean of beings in an evil age of five defilements*,
Should accept the Tathagata's words of truth."

Further, in the Postscript to that same work, he wrote:

"The great masters and venerable teachers who spread the sutras
Saved countless beings from utter defilement and evil.
With the same mind, all people of the present, whether monk or lay,
Should rely completely on the teachings of these venerable masters."

[*Note: "Five defilements": defilements of period, views, base passions,
sentient beings, life.]

These passages contain the words, "accept" and "rely completely on." As to what it is that the Venerable Master told us to "accept" and to "rely completely on," it is "Tathagata's words of truth." In other words, to accept without doubt Amida Buddha's Primal Vow which Shakyamuni Buddha taught.

Again, where it states, "rely completely on," he is urging us to accept the explanations of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow by the "Seven Eminent Scholar/Monks."* Like Shakyamuni Buddha, they also urge acceptance of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow.

[*Note: "Seven Eminent Scholar/Monks: Ryuju Bosatsu {Nagarjuna Bodhisattva} (2nd -3rd century) and Tenjin Bosatsu {Vasubandhu Bodhisattva} (4th century) of India; Donran {T'an-luan} Daishi (476 -542), Doshaku {Tao ch'o} Zenji (562 -645) and Zendo {Shan-tao} Daishi (613 -680) of China; and Genshin Kasho (942 -1017) and Honen Shonin (1133 -1212) of Japan.]

As already mentioned, the "Hymn of True Faith" summarizes the Venerable Master Shinran's major work, "Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment." And what the Venerable Master urges on us in that entire work is acceptance of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow. I believe what the Venerable Master Shinran wanted for us is "settled shinjin" and being part of the "group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in the present life." And it was Master Rennyo who correctly transmitted that intent to us.

In Letter 10 of Fascicle V previously quoted, Master Rennyo says that what the Venerable Master urged was “shinjin is fundamental”:

“What is taught by the Venerable Master Shinran and in his school is that shinjin is fundamental.”

Again, as expressed in Letter 15 of Fascicle Four, what “settling of shinjin” means is to be in accord with Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow: Therefore, if everyone—whether they are of noble or humble birth, monk or lay—is brought to a definite “settling of shinjin” that is firm and diamond-like, this would truly be in accord with the Primal Vow of Amida Tathagata and in conformity with the fundamental intent of the Venerable Master (Shinran).

And again, in Letter 3, Fascicle Two, Master Rennyo wrote:

“...the essential point transmitted by the founding Master of our school (the Venerable Master Shinran) is but one thing: shinjin. Not knowing this is what distinguishes other schools from our school; knowing it is the mark of those who participate in the true teaching”.

As indicated above, the Venerable Master Shinran stated that shinjin—which is acceptance of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow to cause our birth in the Pure Land—is what is most important. Those who are not aware of this cannot be considered followers of the Jodo-Shinshu teaching.

The person who correctly accepted this teaching by the Venerable Master Shinran and who spread it widely throughout Japan was Master Rennyo. Thus to say that Master Rennyo distorted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching is an absurdity. As I have repeated time and time again, what it means to have “settled shinjin” is conviction that our birth in the Pure Land is already determined, and that we are part of the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in our present life.”

Clearly, what both the Venerable Master Shinran and Master Rennyo wished for us was to become part of that group. In Chapter One I took up the views of various individuals who considered Master Rennyo to have distorted the Venerable Master’s teaching. I believe such individuals have absolutely no experience of the world of “those assured of birth in the Pure Land in our present life.”

The Venerable Master Shinran wrote the following in the Chapter on

Transformed Land of his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment” criticizing those in the Imperial Court who tried to prohibit the Pure Land teaching:

“The emperor and his ministers, acting against the Dharma and violating human rectitude, became enraged and embittered. This is a criticism of those who censured and prohibited the true teaching of the Pure Land and has nothing to do with criticizing authority in general.”

And yet those who criticize Master Rennyo consider the scant twelve characters used to write the above (in the kambun way of writing, only twelve kanji characters are used) to be all there is in the “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment.” That is a delusion. It completely disregards the essence of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching of salvation based on the shinjin of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow.

Those who criticize Master Rennyo use these twelve kanji characters to imply that what the Venerable Master wanted to do was promote an anti-authoritarian policy. They try to imply that Master Rennyo’s statements, such as, “Do not disrespect the ‘magistrates’ and ‘village elders,’” are distortions of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching, and completely miss the Venerable Master’s intent.

I believe such irresponsible opinions arise because of a complete lack of understanding regarding the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” because of “settled shinjin.” And because they are unaware of the world of “settled shinjin,” they do not understand Master Rennyo’s words already quoted:

“... the essential point transmitted by the founding Master of our school (the Venerable Master Shinran) is but one thing: shinjin. Not knowing this is what distinguishes other schools from our school; knowing it is the mark of those who participate in the ‘true teaching’ (shinshu).”

Accordingly, the opinions of those who consider Master Rennyo to have distorted the teaching of the Venerable Master Shinran must be considered the opinions of those about a teaching that has absolutely no connection with Jodo-Shinshu.

GROUP OF THOSE ASSURED IN THE PRESENT LIFE

In “Passages (Concerning) Birth in the Pure Land in the Three Pure Land Sutras” the Venerable Master Shiran wrote:

“In this life we dwell in the ‘group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land’ and we necessarily reach the true and real fulfilled land.”

Here the Venerable Master clearly states that we join the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” in our present life (in the present world). Further, in the Chapter on Attainment of his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” the Venerable Master wrote:

“When ‘ignorant beings filled with base passions’ and the multitudes caught in the cycle of birth-and-death and defiled by evil karma, realize the mind and practice that Amida directs to them, they immediately join the Mahayana group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land.”

And again, in “Hymns on the Pure Land,” the Venerable Master wrote:

“Those who attain true and real shinjin
Immediately join the group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land;
Having entered the stage of non-retrogression,
They are guaranteed to attain nirvana.”

The above quotations by the Venerable Master Shinran clearly state that when our shinjin is settled in the present, we will be included in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land,” i.e., that our enlightenment in the Pure Land is guaranteed.

In Letter 4, Fascicle One of “Honorable Letters,” Master Rennyo wrote:

“Awakening the one thought-moment’ means joining the ‘group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land.’ This is the benefit we gain in this defiled world. The benefit we receive in the Pure Land is attaining nirvana.”

Here Master Rennyo clearly states that being in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” is a benefit in this “defiled world” (edo, our present world in which we are lead astray by our ignorance and base passions). Attainment of “Buddhahood” or “nirvana” (the realm where our sufferings are extinguished) is the benefit that we receive after being born in the Pure Land,

so it refers to the next world.

Speaking personally, my dissertation in graduate school was, “On the Jodo-Shinshu Teaching (of Joining the) ‘Group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land’ in our Present Life.” More than 30 years have passed since I wrote it, but it was from that time that the subject of the “Group of those assured in our present life” has been my primary interest and is what made me realize the truly marvelous nature of our Jodo-Shinshu teaching.

That feeling has not changed in the least even today. The benefit we receive is the true and real benefit that we receive in this present life. It is directly related to the life we are presently leading.

The Venerable Master Shinran emphasized the benefits we receive in our present life. In the Chapter on Faith of his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” he listed ten of them. In the “Hymns on Benefits in the Present” part of “Hymns of the Pure Land” (Jodo Wasan), he wrote 15 wasan regarding benefits. All of them can be considered benefits that derive from being in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land.”

In his “Notes on Passages About the Pure Land” (Jodo Monrui Jusho), the Venerable Master wrote:

“When we receive shinjin and recite his Name,
Amida’s Light embraces and protects us,

And we acquire immeasurable virtue in this life.”

Here the Venerable Master clearly states that when we recite the Nembutsu with “settled shinjin,” we are taken in and embraced by the light of Amida Buddha’s salvation and receive immeasurable virtue (benefits) in this life (this world).

The fourth wasan in the “Hymns on Benefits in the Present” is:

“When we recite Namu Amida Butsu
We gain boundless benefits in the present;
The evil of transmigrating disappears,
And determinate karma and an untimely end are eliminated.”

The phrase, “gain boundless benefits in the present” can only be a benefit of being in the “‘group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land’ in our present

life.”

Further, in his “Hymns of the Pure Land,” the Venerable Master wrote:

“Those who receive shinjin in joy
Are said to be equal to Tathagatas.
Great shinjin is itself Buddha-nature
And Buddha-nature is none other than Tathagata.”

And again, the Venerable Master wrote in “Hymns on the Three Periods”:

“Five billion and 670 millions of years...
That is how much time must pass
Before Miroku (Maitreya) Bosatsu attains Buddhahood.
But those who receive true shinjin
Will become enlightened with the end of life.”

Receiving true and real shinjin Means immediately joining the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” where we attain the same rank as Miroku (Maitreya) Bosatsu, the future Buddha, and are guaranteed Supreme Enlightenment.

Those who join the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” as a result of “settled shinjin,” will become “equivalent to Tathagata (Amida Buddha)” and “the same as Miroku (Maitreya) Bosatsu (Bodhisattva).” That does not mean, however, that our “ignorance and base passions” (bonno) will disappear and that we will become Enlightened here and now. Nor does becoming “the same as Miroku (Maitreya) Bosatsu” mean that we lose our “ignorance and base passions” and reach the same 51st stage of bodhisattvahood that Miroku (Maitreya) Bosatsu has reached. Rather, it means that we are guaranteed enlightenment and become a Buddha with our “ignorance and base passions” intact.

As the Venerable Master wrote in “Hymn of True Faith”:

“The one-thought-moment of joy arising,
Means attainment of nirvana without
Cutting off ignorance and base passions.”

