

# Understanding Jodo Shinshu by Eiken Kobai Sensei

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## Recommendation

by Paul Roberts

IF YOU HAVE A PERSONAL INTEREST in the teachings of Shinran known as Shin Buddhism or Jodo Shinshu you need to know about Professor Eiken Kobai.

Why? Because he is a Shin Buddhist scholar that I can recommend without reservation as a TRUE TEACHER of Shinran's teaching.

You might ask: Is the input of a TRUE TEACHER that important to the transmission of SHINJIN the state of TRUE ENTRUSTING that leads to rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life as a Buddha and the end of suffering at last?

**No, it's CRITICAL.**

That was the opinion of Rennyo, known as "Rennyo the Restorer," because he restored Shinran's teaching to a Shin Buddhist community that had lost its way.

Here's what Rennyo said:

Pertaining to the conditions existent towards the realization of rebirth, I (Rennyo) shall establish the Five Conditional Steps here:

1. The culmination of related past conditions and circumstances leading one to the Dharma.
2. A "Good teacher of the Dharma."
3. The Light of Amida Buddha.
4. Faith "Shinjin."
5. Amida's Name.

It appears to me that without the presence of ALL the conditions of these five steps, one will NEVER obtain rebirth.

Therefore, a "Good Teacher of the Dharma" is a bearer of the message, "Place your reliance on Amida Buddha!"

If conditions materialize where there is a culmination of related past conditions and circumstances without the meeting of a "Good Teacher of the Dharma," rebirth will not be realized.

Why does Rennyo insist that a GOOD TEACHER is one of the five critical components? Because in Shin Buddhism, there is no practice except for *listening deeply*. Therefore the CONTENT of what is being taught is critical, in order for rebirth to be realized, just as Rennyo says.

So if you're SERIOUS about Shin Buddhism, don't be naive about ANY teacher or teaching just because it's LABELED as Shin Buddhism. Line it up against what Shakyamuni and Shinran say in THEIR teaching.

The story of how I found Professor Kobai's teaching, and the man himself, is a perfect illustration of why a GOOD TEACHER is one of Renny's five critical conditions in teaching Shinran's teaching about Amida Buddha's salvation.

I share it with you here:

Overwhelmed with grief after the suicide of my daughter, I contacted a nationally known Shin Buddhist teacher whose writings I had read. He was kind enough to enter into an e-mail dialogue with me, as I sought for a way to handle the great suffering I was experiencing. He also sent me some books that informed his own thought. To this day I remain grateful for his time and his efforts.

Looking for comfort, for light, for light in my darkness, I was re-reading the *Tannisho* (Lamenting Divergences) one day. The following passage leaped off the page, as though our teacher Shinran was speaking personally to my situation and me:

There is a difference in compassion between the Path of Sages and the Path of Pure Land. The compassion in the Path of Sages is expressed through pity, sympathy, and care for all beings, **but rare is it that one can help another as completely as one desires.**

The compassion in the Path of Pure Land is to quickly attain Buddhahood, saying the nembutsu, and **with the true heart of compassion and love save all beings completely as we desire.**

In this life no matter how much pity and sympathy we may feel for others, **it is impossible to help another as we truly wish; thus our compassion is inconsistent and limited.**

**Only the saying of nembutsu manifests the complete and never ending compassion which is true, real, and sincere.**

I, Shinran, have never even once uttered the Nembutsu for the sake of my father and mother. The reason is that all beings have been fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth-and-death.

**When I attain Buddhahood in the next birth, each and everyone will be saved.**

If it were a good accomplished by my own powers, then I could transfer the accumulated merits of the Nembutsu to save my father and mother.

But since such is not the case, **when we become free from self-power and quickly attain the enlightenment of the Pure Land, we will save those bound closest to us through transcendental powers, no matter how deeply they are immersed in the karmic sufferings of the six realms and four modes of birth.**

Here was Shinran my teacher speaking to the very heart of my grief:

- I couldn't help my beloved daughter as I wanted to, even though I had tried. She had succumbed to a downward spiral of depression, and nothing I did could pull her out of it. My pity, sympathy and care were real but I was LIMITED because I am just not a Buddha. As Shinran says, I simply couldn't help her as completely as I desired.

- More than that, accepting Buddha's fundamental teaching that we go through endless lives of suffering, and our karmic actions in one life determine our rebirth in the next, I was overwhelmed with concern about the karmic ramifications of her action in taking her own life.

Now, my teacher Shinran had provided me with the dharma antidote for the terrible poison of such anguished thoughts and feelings: at the end of this life, as a person of SHINJIN of true entrusting I would take rebirth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land, and become a Buddha, at last.

As a Buddha, I would have all the transcendental powers only a true Buddha has, to find my beloved daughter and to save her, no matter how deeply she might be immersed in karmic suffering in one of the six realms of rebirth.

As the power of this dharma truth settled in my head and my heart, I felt a great shift. Of course, I was still a grieving father. But here was the answer to my existential despair arising from my all too human sense of HELPLESSNESS in the face of such tragedy.;

In my next letters to the teacher I had been corresponding with I wrote with real joy about this new awareness of just HOW I was going to fulfill my heart of compassion to my daughter, who was now beyond my reach, having taken rebirth in some other life in one of the six realms - where, I did not know.

Talking at the same time to another Buddhist, a woman who had just lost her husband to suicide, I conveyed the same message of Great Compassion the compassion of becoming a Buddha in the Pure Land and then helping those we had loved and could not help as plain people in this life. Though she had never even heard of Shin Buddhism, she too began listening deeply, finding comfort and hope in the message of Shinran.

Now: here's where the difference between TRUE teachers, and FALSE teachers, reveals itself:

When I talked with this Shin Buddhist teacher, he said to me that I shouldn't take these words of Shinran LITERALLY - that they were symbols pointing to something else entirely.

I was STUNNED by his words.

Hardly in the place for theological or philosophical discourse in this most terrible time of my life, I tried feebly to point out that this was simply what Shinran the man had taught, and his student Yuien was conveying, sometime after his death. Their audience was essentially laypeople like me - not very educated - and it didn't seem possible that

Shinran would say such things if he didn't believe them to be true literally true himself. In fact, Yuien said specifically that he was conveying Shinran's teaching to dispel doubt and confusion:

As I humbly reflect on the past [when the late master was alive] and the present in my foolish mind, I cannot but lament the divergences from the true SHINJIN that he conveyed by speaking to us directly, and I fear there are doubts and confusions in the way followers receive and transmit the teaching.

For how is entrance into the single gate of easy practice possible unless we happily come to rely on a true teacher whom conditions bring us to encounter? Let there be not the slightest distortion of the teaching of Other Power with words of an understanding based on personal views.

Here, then, I set down in small part the words spoken by the late Shinran Shonin that remain deep in my mind, solely to disperse the doubts of fellow practitioners.

At that point, my conversation with this teacher broke down very quietly. As I said before, I am grateful for his time and attention and his sincere attempt to be helpful during my time of crisis. But I knew because I have read Shinran's writings, more than once, that he was NOT teaching Shinran's teaching accurately when he told me not to take Shinran's plain words as simply true in the plain way Shinran said them.

When I had first come in contact with Shinran and Shin Buddhism, I had read many teachings on the internet in an attempt to understand what Shinran was taking about in addition to reading his own writings, and those of his followers like Yuien and Rennyō.

Now I went back with fresh eyes, and the suffering that life had brought, and was sensitive because of my experience to the differences between what Shinran was teaching, and what this Shin Buddhist teacher was teaching. Like Shinran's student Yuien, I couldn't help noting divergences from Shinran. And I couldn't help wondering why there weren't more experienced Shin Buddhists particularly Shin Buddhist scholars doing what Yuien did in lamenting the divergences in plain, honest language to help a Shin Buddhist beginner such as me.

It was during this internet research that I found Professor Eiken Kobai's website.

It was mostly in Japanese but had a few sections with English translations including one long page with an unformatted draft of the book you are holding in your hand.

As I read it, I was struck by the clarity and power of Kobai's writing as a GOOD TEACHER of Shinran:

- **First, Kobai was committed to making Shinran's words and ideas the PLUMBLINE for his own.** He clearly was humble enough to know that it was his VOCATION to show exactly what Shinran believed and taught. To do that, he illustrated his teaching with passage after passage from his lifetime of study of Shinran's work to VALIDATE everything he said. The purpose of his scholarship was not to advance HIS ideas—but SHINRAN'S ideas.

- **Second, like our dharma heroes Honen, Shinran, Yuien and Rennyo, Kobai was bold enough to make the distinction between true teachers, and true teaching from FALSE.** Once again he was fulfilling the role of a GOOD TEACHER helping me with his honest scholarship to distinguish what Shinran did say from what he didn't say. He actually had the courage to say what Honen said (in Yuien's recounting): that people who taught such divergent teachings were not of the same SHINJIN as Honen and Shinran and thus not to be trusted as GOOD TEACHERS of Shinran's teaching.

I had found someone whose lifetime of dedication to scholarship could provide me, a layperson, with a strong platform on which to discuss with others in the Shin Sangha my own concerns about the many divergences I was seeing from the TRUTH that Shinran taught.

Of course, these divergences false teachings propagated by false teachers are not a new problem. False teachings were a confounding problem during Shinran's lifetime indeed Shinran's own son was such a false teacher, and Shinran had to disown him on that account. False teachings were a confounding problem after Shinran's death, prompting his student Yuien to write the Tannisho, dipping his brush in his own tears (as he said) to make the distinction. False teachings were a confounding problem when Rennyo began his great work of restoration, calling Shin Buddhists to return to Shinran's teaching in his own preaching and writing.

And false teachings divergences from Shinran's teachings are still a confounding problem today.

Why are true teachers, whether Shinran, Yuien, Rennyo or Kobai, so concerned about TRUE teaching and distinguishing them from false teaching? Because false teachings confound the great purpose and the great compassion of Shakyamuni Buddha and Amida Buddha both. Why? Because there is no practice in Shin Buddhism other than listening deeply to the true teaching and reflecting on its meaning in our lives.

Unlike other types of Buddhism there's just nothing else we need to DO. Indeed, one of Shinran's most basic ideas is that there nothing else we CAN do to deal with our suffering in a full and final way, because of the age of Dharma Decline in which we live.

All we can do is open ourselves up to listen honestly, openly, willingly. Amida Buddha must do everything else. He make take on the burden of our transformation to Buddhahood entirely. We simply can't get there to the far shore of full awakening from where we are right now in any other way.

That's why a GOOD teacher - a TRUE teacher - invites us to listen with true intention deeply with both sides of our brain:

- By listening with or rational left-brain we learn the content of the TRUE teaching which is the CRITICAL place to begin according to Shinran and his true students such as Rennyo the Restorer and Professor Kobai, too. Shin Buddhism isn't

mushy mysticism there is CONTENT that must be understood, and digested, and finally accepted as Buddha's TRUTH.

- By listening with our emotional right-brain we experience our hearts opening to the primal felt sense of our own need and the calling of Amida Buddha to entrust ourselves to HIM entirely. When both are present together, our felt desire for the end of suffering, and the clear understanding of what Shinran taught as he taught it, we are able to respond to Amida's Light and Life by entrusting ourselves completely to Him, His Vow and His work. And thus, as Professor Kobai stresses, we experience the same SHINJIN the gift of Amida Buddha that Shinran did.

Here's the bottom line:

Few in the West will care about Shin Buddhism as an obscure Japanese sect of Buddhism. Few will care about Japanese culture either. Speaking plainly I have no intrinsic interest in either.

But what I am interested in and care deeply about is what Buddha focused on, always and ever: the fundamental questions of suffering, and how to end suffering at last.

There are literally MILLIONS of people who are seeking answers to these, life's hardest questions, just like me.

There are MILLIONS who are seeking to understand the problem of suffering—both personal suffering and global suffering.

There are MILLIONS who are looking for the end of suffering at last enlightenment Buddhahood by whatever name it is called.

For those MILLIONS of plain people the dharma gate of Shinran offers a guaranteed path an easy path and in this age of Dharma Decline the ONLY path to answer their questions and to meet their deepest need and mine.

That is why just as Rennyō said we need TRUE teachers in the Shin Sangha – teachers like Professor Eiken Kobai who will use their scholarly vocation to present Shinran's teaching just as Shinran would present it himself.

For me, a lot of what I read in Professor Kobai's book was confirmation of what I had read in Shinran's works already. But I personally want to thank him, publicly in this introduction, for making clear to me Shinran's plain teaching about SALVATION IN THE PRESENT. As he points out, THIS is the very heart of Shinran's unique contribution to Pure Land thought. It is Shinran who teaches unequivocally that even one moment of thought of entrusting Amida Buddha FULLY puts each and every one in the "rightly established group" of those who will take rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life.

Professor Kobai explains this with a clarity that made Shinran's TRUE teaching come alive for me with even greater power than before. And that is what a true teacher does, whether ancient or contemporary, Japanese or American, scholar or layperson.

I also want to thank him for his COURAGE for being willing to point out based on his lifetime of scholarship and knowledge of the history of the Shin Sangha the kinds of FALSE teachings that have come up, over and over again.

Once again, he is humble enough to look to our common teacher Shinran to refute false teaching and to declare boldly, just like Honen and Shinran did, that a person of the same SHINJIN as they would never make such foolish and misleading statements.

In speaking out so clearly, Kobai Sensei reminds me of Yuien's words in the Tannisho, recounting Shinran's conversation with his teacher Honen:

I feel that the preceding views (the false teachings Yuien had just described) all arise due to differences in the understanding of SHINJIN (true entrusting). According to our late master Shinran, it was the same at the time of his teacher, Honen.

Among his disciples, there were only a few people who truly entrusted themselves to Amida. This was once a cause of debate between Shinran and fellow disciples. When he claimed, "Shinran's entrusting and Honen's entrusting are identical," Seikan, Nenbutsu, and others strongly refuted this, saying, "How can you claim that our master's entrusting and your entrusting are identical!"

To this Shinran replied, "Our master's wisdom and knowledge are truly profound and to say that our entrusting to Amida are identical is preposterous. But as far as true entrusting, leading to birth in the Pure Land is concerned, no difference exists at all. Both are the same."

Still they continued to press Shinran, challenging him by saying, "How can that be possible?"

They finally decided to settle the argument once and for all by going to Honen, relating the details. When Honen listened to their respective views, he said, "The true entrusting of Honen is a gift granted by the Tathagata, and the true entrusting of Shinran is also a gift from the Tathagata. Thus, they are the same. People whose entrusting is different will probably not go to the same Pure Land as I."

**Such was the case in earlier times, and today it seems that among the followers of single-hearted nembutsu there are some who do not share the same entrusting as that of Shinran. Although I may sound repetitious, I want to put all this down in writing.**

"Such was the case in earlier times" Yuien says, remembering the days when his teacher Shinran was still alive. And, Yuien continues, it seemed the same still at the dusk of his own life, after his teacher's death.

And such was the case, 200 years later, when Rennyō found the Sangha in disarray, and did the work of preaching and teaching to restore the Sangha by returning it to the TRUE teaching of our teacher Shinran once again.

And such is the case TODAY.

That is why I consider Professor Eiken Kobai's voice so important for us all to hear and recommend his work without reservation. He models, by his example, how we ALL need to teach and what we ALL need to learn in order to restore the Shin sangha so that as a Dharma COMMUNITY we are prepared to offer countless hungry listeners the True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way.

Namo-Amida-Butsu

## Foreword

“LIFE LASTS BUT FIFTY YEARS” is a traditional Japanese saying that applied until fairly recently. With the great advances in health care, however, it rarely applies today. The average life-span of the Japanese has increased to where it is now the longest in the advanced world.

I am, however, reminded of this saying because I have now passed the age of 50. How quickly time passes!

I was born in a Jodo-Shinshu temple and am most grateful to have been allowed to pursue my study of that school of Buddha-dharma. My present feeling is one of gratitude for the profoundness and sacredness of the Jodo-Shinshu teaching. From this feeling, and from a desire to set a milestone in my life, I have decided to express my understanding of Jodo-Shinshu in this book, which is divided into three parts.

In Part One I briefly described the main events in the Venerable Master Shinran’s life, his earnest search for the truth, and his efforts to spread that truth to all with whom he came in contact.

Part Two is the main focus of this book. It is divided into three chapters:

- Chapter 1. The Foundation of the Venerable Master Shinran’s Teaching.
- Chapter 2. “Salvation” in the Venerable Master Shinran’s Teaching.
- Chapter 3. Shinjin and the Nembutsu in the Venerable Master Shinran’s Teaching.

Of the above three chapters, I wanted most to write about the “Salvation” of Chapter 2. Accordingly, that chapter is further divided into the following four sections:

- The Benefit of “Truth”
- The “Salvation” of the “Evil Person”
- “Salvation” in the Present
- “Birth in the Pure Land” (*Ojo*) and “Becoming a Buddha” (*Jobutsu*)

Of these four sections, I particularly wanted to emphasize “‘Salvation’ in the Present.” This is the most important part of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching and is what sets him apart from all other teachers. I believe it would not be overstating the case to say that if you understand this section, that you will understand all of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching. Further, this is where the Pure Land teaching that was apt to be considered a teaching that is important in the *future*, came to be understood as a teaching that is meaningful in the *present* and, I believe, is where the essence of the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching is to be found.

It was from knowing about this world of “‘salvation’ in the present” that I sensed the greatness of the Jodo-Shinshu teaching, and is what allows me to take such great pride in my life as a Jodo-Shinshu minister.

In Part Three I expressed some of my opinions on the Venerable Master Shinran’s teaching regarding problems related to religion and medical care, and problems of life.

I began this book with the expectation of demonstrating how great a person the Venerable Master Shinran is, and the truly superb nature of his teaching. Because of my poor ability to express myself, however, I have fallen far short of my expectations. For this reason, I wish you will use this work as just a starting point to look further into this marvelous teaching. If this book proves to be even the slightest help in your “tasting the *dharma*,” I can ask for nothing more.

## **PART ONE. THE VENERABLE MASTER SHINRAN’S LIFE**

THE VENERABLE MASTER SHINRAN, the man looked up to as the founder of the Jodo-Shinshu denomination of Buddha-dharma, was born during the 3rd year of Joan (1173 AD) at a place called Hino, located southeast of the city of Kyoto.

The names he is said to have been given at birth include Matsuwakamaro, Tsurumitsumaro and Matsumaro. Most scholars seem to agree, however, that his name at birth was Matsuwakamaro. The date of the Venerable Master’s birth is not completely accepted by all scholars, but is generally considered to be the 1st day of the 4th lunar month, which has been converted in modern times to March 21 of the Western calendar.

His father was Hino Arinori, a member of a branch family of the Fujiwara nobility. His mother is said to be Kikkonyo, a member of the Minamoto warrior clan, but there is no historical evidence of this. The Venerable Master is said to have been separated from his father when he was four years of age and from his mother by death when he was eight, but there is no evidence for either of these assertions. During the spring of 1181 AD, when he was nine years of age, his uncle, Hino Noritsuna, brought him to a well-known monk of that time, Jien (also known as Jichin), who initiated the Venerable Master into the Buddhist monkhood. He was given the name Hannen, climbed Mt. Hiei—then the center of Buddhist learning—and began studying the teachings and performing the religious practices of the Tendai school of Buddha-dharma.

The Tendai school of Buddha-dharma was founded on Mt. Hiei in Japan by a monk named Saicho (767 - 822 AD). When the Venerable Master went there to study, the monks were organized into three groups: *gakusho*, *doso* and *doshu*. It is not exactly clear what function each group performed, but generally the *gakusho* were scholars, the *doso* conducted ceremonial services and the *doshu* did menial

In a letter written by the Venerable Master’s wife, *Eshinni-ko* (1182 - approx, 1270 AD), the Venerable Master “...was a *doso* on Mt. Hiei.” Further, according to a passage in a

work by the Venerable Master's grandson, Master Kakunyo (1270 - 1351 AD), titled, *Godensho* (Notes on the Honorable Life (of the Venerable Master Shinran), the Venerable Master "received the teaching propagated by Ryogon (Temple) located in Yokawa." The full name of this temple is shuryogon-in. Yokawa is an area on Mt. Hiei, and very likely, the Venerable Master was a *doso* there.

Very little is known about what the Venerable Master did during the twenty years that he spent on Mt. Hiei. It can be assumed, however, that he followed all the Tendai religious practices performed there at that time, and studied the doctrines of that Buddhist school. Based on his accomplishments later in life, I believe he attained a level of religious study and practice that was unmatched by the other monks. In spite of the life-and-death struggle that he engaged in, however, the Venerable Master did not gain the conviction that he had "left the world of delusion and entered the way to enlightenment." One of the reasons for this may have been because Saicho's spirit had disappeared from Mt. Hiei by then. The level of religious practice and study performed there had fallen, and the Venerable Master may have been extremely disappointed in the religious environment that he found himself. I believe, however, that the basic reason was his deep self-reflection which lead him to feel he had come to a dead-end in his search for enlightenment.

We can determine how deeply introspective the Venerable Master was from the following passage in the *Ichinen Tannen Mon'i* (On the One Recitation and the Many Recitations), written in his later years:

A *bombu* is an ignorant being filled with base desires. Greed, anger, hatred and jealousy constantly rise within him, and do not cease until the last moment of life.

The Venerable Master identified with being a *bombu* who burns with "base desires" (*bonno*) until the very moment of death. Further, in his *Shozomatsu Wasan* (Japanese Poems on the Three Periods (of the True, Semblance and Decay of the *Dharma*), he wrote:

*How difficult to renounce my evil nature...  
My mind is like snakes and scorpions,  
And since even the good I try to do  
Is tainted with the poison (of "self-centered effort"),  
It must be called the practice of an idiot.*

We see the Venerable Master's deep introspection in these ways where he states that the practices that he cultivates are not true, and further, are "tainted with the poison (of self-centered effort)" (*zodoku no zen*) and therefore, are "the practices of an idiot" (*koke no gyo*).

And as the Venerable Master is quoted as saying in Article Two of the *Tannisho* (Notes Lamenting Differences), "...since I am incapable of any practice whatsoever, hell will definitely be my dwelling," he came to the realization that because he could not perform any spiritual practices by which he could become a Buddha, he was an evil-laden person who had nowhere to go but hell.

There is an old Japanese saying, “Correcting our errors from seeing the errors of others,” but actually becoming aware of our own errors is extremely difficult. Although we are always making mistakes, isn’t our attitude that nothing we do is wrong? Isn’t that what we are truly like? In contrast, the Venerable Master was a person who looked deeply within and saw his real self.

Because that was the sort of person he was, although he surpassed everyone on Mt. Hiei in study and religious practice, the Venerable Master’s agony must have been that he was unable to perform any religious practice—that he was, after all, absolutely unable to attain enlightenment through his own efforts.

I believe the deadlock that the Venerable Master came to on Mt. Hiei—the strong awareness that he could not remove the *bonno* in his mind and heart and attain the Buddha’s enlightenment through his own efforts—was due to that deep self-reflection.

Further, I believe understanding his deeply introspective attitude is the key to understanding the Venerable Master’s teaching.

When the Venerable Master was 29 years of age (during 1201 AD) and came to a deadlock on Mt. Hiei, he decided to seek the guidance of Shotoku *Taishi* (574 - 622 AD) whom he had revered for a long time. He expressed his reverence for Shotoku *Taishi* in his *Shozomatsu Wasan* in the following words, “...the king of the *dharma* in our country (Japan), Shotoku *Taishi*...”

The Venerable Master decided to seclude himself for 100 days in a temple named Rokkaku-do in Kyoto. He did so because that temple was built by Shotoku *Taishi*, and because Shotoku *Taishi* was considered the incarnation of the object of reverence in that temple, Kuse Kannon Bosatsu. (The object of reverence in that temple today, however, is Nyoirin Kannon Bosatsu.)

Early on the morning of the 95th day of his seclusion, the Venerable Master had a dream. That dream led him to Master Honen (1133 - 1212 AD), who was then living at a hermitage in Yoshimizu.

In his *Kyogyoshinsho* (Teaching, Practice, Shinjin and Attainment) the Venerable Master recorded the events of that time in the following way:

“I, Gutoku shuku Ran (“ignorant short-haired disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha (Shin)ran,” i.e., the Venerable Master Shinran), “abandoned the miscellaneous practices and took refuge in the Primal Vow during the Shinyu year of Kennin.”

As stated here, the Venerable Master abandoned the “miscellaneous practices” (the religious practices prescribed in the Tendai school) and relied on the “Primal Vow” (Amida Buddha’s vow to save all sentient beings) during the Shinyu year of Kennin, which is the 1st year of the Kennin era, or 1201-2 AD. He was then 29 years of age. The Venerable Master clearly states that he abandoned the “way of becoming enlightened through my own efforts,” and entered into the “way of becoming enlightened through reliance on Amida Buddha’s power to save” (*tariki no michi*).

In Letter Three of Eshinni-ko's (the Venerable Master Shinran's wife) letters, she refers to this event in the following words:

(The Venerable Master Shinran) descended the mountain (Mt. Hiei) and retreated to Rokkaku-do for a hundred days to pray for salvation. In a dream at dawn of the 95th day, Shotoku *Taishi* revealed a verse indicating the path to take. (The Venerable Master Shinran) immediately left Rokkaku-do and called on Master Honen to be shown the way. And just as he had confined himself for a hundred days at Rokkaku-do, he visited Master Honen for a hundred consecutive days, whether it rained or shined, regardless of the obstacles. From that "good person" he learned that only the Nembutsu is necessary to overcome life and death.

We do not know exactly what Shotoku *Taishi's* words in the Venerable Master's dream were. They should have been included in Eshinni-ko's letters, but they are lost.

Regarding this, there is a poem titled *Byokutsu-ge* that is carved in stone in Shotoku *Taishi's* mausoleum. In it, Shotoku *Taishi* states that he is the transformed body of Kuze Kannon, his wife the transformed body of Daiseishi, his mother the transformed body of Amida, and that they appeared in this world to save all sentient beings.

There are other indications pointing to the Venerable Master being lead to Master Honen by Shotoku *Taishi*, but they cannot be used as historical evidence. At any rate, the Venerable Master seems to have decided to visit Master Honen on the 95th day of his seclusion in Rokkaku-do. That was when he abandoned the way of trying to become enlightened through his own efforts and entered the way of relying on Amida Buddha's Primal Vow.

As indicated in Eshinni-ko's letter already quoted, the Venerable Master studied with Master Honen for a hundred consecutive days, earnestly seeking the way that would allow him to leave the world of delusion and suffering, and enter the world of enlightenment.

The Venerable Master expressed his deep emotions of that time in *Koso Wasan* (Japanese Poems on the Eminent Monks):

*After long kalpas and many births,  
We still did not know  
The powerful conditions for release.  
If Genka (Master Honen) had not appeared,  
This life would also have passed in vain.*

I was born and died from endless past, the Venerable Master says, and had been mired in this world of delusion, unable to know the power of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow that allows me to leave this deluded world. If Master Honen had not lived and if I had not met him, I would have continued drifting aimlessly, never to be born in the Pure Land of Enlightenment.

There are many differences of opinion regarding when the Venerable Master turned to the Primal Vow (the 18th Vow), that is, when he received *shinjin* (the "faith" mind, or

“true” mind). I believe it was at the age of 29, when he met Master Honen. Indications after that age can be considered a deepening of his thought, but I believe absolutely nothing could have swayed his conviction and peace of mind regarding his birth in the Pure Land that he received then.

At any rate, when the Venerable Master was 29 years of age, he became Master Honen’s disciple and began relying on Amida Buddha’s vow power to cause his birth in the Pure Land. That was when he changed his name to shuk’ka.

Master Honen was then 69 years of age, in the prime of his life. This was 26 years after he had established the Jodo (Pure Land) School of Buddha-dharma at the age of 43, and three years after writing his major work, *Senjaku Hongan Nembutsu-shu* (Selected Passages on the Nembutsu of the Primal Vow), at the request of the Regent Kujo Kanezane, when he was 66 years of age.

The Venerable Master too, must have been untiring in learning all that he could from Master Honen, and that dedicated attitude won Master Honen’s trust. Four years after becoming Master Honen’s disciple on the 14th day of the 4th lunar month of 1205 AD when the Venerable Master was 33 years of age, he was allowed to make a copy of Master Honen’s *Senjaku Hongan Nembutsu-shu*. Among Master Honen’s many disciples, only a select few, including well-known monks such as Bencho, Shoku, Ryakan, Kosai, Shinka and Genchi, in addition to the Venerable Master, were allowed to make copies of that work. On the 29th day of the 7th lunar month of that same year (1205), the Venerable Master again changed his name, this time to Zenshin. That name was personally brushed by Master Honen (some scholars say the name Shinran dates from that time, however). These matters are described very movingly in the Chapter on Transformed Land of the *Kyogyoshinsho*.

Master Honen taught that all we need do to be born in the Pure Land (the Buddha’s world of Enlightenment) is recite Amida Buddha’s name of “Namo Amida Butsu.” This is referred to as “reciting the Nembutsu.” There is thus no need to perform any other practice, or rather, other practices are only 3 distractions. Master Honen taught that following the Path of Sages (*shodomon*) and performing “various practices” (*shogyo*) are of absolutely no use regarding birth in the Pure Land.

Master Honen taught that study and religious practices are unnecessary, and that even the worst of people will be saved by the single recitation of “Namo Amida Butsu.” Many classes of people responded to his teaching. Beginning with members of the nobility such as the Regent Kujo Kanezane, they included *samurai*, as well as thieves and prostitutes.

Because Master Honen’s teaching attracted such a large following, and because he completely denied following the Path of Sages and performing “various practices,” the established Buddhist denomination on Mt. Hiei and elsewhere began criticizing his teaching.

During the 10th month of 1204 AD, the monks on Mt. Hiei urged abolishing the Nembutsu teaching because of the overzealous actions of a few of Master Honen’s

followers. In response to that appeal, Master Honen wrote the *Shichikajo Kishomon* (Seven Rules for Self Regulation) on the 7th day of the 11th month of that same year. He had 190 of his disciples sign the regulation, and presented it to Shinsho, the head monk of Enryaku Temple on Mt. Hiei. In this document, Master Honen admonished his disciples to: 1) not criticize other Buddhist denominations, 2) respect Buddhas and Bodhisattvas other than Amida Buddha, 3) not urge those who perform religious practices to become members of the “selected Nembutsu” group, 4) not advocate drinking intoxicating beverages and eating meat because the teaching of the “selected Nembutsu” does not have precepts that *must* be followed, 5) not criticize followers of the Buddhist precepts for performing “difficult practices,” 6) not fear “creating evil” because they rely on Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow, and finally, 7) practice self-discipline.

The Venerable Master signed this document as “Monk shuk’ka” (*so shuk’ka*), the name that he was then using, as the 87th member. This document seemed to have lessened the criticism against Master Honen’s group for a while, but during the 10th month of the next year (1205 AD), a document titled *Kofukuji Sojo* (Kofuku Temple Petition for Censure) was presented to the Imperial Court. I will describe the contents of this petition in detail later, but the following are the main points for which Master Honen was criticized:

1. Establishing a new Buddhist denomination without Imperial permission.
2. Drawing a new image of Amida Buddha.
3. Slighting Shakyamuni Buddha.
4. Criticizing the doing of “good.”
5. Slighting local gods.
6. Unclear on the concept of the Pure Land.
7. Misunderstanding the Nembutsu.
8. Breaking the Buddhist precepts.
9. Creating disturbances in the country.

The Imperial Court was requested to ban the Nembutsu teaching for the above reasons.

The then Emperor, Go-toba, and other members of the Imperial Court looked on Master Honen’s teaching favorably so they did not take any action at first.

Beginning on the 9th day of the 12th lunar month of 1206 AD, however, while the Emperor Gotoba was on a trip to Kumano, several of his favorite concubines determined to abandon the secular world and become nuns under the guidance of Master Honen’s disciples named Jaren and Anraku. This aroused the rage of the Emperor, and during the 2nd month of 1207 AD, he ordered the Nembutsu teaching to be suspended. Four persons, including the above-mentioned Jaren and An-raku, were ordered executed, and eight persons, including Master Honen and the Venerable Master were ordered exiled.

Master Honen was then 75 years of age. His place of exile was Tosa Province on the island of Shikoku (other sources say it was to Sanuki Province). He was given the criminal name of Fujii Motohiko.

The Venerable Master Shinran was then 35 years of age. His place of exile was the Province of Echigo, present-day Niigata Prefecture. He was given the criminal name of Fujii Yoshizane. Regarding this incident, the Venerable Master later wrote the following in the Chapter on Transformed Land of his *Kyogyoshinsho*:

Lords and vassals who opposed the *dharma* and justice were indignant and resented (the Nembutsu teaching)...

Suppressing the true *dharma* which teaches that all living things are blessed with the Buddha's saving grace is an absolutely atrocious act, the Venerable Master said in severely criticizing the authority of the Imperial Court, a practically unheard of thing during that time.

From this I believe you can get a glimpse of how important the Venerable Master considered Master Honen's teaching which he received only after a long and dedicated search.

Again, as the Venerable Master is quoted as saying in Master Kakunryo's *Godensho* (Notes on the Honorable Life (of the Venerable Master Shinran)):

...if the Great Master Genku (Master Honen) had not been banished (from the capital of Kyoto), I would never have been sent to my place of exile. And if I had not gone to my place of exile, how would I have been able to influence the people of that remote area. All this is due to my Master's teaching...

The Venerable Master felt that if Master Honen's group had not been banned, he would not have been exiled to Echigo Province. And if he had not been exiled, how would he have been able to spread the precious teaching of the Nembutsu to the people there? The Venerable Master was actually grateful for being exiled because only then was he able to engage in activity that spread the Nembutsu teaching. From this, I believe we have another glimpse into the Venerable Master's sacred mind and heart that was always concerned with letting others know about Amida Buddha's salvation.

After being exiled, the Venerable Master referred to himself as "non-monk, non-layperson" (*hiso hizoku*). He also called himself "Shinran, the ignorant short-haired one" (*gutoku Shinran*). (The term *Shonin* that is associated with his name today means "sacred" or "saintly" person and is an honorific that later generations assigned to him. The Venerable Master Shinran never used it himself.)

The "non-monk" part of "non-monk, non-layperson," refers to a monk who is no longer able to maintain the Buddhist precepts, and therefore is no longer officially recognized as a monk. The "nonlayperson" part of that phrase probably refers to the fact that although he was a Buddhist layperson, he did not consider himself to be an ordinary layperson.

The “short-haired” part of the name, “Shinran, the ignorant short-haired one,” refers to a monk who does not maintain the Buddhist precepts. A monk has a clean-shaven head. A person with short hair, however, is a person who, while attempting to be a monk, cannot follow all the precepts that a monk has vowed to follow.

The Venerable Master Shinran’s “personal depth of reflection” (*jiko naikan*) can be considered to have deepened greatly after being sent to Echigo Province and living the life of an exile. (Since the introspection after *shinjin* has been established is a function of “‘Buddha-centered power’ *shinjin*” (*tariki shinjin*), I have used a different term (“personal depth of reflection”) to refer to the contents of Shinran *Shonin* spiritual life after that fundamental experience.) -

The Venerable Master’s marriage to Eshinni-ko took place while he was exiled in Echigo Province. During that time, marriage was considered to be breaking one of the precepts that monks had to follow. The Venerable Master’s determination to marry can be considered to have been made on the “evening of the 5th day of the 4th month during the 3rd year of Kennin.” The “3rd year of Kennin” is 1203 AD, when he was 31 years of age. According to the *Godensho*, that was when the Venerable Master had a dream in which Kannon Bosatsu told him:

Oh “doer (of the Nembutsu)” (*gyoja*), if the conditions arise for you to be bound with a woman, I will transform myself into a woman as beautiful as a jewel and be your bride. I will serve you for your entire life and lead you to birth in the Pure Land when your life in this world comes to an end.

This passage is referred to as *Nyobon-no-mukoku* (Revelation of a Monk’s Clandestine Romance in a Dream).

Some scholars believe this is what the Venerable Master heard from Shotoku *Taishi* in a dream at the age of 29, and was what caused him to visit Master Honen. The problem that confronted the Venerable Master at the age of 29, however, was how to resolve the problem of life-and-death whether he should abandon the Path of Sages (the way of becoming enlightened solely through his own efforts) and enter the Pure Land Path (the way of becoming enlightened through reliance on Amida Buddha’s Vow).

Accordingly, I believe *that* “revelation” (about visiting Master Honen) was a different text. I also believe that *this* “revelation” about marrying should be considered to have occurred several years after the Venerable Master became Master Honen’s disciple. That would be when the Venerable Master was about 31 years of age. It was only then that he began considering the problem of marriage for a monk who follows the Pure Land Path.

If the problem of sex was uppermost in the Venerable Master’s mind at the age of 29, he could have had a clandestine affair as many monks at the time were doing. But one of the reasons the Venerable Master left Mt. Hiei was because the monks were not keeping the Buddhist precepts, among which is not engaging in sexual activities.