When the “one-thought-moment of joy” (shinjin) awakens in us, in other words, when our “shinjin is settled,” we are guaranteed to be born in the Pure

Land and attain nirvana (become enlightened) even while being burdened with “ignorance and base passions” in our present life. In other words, when our “shinjin is settled,” we are guaranteed to become a Buddha because we join the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land.”

In his “Notes on the Single Recitation and the Many Recitations” (Ichinen Mon’i), the Venerable Master Shinran wrote:

“The true and real benefit is Amida’s Primal Vow. As indicated here, the “true and real benefit” is Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow to bring about our enlightenment.”

Further, the same “on the one Recitation and the Many Recitations” contains the phrase, “acquires the great benefit”. This phrase has the comment, “Know that one receives the benefit of definitely attaining Buddhahood” associated with it.

The comment next to the phrase, “the great benefit acquired by the one thought is supreme in the Takeda copy of the “Hymns of the Pure Land” (Jodo Wasan) is, “Attaining nirvana (becoming Enlightened), is the greatest benefit, than which there is no greater.”

These are the ways in which the Venerable Master Shinran explained that the true and real benefit does not consist of an estate, position or fame. What it means to be included in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” in the “present life,” is that we are given the greatest of all benefits: absolute assurance of being enlightened and becoming a Buddha.

ESSENCE OF THE GENERAL PREFACE TO THE TEACHING, PRACTICE, FAITH AND ATTAINMENT

The General Preface to the Venerable Master Shinran’s “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” begins with:

“Reflecting carefully, I realize that the difficult-to-consider Universal Vow is a great vessel that bears us across the difficult-to-cross ocean. The unhindered light is the sun of wisdom that vanquishes the darkness of our ignorance. Thus when conditions had matured for the teaching of birth in the Pure Land to be revealed, Devadatta provoked Ajatasatru to commit great crimes. Using

this opportunity, Shakyamuni Buddha lead Vaidehi to select the Land of Peace and Happiness by explaining the pure action by which birth (in the Pure Land) is established.”

In other words, after careful reflection, the Venerable Master realized that Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow, which is absolutely beyond the comprehension of the “ignorant filled with base passions” (bomby), is a great ship that allows us to sail across the ocean of delusion from which it is so difficult to be saved, that it is the light which rips asunder the darkness of doubt without being obstructed by anything.

And because that is what it is, when the Pure Land teaching matured to where it could be revealed in this world, Devadatta seduced Ajatasatru into turning against his own father, King Bimbisara, and finally killing him. This tragic incident resulted in Shakyamuni Buddha leading Queen Vaidehi, who desired to live in a world without suffering, to select the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy.

That world is attained by reliance on the Nembutsu of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow. This is called “accommodative virtue”, which refers to a Buddha or a Bodhisattva who has temporarily assumed a form to bring about the salvation of sentient beings. The Venerable Master Shinran considered Devadatta, Ajatasatru, and Vaidehi in this story recounted in the “Meditation Sutra,” to be Bodhisattvas who assumed the forms they did in order to relieve the suffering of sentient beings in this world. What this story tells us is that the Buddha’s Great Compassion is what truly saves those who are filled with evil, such as those who commit the “five perversities”.*

As I have already stated, the above are the opening words of the Venerable Master Shinran’s major work, “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment.” obviously, he wanted first of all, to praise the virtue of the Primal Vow by which he himself was saved, and therefore described the central character in the “Meditation Sutra,” Queen Vaidehi, with the words, “Shakyamuni Buddha lead Queen Vaidehi to select the Land of Peace and Happiness...”

[*Note: “Five perversities”: 1) killing father, 2) killing mother, 3) killing a sage, 4) shedding the blood of a Buddha, 5) causing disturbance in the Sangha.]

Queen Vaidehi was the consort of King Bimbisara of the great country of Magda in ancient India.

King Bimbisara was a devout Buddhist and well-known in Buddhist history for

having constructed the first gathering place for Buddhists, known as Chikurin Temple. According to what is narrated in the sutras, the king and his queen had a very difficult time conceiving a child. Because he was so anxious for an heir, King Bimbisara consulted a soothsayer, who told him that an ascetic living deep in the mountains would die in three years and be reborn as the king's child.

King Bimbisara was so anxious for an heir, however, that he could not wait three years. He therefore ordered certain of his followers to visit the ascetic and persuade him to end his life immediately. If the ascetic refused, King Bimbisara ordered, they were to kill him. And because the ascetic did refuse to kill himself, the king's followers killed the ascetic.

Just before he was killed, the ascetic said that when he was reborn as the king's son, he would in turn kill the king. The king's followers reported this threat to the king.

As the soothsayer had prophesied, Queen Vaidehi found herself pregnant the night of the ascetic's death. King Bimbisara was overjoyed. He called the soothsayer to ask whether the child would be male or a female. The soothsayer replied that it would be a male, and that this male successor would eventually injure the king.

At first King Bimbisara did not feel threatened by the impending birth of his son. Finally, however, he became concerned enough that he ordered Queen Vaidehi to give birth from the top of a cliff, hoping the newly-born infant would be killed. Queen Vaidehi did so, but miraculously, the infant lived. All it received was a small cut in its baby finger.

The infant grew up to be Prince Ajatasatru who rebelled against his father, imprisoned him in a jail with seven walls and finally killed him.

Devadatta was Shakyamuni Buddha's cousin. He is said to have been Ananda's (Shakyamuni Buddha's closest disciple) older brother. Although Devadatta was also a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha, he gradually developed the ambition to become the leader of the fledgling Buddhist organization.

To accomplish that end, he approached Prince Ajatasatru, gained the prince's trust, and proposed that Ajatasatru become the political leader of the land by replacing his father as king of Magda. He then tried to take control of

Shakyamuni Buddha's organization.

After planning this intrigue, Devadatta learned the details of Ajatasatru's birth, which played right into his hands. "Your father planned to kill you!" Devadatta told Ajatasatru. "Because he (King Bimbisara) does not love you, he will not allow you to succeed him. That's why you should do away with your father and assume the reins of power yourself!"

Ajatasatru did not trust Devadatta at first, and actually became angry at Devadatta's suggestion that he kill his own father. After being told that his injured little finger was proof that his father had tried to have him killed, however, Ajatasatru began trusting Devadatta. At first, Ajatasatru tried to starve his father to death by placing him in a jail with seven walls.

The Venerable Master Shinran wrote about this in "Hymns of the Pure Land" (Jodo Wasan) in the following way:

"Not waiting for the ascetic's natural death,
King Bimbisara had him killed.
In retribution for this horrendous act,
He himself was placed in a prison of seven nested walls."

Last year I went on a Buddhist pilgrimage to India. With my own eyes saw the remains of the seven-walled jail within which King Bimbisara was imprisoned; the remains of wheel tracks of the chariot that the king rode; the remains of Osha Castle where King Bimbisara, Queen Vaidehi and Prince Ajatasatru lived; and finally the remains of King Bimbisara's temple, said to be the first Buddhist structure ever built (Chikurin Temple. What remains today, however, was built much later.) The activities of Shakyamuni Buddha, King Bimbisara, Queen Vaidehi, Prince Ajatasatru and Devadatta two-thousand-five-hundred years ago came vividly to mind.

Returning to my narrative, Queen Vaidehi learned that her son had imprisoned her husband in a seven-walled jail and was starving him. She therefore covered her body with a mixture of honey and wheat-flour paste, and filled her ornaments with wine. In this way, she was able to secretly feed her husband. After "three periods of seven days" (21 days), when Ajasé inquired of his guards about his father's condition, he learned how his mother was keeping his father alive.

"My mother has turned against me!" Ajatasatru shouted. "She's a traitor!"

Ajatasatru tried to kill his own mother, but was prevented from doing so by two of his senior counselors, Jivaka and Candraprabha. Queen Vaidehi was placed in prison as a compromise.

The problem of a child using violence to solve a family quarrel is the same social problem that exists today, 2,500 years later. I believe that for a parent, nothing is more frightening than to have a child use violence. How much more difficult would it be for a mother who sacrificed herself to give birth to and raise a child, have that child turn against her?

Choked with tears, Queen Vaidehi faced Mt. Gishaku where Shakyamuni Buddha was then living, and asked him to console her.

Shakyamuni Buddha immediately appeared before Queen Vaidehi.

“O World-Honored one,” Queen Vaidehi said, “what evil have I committed that I gave birth to such a child? Further, O World-Honored one, how could you be related to so evil a person as Devadatta?” she asked.

While acknowledging the evil in her own child, Queen Vaidehi could not help but make allowances for that evil. If only that even-more-evil Devadatta had not been around... if that Devadatta had not tempted my precious son, my precious Ajatasatru would not have killed his father. Even as she sought his help, Queen Vaidehi could not help feeling resentment towards Shakyamuni Buddha because of a desire to protect her own child. Her resentment of Shakyamuni Buddha was all the greater because Devadatta was Shakyamuni Buddha’s cousin.

Queen Vaidehi thus reveals herself as a self-centered, deeply-evil individual who is “ignorant and filled with base passions” (bombu).

But Queen Vaidehi then asks, “O World-Honored one, please teach me of a world in which there is no suffering or agony. That is where I would like to live. Please use your great powers to show me such a pure world!”

Shakyamuni Buddha revealed and explained the various Buddha-worlds in the ten directions. Queen Vaidehi selected Amida Buddha’s Pure Land (the Pure Land of Serene Sustenance), and asked to be born there.

This is expressed in the General Preface to the “Teaching, Practice, Faith and

Attainment” in the following way:

“And using this opportunity (to reveal the Pure Land teaching), Shakyamuni Buddha lead Vaidehi to select the Land of Peace and Happiness.”

And in “Hymns of the Pure Land,” the Venerable Master Shinran wrote:

“From boundless compassion Shakyamuni Buddha
Instructed Queen Vaidehi, leading her to select
Amida’s world of peace and happiness
From all the lands revealed in the pedestal of light.”