I believe the Venerable Master determined to marry because of the revelation by Kuse Kannon of Rokkaku-do. As indicated in the following passage from the *Wago Toroku* (A

Record of the Light), Master Honen said that we should live in whatever way allows us to recite the Nembutsu:

Recite the Nembutsu to get along in this world. It makes no difference what you do as long as it does not obstruct reciting the Nembutsu. If you cannot recite the Nembutsu by abandoning the world and becoming a monk, then take a wife. If you cannot recite the Nembutsu while married, then abandon the world. If you cannot recite the Nembutsu while settled down, then recite while wandering from place to place. If you cannot recite the Nembutsu while wandering, then become a householder.

As indicated in the above passage, Master Honen said that if we cannot recite the Nembutsu and remain celibate, then we should recite it while married; that if we cannot recite the Nembutsu while married, then we should recite it while celibate.

Master Honen himself remained celibate all his life but he did not say everyone should follow his example. The Venerable Master must have heard Master Honen say similar things, and very likely affirmed a married life for himself.

The Venerable Master's spiritual life must have deepened while living the life of an exile in the deep snows of the remote area of Echigo Province, surrounded by a wife and children, and associating with the people of that area.

On the 17th day of the 11th month during the 1st year of Kenryaku (1211 AD), when he was 39 years of age and five years after reaching his place of exile, the Venerable Master and Master Honen were pardoned. The Venerable Master very likely intended to return to Kyoto, but on the 25th day of the 1st month of the next year (1212 AD), just two months after their pardon notices, Master Honen passed away in Kyoto at the age of 80.

The Venerable Master apparently gave up any thought of returning to Kyoto after learning of Master Honen's death. He remained in Echigo province for some time after being pardoned, but during 1214 AD, when he was 42 years of age, he left that area with his wife and children for Shinano Province (present-day Nagano Prefecture). He then moved to the town of Sanuki in Kozuke Province (present-day Gumma Prefecture), and from there to Hitachi Province (present-day Ibaraki Prefecture).

In Hitachi Province, the Venerable Master made towns such as Kojima and Inada his base, and spent the next twenty years spreading the Nembutsu teaching. This activity resulted in a large number of disciples and followers. He had about 80 direct disciples. If those who were disciples of his direct disciples are counted, however, his followers can be considered to have numbered in the tens of thousands.

But as the Venerable Master is quoted as saying in the *Tannisho*, however, he did not consider himself to have any disciples:

“I, Shinran, do not have any disciples. The reason I do not is because people recite the Nembutsu through the workings of Amida Buddha and not because of any efforts on my part. It is thus ridiculous to refer to those who recite the Nembutsu as ‘my disciples’.”

The Venerable Master said he did not have any disciples because people do not recite the Nembutsu because of him, but because of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow. Referring to such people as *his* disciples is therefore preposterous. Further, since all are disciples of the Buddha, he considered them to be "friends" (*ondobo*) who "walk the same path" (*ondogyo*).

There is a well-known story about the Venerable Master's encounter with an ascetic named Bennen of Mt. Itajiki during this time. Because of the Venerable Master's dedicated efforts in the Hitachi area, the number of people who devoted themselves to the Nembutsu increased. This caused Bennen to become jealous, and he determined to kill the Venerable Master. Bennen lay in wait on Mt. Itajiki, where he knew the Venerable Master would pass on his missionary travels, but was never able to be there when the Venerable Master walked by. Bennen became increasingly frustrated at being unable to harm the Venerable Master, and finally determined to attack the Venerable Master's hermitage in Inada. The moment Bennen saw the Venerable Master's calm and composed face, however, his evil intent disappeared. Bennen wept tears of repentance, and became the Venerable Master's disciple on the spot. The Venerable Master gave Bennen a new name, Myoho-bo.

In the *Godensho*, Master Kakunryo relates this incident in the following way:

Because he could not meet the the Venerable Master (Shinran) as he desired, he went to (the Venerable Master's) home and was met cordially. The moment he saw (the Venerable Master's) sacred face, his evil intent disappeared completely and he could only repent. ... This person was *Myoho-bo*, the name given to him by the Venerable Master (Shinran).

Burning with hatred towards the Venerable Master and with the determination to kill him, Bennen attacked the Venerable Master's hermitage with a sword, and bow and arrow. But the composure with which the Venerable Master met Bennen, even though the Venerable Master had no warning that he would be attacked, caused Bennen to stop in his tracks. The Venerable Master Shinran's gentle expression caused Bennen to realize what a truly sacred person the Venerable Master was. Bennen deeply repented how mistaken he had been in intending to kill the person standing before him, and immediately became the Venerable Master's disciple.

The Venerable Master is said to have been 49 years of age then, and Bennen 42.

A poem carved on a rock on Mt. Itajiki that Bennen (*Myoho-bo*) is said to have composed in later years, expresses the Venerable Master's sacred character that converted even a person who was intent on killing him:

*The mountains remain the same,  
As do the trees and streams...  
All that has changed  
Is my heart.*

The Venerable Master is considered to have started work on his major literary work, the *Kyogyoshinsho* (Teaching, Practice, *Shinjin* and Attainment) during the 1st year of Gennin (1224 AD) when he was about 52 years of age. The complete title of this work is *Ken Jodo Shinjitsu Kyogyosho Monrui* (Passages in Which the True Teaching, Practice and Attainment in the Pure Land are Revealed).

At least a draft of this work is considered to have been completed by the time he was 75 years of age, but there is evidence that he kept revising it until he was about 85 years of age.

The *Kyogyoshinsho* is a major work that is divided into six chapters: Chapter on Teaching, Chapter on Practice, Chapter on *Shinjin*, Chapter on Attainment, Chapter on True Buddha Land and Chapter on Transformed Buddha Land. It is a very difficult work, written in *kambun*, the Japanese way of writing Chinese, but it describes the Jodo-Shinshu teaching very clearly. At the end of this work, the Venerable Master confesses his joy at being in the embrace of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow:

"What a joy to place my mind in the soil of the Buddha's Universal Vow and let my thoughts flow into the sea of the "marvelously mysterious" *dharma*. I deeply acknowledge the Tathagata's compassion and sincerely appreciate the Master's (Hōnen's) benevolence in instructing me. My feeling of indebtedness grows as my joy increases. I have therefore expressed the essentials of the True Teaching (*Shinshu*) by collecting important passages on the Pure Land. I can think only of the Buddha's deep Benevolence, and care not the least about the abuses of others. May those who read this eventually attain the Serene Shinjin of the Vow-Power either by the cause of faithful obedience or by the condition of doubt and abuse, and realize Supreme Fruition in the Land of Serene Sustenance."

After expressing his joy at being embraced within the Primal Vow, the Venerable Master states that those with *shinjin* are, of course, included, but he hopes that the doubts of those without *shinjin* will become the condition for them to accept the Primal Vow. His greatest wish is for even one more person to become aware of the saving grace of the Primal Vow and attain true happiness.

The *Shoshin-ge* (Hymn of True *Shinjin*), that is chanted daily in Jodo-Shinshu households throughout Japan, is found at the end of the Chapter on Faith of the *Kyogyoshinsho*.

The Venerable Master returned to Kyoto from the Kanto area during 1232 AD (1st year of Joei), at about the age of 60.

In Kyoto, with its much greater resources of Buddhist materials, the Venerable Master completed work on his *Kyogyoshinsho*. He wrote many other works that are indispensable for a detailed understanding of the Jodo-Shinshu teaching. They include: *Jodo Monrui Jusho* (A Collection of Passages on the Pure Land), *Gutoku-sho* (Notes of an Ignorant Short-Haired One), *Nyushitsu Nimon-ge* (Hymns on Entering and Leaving

the Twin Gates), *Jodo Wasan* (Japanese Poems on the Pure Land), *Koso Wasan* (Japanese Poems on the Eminent Monks), *Shozomatsu Wasan* (Japanese Poems on the Three Periods (of the True, Semblance and Decay of the Dharma)), *Kotaishi Shotoku Hosan* (In Praise of Prince Shotoku), *Dainippon Kokuzoku Sano Shotoku Taishi Hosan* (In Praise of Shotoku Taishi, the Kokuzoku Sano of the Great Country of Japan), *Yuishinsho Mon'i* (Essence of "Faith Alone"), *Ichinen Tanen Mon'i* (Notes on the One Recitation and the Many Recitations), *Songo Shinzo Meimon* (Collection of Comments on the "Objects of Reverence"), *Jodo Sangyo Ojo Monrui* (Passages on Birth in the Pure Land Based on the Three Pure Land Sutras), *Nyorai Nishu Eko-mon* (The Two Types of Amida Buddha's Merit Transferences), and *Mida Nyorai Myogo Toku* (The Virtue of Amida Buddha's "Name").

In addition to the above, the Venerable Master wrote many letters to his disciples and followers who remained in the Kanto area, further explaining the teaching of Jodo-Shinshu. These letters were later collected and published under titles such as *Mattosho* (Light for the Latter Ages) and *Goshosoku-sho* (Collection of Honorable Letters).

With all his literary activities, the Venerable Master must have been very busy in Kyoto.

The one great disappointment of the Venerable Master's later years must have been having to disown his son, Zenran. This came about because misunderstandings of his teaching began to grow among the people who remained in the Kanto area.

One of the misunderstandings was that since Amida Buddha's Primal Vow states that everyone (except those who commit the Five Perversities) who recites the Nembutsu will be born in the Pure Land, i.e., that as long as you recite the Nembutsu, it is all right to even commit wrong deeds. The technical term for this wrong attitude is *zoaku muge*.

Another misunderstanding is just the opposite of *zoaku muge*, and that is, although the Primal Vow assures our birth in the Pure Land, that does not mean we need not do anything to be born there. Rather, it means that we must continually endeavor to do good. This misunderstanding—in the opposite direction—is referred to as *senjukenzen*.

When the Venerable Master was about 80 years of age, he sent his son Zenran to the Kanto area in order to correct these misunderstandings. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a very difficult task, and the work did not seem to go forward smoothly. As time went on, it seems that Zenran developed the ambition to gain control of the organization in the Kanto area. In order to increase his influence and authority, Zenran began promulgating what is now known as the "secret tradition of the wrong views" (*mitsuden igi*).

Zenran told the people in the Kanto area that he was taught by his father secretly late one night, and that he was the only person in the Kanto area who knew the true teaching. This was, of course, completely untrue, for the Venerable Master always taught the same thing openly to everyone.

The actual teaching that Zenran claimed to have learned from the Venerable Master is not known; however, the letter that the Venerable Master wrote to disown Zenran

contains the following passage: "...you say that the 18th vow, the Primal Vow, is nothing more than a faded flower that must be discarded..." This indicates that Zenran denied the saving power of the "absolute 'Buddha-centered power'" (*zettai tariki*) of the 18th Vow, and that he seems to have said that we must concentrate on performing good acts, which is the error of *senjukenzen*. In other words, rather than relying on "Buddha-centered power," Zenran seems to have urged "self-centered effort" to attain birth in the Pure Land.

Sending Zenran to straighten out the misunderstandings among his followers in the Kanto area did not seem to have much effect. Rather, it seems to have resulted in disturbances breaking out among his followers. When the Venerable Master learned that the leader of those who misunderstood his teaching was his own son Zenran... We today probably cannot begin to imagine the Venerable Master's disappointment then.

In a letter addressed to Zenran dated the 29th day of the 5th month during 1256 AD (8th year of Kencho), when the Venerable Master was 84 years of age, he expressed his sorrow in the following words:

"With the deepest of regrets, I no longer consider myself to be your father and you to be my son. Sorrowfully, I state this before the 'Three Treasures (of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha)'."

There are many scholarly opinions regarding the reason or reasons for the Venerable Master disowning Zenran. Many believe it was because Zenran conspired to gain power over the Kanto followers, but I do not consider that to be the primary reason. In the letter in which the Venerable Master disowned Zenran, he wrote:

"I regret that those in the Rokuhara and Kamakura areas have heard that I disowned you like this. But (the fact that I have to do so) is something that cannot be helped. What is much more important is that you have misled those in the Hitachi and Shinozuke areas regarding the importance of birth in the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy."

Here, the Venerable Master says that while it is regrettable that those in the Rokuhara and Kamakura areas learned that he disowned his son, that happens frequently in this world and so cannot be helped. Misleading others, however, is truly regrettable. Even more than conspiring with those in authority, the main reason Zenran was disowned seems to be because he twisted the most important teaching of birth in the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy. I believe that here—where he went so far as to disown his own beloved son in order to preserve the true teaching—we have a glimpse into the Venerable Master's truly sacred mind and heart.

Although he encountered heart-breaking sorrow such as having to disown his own son, the Venerable Master spent his entire life spreading the precious Nembutsu teaching.

The Venerable Master Shinran passed away on the 28th day of the 11th lunar month during 1263 AD (2nd year of Kocho) at the age of 90. The date of his passing has

been converted to January 16 of the Western calendar. He is said to have spent his last hours at a temple called Zenbo-in, located in Kyoto.

In the *Godensho*, his last moments are described in the following way:

Without speaking of worldly matters at all, he expressed his deep indebtedness to the Buddha by reciting the sacred name (the Nembutsu) without cease.

As can be determined by this passage, the Venerable Master left this world expressing gratitude by reciting the Nembutsu.

In the *Gaija-sho* (Notes on Correcting Mistaken Views) written by the Venerable Master's grandson, Master Kakunryo during 1337 AD, the Venerable Master's last words are said to be,

When I close my eyes for the last time, please place my remains in Kamo River to nourish the fish.

In the *Hanazono Bunko* (Anthology of Flowery Passages), a work published in 1847, the Venerable Master's "Deathbed Text" is said to be:

"My life is coming to an end and though I am said to be going to the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy, (I am) like the waves of Waka Bay that ceaselessly break on the shore. Where there is one who rejoices (in the Nembutsu) consider there to be two, and where there are two who rejoice, consider there to be three, and that third (person) will be me, Shinran.

"Like Waka Bay,  
The *dharma* will remain  
Even when I am no longer here.  
(The *dharma*) will remain constant,  
As long as there  
Are those in need of it."

I believe the Venerable Master's love of all living things and his earnest desire that the teaching that saves all beings impartially will spread widely, is clearly shown in these passages.

The "Deathbed Text" was published many centuries after the Venerable Master's passing so many consider it to be a forgery. I believe, however, that it expresses the Venerable Master's compassionate mind and heart that desires the salvation of all living things very well.

## Chapter 1. The Foundation of the Venerable Master Shinran's Teaching

AS RELATED IN PART ONE, the Venerable Master Shinran was 29 years of age when he met Master Honen and selected the "Way of (attaining enlightenment by) being born in the Pure Land through the Buddha's power" (*tariki jodo-mon*). The term *tariki* used in

this phrase is written with the *kanji* character meaning “other” and the character for “power.” Accordingly, it is often misunderstood to mean relying on other people in our everyday life; however, the use of this term is restricted to our spiritual life. In explaining this term, the Venerable Master wrote in the Chapter on Practice of his *Kyogyoshinsho* (Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment), “The term *tarik*i refers to Amida Buddha’s power of the Primal Vow.”

Letter 10 of the *Mattosho* (Light for the Later Ages) contains the passage, “*Tariki* refers to being free of any calculation.” The 13th letter in that same work contains the passage: “At any rate, *tarik*i is not having the slightest calculation on the part of the ‘doer’ (*gyoja*).”

As can be determined from these quotations, everything regarding our spiritual life is to be left in the hands of the Primal Vow established by Amida Buddha. This is in common with Master Honen’s teaching in which he said that our salvation (wherein we attain the same enlightenment as a Buddha) depends solely on Amida Buddha’s Vow Power.

The term *tarik*i thus refers to the fact that in the context of spiritual realization, only Amida Buddha’s power (contained in the Primal Vow) is meaningful. For that reason, from here on, the term *tarik*i will be translated into English as “Buddha-centered power.”

The effort to realize Enlightenment through our own efforts is *jiriki*, which is written with the *kanji* characters for “self,” and “power” or “effort.” For this reason, the term *jiriki* will be rendered “self-centered effort” from here on.

## 1. Deep Self Reflection

Determining to leave everything regarding our spiritual life to “Buddha-centered power” is a truly momentous matter. As mentioned in Part One, there are many passages in the Venerable Master’s writings that demonstrate how deeply he realized how imperfect a human being he was, and how absolutely incapable he felt of eliminating his base passions and entering the realm of Enlightenment through his own efforts. If I were to quote all the passages by the Venerable Master that show this awareness, there would be no end to it, but as examples, there are the following in the *Shozomatsu Wasan* (Japanese Poems on the Three Periods (of the True, Semblance and Decay of the Dharma):

*Outwardly, we try to appear  
Wise, good and diligent,  
But we are actually filled  
With nothing but the deceits  
Of greed, anger and wrong views.  
How difficult to renounce my evil nature...*

*My mind is like snakes and scorpions,  
And since even the good I try to do  
Is tainted with the poison  
(of self-centered effort),  
It must be called the practice  
of an idiot.*

*My mind is as deceitful  
as snakes and scorpions,  
So I am absolutely incapable  
of performing good deeds.  
Without the Tathagata's merit transference,  
How can I not end with shame  
and repentance?*

These verses are based on a passage by Zendo Daishi (613 - 681 AD, one of the Seven Patriarchs of Jodo-Shinshu ) in his *Kangyo Shijoshō* (Commentary on the *Meditation Sutra*, in Four Volumes). This passage is usually translated as follows:

“Do not appear to be wise, good and diligent while inwardly false.”

The above reading expresses what Zendo *Daishi* wrote. The Venerable Master, however, quoted this passage in the Chapter on Faith of his *Kyogyoshinshō*, and interpreted it in the following way:

“Do not appear wise, good and diligent because we are so false inwardly.”

What Zendo *Daishi* intended to say was that regardless of how good we may present ourselves, that appearance is meaningless if it is not accompanied by an associated goodness within us. If we are filled with greed, anger, dishonesty and falsehood, regardless of how we may try to do good with our “three actions” (*sango*: deeds, words, thought), they are nothing more than “good mixed with the poison (of self-centered effort).” They are the “practices of an idiot” and absolutely cannot be referred to as “true.”

In other words, Zendo *Daishi* said that we must not perform “good mixed with poison” and perform the “practice of idiots”; that we should try to live as sincerely as we can.

The Venerable Master, however, read Zendo *Daishi's* words and through his great introspection, understood them to mean that we should not try to *appear* outstanding because inside we are nothing but lies, and are filled with the “base passions” of greed, anger, dishonesty and falsehood. He felt that our base nature was like that of snakes and scorpions. Regardless of how we try to do good with our “three actions,” those actions are nothing more than “good mixed with poison” and therefore “false,” and that there is nothing even resembling “truth” about them.