The Venerable Master Shinran said that in order to lead Queen Vaidehi from her grief and sorrow as a result of the treachery of her own son—in response to her desire for a realm without suffering or anguish—Shakyamuni Buddha lead her to wish for birth in Amida Buddha’s Pure Land of Ultimate Joy.

The Venerable Master Shinran considered King Bimbisara, Queen Vaidehi, Prince Ajatasatru and Devadatta to be bodhisattvas who took human form in order to “save” deluded beings. He considered this tragedy of Osha Castle a means to lead those who are aware of the “weight of their karmic evil” and their “ignorance and base passions” (bombyu) to the realm of salvation through the Primal Vow. That is why the Venerable Master emphasized that, like Queen Vaidehi, those with true and real shinjin would receive great salvation.

In his “Hymn of True Faith,” the Venerable Master wrote:

“When doers correctly receive the diamond-like mind,
In accord with the one-thought-moment of joy;
They acquire the “three-fold insight”
And reveal the eternal bliss of dharma-nature just as Queen Vaidehi did.

As expressed here, those with the settled “diamond-like mind” (shinjin) and the resulting joyous mind and heart, acquire the same “three-fold insight” (joy, awakening, confidence).

The Venerable Master Shinran considered acquiring the “three-fold insight” to be the same as entering the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” and that doing so guarantees we will be born in the Pure Land where we will attain Enlightenment.

Essentially, what this part of the “Hymn of True Faith” states is that in this present life, those with “settled shinjin” will dwell in the same “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” that Shakyamuni Buddha taught Queen Vaidehi in the story of the Tragedy of Osha Castle.

Regarding this point, in the Chapter on Faith of the “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” it states that since those with “settled shinjin” are guaranteed to become a Buddha, they are the same as Miroku (Maitreya) Bosatsu. Following this passage, the Venerable Master continued:

“Moreover, those who receive the diamond-like mind are the equals of Queen Vaidehi and realize the insights of joy, awakening, and confidence. This is because they have the true mind directed toward them “(in the aspect of) going (to the Pure Land),” which accords with (the working of) the marvelously mysterious Primal Vow.”

In other words, those who receive the shinjin of “Buddha-centered power” receive the same “three-fold insight” of joy, awakening and confidence that Queen Vaidehi did, and dwell in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land.” All this, the Venerable Master Shinran said, is solely due to the power of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow.

He expressed this in the General Preface to his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment”: “... Shakyamuni led (Queen) Vaidehi to select the Land of Peace and Happiness” after being oppressed by her own son and being jailed, after barely escaping being killed herself. While lamenting her difficulties, Queen Vaidehi heard and seriously considered Shakyamuni Buddha’s Dharma Talk. As a result, she entered the world of salvation through the Primal Vow, received the “three-fold insight” and entered the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” in her present life. This is what the Venerable Master Shinran emphasized and urged us to also become.

Near the end of the General Preface are the words:

“Ah, hard it is to encounter, even in many lifetimes, the decisive cause of birth (in the Pure Land)—Amida’s universal vow! How hard it is to realize, even in myriads of kalpas, pure shinjin that is true and real!”

As expressed here, the true and real “pure shinjin” is difficult to receive, but when it is, we are able to appreciate the “power of (Amida Buddha’s) Primal Vow”, and take the greatest of joy in it. I believe this expresses very well the

Venerable Master Shinran's mind and heart that urges us to receive shinjin.

THE ESSENCE OF ARTICLE ONE OF NOTES LAMENTING DIFFERENCES

Article One of the "Notes Lamenting Differences" (Tannisho) is:

"The moment we accept that even ignorant beings such as we will be born in the Pure Land as a result of Amida Buddha's marvelously mysterious vow and the desire to recite the Nembutsu rises within us, we already share in the benefit of being embraced, never to be abandoned. Amida Buddha's Primal Vow does not distinguish between young and old, or good and bad. All that it requires is shinjin, because the sole purpose of the Primal Vow is to save those burdened with karmic evil and defiled with blind passions. That is why we need not worry about doing good; all we need is reliance on the Primal Vow. Or rather, there are no good deeds that surpass the Nembutsu. Further, we need not fear evil, because no evil can obstruct the working of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow to cause our birth in the Pure Land."

This is Article One in its entirety. The "Notes Lamenting Differences" consists of eighteen articles, the first ten of which are the Venerable Master's words (and referred to as "ten lessons from the Master") and the latter eight articles which are the author's (Yuien's) comments deploring misunderstandings regarding the Venerable Master's teachings then current (and referred to as "eight articles on misunderstandings").

Article One quoted above is considered to be a preface to the "ten lessons from the Master." Since the words contained in this article are the very first in the entire work, they very likely remained most vividly in Yuien's memory as being the most important of the Venerable Master's teaching of Jodo-Shinshu.

The content/meaning of Article One is very similar to the General Preface of the "Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment" discussed in the previous section. It first describes the sacredness of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow, that we are "saved" solely by shinjin, that there is no limit to the salvific power of the Primal Vow and that the most evil beings are the primary objects of that Vow.

Here, I would like to examine the phrase in "Notes Lamenting Differences": "...

already share in the benefit of being embraced, never to be abandoned.”

This passage points out that the moment the mind and heart that recites the Nembutsu through acceptance of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow arises, we are already within Amida Buddha’s Light and receive the benefit of “being embraced, never to be abandoned.”

What it means to receive the benefit of “being embraced, never to be abandoned” is that we are already included in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land.” I believe what the Venerable Master Shinran wanted for us more than anything else, is that we dwell in this “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” in our “present life” (gensho).

The “Hymns of the Three Periods” contains the wasan:

“Great Pure Land teachers of India, China and Japan
Embrace us out of pity and compassion.
Guiding us to true and real shinjin,
They bring us to join the “group of those assured (of birth in the Pure Land).”

This wasan is very much like the ending of the “Hymn of True Faith” (Shoshinge) already quoted:

“The great masters and venerable teachers who spread the sutras
Saved countless beings from utter defilement and evil.
With the same mind, all people of the present, whether monk or lay,
Should rely completely on the teachings of these venerable masters.”

Both these passages urge us to accept the teachings of the “Seven Eminent Scholar/Monks” and receive “settled shinjin,” but as in the phrase, “Guiding us to true and real shinjin/They bring us to join the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land,” the fact that we join the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” is emphasized.

I believe the Venerable Master Shinran emphasized it as he did because he experienced that benefit himself.

I believe Yuien considered Article One of the “Notes Lamenting Differences,” to be the most important aspect of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching. That is why I believe he placed it at the very beginning of his work. As I have repeated many times now, however, all that the passage, “The moment we

believe ignorant beings such as we will be born in the Pure Land as a result of Amida Buddha's marvelously mysterious vow and the desire to recite the Nembutsu rises within us, we already share in the benefit of being embraced, never to be abandoned," says is that we join the "group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land" in our "present life."

What it means to be in the "group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land" in our present life" is that when our "shinjin is determined" in the present, we are already among those who are guaranteed to be born in the Pure Land where we will attain the same enlightenment as a Buddha. This is the world that the Venerable Master Shinran experienced himself. It is the true world of salvation which he said is the world of true benefit. That is why he recommends that world to us.

In the previous chapter I said that I believe those who criticize Master Rennyo for distorting the Venerable Master Shinran's teaching do not understand the essence of not only Master Rennyo's teaching, but also of the Venerable Master's. I believe that because the shinjin of such critics is not yet settled—not yet determined—they do not have experience about the "group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in our present life," that the Venerable Master wished us to know, and that is what gives rise to such misunderstandings about Master Rennyo.

THE WORLD OF *HEIZEI GO O*

The term *heizei go jo* refers to the fact that our "karma (for being born in the Pure Land) is determined" (*go jo*) during our "everyday life" (*heizei*). It means the same as being in the "group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in our present life." As I have repeated many times already, the outward expression in the sutras is that we will be included among those in the "group of those assured" when we are born in the Pure Land, but that it was the Venerable Master Shinran who taught us that when our "shinjin is determined" in our present life—in other words, in our "everyday life"—is when we actually join that group.

Actually, however, the Venerable Master Shinran did not use the phrase "karma (for being born in the Pure Land) determined during our everyday life." This phrase was used by Master Kakunyo (1270 - 1351 AD) and by his son Master Zonkaku (1290 -1373 AD). Master Rennyo also frequently used this

phrase.

I believe “karma (for being born in the Pure Land) determined during our everyday life” can be considered an expression that condenses all of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching.

Master Rennyō urged us to always keep “this greatest matter of the next life” in mind. What he meant by that was to urge us to receive “settled shinjin” in our everyday life.

As an example, in Letter 16, Fascicle V of “Honorable Letters,” he wrote:

“And so, because the impermanence of this world creates uncertainty for young and old alike, we should all immediately take to heart this greatest matter of the next life, and, deeply entrusting ourselves to Amida Buddha, recite the Nembutsu.”

As indicated here, “this greatest matter of the next life” that he urged us to consider was relying completely on Amida Buddha, and becoming a person whose “shinjin is settled.”

The foundation for “this matter of greatest importance in the next life” is the following passage in the “Larger Sutra”:

“... later being born in the country of immeasurable life and basking in limitless joy.”

The phrase translated above as “later being born” is *gosho*, literally “next life,” which does not merely mean the next world. It has the meaning of “birth in the Pure Land.” Accordingly, “this matter of greatest importance in the next life” really means, “this matter of ‘birth in the Pure Land’ is what is of greatest importance.”

In Letter 50 of the “Cho gai Honorable Letters” is the phrase:

“Nothing surpasses the urgent desire of being born in that good place in the next life.”

As expressed here, “this matter of greatest importance in the next life” is this matter of greatest importance “in that good place in the next life.” That is why it has the meaning of “this matter of greatest importance in the ‘Buddha’s

country of immeasurable life' (the Pure Land) in the next life." This is another indication that "goshō no ichidaiji refers to "this matter of greatest importance is 'birth in the Pure Land.'"