Some say the Venerable Master interpreted Zendo *Daishi's* words exactly the opposite of what Zendo *Daishi* intended. But the Venerable Master's understanding of himself was that regardless of how much he tried to do “good,” what he did was no more than

“good mixed with poison” and therefore “false,” and that there was absolutely no “truth” in anything that he did.

In highly individual readings of classical texts like this, the Venerable Master clearly expressed his feeling of absolute insincerity. He showed that truth can be found only in Amida Buddha, and that is what our sole reliance should be.

This understanding also deepened his awareness of the ineffectiveness of “self-centered effort.” He realized that regardless of how he tried, it was all “good mixed with poison” and therefore “false,” and that the only way open for him was leaving everything to “Buddha-centered power.”

This deep self-reflection and attitude of leaving everything to the working of Amida Buddha is expressed in the three poems from the *Shozomatsu Wasan* already quoted.

I believe giving up “self-centered effort” and entering the world of leaving everything to the working of Amida Buddha is an extremely important state in Jodo-Shinshu. Because the Venerable Master was that sort of person, the *shinjin* that is acceptance of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow and the *Nembutsu* that we recite with our mouth, are absolutely not things that depend on *our* efforts. Rather, because they result solely from “Buddha-centered power,” we refer to them as the “*shinjin* of ‘merit transference’ based on ‘Buddha-centered power’” (*tariki eko no shinjin*) and the “*Nembutsu* of the ‘merit transference’ based on ‘Buddha-centered power’” (*tariki eko no nembutsu*).

## 2. The Primal Vow

As already stated, the Primal Vow (*hongan*) expresses Amida Buddha’s desire to save all sentient beings. The *Daimuryoku-kyo* (Larger Sutra on Immeasurable Life) lists 48 Vows that Amida Buddha made when he was Hozo Bosatsu. The 18th of these vows was traditionally considered the most important. The wording of this 18th Vow is:

If, when I attain Buddhahood, all 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. Only those who commit the five perversities are excluded.

Zendo *Daishi* considered this 18th Vow to be the core of the 48 vows. The original wording of that part of the vow translated above as “recite my name even ten times,” is *naishi janen*, which literally translates to “up to ten thoughts.” It was Zendo *Daishi* who interpreted this to be “ten recitations,” and that is why the 18th Vow is translated in Jodo-Shinshu as it is. Zendo *Daishi* emphasized birth in the Pure Land through reciting the name of Amida Buddha, *Namo Amida Butsu*, which is referred to as the “Nembutsu.”

Master Honen accepted this teaching and referred to the 18th Vow as the “King of Vows.” He delved deeply into the thought of “birth in the Pure Land through recitation

of the Nembutsu,” which is central to the 18th Vow, and emphasized the “Exclusive Practice of (Reciting) the Nembutsu” (*senju nembutsu*), in which no practice other than reciting the Nembutsu is necessary.

The Venerable Master accepted this teaching of completely denying the “Path of Sages” and “various practices,” and made the Nembutsu his exclusive practice. As described in Part One, however, the monks and scholars of the then established schools of Buddha-dharma who considered “self-centered effort” in performing “various practices” to be what following the Buddhist path meant, did not accept that teaching.

During the 10th month of 1205 AD, the 9-point “Kofuku Temple Petition for Censure” written by Jokei (described in Part One) was sent to the Imperial Court. In the 7th article of that petition, Jokei stated that Master Honen misunderstood the Nembutsu. He argued that since Amida Buddha established 48 Vows, why consider only the 18th as the Primal Vow, and make the practice of reciting the Nembutsu (which he considered to be an inferior practice) the only practice.

Further, in a work titled *Zaijarin* (Correcting Errors) written in 1212 AD, a monk named Koben criticized Master Honen’s *Senjaku-shu* which denies the Bodhisattva mind because it requires “practice.” Koben pointed out that the 19th Vow is one of the vows on which Master Honen based his teaching, and yet it contains the phrase, “arouse the Bodhisattva mind and accumulate various merits with sincerity of heart.”

Such criticism, which is at least outwardly based on the *sutras*, takes the Path of Sages position which considers religious practices performed through “self-centered effort” to be the true Buddhist Way. The Venerable Master, however, completely denied the “various practices” position of the Path of Sages and upheld Master Honen’s position of the single practice of reciting the Nembutsu. He made that intent very clear in the Chapter on True Buddha Land of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, where he wrote:

With regard to the ocean-like vows, there are the “true” and “provisional” vows.

In other words, the Venerable Master saw that among Amida Buddha’s 48 Vows, some are “true” while others are “provisional.” He then listed the five true vows that express the “Buddha-centered power” truth:

**11th Vow** that absolutely assures Enlightenment; discussed in the Chapter on Attainment of the *Kyogyo-shinsho*. (11th Vow: *If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not dwell in the Definitely Assured State and unfailingly reach Nirvana, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.*)

**12th Vow** that describes Immeasurable Light (Wisdom); discussed in the Chapter on True Buddha Land. (12th Vow: *If, when I attain Buddhahood, my light should be limited, unable to illuminate at least a hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of Buddha-lands, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.*)

**13th Vow** that describes Immeasurable Life (Compassion); discussed in the Chapter on True Buddha Land. (13th Vow: *If, when I attain Buddhahood, my life-span should be*

*limited, even to the extent of a hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of kalpas, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.)*

**17th Vow** that all Buddhas will recite his Name (Namo Amida Butsu); discussed in the Chapter on Practice. (17th Vow: *If, when I attain Buddhahood, innumerable Buddhas in the lands of the ten directions should not all praise and glorify my Name, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.*)

**18th Vow** that assures birth in the Pure Land of those with “sincere mind,” “faith serene,” and “wish birth (in the Pure Land)”; described in the Chapter on Faith. (18th Vow: see above.)

Jokei and Koben criticized Master Honen by stating that among the 48 Vows, Amida Buddha in his causal state as Hozo *Bosatsu* did not vow only “birth in the Pure Land through recitation of the Nembutsu” (*Nembutsu ojo*) but that he also vowed “birth in the Pure Land through various practices” (*shogyo ojo*). Specifically, Koben criticized Master Honen by quoting the 19th Vow and pointing out that it is an example of “birth in the Pure Land through various practices.”

The Venerable Master considered the 19th and 20th Vows to be vows that express the provisional “self-centered effort” point of view, and described them in the Chapter on Transformed Land of his *Kyogyoshinsho*. The 19th vows “birth in the Pure Land through various practices” (*shogyo ojo*), and the 20th vows “(birth in the Pure Land through) reciting the Nembutsu with ‘self-centered effort’” (*jiriki nembutsu*).

I believe explaining the 48 Vows in terms of “true” and “provisional” vows as the Venerable Master did, completely defuses Jokei and Koben’s arguments.

Incidentally, in most cases where the Venerable Master uses terms such as Primal Vow (*hongan*), and “Oath Vow” (*seigan*), he is referring to the 18th Vow.

### 3. The Three Pure Land Sutras

The “Three Pure Land Sutras” (*Jodo Sambukyo*) are:

- *Muryoju-kyo* (Sutra on (the Buddha of) Immeasurable Life, also referred to as *Daikyo, Larger Sutra*), in two volumes.
- *Kanmuryoju-kyo* (Sutra on Meditation on (the Buddha of) Immeasurable Life, also referred to as *Kangyo, Meditation Sutra*), in one volume.
- *Amida-kyo* (Sutra on Amida (Buddha); also referred to as *Shokyo, Smaller Sutra, and Amida Sutra*), in one volume.

The selection of these *sutras* was made by Master Honen.

The Venerable Master interpreted these “Three Pure Land Sutras” in a very individualistic way. This interpretation, as previously explained, can be considered to be in response to criticisms that Jokei and Koben made to Master Honen’s position. In other words, in Article Six of the “Kofuku Temple Petition for Censure,” Jokei made the “three meritorious acts” (*sanpuku*) described in the *Meditation Sutra* the basis for his assertion that “birth in the Pure Land through various practices” (*shogyo ojo*) is advocated even in the “Three Pure Land Sutras.”

In his *Zaijarin* (Correcting Errors), Koben criticized Master Honen because in his *Senjaku-shu*, Master Honen refuted the “practice of visualizing the Buddha” (*kan-but-su-gyo*) and stated that those who take pleasure in “visualizing the Buddha” and do not “recite the Buddha’s name” of *Namo Amida Butsu*, turn their back on Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow, and disagree with Shakyamuni Buddha’s intent. Koben also pointed out that the title of the *sutra* was, “Sutra on Meditation on (the Buddha of) Immeasurable Life,” and not “Sutra on Reciting (the Name of the Buddha of) Immeasurable Life.” That being the case, he argued, it must differ from Amida’s Primal Vow, or that Shakyamuni, while discussing Amida’s Primal Vow, was in error about it.

As Jokei and Koben point out, the *Meditation Sutra* does recommend practices such as the “three contemplations” (*sangan*), the “three meritorious acts” (*sanpuku*), and “meditating on the Buddha” (*kanbutsu*), so their criticisms are not without merit.

The explanation that shows their interpretation is not faithful to Master Honen’s understanding is referred to as “revealing the (truth) in the three *sutras*, implicitly and explicitly” (*sangyo onkenjaku*). Master Honen’s position is that the *Larger Sutra* teaches the truth just as it is, and based on the intent of the 18th Vow, is the sacred work that explains the “Nembutsu of ‘Buddha-centered power’” (*tarikis nembutsu*). It does not have an “implicit” or “explicit” position.

The *Meditation Sutra*, however, is considered to express the truth through expedient means. This *sutra* is considered to express the truth using the “principle of describing expedient means obviously” (*kenzetsu*). This means explaining the intent of the 19th Vow which is the practice of the “two goods, fixed and dispersed” (*josan nizen*). The reason for *josan nizen* is to explain the “Nembutsu of ‘Buddha-centered power’” based on the 18th Vow. This is referred to as “the principle of expressing dimly-seen truth” (*onsho*).

Finally, the *Amida Sutra* is also considered to express the truth through expedient means.

The “principle of expedient means expressed obviously” in this *sutra* expresses the intent of the 20th Vow, which is “reciting the Nembutsu through ‘self-centered effort’” and the “principle of the truth expressed in an obscure way” expresses the intent of the 18th Vow, namely, reciting the Nembutsu through “Buddha-centered power.”

This explanation of “revealing the truth implicitly and explicitly” is similar to the division of the 48 Vows into those that are “true” and those that are “provisional,” and can be

considered the Venerable Master's counter-argument to criticisms of Master Honen's "Buddha-centered power" teaching by other Buddhist schools.

Many of Master Honen's other disciples also attempted to counter the criticisms by other Buddhist schools, but they did so based on a "self-centered effort" Path of Sages position. The Venerable Master must be considered to have taken the most extreme "Buddha-centered power" position, and thus was most faithful in upholding Honen *Shonin's* teaching.

#### 4. Purpose of the Buddha's Appearance in this World

As the Venerable Master Shinran wrote in the Chapter on Teaching of his *Kyogyoshinsho*: "Now if I were to reveal the True Teaching, it is the *Larger Sutra* on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life...", he considers the *Larger Sutra* to be the sutra that expresses the truth.

A little later, the Venerable Master asks: "How do we know (this *sutra*) was the great matter for which Shakyamuni appeared in this world?" He then quotes Ananda's words from the *Larger Sutra*:

Today, Oh World-Honored One, you seem filled with joy, your body is pure and your face radiates a brightness that is like an image in a mirror without blemishes. Further, your august appearance is magnificent and beyond measure. I have never seen you look as majestic as you do today. Oh World-Honored One, today you seem to dwell in a marvelous meditative state, that you dwell in the World of Enlightenment where all base desires have been destroyed, and as the eye of wisdom that lights up the world of delusion, you are blessed with the virtue of leading others. As the Most Honored in this World, you dwell in the realm of Wisdom, and as the Most Honored in all the Worlds, you put into practice the virtue of the Tathagatas.

This passage is referred to as "Realizing the Essence of the Five Virtues" (*gotoku zuigen*) because Ananda sees "the five virtues" in Shakyamuni Buddha.

There are other translations of the *Larger Sutra* (with different titles) that refer to the same "five virtues." the Venerable Master then states in the conclusion to the Chapter on Teaching:

Accordingly, this is clear evidence that (the *Larger Sutra*) reveals the True Teaching.

In other words, Shakyamuni Buddha preached the *Larger Sutra* with the "five virtues" that he did not usually reveal, and that is why it is considered the teaching that he appeared in this world to preach.

Regarding this, in the *Shoshin-ge* (Hymn of True *Shinjin*), the Venerable Master wrote:

*The reason for the Tathagata's  
appearance in the world,*

*Was to preach the ocean-like Primal Vow of Amida.*

Further, in the *Songo Shinzo Meimon* (Collection of Comments on the “Object of Reverence”), which explains the *Shoshin-ge*, he wrote:

“The phrase, ‘The reason for the Tathagata’s appearance in the world’ means that the dharma that (Shakyamuni) appeared in this world of the various Buddhas to teach, ‘Was to preach the ocean-like Primal Vow of Amida.’ The sole reason (Shakyamuni) appeared in the world of the various Buddhas was to teach about Amida Buddha’s Ocean-like Vow taught in the Single Vehicle (*Larger Sutra*).

As we can see in this passage, which the Venerable Master wrote in his later years, the term “*tathagata*” was not limited to Shakyamuni Buddha, but referred to all Buddhas, and that the purpose of all Buddhas appearing in this world was to preach the *Larger Sutra* which explains Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow.

Earlier scholar/monks asserted that the *Lotus Sutra* (*Hokke-kyo*) is the true *sutra*, the that Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in this world to preach. They also asserted that the *sutras* used in the Jodo- Shinshu teachings are not completely true, that rather, they are only a temporary truth, and even urged that they be discarded.

The Tendai and Nichiren Schools of Buddha-dharma consider the *Lotus Sutra* to be the *sutra* that Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in this world to preach, but as already mentioned, in our Jodo-Shinshu School the *Larger Sutra* is the *sutra* that explains the truth, and is considered the *sutra* that Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in this world to proclaim.

## 5. Classification of the Teachings

As related in Part 1, when Shinran *Shonin* was 29 years of age, he abandoned the way of “self- - centered effort” and entered the way of “Buddha-centered power.” He was firmly convinced that the 18th Vow (the Primal Vow) of “absolute ‘Buddha-centered power’” was the only way available for himself, and this lead him to feel that the teaching which he accepted was the highest. That is how he evaluated Buddha-dharma and religion in general. This is referred to as, “classification of the various Buddhist schools” (*kyoso hanjyaku*), in which each Buddhist school shows how it is related to other Buddhist schools with the goal of showing why their own school is the best. The Venerable Master’s classification has two parts:

- “Division of a pair into four parts”
- “Classification of the ‘true,’ ‘provisional’ and ‘false’ teachings”

## “Division of a Pair into Four Parts”

The principle of “division of a pair into four parts” (*niso shija-han*) is explained in the Venerable Master’s *Kyogyoshinsho* and *Gutoku-sho* (Notes of the Short-Haired One). The *niso* of *niso shija-han*, is a division of Buddha-dharma into “transcendent” (fast or quick) and “gradual” (slow).

The *shija* of *niso shija-han* is written with the *kanji* characters for “four” (*shi*) and “parts” (*ja*). It points out that the “transcendence” of *niso* is further divided into “crosswise” and “vertical,” and that the “gradual” is also divided into the same “crosswise” and “vertical,” as shown in the following:

“Crosswise” refers to the “‘easy practice’ (*igyō*) of ‘Buddha-centered power’” of the Pure Land Path.

“Vertical” refers to the “‘difficult practice’ (*nangyo*) of ‘self-centered effort’” in the Path of Sages.

Broadly speaking, all of Buddha-dharma can be divided into the following four categories of teachings:

- “Self-centered effort” (*jiriki*).
- “Buddha-centered power” (*tariki*).
- “Abrupt enlightenment” (*tongyo*).
- “Gradual enlightenment” (*zengyo*).

“Crosswise Transcendent” (*ocho*) in the above chart is the “abrupt enlightenment” teaching within the “Buddha-centered power” teaching. It is the teaching of “absolute ‘Buddha-centered power’” (*zettai tariki*) based on the 18th Vow that is the foundation of the Jodo-Shinshu teaching.

“Vertical Transcendent” (*shucho*) on the other hand, is the “abrupt enlightenment” teaching within the “self-centered effort” teaching, and is the basis of the Kegon, Tendai, Shingon and Zen schools of Buddha-dharma.

Further, “crosswise gradual” (*o-shutsu*) is the “gradual enlightenment” teaching within the “Buddha-centered power” teaching that is the basis of the 19th (called the Essential Vow) and 20th (called the True Vow) Vows, which have not yet reached the state of being “absolute ‘Buddha-centered power’” as is the 18th Vow.

“Vertical gradual” (*shushutsu*) is the “gradual enlightenment” teaching within the “self-centered effort” teaching, and is the basis of the Hosso and Sanron schools of Buddha-dharma.

In the part of the *Gutoku-sho* (Notes by the Short-Haired One) where the Venerable Master discusses “division of a pair into four parts,” he points out that aside from the

“crosswise transcendent” teaching of “absolute ‘Buddha-centered power’” based on the 18th Vow, all other teachings are “expedient teachings.”

### “Classification into the ‘True,’ ‘Provisional’ and ‘False’”

Next is “Classification into the ‘true,’ ‘provisional’ and ‘false’” (*shinke-gi-han*). In Letter 1 of the *Mattosho* (Light for the Later Ages), the Venerable Master wrote:

Within the Jodo teaching are the “true” and the “provisional.” The “true” is the selected Primal Vow. The “provisional” is the good of the meditative and non-meditative practices. The selected Primal Vow is the True Teaching of the Pure Land, and the meditative and non-meditative practices are provisional teachings.

In the Chapter on *Shinjin* of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, the the Venerable Master wrote the following about the word “true”:

...the word “true” is contrasted with “false” and “provisional.”

He wrote the following about “provisional”:

“Provisional” refers to the various beings in the Path of Sages and the beings who practice the meditative and non-meditative good deeds of the Pure Land Path.

He wrote the following about “false”:

There are 95 false teachings, described under 65 headings.

As can be determined from the above, the teaching of “absolute ‘Buddha-centered power’” based on the 18th Vow (the Selected Primal Vow) is the True teaching. The teaching of the Path of Sages and also the Pure Land Path that is based on the 19th (the “essential gate”) and 20th (the “true gate”) Vows are the “provisional” teachings. The teachings other than the teachings of Buddha-dharma are “false” teachings. That is how the Venerable Master placed Jodo-Shinshu within the context of other teachings.