The reason Master Rennyo stressed keeping "this matter of greatest importance in the next life" in mind was to encourage us to have "settled shinjin" in our everyday life and join the "group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land' in our 'present life.'"

Those who criticize Master Rennyo as being solely concerned about the next world frequently use the following quotation from Letter 10, Fascicle I of "Honorable Letters" as the basis of their criticism:

"We live only as long as a dream or an illusion. Only in the "next life" can we find the joyful result in all eternity. That is why we should abandon the mind that wishes to perform various practices and also the mind that tends to avoid certain things, and single-mindedly rely on Amida Buddha. We need not concern ourselves with other buddhas, bodhisattvas and various deities; rather, we should take refuge exclusively in Amida, knowing that our birth in the Pure Land is already absolutely determined. The gratitude to Amida Buddha we feel as a result causes us to recite the Nembutsu."

But even in this passage, Master Rennyo urges us to have "settled shinjin" and become a person whose "birth in the Pure Land is already absolutely determined" in our everyday life with the phrase, "... take refuge exclusively in Amida, knowing that our birth in the Pure Land is already absolutely determined. The gratitude to Amida we feel as a result causes us to recite the Nembutsu."

Further, critics are fond of quoting the following passage from Letter 2, Fascicle V:

"Those who do not know (the importance of) the next life are said to be foolish, even if they understand eighty thousand sutras and teachings. But those who know about the next life are wise, even if they are unlettered men and women who have renounced the world while remaining in lay life. Accordingly, the heart of our tradition is, more than diligently reading the sacred literature and knowing intellectually, experiencing the one thought-moment of shinjin. This you should know."

As expressed in this passage, "experiencing the one thought-moment of

shinjin,” is what is most important. Thus although the phrase, “... those who know about the next life are wise” is used, it does not refer to merely having intellectual knowledge about the next world; rather, it refers to urging us to “experience the one thought-moment of shinjin” (receive “settled shinjin”) and urges us to be persons whose birth in the Pure Land is guaranteed in our everyday life.

The *heizei go jo* that Master Rennyo spoke of is not something that takes place after our life in this world comes to an end. Rather, it refers to “settled shinjin” and fulfillment in our everyday life of the karmic conditions for our birth in the Pure Land where we will become a Buddha. It does not refer to being born in the Pure Land the moment our “shinjin is settled” in everyday life, nor that we become a Buddha then.

It appears there were expressions current during Master Rennyo’s time that implied you could become a Buddha in the present world if your “shinjin was settled.” Examples of such expressions are:

“I thought Namo Amida Butsu was the Name and title of the Buddha but it is actually an aspect of the person chanting it.” - (said by Master Shoku (1177 - 1247 AD) of the Seizan branch of the Jodo denomination of Buddha-dharma) and “When I chant Namo Amida Butsu, Namo Amida Butsu, there is no distinction between the Buddha and me.” - (said by Master Ippen (1239 -1287 AD, founder of the Ji denomination of Buddha-dharma)

Master Rennyo, however, insisted on following the lead of the Venerable Master Shinran and his teaching of the “two benefits” of: 1) being in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land” in the present, and 2) attaining nirvana in the next world.

In Letter 113 of “Chogai Honorable Letters,” Master Rennyo wrote:

“Many people in this area say that when we receive shinjin we become one with the Buddha and awaken to nirvana. That is absolutely not the case. How pitiful that they believe such a thing. In the Venerable Master (Shinran’s) school, we teach “rightly-assured (of enlightenment),’ and ‘extinction.’ We abandon auxiliary practices and single-mindedly rely on Amida Buddha. Because of the merit of “being taken in and not abandoned,’ we will be among those who are ‘rightly-assured of birth in the Pure Land.’ This is called *heizei go jo*.”

This passage brings to mind the words of the leader of the Seizen school of the Jodo denomination and by the leader of the Ji denomination previously quoted, and criticizes as outrageous the assertions that with shinjin we are already Buddhas.

Further, this passage states that the teaching of the Venerable Master Shinran is that when we single-mindedly rely on Amida Buddha (receive shinjin), we receive the benefit of being in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in this world,” and that we will be born in that Pure Land and attain enlightenment when our life comes to an end. That is what “karma (for being born in the Pure Land) determined during our everyday life” (*heizei go jo*) is.

In other words, the *heizei go jo* that Master Rennyo spoke of is being in the Venerable Master Shinran’s “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in our present life.”

When our “shinjin is settled,” we are assured of birth in the Pure Land just as we are with all our “ignorance and base passions” (*bonno*) intact. This is the true and real benefit that we receive, and is what both the Venerable Master Shinran and Master Rennyo taught. That is why I believe the teachings of both masters are in absolute accord.

As I indicated in Chapter One, I cannot help but believe that those who assert that Master Rennyo distorted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching in order to curry favor with those in authority and by speaking only about the “life to come,” have absolutely no understanding of the essence of the Venerable Master’s teaching.

It is because such people do not understand being in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in our present life” that they do not understand what the Venerable Master Shinran and Master Rennyo taught, and that misunderstandings of Master Rennyo arise.

THE WORLD OF CERTAINTY OF BIRTH IN THE PURE LAND IS CERTAINTY OF SALVATION

The “Creed” (*Ryogemon*) written by Master Rennyo* begins with the following words:

“Casting aside all auxiliary/mixed practices and the mind of self-centered effort with singleness of mind/heart, I rely upon Amida Tathagata for enlightenment in the life to come. I believe that at the moment of entrustment, my birth in the Pure Land is absolutely assured. Any Nembutsu recited thereafter only expresses gratitude to Amida....”

These words express giving up all “auxiliary/mixed practices” performed through “self-centered effort” and also reciting the Nembutsu through that same sort of endeavor in an attempt to be born in the Pure Land. It expresses leaving “that matter of greatest importance” completely up to Amida Buddha.

[*Note: Some scholars feel this work was written a little after Master Rennyo’s time by others, but there is no mistaking the fact that the content of this work is in complete accord with Master Rennyo’s thought.]

The moment we leave everything up to Amida Buddha, our birth in his Pure Land is assured. Because of absolute confidence in the Buddha’s ability to cause our “salvation,” any recitation of the Nembutsu after that moment is just an expression of joy and gratitude for our indebtedness to the Buddha.

I believe the expression, “at the moment of entrustment, birth in the Pure Land is absolutely assured,” is extremely important. The moment we leave it all up to the workings of Amida Buddha, we dwell in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in our present life” and the conviction that our “birth in the Pure Land is settled” (o jo ichijo) arises and we dwell in a state of complete assurance. And as expressed, “any Nembutsu recited thereafter only expresses gratitude to Amida...,” the Nembutsu (Namo Amida Butsu) that we recite in that realm of assurance is a recitation of gratitude for our indebtedness.

Incidentally, Letter 10, Fascicle V, of “Honorable Letters,” which is familiar to all followers of Jodo-Shinshu because it simply and concisely expresses the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching, contains the passage:

“What is taught by the Venerable Master (Shinran) and in his school is that shinjin is fundamental. The reason we do so is because our birth (in the Pure Land) is assured when we discard performing auxiliary/mixed practices and single-heartedly take refuge in Amida because of the marvelously mysterious working of his Vow. This state is expressed as awakening the one thought-moment (of entrusting), and joining the group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land. Reciting the Name of the Buddha (saying Namo Amida Butsu)

should therefore be understood as expressing gratitude to the Tathagata for having established the conditions for our birth (in the Pure Land).”

As expressed above, we are urged to join the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in our present life” through the same “settled shinjin” expressed the “Creed” (Ryogemon), and recite the Buddha’s Name in gratitude.

That is what, more than anything, Master Rennyo wanted for us—that we become persons with true and real shinjin, persons whose “karma (for being born in the Pure Land) is determined in everyday life.” In other words, he wished us to be included in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in our present life.”

As indicated above, what both the Venerable Master Shinran and Master Rennyo urged was that we become persons with “settled shinjin” and join the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in our present life” so that we will become Buddhas in the Pure Land. Both masters are in complete agreement on this.

In his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” the Venerable Master Shinran expressed the joy of those in the “group of those assured in our present life,” in the following words:

“How joyous I am! My heart and mind are rooted in the Buddha-ground of the Universal Vow, and my thoughts and feelings flow within the dharma-ocean, which is absolutely beyond logical comprehension! Profoundly aware of the Tathagata’s immense compassion, I am deeply indebted for my masters’ teaching. My joy grows ever fuller, and my gratitude and indebtedness ever heavier.

As related previously, in the part of the “Hymn of True Faith” related to Queen Vaidehi, the Venerable Master expressed his feeling of shinjin using the term “joy”:

“In accord with the one thought-moment of joy,
They acquire the “three-fold insight”
And reveal the eternal bliss of dharma-nature
Just as (Queen) Vaidehi did.”

In Letter 4 of Fascicle IV, Master Rennyo wrote:

“I have heard that this is precisely what is meant by ‘karma (for being born in the Pure Land) is determined in everyday life.’ This teaching of ‘settled shinjin’ continues to resound in my ears even now. How grateful I am—and how inadequate it is to say only that. And so, overwhelmed and thankful for Amida Tathagata’s Primal Vow of “Buddha-centered power,” I will express in a poem what I wrote above, freely giving way to what rises to my lips:

The mind that relies on Amida even once...
That mind is in accord with true dharma.
Burdened with evil karma and relying solely on the Tathagata,
The power of the dharma carries me
To the (Pure Land in the) West.
When our minds are settled on the path of hearing the Dharma,
Simply say, “Namo Amida Butsu.”

In these passages, Master Rennyo expresses the joy of experiencing the “karma (for being born in the Pure Land) determined during everyday life” (being in the “group of those assured in our present life”) poetically.

As indicated in Chapter One, I believe those who criticize Master Rennyo for distorting the teachings of the Venerable Master Shinran are those who have absolutely no awareness of the world of joy such as expressed by Master Rennyo above.

Such people have no awareness of what both the Venerable Master Shinran and Master Rennyo experienced and wished to pass on to us. As in the traditional saying, “Realizing indebtedness to our parents only after having children of our own,” only when we have children of our own do we realize how indebted we are to our parents. Similarly, as expressed by the Venerable Master Shinran,

“By entering the wisdom of shinjin
We become able to respond in gratitude
To the Buddhas’ benevolence”

(from “Hymns of the Three Periods,” *Shozomatsu Wasan*).

Only when we receive “settled shinjin” do we truly realize the world of being in the “group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land in the present life.” That is what people who criticize Master Rennyo lack. Stating it even more frankly,

they are persons whose shinjin is not yet settled.

In Master Rennyo's language, they are "those whose shinjin is not yet settled" (Letter 3 of Fascicle II), "those lacking shinjin" (Letter 11 of Fascicle V), and "in whom anjin is yet to be realized" (Letters 9 of Fascicle III and 7 of Fascicle IV).

CHAPTER THREE: THE WAY TO SHINJIN

Both the Venerable Master Shinran and Master Rennyo urged us to receive "settled shinjin" and to join the "group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land" in the "present world." But what does it mean to receive "settled shinjin"? And what must we do to receive it?

WHAT IT MEANS TO RECEIVE SETTLED SHINJIN

I discussed shinjin in the section on "Shinjin and Anjin" of Chapter One. In recent years, however, the meaning of shinjin seems to have become confused. It now seems to be mixed with the thought of working for the benefit of society. That, however, is not how the Venerable Master Shinran discussed it.

There really shouldn't be any need for me to say such a thing at this point, but the Venerable Master Shinran's shinjin is the shinjin of the 18th Vow. In that vow, the "three minds" of "sincere mind", "entrusting mind", and "mind aspiring to be born in the Pure Land" are mentioned. Of these, the Venerable Master Shinran said that the "entrusting mind" is what shinjin is centered on. Further, because shinjin is the cause of our birth in the Pure Land, he created the phrase, "shinjin is the proper cause of our birth in the Pure Land". There is absolutely nothing about working for the good of society, or moral or ethical concerns in that phrase.

I have already mentioned this, but the Venerable Master Shinran wrote that shinjin was a lack of doubt, as indicated in the following passages in the Chapter on Faith of his "Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment":
"... completely untainted by the hindrance of doubt"

and " ... no mixture of doubt."

Further, in his "On the one Recitation and the Many Recitations," he wrote:

“Shinjin is hearing the vow of Tathagata and being free of doubt.”

And again, in his “Notes on the Inscription on Sacred Scrolls”, he wrote:

“Entrusting is to be free of doubt, believing deeply and without two minds about it, that the Tathagata’s Primal Vow is true and real.”

As indicated in all the above passages, shinjin refers to absence of doubt regarding the power of the Primal Vow to save us. Shinjin is written with the kanji characters for “faith” (shin) and “mind/heart” (jin), but as the Venerable Master pointed out, the “faith” part of it is not what we contrive on our part. Rather, it is what is given to us by Amida Buddha. That is why the term “faith mind” is not a very satisfactory equivalent for shinjin, even though it is an accurate literal equivalent.

In the Chapter on Faith of his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” the Venerable Master Shinran wrote:

‘...by shinjin is meant the shinjin received by the ‘merit transference’ (eko) of the ‘power of the Primal Vow’ (hongan-riki).’

Further, in Article Six of the “Notes Lamenting Differences,” he is quoted as saying:

. “..the shinjin received from Tathagata.”

As indicated by the above quotations, shinjin is what is given to us by Amida Buddha as a result of “merit transference of Buddha-centered power.”

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I would like to state clearly that I am not criticizing the moral or ethical concerns of Nembutsu followers of the Jodo-Shinshu teaching, nor am I suggesting that they should not be concerned about working for the good of society. These are very important concerns. But it is a great mistake to consider moral or ethical concerns, or working for the good of society, is all that implied by shinjin.

The shinjin that the Venerable Master Shinran spoke of is the cause of our birth in the Pure Land. It is not having doubt about the Primal Vow to save us.

Moral and ethical concerns and working for the good of society are very

important, but that is not “shinjin is the proper cause for our birth in the Pure Land.” Rather, that is the error of what might be called “performing auxiliary/mixed practices is the proper cause.”

As to what “settled shinjin” is, the Venerable Master Shinran wrote the following in Letter 13 of “Lamp for the Latter Ages”:

“Since true shinjin is awakened through the working of the two honored ones, Shakyamuni and Amida, the settling of shinjin occurs when we are “grasped.” Thereafter we dwell in the stage of “being embraced” until born into the Pure Land.”

Again, in Article One of the “Notes Lamenting Differences”:

“The moment we accept that even ignorant beings such as we will be born in the Pure Land as a result of Amida Buddha’s marvelously mysterious vow....”

As indicated in the above quotations, shinjin is accepting Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow that guarantees birth in the Pure Land. In Letter 13 of Fascicle I, Master Rennyo wrote:

“What, then, do we mean by shinjin? First of all, when we set aside all auxiliary / mixed practices and giving no thought to deities or other buddhas, take refuge with singleness of heart in Amida Tathagata, the Tathagata embraces us with his light, never to abandon us. This is precisely how the one thought-moment of faith is decisively established.”

And again, in Letter 10, Fascicle III, he wrote:

“The right understanding of our school’s mind at ease is relying single-heartedly and steadfastly on Amida Tathagata without striving. We recognize how marvelously mysterious it is that, although wretched beings burdened with evil karma and blind passion, the working of Amida’s Vow—the strong cause (of our birth in the Pure Land)—is directed toward saving just such worthless beings. And when that single thought free of doubt becomes firm, Amida unflinchingly sends forth his unhindered light and embraces us. Those who have experienced a decisive settling of shinjin in this way will all, each and every one, be born in the fulfilled land—ten people out of ten.”

What this means, in other words, is that “settled shinjin” based on “Buddha-centered power” is established within us. Essentially, what Master Rennyo

wrote is relying “single-mindedly and solely” on Amida Buddha. That is exactly what the Venerable Master Shinran taught—absolute conviction of birth in the Pure Land because of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow. This is solely due to the Buddha’s vow power, and is expressed using phrases such as, “shinjin of merit transference of the power of the Primal Vow” and “shinjin given to us by the Tathagata.”

BUDDHA-DHARMA IS COMPLETED WITH HEARING

Then what should we do to have “settled shinjin”?

At this point, there really shouldn’t be a need for me to say this, but Jodo-Shinshu is not a teaching in which we perform ascetic practices through “self-centered effort” (*jiriki*). Rather it is how we are saved by Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow through “Buddha-centered power” (*tariki*).

And as stated in the previous section, shinjin is what we receive from Amida Buddha, as expressed in phrases such as, “shinjin of merit transference of the power of the Primal Vow” and “shinjin given to us by the Tathagata.”

That does not, however, mean that those who have not yet received “settled shinjin” do not have to do anything. In Article 193 of “Heard and Recorded During Master Rennyo’s Lifetime” is the passage:

“There’s an old saying, ‘Stone is extremely hard and water is extremely soft, and yet that soft water can bore a hole in stone. If you reach down to the depths of the originally pure mind/heart, how can Enlightenment not be attained?’

“If even those without shinjin listen to the teaching of Buddha-dharma from the bottom of their mind/heart, they absolutely will receive shinjin because the power of the Buddha’s Great Compassion is added. All we need do is expend effort in listening to the honorable teaching.”

This is what Master Rennyo said. Again, in Article 185 of that same work, is the passage: “... teach (the ignorant and illiterate) to just listen and accept shinjin. There is nothing in our Jodo-Shinshu teaching other than this.”

As can be determined from the above, Master Rennyo urges us to “just listen

(to the Dharma)” for the purpose of “settled shinjin.”

Again, in Article 155 of that same work, Master Rennyō said: “Make listening to the teaching of Buddha-dharma primary and worldly affairs secondary. “Listening to the teaching of Buddha-dharma only in the leisure you have after your worldly affairs are taken care of is regrettable indeed because there is no tomorrow when it comes to listening to the Dharma,” Master Rennyō said. He then quoted a poem by the Venerable Master Shinran to support his position:

“Those who fight through the flames of the great-thousand worlds
To hear the Buddha’s Honorable Name
Are assured of attaining
The state of non-retrogression.”

Master Rennyō stressed the importance of “hearing” using the phrase “great-thousand worlds” from the Venerable Master Shinran’s “Hymns of the Pure Land” (Jodo Wasan) to reinforce his point.

When he was 29 years of age, the Venerable Master Shinran discarded the way of “self-centered effort” and accepted the way of “Buddha-centered power.” As I have stated previously, he considered shinjin to be completely based on “Buddha-centered power” as expressed in phrases such as, “shinjin of merit transference of the power of the Primal Vow” and “shinjin given to us by the Tathagata.”

In the General Preface to his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” the Venerable Master Shinran wrote:

“Ah, hard to encounter, even in many lifetimes, is Amida’s Universal Vow, the decisive cause of birth (in the Pure Land)! Hard to realize, even in myriads of kalpas, is pure shinjin that is true and real, so if you realize this practice and shinjin, rejoice at the conditions from the distant past that have brought it about!”

Again, in his “Passages on the Pure Land Way”, he uses almost exactly the same words:

“Ah, hard to encounter, even in many lifetimes, is Amida’s Universal Vow, the decisive cause of birth (in the Pure Land). And hard to realize, even in myriads of kalpas, is pure shinjin that is true and real, so if you realize shinjin, rejoice at the conditions from the distant past that have brought it about.”