## Chapter 2. The Venerable Master Shinran’s Teaching of “Salvation”

THE 20TH CENTURY WILL END in a few years. We frequently hear that because of the many problems that arise in our technologically-advanced society that borders on the phenomenal, and because of the collapse of Marxism, that the 21st century will be the “religious century,” or the “period of the mind/heart.”

I believe the teaching of Jodo-Shinshu will be the light that leads the people of the 21st Century to live fully and strongly.

### 1. The Benefit of “Truth”

Many religious cults flourish at present. Most of them say they will give you benefits such as earning more money, curing illnesses or bringing good fortune. The benefit that the Venerable Master Shinran says we will be blessed with in Jodo-Shinshu, however, is “truth,” which cannot be exchanged for anything else.

In the Chapter on Teaching of the Kyogyoshinsho, the Venerable Master wrote:

Shakyamuni (Buddha) appeared in this world and showed the teaching of the Way. He particularly desired to save the multitudes by endowing them with the true benefits.

Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in this world, the Venerable Master tells us, in order to save all who are mired in delusion. He did so by blessing us with the true benefit of all benefits, the “benefit of the truth.” And regarding this “benefit of the truth,” in his *Ichinen Tanen Mon’i* (On the One Recitation and the Many Recitations), the Venerable Master wrote that,:

... the “benefit of truth” is Amida’s Vow...

As the Venerable Master says, the “benefit of truth,” is Amida Buddha’s sacred vow to cause our birth in the Pure Land, as expressed in the 18th Vow, also called the Primal Vow.

In the same *Ichinen Tanen Mon’i* where it states “for receiving the ‘great benefit’” (*i-toku-dairi*), there is the further explanation written in *kana* letters: “Know that you will receive the benefit of becoming a Buddha.”

The term *dairi* means “great benefit,” but it does not refer to becoming well-known or rich in our competitive society, nor does it refer to always being in a state of perfect health. Rather, it refers to the fact that we will become enlightened or attain *nirvana*—that we will become a Buddha. The Venerable Master taught us deluded beings that the “true benefit” is being saved by Amida Buddha’s vow (Primal Vow) that absolutely guarantees we will become Buddhas.

Shakyamuni Buddha, who first awakened to the teaching of Buddha-dharma, was born a prince 2,500 years ago in the country of Kapila in ancient India. It was a small country, but a prince of even a small country had much greater material benefits than an ordinary person. The only unfortunate incident in his life was the death of his mother shortly after he was born (traditionally, it is said that she died seven days after his birth). As a future king, he grew to adulthood with great expectations. Unlike our young people today, I believe Shakyamuni had absolutely no problems with the sort of stress that is a part of our competitive society.

When this prince was twelve years of age, however, he saw a bird swoop down from the sky to capture and eat a worm that had crawled out of the earth. This spectacle brought him to realize that this world is one in which the strong prey on the weak. Later, on leaving his castle from different gates, he saw that human beings are subject to the sufferings of old age, illness and death. As a result, he was brought to realize that everyone, without exception, must experience suffering and agony.

The prince determined to seek a way of release from this human suffering. When he was 29 years of age, he abandoned his princely rank, left home, and became a wandering monk. After six years of the most severe ascetic practices (although not *because* of it), he became a Buddha, which means “Enlightened One.” Such an enlightened state is a release from all suffering. The purpose of the Buddhadharma that Shakyamuni taught is for all of us to “become Buddhas” just like him.

In the *Larger Sutra*, it states:

... those with farm fields are concerned about those fields, and those who have dwellings are concerned about those dwellings...

We suffer when we don’t have what we want. But we are wrong if we believe our suffering will disappear when we get what we want. Rather, a new suffering or agony will arise, and continue to arise, one after the other. We are released from such agony only when we reach the state of enlightenment in which our base passions of greed, anger and a complaining mind are eliminated.

As already stated in the section on “Classification of the Teaching” in Chapter 1, the Venerable Master considered the “absolute ‘Buddha-centered power’” teaching of the 18th Vow to be the true teaching, and that all other Buddhist teachings are merely provisional. Further, he considered all teachings other than Buddha-dharma, which do not consider becoming a Buddha their goal, to be false teachings.

Accordingly, it can be said that the true teaching is what offers the true benefit, “the benefit of becoming a Buddha.” That is why the Venerable Master wrote, “The true benefit is Amida’s Vow,” pointing out that Amida Buddha’s Vow (hongan, the 18th Vow, the Primal Vow) is the true way to be released from the suffering of this world by showing us the way to become a Buddha. That is what true benefit is.

### **Salvation of the “Evil Person”**

- “The Evil Person is the True Object (of Amida’s Salvation)”
- Whose Concept is “The Evil Person is the True Object (of Amida Buddha’s Salvation)”?

### **“The Evil Person is the True Object (of Amida’s Salvation)”**

In Article Three of the *Tannisho* (Notes Lamenting Differences), it states:

Since even a good person will be born in the Pure Land, how much more so will an evil person! Most people, however, say, “Since even an evil person will be born in the Pure Land, how much more so will a good person.” This view seems reasonable at first sight, but it is contrary to the purport of the Primal Vow of “Buddha-centered power.”

In other words, the object of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow are those who are aware of their evil nature, rather than those who are able to do good. This is referred to as "the evil person is the true object (of Amida's salvation)" (*akunin shoki*).

In Article One of the *Tannisho*, it also states:

Know that Amida's Primal Vow does not distinguish between those who are young or old, or good or evil. *Shinjin* (the "faith" mind, "true" mind) alone is necessary to receive the Vow that saves all sentient beings who are weighted down by their base passions.

As can be determined from this passage, the purpose of the Primal Vow is to save all who are burdened by base passions such as greed and anger.

Here, it is extremely important to understand just what is meant by "evil person." Generally, there are three ways of considering what might be considered "evil." They are:

- Legally
- Morally
- Religiously

What is intended by "evil" are not those who have committed robbery or murder and broken laws (legal evil), nor those who have committed immoral acts (moral evil). Rather, what is intended in this passage is "evil" in the religious sense.

As already mentioned, the Venerable Master was a person who reflected deeply on what he was. I have already quoted his poem from the *Shozomatsu Wasan* (Japanese Poems on the Three Periods (of the True, Semblance, and Decay of the Dharma):

*My mind is like snakes and scorpions,  
And since even the good I try to do  
Is tainted with the poison  
(of self-centered effort),  
It must be called the practice of an idiot.*

That is how deeply he looked into himself, and realized how "evil" he was. Following the part of Article Three of the *Tannisho* quoted above, the Venerable Master is further quoted as saying:

“Amida made His Vow out of compassion for us who are so filled with passion that we cannot free ourselves from samsara by any practice...”

This clearly shows his realization of what an "ignorant being filled with base (evil) passions" (*bonno gu soku no bombu*) that he was. Further, in Article Two of the *Tannisho*, the Venerable Master is quoted as saying:

“But since I am incapable of any practice whatsoever, hell will definitely be my dwelling...”

Here the Venerable Master confesses that because he is so filled with evil, no matter how diligently he tries to do good, there is nowhere for him to go other than hell. It was

from such a deeply self-reflective position that he religiously realized what he really is. This is, of course, just the Venerable Master's subjective evaluation of himself; from his conduct, all those around him considered him to be the incarnation of a *bodhisattva*.

As most people know, the *Tannisho* is not a work that the Venerable Master wrote himself. The author is considered to be Yuien-*bo*. Accordingly, some scholars have put forth the thesis that the position, "the evil person is the true object (of Amida's salvation)," is not something developed by the Venerable Master. That is, however, absolutely not the case. First of all, as you must also know, the first ten articles of the *Tannisho* are direct quotations from the Venerable Master. Further, in the General Preface of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

"...Out of compassion, the World's Hero sought in particular to benefit those whocommitted (the five) deadly evils, the abusers of the Right Dharma and the *Issendai*."

As can be determined by this, the Buddha's great compassion extends even to those who have committed, or are:

- "(the five) deadly evils," which are: killing your father, killing your mother, killing an *arhat*, shedding the blood of a Buddha and creating dissension in the *sangha*.
- "abusers of the Right Dharma," who are those who slander the Dharma,
- *Issendai* (Sanskrit, *icchantikās*), who have not had the opportunity to hear the teaching of Buddha-dharma.

Further, in the Chapter on Faith in the *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master referred to those who commit the "five deadly evils," "abusers of the Dharma" and *Issendais*, as: "... (the) three types of beings who are difficult to save and who have the three kinds of illnesses difficult to cure." He then quotes a long passage from the *Nehan-gyo* (Nirvana Sutra) and comments on that passage, emphasizing that even these "difficult-to-save beings" are within the salvation of the Primal Vow. These are the places in his *Kyogyoshinsho* where we can see how the Venerable Master explained his position of "the evil person is the true object (of Amida's salvation)."

Further, the Venerable Master explained the meaning of the passage at the end of the 18th Vow that states: "... those who commit the five deadly evils and abuse the right *dharma* are excluded." In his *Songo Shinzo Meimon* (Collection of Comments on the "Objects of Reverence"), he expands on this phrase in the following way:

"The two *kanji* characters for "exclude" in the phrase, "... those who commit the five deadly evils are excluded," consist of the character for "just" or "only" and the character for "except." The purpose of the phrases, "commit five deadly evils" and "abuse the right dharma" is to show how deeply evil such actions are, and to declare the intent of causing birth in the Pure Land of all sentient beings in the ten directions without exception."

Although the phrases, "commit five deadly evils" and "abuse the right dharma" are used in the 18th Vow, the Venerable Master did not understand this to mean that those who commit such acts will really be excluded from the provisions of the 18th Vow. Rather, he pointed out the deeply evil nature of these two actions, and that the purpose of the vow was to cause birth in the Pure Land of even those who commit them. If we consider that point together with the passage in the General Preface just quoted, we realize that rather than even those who "commit the five deadly evils" and "abuse the right dharma," it is precisely those who commit such acts who are the true object of "salvation."

Although the Venerable Master emphasized that the purpose of the Primal Vow is to save evil persons, he is quoted in the Epilogue of the *Tannisho* as saying:

“When I carefully consider the Vow which Amida brought forth after five *kalpas* contemplation, I find that it was for me, Shinran, alone! How grateful I am to Amida’s Primal Vow that was created solely to save me, possessed of as many karmic evils as I am!”

As indicated above, the Venerable Master looked into the Primal Vow that was established to save "evil persons" such as those who commit the "five deadly evils," "abusers of the right *dharma*" and the Issendai, and looking deeply into himself, realized that he himself was the most evil of all, and thus the most in need of such a vow.

As expressed in the aphorism, "Correcting our errors from seeing the errors of others," only when we see others acting badly do we become faintly aware of that indication in ourselves. Unfortunately, we are very slow to become aware of our own shortcomings. The deeper we look into ourselves, however, the clearer we see how evil we truly are, and the more we become aware of our insincerity. Or, expressed in more modern terms, the more we become aware of our imperfections.

In Article Thirteen of the *Tannisho*, the Venerable Master is quoted as saying, "When the *karmic* conditions are ripe, we might do anything!" making us aware that when the causes or conditions are in place, who knows what horrible things we might do. Because that is the sort of being we are, the position of "the evil person is the true object (of Amida's salvation)" also expressed as, "Since even a good person can be born in the Pure Land, how much more so will an evil person"-gives us confidence that "our birth (in the Pure Land) is determined" (*ojo ichijo*), and is what gives us spiritual relief.

We must be very careful, however, to not take the phrase, "the evil person is the true object (of Amida's salvation)," to mean that we should intentionally perform bad or evil actions. In traditional Jodo- Shinshu terminology, this mistaken point of view is referred to as "creating evil without obstruction" (*zoaku muge*).

Letter 20 of the *Mattosho* contains the passage:

“(You should never say,) here’s an antidote so take all the poison you want...”

Further, the *Tannisho* states:

“A person once fell into holding the following wrong view: He held that since the purpose of the Vow was to save those who had committed evil actions, we should do evil on purpose to make it the cause for our birth (in the Pure Land). So saying, he purposely committed evil. When the Venerable Master (Shinran) heard about this, he said in a letter, ‘We should not take poison just because there is an antidote.’ He meant to dissuade us from holding such a wrong view, but that does not mean evil is an obstacle to our birth (in the Pure Land) at all.”

We should not take poison just because there is an antidote for it. The Venerable Master says it is an outrageous mistake to urge others to do evil because of Amida Buddha's saving grace.

### **Whose Concept is “The Evil Person is the True Object?”**

Recently, some scholars have argued that the concept of “the evil person is the true object (of Amida Buddha's salvation)” did not originate with the Venerable Master and that it can be found in his teacher, Master Honen's teaching. This position is based on a work titled, *Daigo-bon Honen Shonin Denki* (The Daigo Biography of Master Honen), which was discovered in Daigo Sambo Temple in Kyoto during the early part of this century. In that work, there is a passage that clearly parallels the wording of Article Three of the *Tannisho*:

There is an oral tradition that a good person will be born in the Pure Land so how much more so will an evil person.

At first there was some doubt about the authenticity of the above passage. Later studies have, however, confirmed that it does reflect Master Honen's thinking. The opinion that the passage in Article Three of the *Tannisho*, “Since even a good person can be born in the Pure Land, how much more so will an evil person,” was not first expressed by the Venerable Master but rather by Master Honen, therefore became stronger.

Regarding this, the traditional Jodo-Shinshu position is that Articles One through Ten of the *Tannisho* are all words that the author, supposedly Yuien-bo, heard directly from the Venerable Master. As such, most of these articles end with, “... to *un nun*.” This is rendered in the Ryukoku University translation of the *Tannisho* as, “Thus it was said.”

Articles Three and Ten, however, end with, “... to *ose sorai ki*,” which is rendered in the Ryukoku University translation as, “Thus the Master said.”

Article Ten contains the well-known phrase, “The logic of non-logic” (*mugi wo motte gi to su*) which is also found among the words attributed to Master Honen. Since there are many places where the Venerable Master quotes Master Honen, the deduction that the phrase, “...to *ose sorai ki*” refers to the words that the Venerable Master heard from Master Honen may very well be correct. Further, Master Kakunryo, the Venerable Master's great grandson, in his *Kudensho* (On the Oral Tradition), wrote:

“The Venerable Master (Shinran) of the Hongwanji received the teaching from the ‘revered predecessor’ of Kurodani (Master Honen) and told Master Nyoshin that people generally believe that since even an evil person will be born in the Pure Land, how much more so will a good person. But this attitude opposes the general intent of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow, and specifically, opposes the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha. ... Accordingly, since even a good person can be born in the Pure Land, then why wouldn’t the “true object” (*shoki*), namely, an evil person, be born there? That’s why we can say that since even a good person will be born in the Pure Land, how much more so will an evil person.”

As you can see, this passage contains wording that is very similar to the *Tannisho*, “Since even a good person can be born in the Pure Land, how much more so will an evil person,” indicating that those words may well have been received from the “‘revered predecessor’ (*sentoku*) of Kurodani,” meaning Master Honen.

From these indications, it may very well be that the phrase, “Since even a good person can be born in the Pure Land, how much more so will an evil person,” found in Article Three of the *Tannisho*, are not the Venerable Master’s words, but Master Honen’s. Still, I believe there is a great deal of difference in the contents of the thought of these two persons. In Chapter 11 of his *Senjaku-shu* (A Collection of Selected Passages), Master Honen wrote:

“The deepest evil can be eliminated by the supporting power of the Nembutsu. Accordingly, the incomparable dharma is taught to those who are most evil and are at the lowest rungs (of Enlightenment).”

As can be determined from this, the Nembutsu is precisely for the benefit of those who are most evil. That is why the Nembutsu is so outstanding.

Further, in Volume Five of the *Wago Toroku* (A Record of the Light), it states:

“Honen-*bo* (Master Honen ) of the Ten Evils said he will be born in the Pure Land through the Nembutsu, and was. Again, Honen-*bo* the Complainer said he would be born in the Pure Land through the Nembutsu.”

From the phrases, “Honen-*bo* of the Ten Evils” and “Honen-*bo* the Complainer,” we see that the “the evil person is the true (object of Amida’s salvation)” teaching of both Master Honen and the Venerable Master are very similar. However, the following passage can also be found in Book Five of the same *Wago Toroku* document:

Further, in the *Saiho Shinanho* (Notes on Instructions to the Western Direction), it states:

Honen-*bo* (Master Honen ) of the Ten Evils said he will be born in the Pure Land through the Nembutsu, and was. Again, Honen-*bo* the Complainer said he would be born in the Pure Land through the Nembutsu.

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Master Honen and the Venerable Master are very similar. However, the following passage can also be found in Book Five of the same *Wago Toroku* document:

“Good people who recite the Nembutsu while being good, and evil people who recite the Nembutsu while remaining evil, are “saved” by the Nembutsu although they remain what they are. Those who recite the Nembutsu by discarding evil and becoming good, however, are truly in accord with the mind and heart of the Buddha.”

Further, in the *Saiho Shinanho* (Notes on Instructions to the Western Direction), it states:

Those who commit the “ten evils” and “five deadly evils” believe they will be “saved” but they should try to not commit any of these evil actions. Still, since even an evil person will be “saved,” how much more so will a good person.

From these passages, we can determine that while Master Honen, on the one hand says that the evil person can be “saved,” on the other hand also indicates that, “the good person is the true object (of salvation).”

Further, the following passage is found in *Wago Toroku*:

“Although we consider ourselves to be evil persons, we do not consider ourselves to be so evil that we commit the “five deadly evils” and that is why we will be “saved” even a hundred years after the start of the *mappo* period. Because we live in the present period and have not committed the (five deadly evils), how much more so will we be saved (because we have only committed the “ten evils”).”

Here we see that although Master Honen refers to himself as “Honen-*bo* of the Ten Evils,” there is no realization that he was the even worse perpetrator of the “five deadly evils.” There is thus a difference between himself and the Venerable Master who said he was “absolutely destined for hell.”

Again, in the *Wago Toroku* and *Sanbukyo-tai'i* (Essence of the Pure Land *Sutras*), Master Honen recommends, “birth in the Pure Land in the highest grade” (*jobon-ojo*), but in this regard the Venerable Master said:

“When I carefully consider Amida’s Vow that he established after five *kalpas* of contemplation, I see that it was solely for me, Shinran, alone,” indicating that Amida Buddha’s Great Compassion is directed to him, who was “absolutely destined for hell” (i.e., in the “lowest rank of the lowest grade”).