The only difference in these two passages are “practice and shinjin” in the first passage and “shinjin” in the second. As they indicate, when we receive shinjin, we should rejoice at having been cultivated by the Buddha from the distant past. These quotations indicate that all the effort in receiving shinjin comes from Amida Buddha’s side. We cannot, however, say that the Venerable Master did not do anything about the shinjin he himself received because of that.

The Venerable Master Shinran earnestly sought the way on Mt. Hiei for 20 years, from the time he was nine years of age. But he wrote the following in the Chapter on Transformed Land of his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment” regarding those twenty years of struggle on Mt. Hiei. This was, of course, after meeting Master Honen at the age of 29:

I, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Shakyamuni, abandoned the sundry practices and took refuge in the Primal Vow during the 1st year of Kennin (1201 AD).

This passage announces that he abandoned the “sundry practices” that he had followed on Mt. Hiei and relied exclusively on the “Buddha-centered power” of the Primal Vow after meeting Master Honen.

Accordingly, there is no need for those of us who receive the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching to repeat the sort of “difficult practices” that he performed with “self-centered effort” for 20 years. That is why the Venerable Master Shinran secluded himself in Rokkaku Temple and was lead to Master Honen through the guidance of Shotoku Taishi (574 - 622 AD) in a dream. This is recorded in “Letters of Esshinni”:

“And just as (the Venerable Master Shinran) had confined himself for a hundred days in Rokkaku Temple, he visited Master Honen daily for a hundred days, regardless of the difficulties, rain or shine. He heard that “good person” (i.e., Master Honen) speak of the next life, that in order to escape the suffering of birth and death, only single-minded reliance on the Nembutsu is necessary....”

Just as he secluded himself in Rokkaku Temple for a hundred days, the Venerable Master Shinran attended Dharma Talks given by Master Honen for a hundred days without missing a single day.

And as indicated by Esshinni’s words, “.. to escape the suffering of birth-and-death, only single-minded reliance on the Nembutsu is necessary,” he

accepted Master Honen's words about the way to transcend this world of "birth-and-death," without doubt. This is recorded in Article Two of the "Notes Lamenting Differences":

"As for me, Shinran, there is nothing other than accepting what my revered teacher told me, 'Just say the Nembutsu and be saved by Amida.' Nothing else is involved."

As indicated by the words, "nothing other than accepting what my revered teacher told me," we can infer that he continued listening to Master Honen's words.

Further, the Venerable Master placed great importance on the following words in the "Larger Sutra":

"...hearing the 'name and title,' and joyfully thinking of (Amida Buddha) even once with shinjin...."

This passage is considered to be so important, it is referred to as the "fulfillment text of the Primal Vow." The Venerable Master considered the phrase, "listening to the 'name and title'" of this passage to be especially important. The "name and title" (myo go) of course, is the name and title of Amida Buddha (Namo Amida Butsu). He commented on these words in the Chapter on Faith of his "Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment" in the following way:

"The word 'hear' in the passage from the Larger Sutra means that sentient beings, having heard how the Buddha's Vow arose—its origin and fulfillment—are completely free of doubt. That is what 'to hear' means."

From this we see that "hearing" (mon) means listening to and accepting the reason Amida Buddha established his Primal Vow and the extraordinary amount of time he spent performing religious practices to fulfill it.

Regarding this, Master Rennyo wrote the following in Letter 15 of Fascicle I:

"Further, we are not saved simply by repeating the 'name and title' with no understanding of it. The (Larger) Sutra teaches that when we hear the "name and title," we realize shinjin and joy. Hearing the 'name and title' is not hearing the six-characters of na-mo-a-mi-da-butsu unreflectively. Rather, it refers to meeting a good teacher, receiving his teaching, and entrusting ourselves

(namu) to the ‘name and title’ of Namo Amida Butsu.”

As indicate by the above, we should “listen” without doubt to the reason for the “name and title” in the Primal Vow that absolutely guarantees to save us.

We thus see how important “listening” is for “settled shinjin,” even for the Venerable Master Shinran. And through Master Rennyo’s quotation of the Venerable Master’s wasan in Article 193 of “Heard and Recorded During Master Rennyo’s Lifetime” already quoted, we see that both Master Rennyo and the Venerable Master considered “listening” to be the basis of “settled shinjin”:

“Those who fight through the flames of the great thousand worlds
To hear the Buddha’s Honorable Name
Are assured of attaining
The stage of non-retrogression.”

As to what we “listen” to, it is the Honorable Name of Namo Amida Butsu mentioned in the phrase “hearing the name and title” of the “text on the fulfillment of the Vow.” Regarding this, as Master Rennyo wrote in Letter 15, Fascicle I of “Honorable Letters” already quoted:

“Hearing the ‘name and title’ is not hearing the six-characters of “na-mo-a-mi-da-but-su” unreflectingly. Rather, it refers to meeting a good teacher, receiving his teaching, and entrusting ourselves to the ‘name and title’ of Namo Amida Butsu.”

Specifically, what it means to “listen” to the “name and title” is exactly what the Venerable Master Shinran wrote in the Chapter on Faith of his “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment” regarding “hearing” the “reason for the origin and fulfillment of the Buddha’s Vow.”

I am constantly repeating this but “reason for the origin and fulfillment of the Buddha’s Vow” refers to why Amida Buddha established his Primal Vow, which is to save me, “ignorant and filled with base desires” as I am, and absolutely incapable of becoming enlightened through my own efforts.

The “origin” of “origin and fulfillment” in the above paragraph is the infinitely long period (five kalpas of contemplation) that the Buddha spent considering how best to “save” me, and what he had to do to fulfill the vow (Primal Vow) that he established. “Fulfillment” refers to the fact that the Primal Vow which

will absolutely “save” me (through the “name and title”) has been brought to fruition.

And as expressed, “... sentient beings, having heard how the Buddha’s Vow arose—its origin and fulfillment—are completely free of doubt. That is what ‘to hear’ means,” is what the Venerable Master referred to when speaking of “listening” without doubt.

Regarding this, in “On the one Recitation and the Many Recitations,” it states: “Hearing the ‘name and title’ means hearing the ‘name and title’ that embodies the Primal Vow. ‘Hear’ means hearing the Primal Vow free of doubt and expresses what shinjin is,” pointing out that it does not refer to just listening passively, but listening without doubt. That truly is what “hearing” is. And that “hearing,” just as it is, is what shinjin is. Listening until we reach a state where there is absolutely no doubt is extremely difficult. I believe that is why the shinjin of “Buddha-centered power” is said to be the “difficult-to-acquire shinjin.”

Regardless of how much you listen to the “reason for the origin and fulfillment of the Buddha’s vow,” if you do so through logical analysis, you will always have doubt regarding it. In Letter 9 of “Lamp for the Latter Ages” (Mattosho), the Venerable Master Shinran wrote:

“There must be no calculation on our part in the act that leads to birth in the Pure Land. ... We must simply open ourselves to Amida Buddha.”

As indicated in this passage, the problem of “birth in the Pure Land” is not something that we “ignorant beings filled with base passions” can do anything about. All we can do, according to the Venerable Master, is to leave it completely up to Amida Buddha.

The problem, then, is why it is so difficult to leave it completely up to Amida Buddha. And the answer is that it is due to our being so taken in by our desire to be “logical” and our desire to “understand” it all. There is understanding, but it is spiritual and not logical.

Only when we sense what ignorant beings we are, only when we sense the base passions that truly move us and simply acknowledge it will we be able to break the bonds of “logic” and the desire to “understand,” that bind us. That is when doubts about the Primal Vow disappear, and when we are able to leave our salvation completely up to the workings of Amida Buddha.

Okaru (1801 - 1857 CE), considered a *myokonin*, a person enlightened by the Jodo-Shinshu teaching, expressed her understanding of this in the following way:

“Why not listen to the Way of Truth...
It isn't an unreasonable teaching at all.
Don't you want to hear what is true and real?
Makes me wonder what you want to hear...
Though you are entitled to walk freely,
Why not give up all attachments
And leave it all to Amida?”

The last lines, “Why not give up all attachments/And leave it all to Amida?” is an expression of a world in which everything is left to the Primal Vow without the least bit of doubt.

Accordingly, in Jodo-Shinshu, and particularly in Master Rennyō's teachings, “Regardless of your ‘lack of shinjin,’ if you have the mind/heart to listen, you will receive shinjin because of Amida Buddha's Great Compassion. The teaching of Buddha-dharma ends with listening.” And also, as in the passage, “Even the most complaining sentient being will receive shinjin as a result of listening,” the way to shinjin is by way of listening.

It goes without saying, however, that it is not the “listening” that we do that allows us to receive shinjin. From first to last, it is the shinjin:

- that is “given to us by the Tathagata”
- of “merit transference” of the “power of the Primal Vow”.

This is also indicated in a passage in Master Zonkaku's “Seen and Heard (Regarding the) Pure Land”:

“Hearing is hearing with ‘Buddha-centered power.’ Settlement of my shinjin is determined by Amida's Vow Power.”

Both of the above have not the least bit of “self-centered effort” in them. The important point here is, “Hearing is hearing with ‘Buddha-centered power.’”

Another poem by Okaru expresses it in the following way:

“After ‘hearing’ Amida's Great Compassion
(I see) that his salvation

Comes even before hearing.
There's absolutely no requirement to listen.
And since it's not required,
All that's left is 'listening'..."

There is no virtue in listening, regardless of how hard we try. But when we hear, we are cultivated to the fullest by "Buddha-centered power." Accepting that is what the Jodo-Shinshu teaching is all about.

(The difference between "listening" and "hearing" can be made clearer by the phrases, "I'm listening," where we express the feeling of being open to what the other wishes to say, and "I hear you," in which we express the feeling of understanding what the other said.)

CHAPTER FOUR: MASTER RENNYO'S VIRTUOUS LEGACY

Master Rennyō was born in the Otani Hongwanji located in the Higashiyama area of Kyoto on the 25th day of the 2nd lunar month of the 22nd year of Oei (1415 AD), the first son of the Seventh Spiritual Leader of the Hongwanji, Master Zonnyō (1396 -1457 AD). The name he was given at birth was Hotei but during his childhood he was referred to as Kotei. His father, Master Zonnyō, was then 20 years of age, and had yet to succeed his own father Master Gyonyō (1367 - 1440 AD) as Spiritual Leader of the Hongwanji.

Master Rennyō's birth mother is considered to be a servant who served his grandmother (Master Gyonyō's wife). According to the work "Gathering Dust Record", written by Master Rennyō's tenth son, Jitsugo, when Master Rennyō was six years of age, his birth mother left the Hongwanji, leaving the following words:

"I am from the Western Provinces and not meant to be here...."

It is said that she left on the 28th day of the 12th lunar month during the 27th year of Oei (1420 AD). No one knows where she went. Master Rennyō considered this 28th day of the 12th lunar month to be the day of his mother's passing, and is said to have held a memorial service for her on that day every year without a break.

There are many theories as to where Master Rennyō's birth mother was born.

They include Bingo-no-tomo, Ono-michi, Shiga, and Bungo-no-tomo, but at present there is no way to determine with absolute certainty just where.

After Master Rennyo's birth mother left the Hongwanji, his father, Master Zonnyo, married a woman named Nyoenni, who was from a warrior-class family named Ebina. Accordingly, it can be assumed that Master Rennyo was raised by her.

Tradition has it that Nyoenni was very cold towards Master Rennyo. She gave birth to her own son, Ogen, during the 5th year of Eikyo (1433 CE), when Master Rennyo was 19 years of age. The relationship between Master Rennyo and his step-mother seems to have become fixed from that time on, with his step-mother far more concerned about her own son than with Master Rennyo.

I should add that this was when the fortunes of the Hongwanji were at its lowest point. The years of Master Rennyo's childhood and youth were spent in very unfavorable circumstances, both materially and emotionally. But as I have already related, even in such difficult circumstances, "Renjun's Record" (Renjun-ki) states:

"At the age of 15, Master Rennyo fervently expressed his desire to rebuild the Venerable Master (Shinran's) 'dharma-flow'" (i.e., the Jodo-Shinshu teaching). And in "A Record of Master Rennyo's Meritorious Deeds" (Rennyo Shonin Itoku-ki), it states that:

"From the age of 15, the former master (Rennyo) repeatedly expressed his determination to bring about the prosperity of the (Jodo-) Shinshu teachings. That was during the 1st year of Eikyo (1429 CE). During the 3rd year of Eikyo (1431 CE), when he was 17 years of age, in accordance with the custom of the Hongwanji then, he received tonsure at Shoren Temple, a high-ranked temple within the Tendai denomination of Buddha-dharma. He was given the Dharma name of Rennyo and the secular name of Kenju. During this period, he dedicated himself to studying the Venerable Master Shin-ran's writings.

In "Renjun's Record," is the following passage:

"He constantly read the 'Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment' and 'Essence of the Kyogyoshinsho' (Rokuyo sho), and also wore out three copies of "Notes on Settled Peace of Mind" (Anjin Ketsujo-sho). In this way, he ceaselessly studied the sacred literature. Again, in "Eigen's Record" it states:

“I also heard for certain that Master Rennyo wrote out seven copies of ‘Notes on Settled Peace of Mind’.”

As indicated in the above passages, Master Rennyo studied works such as the Venerable Master Shinran’s “Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment,” Master Zonkaku’s “Essence of the Kyogyoshinsho ” and other works such as the “Notes on Settled Peace of Mind.” The fierce study during his youth which allowed Master Rennyo to correctly understand the Jodo-Shinshu teaching was the impetus for his actively spreading the Nembutsu teaching in later life.

During the 6th lunar month of the 3rd year of Kojo (1457 CE), when Master Rennyo was 43 years of age, his father, Master Zonnyo, the Seventh Spiritual Leader of the Hongwanji, passed away.

Master Rennyo’s step-mother, Nyoenni, wanted her own son, Ogen, to succeed Master Zonnyo and plotted to bring that about. She almost succeeded. Because of the strong support of his uncle, Nyojo, however, Master Rennyo was able to succeed his father and became the Eighth Spiritual Leader of the Hongwanji.

After assuming leadership, Master Rennyo, in addition to copies of the sacred literature, also began giving *myogo* (the written form of the “name and title” of Amida Buddha, “Namo Amida Butsu,” used during worship) and letters to Hongwanji followers.

Rather than the six-character *myogo* (“Namo Amida Butsu”) that is most common today, however, at first Master Rennyo brushed the ten-character *myogo* of Kimyo Jinjippo Mugeko Nyorai, which means “I take refuge in the Tathagata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters.” Later, he changed this to the six-character Namo Amida Butsu that we use today. It is said that Master Rennyo brushed as many as a hundred of these six-character *myogos* in a single day.

Master Rennyo wrote the first letter that was later collected under the title “Honorable Letters” (Gobunsho), four years after succeeding his father. This was during the 2nd year of Kansho (1461 CE), when he was 47 years of age. It was written in response to a request by Dosai (also known as Zenju) of Kanamori in Omi Province, and is referred to as “The very first ‘honorable letter’.” From that first letter, until the year before Master Rennyo passed away at the age of 85 (his last letter was written during the 12th lunar month of the

7th year of Meio, 1498 CE), his output was prodigious. The collection that is referred to as the “Chonai Honorable Letters” (Chonai Gobunsho) consists of 85 letters, and what is referred to as “Chogai Honorable Letters” (Chogai Gobunsho) contains 139.

Eight years after succeeding his father as the Spiritual Leader of the Hongwanji, during the 6th year of Kansho when Master Rennyō was 51 years of age, the warrior/monks of Mt. Hiei attacked the Otani Hongwanji twice—during the 1st lunar month and during the 3rd lunar month. They did so because of the vigor with which Master Rennyō spread the Nembutsu teachings and his success in attracting followers. This angered the established Buddhist institutions.

(The Otani Hongwanji began as the Otani Mausoleum where the Venerable Master Shinran’s remains were buried. It was established by the Venerable Master’s daughter Kakushinni during the 9th year of Bunei (1272 CE), so it had been in that area for 193 years when it was destroyed.)

Following destruction of the Otani Hongwanji, Master Rennyō changed residence many times, living in the capital city of Kyoto, and in places like Katata and Kanamori in Omi Province (modern Shiga Prefecture). During the 3rd year of Bummei (1471 AD) when he was 57 years of age, Master Rennyō set out on a journey to spread the Nembutsu teaching in the Northern District and eventually arrived at Echizen Yoshizaki (modern Fukui Prefecture).

Less than three months after reaching the remote area of Yoshizaki, which Master Rennyō described in Letter 8, Fascicle I of “Honorable Letters” as being, “... a clearing in the mountain, which for many years had been the habitat of ‘tigers and wolves,’” a temple and living quarters were built. Within a year, many structures called taya, where followers could stay while being taught by Master Rennyō, were also constructed. Followers from many different areas of Japan crowded in to hear his Dharma Talks.

Master Rennyō’s increasing popularity was very satisfying for him. Unfortunately, that popularity was also the cause of friction with those in authority in the area, the *shugo* who maintained law and order, and the *jito* district administrators. Master Rennyō tried to avoid discord with those in authority as much as possible. I believe he was consistent throughout his life in not seeking solutions to the problems of his fledgling organization by lawsuits and other appeals to those in authority.

Item two of Letter 3, Fascicle II of “Honorable Letters,” is:

“Do not slight the various kami (deities) and buddhas and the bodhisattvas. The first of the six items in Letter 10, Fascicle III, is:

- Do not slight Shinto Shrines
- Do not slight buddhas and bodhisattvas revered in other temples ... (omitted)
- Do not slight *shugo* constables and *jito* administrators.

As indicated in these passages, Master Rennyo cautioned his followers against slighting Shinto Shrines, the buddhas and bodhisattvas revered in other temples, and governmental authorities. Further, in Letter 11 of Fascicle III, he wrote:

“... (the Venerable Master Shinran) urged us to observe the principles of humanity, justice, propriety, wisdom and sincerity; that we should honor the “king’s law”; and that, deep within, rely completely on the shinjin based on the Primal Vow of ‘Buddha-centered power.’”

In Letter 12 of Fascicle III Master Rennyo wrote:

“In particular, make the ‘king’s law’ fundamental and, giving priority to (the principles of) humanity and justice, follow generally-accepted customs; deep within yourself, however, maintain the “settled mind” (anjin) of our tradition; and, outwardly, conduct yourself in such away that the transmission of the dharma you have received will not be evident to those of other sects and other schools.

Master Rennyo cautioned his followers to not make light of those in authority and urged them to “make the king’s law fundamental.”

I have already mentioned this but those who criticize Master Rennyo take his statements such as “Do not slight buddhas and bodhisattvas revered in other temples” and “Do not slight Shinto Shrines,” to be expressions that court those in authority. These scholars say such statements go against the Venerable Master Shinran’s position of being anti-authority, and corrupt the Venerable Master’s shinjin. But, I repeat, that is the position of those who misunderstand the shinjin that the Venerable Master Shinran taught.

The Venerable Master Shinran’s shinjin is the shinjin of the 18th Vow. In “on

the one Recitation and the Many Recitations,” he wrote, “Shinjin is hearing the Tathagata’s Honorable Vow without doubt,” pointing out that shinjin is accepting the salvation of the Primal Vow without a second thought.

Shinjin is not engaging in anti-authoritarian activities, nor is it simply not worshipping other buddhas or gods; rather, it is accepting the truth of the Primal Vow and is the correct cause of our birth in the Pure Land.

When we accept the truth of the Primal Vow, we will not, of course, worship other buddhas or gods. But simply not worshipping other buddhas or gods without an acceptance of the Primal Vow is absolutely not what shinjin is.