Further, I believe Article Nine of the *Tannisho* makes very clear the difference between Master Honen’s and the Venerable Master’s position. In that article, the author Yuien-*bo* complains that,

“Even when I recite the Nembutsu, I rarely have the mind of rapture and joy, nor do I wish to be born in the Pure Land in all haste. Why is this so?”

“In response to this statement expressing doubt, the Venerable Master replies:

“I, Shinran, also had the same question. Now, Yuiem-*bo*, you are in the same state of mind!”

Some people understand the statement, “also had the same question” in the above passage to mean, “*still have* the same doubt,” but I believe it really means, “*had* such doubts in the past.” (I plan to go into this in greater detail later in this book.) And then, as the Venerable Master continues:

“... don’t you think our birth in the Pure Land is all the more assured because we cannot rejoice and dance up to in heaven and down to earth? It is our evil passions that prevent us from rejoicing when we should. Knowing this, the Buddha referred to us as, “common mortals filled with evil passions.” That is why (evil) beings such as we are able to accept the Compassionate Vow of ‘Buddha-centered power’ as being all the more trustworthy.”

As the Venerable Master pointed out, our birth in the Pure Land is all the more assured precisely *because* we are unable to rejoice at the things that we should. He continues by saying, “that is why (evil) beings such as we, are able to accept the Compassionate Vow of ‘Buddha-centered power’ as being all the more trustworthy,” pointing out that Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow is primarily for “ignorant beings filled with base passions” (*bonno gusoku no bombu*), which is what the “evil person” (*akunin*) is.

And then, as this passage continues:

“Again, the lack of desire to be born in the Pure Land in all haste and the helplessness we feel when we become even slightly ill, leading us to fear we may die, are also due to our evil passions ... Amida Buddha is especially concerned about those who have no desire to hurry to the Pure Land. That is why we feel so grateful to the Great Compassion and the Great Vow, and trust them all the more, knowing that our birth in the Pure Land is absolutely assured.

“The working of our *bonno* is seen where we do not wish to hurry to the Pure Land and worry about whether we will die or not when we become even the least bit ill. Since the nature of the Primal Vow is to take pity on those who are *not of a mind to hurry to the Pure Land* and cannot look on indifferently and not save such persons, however, we who do not wish to hurry to the Pure Land can be all the more assured of the saving grace of the Buddha’s Primal Vow. That is why “ignorant beings filled with base passions” are the object of the Primal Vow.”

As the Venerable Master is quoted as saying in Article Nine of the *Tannisho*, the object of salvation by the Primal Vow are those who are unable to rejoice when they should, and who do not have the mind and heart of desiring to quickly be born in the Pure Land.

On this point, Master Rennyo wrote the following in Letter 13, Fascicle 4, collected in the *Gobunsho* (Honorable Letters):

...Master Honen said, “Doers (of the Nembutsu)’ (*gyonin*) who aspire for the Pure Land are filled with joy when they become ill.” These are his very words.

As can be seen from this passage, Master Honen used exactly the opposite words from those in the *Tannisho* just quoted.

The following appears in a work titled *Denzaki Nyasho* (Notes on Kneading the Denzaki) by Master Shogei of the Chinzei School of the Jodo denomination (which traces its lineage to Master Honen):

(Master Honen) said, “Merchants are happy to have their sleep interrupted by the crowing of the rooster at sunrise so they can start work. Those who desire to be born in the Pure Land should take similar pleasure in the unexpected agony of illness.”

As can be determined from this, those who desire to be born in the Pure Land rejoice rather than become discouraged when they become ill.

Further, in Panel 23 of *Honen Shonin Gyojo Ezu* (Illustrations of Master Honen’s Conduct), - Honen *Shonin* is quoted as saying:

“I have no doubts about the Primal Vow. Nor do I not desire to be born in the Pure Land. But though I consider my birth in the Pure Land to be absolutely determined, it is not good that the desire to be born there immediately does not arise morning and evening. This is like hearing the Pure Land teaching, but not truly listening to it. As expressed in the sutras, this is like transcending the ‘three evil realms’ but still being filled with evil.”

As expressed above, Master Honen believed that not wanting to hurry to the Pure Land morning and evening is bad, and proof that our evils have not been eliminated.

The Venerable Master Shinran’s position, however, is that those without the desire to hurry to the Pure Land, and who feel helpless and fearful of dying when they become even slightly ill, are the true object of salvation by the Primal Vow.

I believe this is a clear difference in Master Honen’s and the Venerable Master’s positions.

The above summarizes the sorts of arguments that have recently been raised about the originator of the point of view that, “the evil person is the true object (of Amida’s salvation).”

I believe the statement found in Article Three of the *Tannisho*, “Since even a good person can be born in the Pure Land, how much more so will an evil person,” was first expressed by Master Honen but I also believe that there is a great deal of difference in the significance of that statement for the Venerable Master and for Master Honen.

The Venerable Master Shinran felt he was absolutely destined for hell, that the Primal Vow was solely for the evil person that he was. Master Honen said something similar to, “the evil person is the true object (of Amida’s salvation),” but this phrase came into wide use as a result of what the Venerable Master was quoted as saying in the *Tannisho*, “Since even a good person will be born in the Pure Land, how much more so will an evil person.”

From that point of view, I believe the originator of the thought, “the evil person is the true object...” is, after all, the Venerable Master Shinran.

## Salvation in the Present

The Jodo-Shinshu teaching is frequently misunderstood as being “salvation” that takes place after death. This is a great mistake. The Venerable Master Shinran carefully pointed out that the salvation of the Primal Vow takes place in the *present*. I believe that the most important and deep meaning that the Jodo-Shinshu teaching has, is that salvation is granted to those of us living at this very moment.

## Being “Rightly Established” in the Present

In the Chapter on Attainment of his *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

When “ignorant beings filled with base passions” and multitudes who are defiled with the evils of birth-and-death receive the mind and practice of “merittransference” in the “phase of going (to the Pure Land),” they at that moment enter the “rightly-established group.”

In the *Jodo Sankyo Ojo Monrui* (Passages on Birth in the Pure Land through the Three Pure Land Sutras), the Venerable Master wrote:

Birth in the Pure Land as expressed in the Larger Sutra is based on the “marvelously mysterious” vow “selected” by Amida Buddha, which is beyond human comprehension. This is referred to as (being based on) “Buddha-centered power.” That is what “birth in the Pure Land through the Nembutsu” means, and why we are guaranteed absolute enlightenment. The result is that we are included in the “rightly-established group” in our present life and will be born in the true land of recompense (in the next).

Further, in the *Jodo Wasan* (Japanese Poems on the Pure Land), the Venerable Master wrote:

*Those with shinjin are instantly  
Included among the “rightly established.”  
When they reach the “non-retrogressive stage,”  
They will unfailingly be led to Nirvana.*

As expressed in the above passages, when we receive *shinjin*, we are immediately placed in the “rightly established group” which means that we are already in the embrace of “salvation.” This clarification of the wording in *sutras* and commentaries by the Seven Masters was made by the Venerable Master Shinran; namely, that although we are born in the Pure Land after death, our true “salvation” is what we receive in this life (in the present).

In Ryuju *Bosatsu's* (Indian name, Nagarjuna, latter half of 2nd century AD) Chapter on Easy Practice of *Jaja Bibashu-ron* (Commentary on the Ten Stages), he expressed the

idea of “not falling back in this world” (*gensho futai*), which the Venerable Master inherited. But the *Jaja Bibashu-ron* is a commentary on part of the *Kengon-gyo* (Flower Wreath Sutra), and is a teaching that is a part of the Path of Sages. Accordingly, the thought of “not falling back in this life” in the Pure Land teaching, is still unique to the Venerable Master.

Regarding the term “rightly-established group” (*shojo-ju*), the Venerable Master explained it in the *Ichinen Tanen Monrui* (On the One Recitation and the Many Recitations) in two ways: “being assured of birth in the Pure Land,” and also as “guaranteed to become a Buddha.”

But although the Venerable Master explained it in the above two ways, they are exactly the same in terms of content, and mean “being in the state whereby we become a Buddha in the Pure Land.” As to *when* in the present we become part of the “rightly established group,” as stated in the previous quotations, it is at the moment we “receive the mind and practice of ‘merit-transference’ in the ‘phase of going (to the Pure Land),” i.e., when our *shinjin* (“true mind,” “faith mind”) is determined.

As to what *shinjin* is, in the Chapter on Faith of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote that it is the mind “without doubt” and also the mind “not mingled with doubt.”

Further, in the *Ichinen Tanen Mon’i* (On the One Thought and the Many Thoughts), the Venerable Master wrote:

“*Shinjin* is hearing the Tathagata’s Great Vow without doubt.”

In other words, *shinjin* is, “the mind that accepts the Primal Vow without doubt.”

Further, this *shinjin* is divided into “the two aspects of deep faith” (*nishu jinshin*), which is the deep faith on the part of “those who are to be saved” (*ki*) and the deep faith on the part “that does the saving” (*ho*, i.e., the saving power of the Primal Vow).

Zendo *Daishi* expressed this in the following way:

“The term *jinshin* refers to the ‘deep mind.’ There are two aspects to this mind. The first is the awareness that I am an evil being who has been transmigrating from beginningless past with absolutely no possibility of escape from that round of suffering. Second is acceptance of Amida Buddha’s 48 Vows that embrace all sentient beings and that its Vow Power absolutely guarantees my birth in the Pure Land.”

The first is the deep faith of “those who are to be saved,” and the second is the deep faith of the “side that does the saving.” In other words, the *shinjin* taught in Jodo-Shinshu is:

- “I am an evil being who has wandered in the world of delusion from timeless past and have absolutely no possibility of reaching the world of enlightenment” (*ki-no- jinshin*) and
- “Amida Buddha established his Primal Vow to absolutely cause just such an evil person to be born in the Pure Land” (*ho-no- jinshin*).

These two aspects are the single deep personal self reflection that, “this person who is completely beyond salvation will, in fact, absolutely be saved.”

As already mentioned, the Venerable Master Shinran considered *shinjin* to be something completely due to Amida Buddha, and referred to it as “*shinjin* based on the ‘merit transference’ of ‘Buddha-centered power’” (*tariki eko no shinjin*). Essentially, when this *shinjin* is decided, is when we enter the “rightly-established group of those who are assured of birth in the Pure Land without fail.”

As it states in Article One of the *Tannisho*:

“The moment we accept the fact that even ignorant beings such as we, will be born in the Pure Land through Amida’s “marvelously mysterious Vow, and there rises within us the desire to recite the Nembutsu, we already share in the benefit of ‘being embraced never to be forsaken,’ when we accept the Primal Vow and the desire to recite the Nembutsu rises within us, we are ‘embraced never to be forsaken.’ That is, we enter into the ‘rightly-established group of those assured of birth (in the Pure Land), from which there is no falling back’.”

That is how the Venerable Master taught us that our birth in the Pure Land, where we will become a Buddha, is guaranteed from the moment we receive *shinjin*. That is our benefit in the present.

Again, as already stated, the purpose of what is known as Buddha-dharma is to teach us how to become a Buddha. Next to the phrase, *itoku dairi*, which means “benefit of becoming (a Buddha),” is the following phrase written with *kana* characters to explain what this means: “Know that you will receive the benefit of becoming a Buddha.” In other words, the Venerable Master said that the great benefit of truth is being assured that we will become a Buddha, and that is what joining the “rightly-established group of those assured (of birth in the Pure Land)” means.

The Venerable Master Shinran explained that the “ten benefits in the present world” (*gensho jisshu*) are:

1. Protected by unseen divine beings (*myoshu goji*).
2. Possessed of the supreme virtue (*shitoku gusoku*).
3. Having evil turned into good (*tenaku jyozen*).
4. Protected by all Buddhas (*shobutsu gonen*).
5. Praised by all Buddhas (*shobutsu shyosan*).
6. Protected by the Buddha’s spiritual light (*shinko jogo*).
7. Having much joy in mind (*shintai kangai*).
8. Acknowledging His benevolence and repaying it (*chion hotoku*).
9. Always practicing the Great Compassion (*kyogyo daihi*).
10. Entering the Rightly-Established Group (*shojyoku ni iru*).

Further, the Venerable Master wrote 15 poems in *Genze Riyaku Wasan* (Japanese Poems on Benefits in the Present Life). All those in the “rightly-established group” receive these benefits in the present. The Venerable Master’s great grandson, Master

Kakunryo, used the term “everyday life” (*heizei*) in referring to when our birth in the Pure Land is determined.

In the *Jodo Wasan* is the following:

*(He) watches over Nembutsu followers  
Within worlds numerous as dust particles  
That lie in the ten directions,  
Embracing and not forsaking them;  
Hence, he is called “Amida.”*

In the Takada copy of the *Jodo Wasan*, there is a comment next to the *kanji* characters, *sesshu*, which is rendered “embracing” in the above translation. The comment is, “to take in and never discard.”

I sense a very profound meaning in this term, *sesshu*. It refers to the fact that once Amida Buddha “takes us in,” he will absolutely never abandon us. Here we see the Venerable Master’s strong conviction that once we receive *shinjin* and become part of the “rightly-established group,” we are absolutely assured of birth in the Pure Land regardless of what may happen in the future.

The following passage is found in the Chapter on Faith of the *Kyogyoshinsho*:

“‘Destroying’ means that when the ‘single mind of merit transference’ in the ‘phase of going (to the Pure Land)’ is awakened, there will be no (new) existences into which to be born, nor any (new) realms to go to. Since the causes and effects of the Six Realms and the Four Births are annihilated, the births and deaths in the ‘three existences’ are instantly destroyed.”

As can be determined by the above passage, the moment our *shinjin* is determined, our birth and death in the worlds of delusion in the “Six Realms” (*rokushu*) and the “Four Births” (*shisho*) is cut off. Further, in the *Koso Wasan* (Japanese Poems on the Eminent Masters), the Venerable Master wrote:

*The moment we receive shinjin,  
Hard and fixed like a diamond,  
Amida’s spiritual light embraces and protects us,  
Cutting us off completely from the cycle  
of birth and death.*

As can be determined from this poem and many other places in the Venerable Master’s writings, when our *shinjin* is determined, we are already within Amida Buddha’s protective embrace that guarantees our birth in the Pure Land. I sense the Venerable Master’s personal experience of the Buddha’s salvific activity in the phrase, “to take in and never discard.”

## Denial of “Amida Buddha Coming to Welcome Us at Death”

The thought of “Amida Buddha Coming to Welcome Us at the Moment of Death” (*rinju raigo*), is considered very important in the Pure Land teaching. First, the 19th Vow in the Larger Sutra (*Daikyo*), states:

“If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the ten directions who aspire to be enlightened, perform various meritorious deeds and sincerely desire to be born in my land, do not see me appear before them at their death surrounded by a multitude of sages, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.”

As can be determined from this, Amida Buddha vowed to appear with a multitude of enlightened beings in front of those who are about to leave this world. The same thought is expressed in the *Meditation Sutra (Kangyo)* and in the *Amida Sutra (Amida-kyo)*. This was considered very important by the founders of the Pure Land teaching. In Japan, Genshin Kasho (942 - 1017 AD), whom the Venerable Master revered as the Sixth Patriarch of Jodo-Shinshu, considered “Amida Buddha coming to welcome us at death” to be especially important. Under the heading, “Department at the Moment of Death” (*rinju Gyogi*) of his work, *Ojyoyo-shu* (Essentials of Birth in the Pure Land), Genshin Kasho carefully explained how we should act so the mind that has faith in Buddha’s salvific activity will not be disturbed when we are about to die.

When you correctly come to the end of your life, ask yourself if you truly know that this is the absolute end. That single thought at the moment of death is superior to your actions for the past hundred years. When you pass that final moment is when your birth in the Pure Land is determined. Truly when you single-mindedly think of the Buddha during that last moment, you will be born on a seven-jeweled lotus flower growing in the Lake of Eight Virtues in the subtle Pure Land of Ultimate Joy.

As can be determined from the above, Genshin Kasho considered “...the single thought at the moment of death is superior to your actions for that past hundred years.” That was how important he considered the proper mental attitude at the moment of death. From many current documents of the time, we can determine just how great an influence the idea of “the Buddha welcoming us (to the Pure Land) at the moment of death” (*rinju raigo*) and “proper mental attitude at the moment of death” (*rinju shonen*) had. For example, in the story, “Crane Forest,” found in Volume 30 of *Eiga Monogatari* (Tales of Prosperity), there is a record of the desire for “Amida Buddha coming to welcome him at the moment of death” by Fujiwara Michinaga, then the most powerful person in the land. That is how powerful an influence Genshin Kasho’s thought of “the Buddha welcoming us at the moment of death” had on the people of Japan.

Regarding this, Master Honen in his *Saiho Shinan-sho* (Notes on Leading to the Western Direction), wrote:

“At our death the Buddha will come to welcome us (to his Pure Land) without fail because of the Nembutsu that we recite during ordinary times. (Most people) are reassured regarding the last moments of their life when they see that figure of the Buddha ... Those who recite the Nembutsu during those ordinary times have no need to be concerned about whether the Buddha will come to welcome them to the Pure Land

or not. Further, know that the Buddha coming to welcome us means that we are absolutely prepared for our pending death.”

As can be determined from this, Master Honen did not consider earnestly desiring “the Buddha welcoming us at the moment of death” to be of primary importance. Rather, he said it was the virtue of reciting the Nembutsu during ordinary times that causes Amida Buddha to welcome us and what assures us of having the proper mental attitude at that time.

In another part of this same work, Master Honen’s behavior at the moment of his passing is described in the following way:

“When (Master Honen) disciples asked him if they should attach strings with the five colors to the hands (of a statue) of the Buddha (and bring the other ends of the strings to Master Honen for him to hold), (Master Honen) said that is a custom many follow, but that there is no need to insist on following it.”

As described above, at his own moment of death, Master Honen’s disciples probably tied a fivecolored string to the hand of a Buddhist image and placed the other end in Master Honen’s hands, urging him to request Amida Buddha to welcome him to the Pure Land. In response, Master Honen said that may be a common practice, but it is not something that must be done, and that he himself would not do it.

As can be determined from this, Master Honen was confident of Amida Buddha welcoming him to the Pure Land because of the virtue in the Nembutsu. He didn’t have the slightest uneasiness about it, but he had no desire to deny it either.

On this point, the Venerable Master wrote the following in Letter 1 of the *Mattosho*:

Amida Buddha coming (to escort you to the Pure Land) is for those who perform various practices. The moment of death is of concern to such “doers” of “self-centered effort” practices because they have not received true *shinjin*. ... Those with *shinjin*, however are in the “rightly-established group” for they have been “embraced, never to be forsaken.” There is thus no need for us to wait for the moment of death, nor to rely on Amida Buddha coming (to escort us to the Pure Land) because our birth in the Pure Land is established at the moment our *shinjin* is determined.