I seem to keep repeating myself but the shinjin that the Venerable Master Shinran taught is simply acceptance of the Primal Vow, nothing else.

I also mentioned this before, but regarding “king’s law is primary”, Article 37 of “Items Agreed Among Brothers” contains the passage:

“Needless to say, in our school we make the ‘Buddha’s Law’ primary. The reason the ‘king’s law’ is followed in the world is solely to further the teaching of Buddha-dharma. At that time, however, many thought the ‘king’s law’ came first and the ‘Buddha’s Law’ second. This is absurd.”

What Master Rennyo wished to accomplish with the words quoted above was to lessen discord between his organization and the outside world, which included the power of temples and shrines that felt threatened by his teachings, the *shugo* guardians of the peace, the *jito* district administrators, and the feudal lords.

During the 4th year of Bummei (1472 AD), Master Rennyo conducted the 13th Memorial Service for his step-mother, Nyoenni. In “A Record of Gathering Dust” this is recorded in the following way:

“Nyoenni passed away on the 4th day of the 10th lunar month during the 1st year of Kansho (1460 CE). Later, during the 4th year of Bummei (1472 CE), the 13th-year memorial service for her, and other Buddhist activities were held at the Yoshizaki Temple in Echizen Province. (Although his step-mother treated him badly during his childhood) Master Rennyo always treated her with the respect that he wanted to give his birth-mother. Nyoenni regretted her attitude toward Master Rennyo when he was a child, and expressed remorse for her past actions. She awakened to the ‘shinjin of joy’ and achieved her

cherished desire of birth in the Pure Land. Master Rennyo regarded his step-mother—who had treated him so coldly when he was a child and had even tried to prevent him from succeeding his father as the Spiritual Leader of the Hongwanji—as he regarded his birth mother. It is said that Nyoenni regretted how she had treated Master Rennyo, repented, received “settled shinjin,” and was born in the Pure Land.”

I believe Master Rennyo’s gentle character can be determined from the above passage.

During the time he was in the Yoshizaki area—specifically the 5th year of Bummei (1473 CE) when he was 59 years of age— Master Rennyo had the Venerable Master Shinran’s “Hymn of True Faith” (Shoshinge) and “Hymns in Japanese” (Wasan) printed in book form so it would be more widely available.

The services held at the Hongwanji until then included the chanting of Zendo Daishi’s “In Praise of Birth in the Pure Land” (Ojo Raisan). From about the beginning of the Bummei era (began in 1469 CE), however, this was changed to chanting the “Hymn of Truth Faith” followed by several verses of “Hymns in Japanese.” Clearly this is further indication of how faithfully Master Rennyo wished to follow the teaching of the Venerable Master Shinran, and the great importance he placed on shinjin.

During the 8th lunar month of the 7th year of Bummei (1475 CE) when he was 61 years of age, Master Rennyo left the Yoshizaki area. Passing through Wakasa, Konama, Tanba and Settsu, by year’s-end, he had moved to Deguchi Village in Kawachi Province (Kozen Temple). The next year he visited Kyogyo Temple in Tonda, Settsu; Shinsho Temple, presently Sakai Betsuin in Sakai; and other areas to spread the Nembutsu teaching even wider. During the 1st lunar month of the 10th year of Bummei (1478 CE) when he was 64 years of age, Master Rennyo moved to Yamashina, a suburb of Kyoto, to rebuild the Hongwanji Headquarters Temple. The rebuilding was largely completed by the 15th year of Bummei (1483 CE). The structure was far larger than the Otani Hongwanji which it replaced.

About that time, many leaders of different Pure Land schools and their followers joined Master Rennyo and became part of the Hongwanji. Kyogo of the Bukkoji branch joined Master Rennyo during the 13th year of Bummei (1482 CE), Zenchin of Izumo Temple of the Goshoji branch joined during the 14th year of Bummei (1483 CE), and Shoe of the Kinshokuji branch joined during the 2nd year of Meio (1443 CE). With these additions, the Hongwanji

became the largest religious organization in Japan.

The great increase in the number of Hongwanji followers is mentioned in “Heard and Recorded During Master Rennyo’s Lifetime,” in the following words:

“The prosperity of a teaching does not depend on the number of people who gather in its name. Rather, it is determined by even one more person receiving shinjin.”

As indicated in this passage, rather than the number of followers, Master Rennyo was more concerned about the shinjin that was received.

And when Master Rennyo was 75 years of age, during the 8th lunar month of the 1st year of Entoku (1489 CE), he retired so his son Master Jitsunyo could succeed him. Even after retiring, however, Master Rennyo continued to work for the development of the Hongwanji.

During the 9th lunar month of the 5th year of Meio (1496 CE), when he was 82 years of age, Master Rennyo built a temple on land in what is now the city of Osaka. This temple would later be called the Ishiyama Hongwanji. He refers to it in Letter 15, Fascicle IV of his “Honorable Letters” in the following way:

“After seeing Osaka (in Ikutama estate, Higashinari district, Settsu province) for the first time, I sensed a link to it from the past and had a simple temple built in the traditional way. Construction began during the latter part of autumn during the 5th year of Meio. Three years have already sped by since then.”

As can be determined from the passage, “in Ikutama estate, Higashinori district, Settsu Province,” the area referred to as “Osaka” (written with slightly different characters than presently used, but read the same) was far smaller than it is today. The name “Osaka” in this letter is considered the first time it was used in a written document.

Further, in “Gathering Dust Record,” is the passage:

“Construction of the osaka Temple in Ikutama estate, Higashinari district in Sesshu Province began during the fall of the 5th year of Meio (1496 AD), specifically on the 24th day of the 9th lunar month. (That was when Master Rennyo) became aware of (this place) where wolves and tigers live. There

were no houses then, just fields.”

As can be determined from this passage, only animals such as “tigers and wolves” lived in the area at that time. Actually, there were no tigers in Japan then, so Master Rennyo was obviously speaking figuratively. It appears there were no houses there either—only cultivated fields.

It is said that this temple in “Osaka” became a central gathering place for followers, and the beginning of the modern city of Osaka.

About the time the “Osaka” temple was constructed, temples were also constructed in Kii Province, Settochi, Kyushu, and the Shikoku areas, greatly increasing the teaching areas of the Hongwanji.

After the “Osaka” temple was completed, during the 4th lunar month of the 7th year of Meio (1498 CE) when Master Rennyo was 84 years of age, he became aware of how frail his body had become. Until then, he seems to have been extremely vigorous. His 13th son, Jitsuju, was born that year.* Further, he continued writing letters and brushing the written form of “Namo Amida Butsu” (*myogo*) for his followers until his death.

[*Note: Truly, Master Rennyo’s life was one in which he worked for the restoration of the Jodo-Shinshu teachings until his very last moments.]

What are said to be Master Rennyo’s last words are contained in the work, “Heard and Recorded by Kuzen”, written by Master Rennyo’s disciple, Kuzen:

“These are my last words. Please accept (receive) the single thought of shinjin,” he said to everyone, and especially to his children.

As indicated above, his last words were concerned with urging his children to have “settled shinjin.” This passage continues: What he said on the 18th day was, “Please listen carefully: After I leave this world, I wish all of you children get along with each other. If you just have the “single taste”(ichimi, i.e., single thought) of shinjin, you will work out any differences and be in accord with our Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching. As indicated above, on the 18th day of the 3rd lunar month, just seven days before leaving this world for the Pure Land, he spoke of the importance of shinjin to his children. As you can see, Master Rennyo urged “settled shinjin” until the very last.

Master Rennyo ended his life at the Yamashina Hongwanji on the 25th day of the 3rd lunar month during the 8th year of Mei, (1499 CE), at the age of 85.

Article 188 of “Heard and Recorded During Master Rennyo’s Lifetime” contains the following passage:

“The most important aspect of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching of Jodo-Shinshu is the shinjin of single-minded reliance on Amida Buddha. All the ‘good and virtuous teachers along the way’ since the Venerable Master (Shinran) have urged us to leave everything up to the workings of Amida. Unfortunately, many did not know how to do that. When Master Rennyo became the leader of the Hongwanji, he wrote in his ‘Honorable Letters’: ‘Discard all practices and accept Amida’s vow to cause your birth in the Pure Land without doubt’.”

That is why Master Rennyo is referred to as “the Master who restored the Jodo-Shinshu teaching.”

Regarding this matter of “shinjin of single-minded reliance on Amida Buddha,” Master Rennyo has written, “Abandoning all auxiliary-mixed practices and the mind of ‘self-centered effort,’ with single-mindedness I rely on Amida Buddha,” clearly teaching us the essence of the Jodo-Shinshu teaching. That is why he is considered to be the “master who revived (the Hongwanji).”

Master Rennyo urged us to discard all practices based on “self-centered effort,” and leave it completely up to Amida Buddha who has assured us that he absolutely will bring about our birth in the Pure Land.

Regardless of whether it is “giving up ‘self-centered effort’” or “leaving it completely up to the intent of Amida Buddha,” both attitudes faithfully follow the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching of “shinjin is fundamental.” (Because he expressed the Venerable Master’s teaching in a way that is easy to understand, Master Rennyo is rightly referred to as the “master who restored (the Hongwanji)” and “master who revived (the Hongwanji).”

Finally, to repeat what I have said all through this book, I believe those who criticize Master Rennyo and say he distorted the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching are those who have absolutely no understanding of the Venerable Master’s teaching. In other words, they have not experienced the world of salvation based on the Primal Vow. They must be considered to be those described by Master Rennyo in phrases such as, “those whose shinjin is not

yet settled” (Letter 3 of Fascicle II); “those lacking in shinjin” (Letter 11 of Fascicle V); and “in whom anjin is yet to be realized” (Letter 9 of Fascicle III, and Letter 7 of Fascicle IV.)