As can be seen from the above, the Venerable Master also denied the thought of Amida Buddha welcoming those about to die. As indicated in the section titled “The Primal Vow” of Chapter 1 of this part, the 48 Vows are divided into the “true vows” and the “provisional vows.” The 19th Vow is considered to be an expedient (provisional) vow, and therefore not an explicit statement of the truth. Further, we have the Venerable Master’s statement that I just quoted: “There is thus no need to wait for the moment of death, nor to rely on Amida Buddha coming (to escort us to the Pure Land) because our birth in the Pure Land is established at the moment our *shinjin* is determined.”

From the firm conviction of “being embraced, never to be forsaken” that comes from being in the “rightly-established group,” the Venerable Master emphasized that our birth in the Pure Land comes at the moment we receive *shinjin*, and neither from our

mental attitude at the moment of death nor when Amida Buddha welcomes us to the Pure Land. He thus denied the necessity of Amida Buddha coming to welcome us to the Pure Land at the moment of death, and emphasized the importance of the *shinjin* that we receive in the present.

In connection with Amida Buddha welcoming us to his Pure Land at death, in Letter 6 of the *Mattosho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

How sad that so many people, young and old, male and female, have died this year. We should not, however, be distressed about this because Amida Buddha teaches us about transiency of life and death. I, Zenran (the Venerable Master Shinran) do not attach any significance to a person's last moments, good or bad, because those whose *shinjin* is settled have no doubt and so are in the "rightly established group." The foolish and ignorant celebrate their birth in the Pure Land because that is what the Tathagata desires for them.

This letter is dated the 13th day of the 11th month during 1260 AD (1st year of Bun'ō). Famine and plague haunted all the provinces of Japan then, and it is said that the number of those who died was very large. Many very likely died grotesquely after suffering a great deal. I believe this letter was written in response to a question regarding birth in the Pure Land by those who, because of their suffering, could not have had the "proper mental attitude" (*shonen*) at the moment of death.

The Venerable Master wrote, "... do not attach any significance to a person's last moments, good or bad," indicating that the way in which your last moments are passed do not have any connection with your birth in the Pure Land. As long as your *shinjin* is settled and you are in the "rightly-established group," regardless of how agitated you are, no matter how much you suffer during your last moments, there is absolutely no doubt that you will be born in the Pure Land because the cause of your birth there is completely due to the Amida Buddha's Vow Power. The Venerable Master said that whether we will be born in the Pure Land or not is determined during our "everyday" (*heizei*) life as a result of *shinjin*, and not at the moment of death when Amida Buddha does or does not come to welcome us there. That is how he stressed that our salvation is from the present.

## The Unimpeded Single Path

Article Seven of the *Tannisho* contains the statement:

"The Nembutsu is the Unimpeded Single Path."

The original Japanese of this passage is, "*Nembutsu-shu wa muge no ichido nari.*" The *kanji* character *shu* that follows the characters read "Nembutsu" in this passage means "person," so a case can be made that this passage should be translated, "The doer of the Nembutsu walks the Unimpeded Single Path." In Chinese, however, the character *shu* does not have a literal meaning except to show that the antecedent (Nembutsu) is

the subject, and therefore the translation of this passage should be as given at the very beginning.

Following this passage, however, is the following:

The reason this is so is because the gods of heaven and earth bow in reverence to the “doers’ of *shinjin*” (*shinjin no gyoja*).

Accordingly, the translation, “The *doer* of the Nembutsu walks the Unimpeded Single Path,” is not incorrect. At any rate, what is important is that the Nembutsu follower is a person whose *shinjin* is determined. In other words, it refers to a person who is in the “rightly-established group.” That is, this passage refers to those who walk the path that cannot be obstructed. I believe this passage beautifully expresses the life style of a person who is blessed with the salvation in this world as a result of *shinjin*.

As already stated in the section titled “The Benefit of ‘Truth’” in this chapter, all human beings must shoulder the burden of suffering. This is something Shakyamuni Buddha experienced at a very young age, and also something we all experience.

A frequent saying of the feudal lord Tokugawa Iyeyasu was, “Life is like carrying a heavy load up a long steep road.” As most of you know, Tokugawa Iyeyasu brought all of Japan under his control, thus ending the “Period of Warring Provinces,” and laid the foundation for a government that lasted 250 years.

“Life is not all happiness and joy,” as Tokugawa Iyeyasu said. Rather, life it is just the opposite. It is like carrying a heavy load on your back over a long steep road. Many difficulties and trying conditions must be overcome during that journey.

It was the same with Emperor Shih, who unified all of China during the Ch’in Dynasty (221 - 206 BC), and whose secular power eclipsed even Iyeyasu’s.

Several years ago, I toured China. I visited the regions associated with the Silk Road, Beijing and Sian, of course, but I also visited places such as the Great Wall and the Ch’in Tomb where Emperor Shih built a monument with thousands of terra-cotta warriors that he hoped would protect him in the next life. I was brought to realize how much power this man had approximately 2,200 years ago. And yet there was something that even he could not attain: the elixir that would prevent old age and death. Emperor Shih even sent a follower to Japan in search of such an elixir, but he left this world unable to acquire such a thing. Even a man such as Emperor Shih, who probably had as much secular power as any man in history, had to suffer from not getting what he wanted.

The Venerable Master Shinran referred to *shinjin* as, “the mind of great joy” (*daikyokishin*). The reason he did so was because, as he also wrote, “this mind cannot be overturned and there is no falsehood in it.” In other words, *shinjin* is a joyous reality that can neither crumble nor change. This is the great joy that we receive in the present.

And it is because of this joyous world that the *myokonin* (pious and devout person enlightened through the Jodo-Shinshu teaching) named Okaru wrote: “Though I climb a mountain road with a heavy load on my back, no suffering is involved when I consider

how blessed I am,” strangely echoing Iyeyasu’s words, but putting a “spin” on them. This joy is also the world of, “All right if I live, and all right if I die.” In other words, as long as we have life, we are fortunate beings who are saved in the present because we are in the “rightly-established group.” We are further blessed because of the absolute assurance that we will be born in the Pure Land regardless of when our life in this world ends.

We are bound to encounter many difficulties in life. Regardless of the difficulties we come in contact with, however, we are sustained by the great joy and reassurance from the *shinjin* of “Buddha-centered power,” and are thus able to make our way through life strongly and vigorously.

### **The Problems of “Birth in the Pure Land with a Doubtful Mind” and “Birth in the Pure Land Not Determined During Our Present Life”**

As already mentioned, the Venerable Master emphasized the “rightly-established group” that we join when we receive *shinjin*. I believe it would not be overstating the case to say that this understanding changed the Pure Land teaching. The change was from the emphasis on salvation in the next world at the moment of death, to being blessed with salvation in our present life. But although the Venerable Master went to great pains to teach about salvation in the present, what slights his great efforts are the views of “birth in the Pure Land with a doubtful mind” (*gishin ojo*) and “birth in the Pure Land not determined during our present life” (*shogai fuketsujo*).

These views have been around for a long time. Although they have always been considered wrong in Jodo-Shinshu, it is an unfortunate fact that such views are held even today.

“Birth in the Pure Land with a doubtful mind” refers to the view that asserts doubts about the Primal Vow cannot be erased as long as we are alive. “Birth in the Pure Land not determined during this life” asserts that because we are “ignorant beings filled with base passions” we cannot have the conviction that we will be born in the Pure Land without doubt. I believe both these positions are preposterous assertions that consider the splendid teaching of the Venerable Master regarding salvation in the present to be nothing more than “concepts.”

Passages that are considered to uphold the “birth in the Pure Land with doubt” position are:

*Though I rely on the True Teaching  
of the Pure Land (Jodo-Shinshu),  
The True Mind is difficult to acquire.  
I have an ignorant and insincere body  
And am absolutely without a Pure Mind.  
(Shozomatsu Wasan)*

*The highest than which there is no higher,  
Is what “true liberation” is,  
Is Tathagata itself.  
Those who are “truly liberated”  
Dwell in the state  
Of “non-love” and “non-doubt.”  
(Jodo Wasan)*

“True liberation” in this *wasan* refers to birth in the Pure Land and thus some mistakenly understand it to mean that our doubts will be removed only after we are born there.

In addition, as I have already indicated in the section, “Whose Concept is ‘The Evil Person is the True Object (of Amida’s Salvation)’?” in response to Yuiem-*bo*’s question:

“Even when I recite the Nembutsu, I rarely have the mind of rapture and joy, nor do I desire to be born in the Pure Land in all haste. Why is this so?”

“The Venerable Master Shinran replied:

‘I, Shinran, also had the same question. Now, Yuiem-*bo*, you are in the same state of mind!’”

Let me clarify the passages quoted above. First, the *wasan* from the *Shozomatsu Wasan*: The lines, “The True Mind is difficult to acquire” and “(I) am absolutely without a Pure Mind,” do not mean that the Venerable Master did not have the *shinjin* that does not doubt the Primal Vow. It is an expression that comes from reflecting on what he is and a confession of how deeply he is filled with “worldly passions.” They express his realization of how lacking he is in a sincere mind, and further, the impurity of his mind, and not that he is unable to rely completely on the Primal Vow. Rather, it is *because* he is so filled with “worldly passions,” and because he is so lacking in a sincere mind, that there is nothing left for him *but* to rely on the Primal Vow.

Second, the lines in the *Jodo Wasan* quoted above, “Those who are ‘truly liberated’/Dwell in the state of ‘non-love’ and ‘non-doubt,’” do not refer to the fact that only when we are “truly liberated”—in other words, when we become enlightened as a result of birth in the Pure Land—that our mind of greed or doubt about the Primal Vow will disappear. The “love” of “non-love” and the “doubt” of “non-doubt” is covetous love, so it refers to the mind of greed. That is what disappears when we are born in the Pure Land and attain Enlightenment.;

The “doubt” of “non-doubt,” however, is the doubt that is one of the six “base passions” (*bonno*), and really refers to “base passions,” itself. It is not the mind that doubts the Primal Vow. “Base passions” will not disappear until we are born in the Pure Land where we will attain Enlightenment (be “truly liberated”), but this does not mean that the mind that doubts the Primal Vow will not disappear until we are born there.

As already indicated, *shinjin* is referred to in the Chapter on Faith of the *Kyogyoshinsho* as, the “mind without doubt,” using terms such as “absolutely no doubt” and “not mixed with doubt.” Further, the *Ichinen Tanen Mon’i* (Notes on the One Thought and the Many Thoughts) states:

“*Shinjin* is the mind that hears (Amida Buddha’s) honorable vow, and does not doubt it.”

The Venerable Master always considered *shinjin* to be the “mind that accepts the Primal Vow without doubt.” If there is doubt, there cannot be *shinjin*.

Third, in the passage in the *Tannisho* where the Venerable Master responds to Yuiem-*bo*, he says: “I, Shinran, have also had the same question. Now, Yuiem-*bo*, you are in the same state of mind!” The passage, “have also had the same question,” is often mistakenly read, “*still* have the same question,” making it seem that the Venerable Master still had doubts about the Primal Vow when Yuiem-*bo* asked him about it. This is easier to see in the English translation because in English you must state things explicitly. Because of the ambiguity of the Japanese language, however, this is often a problem for the Japanese.

Actually, there are many different opinions about this Article Nine of the *Tannisho*. Regarding the doubt expressed by Yuiem-*bo* in the phrase, “Even when I recite the Nembutsu, I rarely have the mind of rapture and joy, nor do I desire to be born in the Pure Land in all haste,” the following can be said.

First, you can consider this to be the doubt *before* receiving *shinjin*, and that what Yuiem-*bo* is asking is: “Although I recites the Nembutsu, the mind of rapture and joy does not rise within me, nor do I have the desire to hurry to the Pure Land. Can I really be born there with such an attitude?” That’s one way of understanding his doubt.

Another way of understanding this passage is that it is the doubt *after* receiving *shinjin*. Although Yuiem-*bo* has no doubt regarding whether he can be born in the Pure Land, he seems to feel he should be happier about it and want to hurry there. Why is that so? You can interpret his doubt in that sort of selfreflective way too.

A scholar representative of those who believe that Yuiem-*bo*’s doubt was the doubt that came before his *shinjin* was established, is Jinrei (1749 - 1842 AD). He wrote a work titled *Tannisho Korin-ki* (Lectures on the *Tannisho*) in which he advocated such a position, and incidentally, asserted that the author of the *Tannisho* was Master Nyoshin. A scholar representative of the position that Yuiem-*bo*’s doubt came after his *shinjin* was established, and was the doubt that arose from deep self-reflection, was Ryosho (1788 - 1842 AD). He wrote *Tannisho Mon’ki* (Notes on Listening to the *Tannisho*) to explain his position, and incidentally asserted that Yuiem-*bo* was the author of the *Tannisho*.

The meaning of the Venerable Master’s reply, “I, Shinran, have also had the same question,” will differ, depending on whether you consider Yuiem-*bo*’s doubt to be a question about birth in the Pure Land *before shinjin*, or whether you consider it not to

be a question about birth in the Pure Land at all, but rather deep self-reflection *after shinjin*.

If you consider the question to have been asked *after* receiving *shinjin*, then you must take the position that even though doubt presently exists, that cannot be considered the basis of doubt regarding birth in the Pure Land. I believe that is one interpretation that can be made. But the Venerable Master's reply to Yuien-bo's lament was:

If we reflect deeply upon the matter, we should realize that our Birth in the Pure Land is all the more assured because we cannot *rejoice at what we ought to so much as to dance in heaven and on earth*.

Further, in response to Yuien-bo's doubt expressed as, "... I do not have the mind to be born in the Pure Land in haste," the Venerable Master replied:

Amida Buddha is especially merciful to those who do not desire to go to the Pure Land in all haste. That is why we trust the Great Compassion and the Great Vow, and that causes us to realize all the more that our Birth is assured.

Through passages such as, "realize all the more that our Birth (in the Pure Land) is assured," and "realize that our birth is assured," the Venerable Master tells us that there is no mistaking the fact that we will be born in the Pure Land. I believe the correct interpretation of the doubt implied in Yuien-bo's question is doubt regarding birth in the Pure Land. Accordingly, I believe the Venerable Master's reply should be understood to mean that he had the same sort of doubt in the past.

What is considered to be the source of the Venerable Master's "doubt regarding birth in the Pure Land" (*gishin ojo*) is the passage: "I, Shinran, have also had the same question..." But considering this to be a statement regarding doubt that the Venerable Master still has, is a great mistake.

Another passage that is often quoted as the foundation for "an undetermined life," is the following passage in the Chapter on Faith in the *Kyogyoshinsho*:

How sad that I, Gutoku Ran, sunk in the vast sea of lust and lost in the great mountain of desire for fame and profit, do not rejoice in joining the "rightly established group," nor take joy in approaching the "true enlightenment." How shameful! How sorrowful!

Another is the following passage from the *Ichinen Tanen Mon'i*:

The term "bombu" refers to being filled with ignorance and blind passions. Our desires are countless. Anger, wrath, jealousy and envy arise within us without pause, overwhelming us. They do not cease, disappear or exhaust themselves until the very last moment of life.

The first of the above passages, the one from the *Kyogyoshinsho* that starts with, "How sad that I, Gutoku Ran..." is in the section devoted to commenting on true disciples of the Buddha:

The word "true" in the term "true disciples of Buddhas" is used in contrast to "false" and "temporary." "Disciples" refer to the disciples of Shakyamuni and other Buddhas.

“True disciples of Buddhas” are “doers (of the Nembutsu)” (*gyonin*) with the “diamond-hard mind.” By virtue of this “faith and practice” (*shingyo*), they will unfailingly realize the Great Nirvana; hence the term, “true disciples of Buddhas.”

As stated here, true disciples of Buddhas are those with the “diamond-hard mind,” i.e., those who have received *shinjin*. It refers to those who are secure in their *shinjin* and take joy in the fact that they are assured of birth in the Pure Land. Accordingly, the phrases, “How sad...,” and “How shameful! How sorrowful!” are not the shame and sorrow of not having conviction regarding birth in the Pure Land. Rather, they are expressions of humility that comes from deeply reflecting on the absolute conviction that birth in the Pure Land is assured, and yet how unworthy we are to receive such a “marvelously mysterious” gift.

The next of the above passages, the one from the *Ichinen Tanen Mon'i*, states that ignorant beings like us are constantly erupting with base passions such as anger, jealousy and envy, which will never be eliminated until our death. That is an expression of what an “ignorant being filled with base desires” is, and not an expression of unease about whether we can or cannot be born in the Pure Land. For these reasons, the two passages quoted above cannot be the basis for “an undetermined life.”

In his *Koso Wasan*, the Venerable Master wrote:

*Master Donran's comment*

*On the passage,*

*“Practice not compatible with truth,” is:*

*“Such a mind of faith is not sincere*

*“Because it sometimes exists*

*“And sometimes does not.”*

The “practice” of “practice not compatible with truth,” is reciting the Nembutsu (saying “Namo Amida Butsu”). The “truth” in this phrase refers to the Primal Vow. This phrase thus refers to reciting Namo Amida Butsu without relying on Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow.

Referring to the true aspect of *shinjin*, the Venerable Master added the following commentary next to the passage translated, “... it sometimes exists/And sometimes does not” (*nyakuzon nyakumo*), above:

At times consider birth in the Pure Land is possible, and at other times consider it is not possible.

(In the Takada copy)

At times (birth in the Pure Land) is possible, and not possible at other times.

(In the Bummei copy)

In other words, the “mind of faith” that “exists (sometimes) and sometimes does not,” is feeling sure of your birth in the Pure Land at times, but not having that conviction at other times, and thus is not true *shinjin*.

Further, in the *Songo Shinzo Mei'mon* (Descriptions on the Sacred Name and the True Image), the Venerable Master comments on his *Shoshin-ge* in the following way:

Those who receive *shinjin* are bathed in and protected by the rays of the Buddha of Limitless Light. That is what removes the darkness of ignorance and brightens up the long night of life and death. Greed, love, anger and hate are like clouds that darken the *shinjin* sky. But do not forget how bright the earth becomes when the clouds that hide the sun and moon are blown away. Similarly, although the clouds of greed, love, anger and hate prevent us from seeing our *shinjin*, our birth in the Pure Land is still absolutely guaranteed because of it.

In other words, greed, love, anger and hatred will continue arising even in those whose *shinjin* is settled those who have no doubts about the Primal Vow and are sure about their birth in the Pure Land.

The assertions by the proponents of “birth in the Pure Land with a doubtful mind” that we *bombucan* never rid ourselves of doubt regarding the Primal Vow, or by proponents of “birth in the Pure Land determined during our present life” that we can never have absolute confidence that we will be born in the Pure Land, arises because of a lack of understanding of the “deep faith of the being to be enlightened” (*ki no jinshin*) part of the “two aspects of deep faith” (*nishu jinshin*).

The “deep faith of the being to be enlightened” refers to realizing that we are evil beings who are absolutely beyond salvation, but *at the same time* is part of the “deep faith of the being that enlightens” (*ho no jinshin*). Accordingly, the realization that we are absolutely beyond salvation, just as it is, is the conviction that our birth in the Pure Land is assured by the Primal Vow. This is an extremely important aspect of the *shinjin* taught in Jodo-Shinshu.

As can be seen, the misunderstandings of “birth in the Pure Land with a doubtful mind” and “birth in the Pure Land not determined during our present life” arise because there is no experience of being in the “rightly-established group in this life” (*gensho shojoju*) which comes from having received *shinjin*. These points of view are absolutely contrary to what the Venerable Master taught. I believe it would not be overstating the case to say that such misunderstandings make the Venerable Master’s wonderful teaching which emphasizes the Pure Land teaching as a way to be saved in the present and which can be the salvation of the world in the future nothing more than a meaningless concept.

## “Birth in the Pure Land and “Becoming a Buddha”

In the previous section, I discussed the problem of “salvation in the present.” Next, I will discuss “becoming a Buddha” (*jobutsu*), attaining the state of Enlightenment, which is the ultimate purpose in Buddha-dharma as a result of “birth in the Pure Land” (*ojo*).

## The Two Aspects of “Birth in the Pure Land”

The term “birth in the Pure Land” (*ojo*) is written with two *kanji* characters, “to go” (*o*) and “be born” (*jo*), and generally has the meaning of “going to Amida Buddha’s Pure Land of Ultimate Joy and being born there.” This is the sense in which the Venerable Master often used this term .

The Venerable Master used the term *ojo* many times in the above way. A typical example is in *Jodo Sankyo Ojo Monrui*:

“Birth in the Pure Land as described in the Larger Sutra ... is being in the ‘rightly established group’ in this life which guarantees birth in the True Recompensed Land (Pure Land). We attain the unparalleled Enlightenment because that is the true purpose of Amida Buddha’s ‘merit transference’ (*eko*) in causing our birth there. This is the basic teaching of the Larger Sutra. That is why it is referred to as ‘birth in the Pure Land based (vowed) in the Larger Sutra,’ and also as, ‘impossible-to-conceive-of birth in the Pure Land’.”

The Venerable Master Shinran referred to “birth in the Pure Land based on ‘Buddha-centered power’” (*tariki ojo*) based on the 18th Vow of the *Larger Sutra* as, “impossible-to-conceive-of birth in the Pure Land” (*nanjigi ojo*) and also as, “birth in the Pure Land (vowed) in the *Larger Sutra*” (*daikyo ojo*). He wrote that those who dwell in the “rightly established state,” will be born in the “True Land of Recompense” (*shinjitsu hodo*) and attain the unsurpassed enlightenment without fail when their life in this world ends.

Further, in the Chapter on Transformed Land of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

... I have left the provisional “true gate” and turned to the “sea of the best selected vow”; having abandoned aspiration for the “difficult-to-conceive-of birth” in the Pure Land (*naji ojo*, the 20th Vow), I now desire the “impossible-to-conceive-of-birth” in the Pure Land (*nanjigi ojo*, the 18th Vow). What deep significance there is in the “vow of accomplishing the ultimate salvation”!

Here the Venerable Master expressed his desire to be among the “rightly-established group” of those assured of birth in the True Land of Recompense and attaining the unsurpassed Enlightenment in the “impossible-to-conceive-of Pure Land.

I seem to keep repeating myself, but the “birth in the Pure Land” used here and almost everywhere else, is the birth in the Pure Land of “going to Amida Buddha’s Pure Land and being born there.”;

But the Venerable Master's understanding of the text in the *Larger Sutra* known as "passage on completion of the Primal Vow" (*hongan jojumon*) is unique. The passage as it appears in the *sutra* is:

All sentient beings who hear his Name, rejoice in faith, remember him even once and sincerely transfer the merit of virtuous practices to that land, aspiring to be born there, will immediately be born there and dwell in the "stage of nonretrogression."

The Venerable Master interpreted this passage as follows:

"Through his compassionate working, all sentient beings who hear his Name, rejoice in faith and think on him at least once; aspiring to be born in his land, they will instantaneously attain birth and dwell in the 'stage of nonretrogression'."

I have already related that to the side of the *kanji* characters for *shojoju*, there is the notation, "being assured of birth in the Pure Land." Further, in the *Yuishin-sho* (Notes on Mind Alone), it states:

"The *Larger Sutra* states that 'those who desire to be born in that country will do so immediately and not fall back.' ... the phrase, 'will do so immediately,' refers to the fact that our birth in the Pure Land is settled the moment we receive *shinjin*."

As you can see, the Venerable Master interpreted "immediately be born (in the Pure Land)" (*sokutoku ojo*) in the "passage on completion of the Primal Vow" as being included in the "rightly established group" of those assured of birth in the Pure Land. Rather than being born in the Pure Land *after* your life in this world is over, *ojo* is expressed in terms of being born in the Pure Land at the moment we "receive *shinjin*" (*shinjin gyakutoku*). From this we see that the Venerable Master's use of the term *ojo* has two meanings: 1) "impossible-to-conceive-of birth in the Pure Land" (*nanjigi ojo*) and 2) "immediately be born (in the Pure Land)" (*sokutoku ojo*) which refers to being included among the "rightly established group" in our present life.

### **The Problems of "Birth in the Pure Land in the Present" and "Becoming a Buddha in the Present"**

The Venerable Master assumed the two principles of "impossible-to-conceive of birth in the Pure Land" (*nanjigi ojo*) and "immediately be born (in the Pure Land)" (*sokutoku ojo*). Because he interprets "immediately be born (in the Pure Land)" as "presently in the 'rightly-established group' of those assured of birth in the Pure Land" (*gensho shojoju*), however, misunderstandings such as the following arise:

- The Venerable Master's use of the term "birth in the Pure Land" (*ojo*) to refer to "receiving *shinjin*" leads to feeling we can be born in the Pure Land in the present
- We will become a Buddha in this world when our *shinjin* is settled..

- We will be endowed with virtues close to that of a Buddha.

These misunderstandings have existed for a long time, and have been referred to as, “benefits of entering the Dharma Gate” (*ichiyaku homon*) and “secret benefits of attaining nirvana” (*metsudo mitsuyaku*). Recently these sorts of problems have again come up for discussion.

Let us take the problem of “birth in the Pure Land in the present” (*genzei ojo*) first. As already related, being included in the “rightly-established group” of those assured (of birth in the Pure Land) in the present” (*gensho shojoju*) is a unique insight by the Venerable Master. This “salvation in the present” that is taught in Jodo-Shinshu is, I believe, a matter of great importance and significance.

I believe this is where the value of Jodo-Shinshu in our world is to be found. I cannot, however, agree with the position that when the Venerable Master talked about “birth in the Pure Land in the present,” he meant that we are born there at the moment we receive *shinjin*. As already related, the Venerable Master clearly understood “immediately be born (in the Pure Land)” which comes from the “passage on completion of the Primal Vow” in the *Larger Sutra* to mean that we are absolutely guaranteed to be included in the group of those who are *assured of being born* in the Pure Land. I am sure that the Venerable Master did not intend this to mean *being born* in the Pure Land.

In commenting on “immediately be born (in the Pure Land)” in the *Ichinen Tanen Mon’I*, the Venerable Master wrote:

“When we receive true *shinjin*, we are embraced in the mind and heart of the Buddha of Limitless Light, never to be abandoned. ... When we are so embraced — when we are in the ‘rightly-established group’ — we are guaranteed ‘birth in the Pure Land’ (*ojo*).”

In other words, when we receive *shinjin*, we are in the “rightly established group.” That is how the Venerable Master interpreted Shakyamuni Buddha’s words in the *sutras*.

As already related, the Venerable Master put the explanation, “birth in the Pure Land has been settled” clearly indicating that rather than being born in the Pure Land, we are in the group of those whose birth there is absolutely guaranteed next to the phrase, “rightly-established group of those assured of birth in the Pure Land.”

The comment on “immediately be born (in the Pure Land)” (*sokutoku ojo*) in *Yuishinsho Mon’I* (Notes on the Essence of Faith Alone) expresses the same thing:

“‘Immediately attaining birth (in the Pure Land)’ refers to the fact that we will be born in the Pure Land when we receive *shinjin*. In other words, ‘birth in the Pure Land’ (*ojo*) means residing in the ‘state of non-retrogression’ (*futaiten*). Residing in the ‘state of non-retrogression’ means being in the ‘rightly established group,’ which is also referred to as the ‘next step to becoming a Buddha’ (*joto shogaku*).”

As can be determined from the above, at the moment of receiving *shinjin*, we are already in the “state of non-retrogression,” and that is what “immediately be born (in the Pure Land)” means.

Essentially, the Venerable Master interpreted the “passage on completion of the Primal Vow” the benefit of birth in the Pure Land to mean the benefit in the *present* life of being included in the “rightly-established group” (*shojoja*) from which there is “no retrogression” (*futaiten*), which is what happens when we receive *shinjin*. In other words, he emphasized that we will be “saved” in this world, but *not* that we will be “born in the Pure Land” in this world. There have been many discussions regarding whether the Venerable Master considers “birth in the Pure Land” to take place in the present or in the future, but in Letter 13 of the *Mattosho*, he wrote:

Being in the state of “non-retrogression” until birth in the Pure Land is referred to as being included among the “rightly-established group.”

Here, rather than “birth in the Pure Land,” the Venerable Master clearly uses the term “rightly established group” in referring to our state while in this world.

Further, in Letter 12 of the *Mattosho*, he wrote:

“My life has now reached the fullness of its years. I am certain that I will be “be born in the Pure Land” before you, so I will await you there without fail.”

As can be determined from the above, the term “birth in the Pure Land” does not refer to something in the present but rather, is what will happen after his life in this world ends.

The above quotations clearly indicate that what happens in this world is being included in the “‘rightly-established group’ from which there is no ‘retrogression’” (*shojoju futaiten*), and not “birth in the Pure Land in the present.” That is why the tenth of the Ten Benefits listed in the Chapter on Faith of the *Kyogyoshinsho* is the “benefit of being in the ‘rightly-established group,’” and not the “benefit of being born in the Pure Land.”

The Venerable Master emphasized salvation in the present, but he did not say that we would be born in the Pure Land in the present, which is what *genzei ojo* means. What he taught was that we would be in the “rightly-established group” in the present, meaning that our birth in the Pure Land is settled in the present, which is what *genzei shija* means.

Next is the problems of “becoming a Buddha in the present” (*genzei jobutsu*). The basis for this error is said to be the quotation from the *Kegon-gyo* (Flower-Wreath Sutra) in the Chapter on Faith of the *Kyogyoshinsho*:

*Those who hear this dharma  
And rejoice in shinjin  
Free of doubt,  
Quickly attain the supreme enlightenment;  
They are thus equal to Tathagatas.*

In his *Jodo Wasan*, the Venerable Master wrote:

*Those who rejoice in shinjin*

*Are said to be equal to Tathagata.  
The “great mind of faith”  
is the nature of the Buddha,  
Which is Tathagata.*

Again, in Letter 3 of the *Mattosho*, he wrote:

“Know that those with true *shinjin* can be called equal to Tathagatas because, although they are impure and always creating karmic evil, their hearts and minds are already equal to Tathagatas. ... In the *Hanju-san* (In Praise of the Buddha’s Appearance), the Master of Komyo Temple, explains that the hearts of those with *shinjin* already reside in the Pure Land. “Reside” refers to the fact that the hearts of those with *shinjin* are always in the Buddha Land. ... This means that they are the same as Miroku, that is, they have attained the state of *toshogaku*, and that is why those with *shinjin* are equal to Tathagatas.”

It is from passages such as, “those with *shinjin* are equal to Tathagatas,” or especially, “those with *shinjin* already and always reside in the Pure Land,” that the feeling that we can become a Buddha in the present, or that we possess the virtues of a Buddha or something close to it in the present, arises.

While the Venerable Master does say, “Those with *shinjin* are equal to Tathagatas,” and while that may sound as if he is saying receiving *shinjin* is the same as being enlightened in the present, the truth is exactly the opposite. Consider the following statements that the Venerable Master made. As already quoted from the Chapter on Faith of the *Kyogyoshinsho*:

“How sad that I, Gutoku Ran (the Venerable Master Shinran), sunk in the vast sea of lust and lost on the great mountain of desire for fame and profit...”

And in the *Shozomatsu Wasan*:  
*How difficult to renounce my evil nature...  
My mind is like snakes and scorpions,  
And since even the good I try to do  
Is tainted with the  
Poison (of self-centered effort),  
It must be called the practice of an idiot.*

Again, in the *Ichinen Tanen Mon’i*:

“The term *bombu* means ‘ignorant being filled with base passions.’ It refers to those who are continually filled with greed, anger, jealousy and a critical attitude that will not cease end until death.”

As indicated in the above passages, because of his deep self-reflection that comes from the *shinjin* based on “Buddha-centered power,” the Venerable Master laments his “ignorance and base passions” and the evilness of his nature. He keenly realizes that he can never overcome that nature until his life in this world comes to an end. Accordingly, he strongly emphasized the fact that he was “deeply filled with evil” and unable to

become a Buddha in this world, or even approach anything like one. This should be apparent from the “deep faith on the part of the being to be enlightened” (*ki-no-jinshin*) of the “two aspect of deep faith” (*nishu-jinshin*) in which realization that we are “deeply filled with evil” continues even after our *shinjin* is determined.

In the Chapter on Transformed Land of his *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

“In the life-time teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, attaining Enlightenment in this world is called following the Path of Sages and also the Path of Difficult Practices. ... Attaining Enlightenment in the Pure Realm of Serene Sustenance is called following the Pure Land Path and also the Path of Easy Practice.”

As explained here, “becoming a Buddha” *in this world* is possible only by following the Path of Sages, and “becoming a Buddha” through *birth in the Pure Realm of Serene Sustenance* is called the Pure Land Path.

The Venerable Master included the following in his *Jodo Wasan*:

*Tathagata is Nirvana;  
And Nirvana is referred to  
as the nature of Buddha.  
An ordinary person  
cannot be enlightened (in this world),  
But can realize it  
In the Land of Serene Sustenance.*

In the *Nyashyutsu Nimon-ge* (Hymns on Entering and Leaving the Twin Gates), is the following:

“Those ‘filled with base passions’ can attain Nirvana without cutting off their base passions. ... This is the virtue of the natural Nirvana (as opposed to Nirvana attained by cutting off base passions).”

As stated here, we cannot become Enlightened (become a Buddha) in this world. The Venerable Master clearly taught that only after being born in the Pure Land will we become a Buddha, that we will attain *nirvana* only in the Pure Land.

Again, in the *Shozomatsu Wasan* are the wasan:

*Those who receive the shinjin of  
Amida Buddha’s two-fold “merit transference”  
Attain the position of toshogaku in the present  
From which they will not regress.*

*Those who attain the rank of toshogaku  
Based on the Vow that promises birth  
in the Pure Land through the Nembutsu  
Are equal to Miroku Bosatsu  
And will attain the Great Enlightenment  
(when they are born in the Pure Land).*

*Those who receive shinjin  
Become part of the “rightly-established group.”  
They are equal to Miroku Bosatsu  
And will attain the unsurpassed Enlightenment  
(in the Pure Land).*

As indicated in the above *wasans*, the Venerable Master held that those with *shinjin* were the “same as Miroku (*Bosatsu*).” This means that those with *shinjin* will become a Buddha in the next life. It does not mean, however, that they will have the same virtue as Miroku *Bosatsu* who has advanced to the 51st stage of enlightenment in which most of his “ignorance and base passions” have been eliminated.

In this regard, the term, “*toshogaku*” in the first of the three *wasan* just quoted has the following comment next to it: “be included in the ‘rightly-assured group’ of those assured birth in the Pure Land.” As is clear from this comment, the Venerable Master did not have in mind the 51st stage of the bodhisattva path, but rather that the problem of our birth in the Pure Land has been settled even while we continue being “ignorant beings filled with base passions.” Regarding this, the following passage appears in Letter 15 of the *Mattosho*”

In the sutras, those who attain true *shinjin* are said to be certain to become a Buddha, and therefore are equal to Tathagatas. This is just like referring to Maitraya as a Buddha even though he has not yet attained Buddhahood because it is certain that he will.

As indicated above, those with *shinjin* are sure to become Buddhas, and that is why they are said to be, “equal to Tathagatas.” That does not, however, mean they *presently* are Buddhas, or possess or are endowed with the virtues that are close to those possessed by a Buddha. In the same way, when those with *shinjin* are said to be “equal to Miroku,” it means that the determination that they will *become* a Buddha has already been made, and *not that they already have* the virtues of attaining the 51st level of Bodhisattvahood.

In addition to the above, Letter 4 of the *Mattosho* also contains the phrase, “equal to Tathagatas,” and praises Shakyamuni with, “Those who have received *shinjin* are my good and intimate friends.” Further, since the 17th Vow states that all the Buddhas in the ten directions will praise Amida Buddha, some people interpret this to mean that the Venerable Master asserts “becoming a Buddha in this world.” This also is incorrect because that is the fifth of the “Ten Benefits in the Present World”—the benefit of receiving the praise of all the Buddhas—which is another way of referring to the benefit of being in the “rightly-established group” described in the Chapter on Faith of the *Kyogyoshinsho*. As such, it is just one of the benefits or virtues of being in the “rightly-established group,” and does not mean that we become a Buddha in this world.

As related in the section on “rightly-established group in the present” (*gensho shojoju*), the Venerable Master considered the “rightly-established group” to be a benefit in the present world, and in the comment about this phrase in the *Ichinen Tanen Mon’i*, he

said it has two meanings: “the determination of birth in the Pure Land has already been decided” and “absolutely able to become a Buddha.”

I believe the Venerable Master’s explanation of “rightly-established group in the present” is complete with these comments. In other words, *ojo* refers to the fact that our birth in the Pure Land is *determined* in the present and not that we are born there while still in this world. It refers to the fact that we will *become* a Buddha in the future, and not that we presently are a Buddha.

## Denial that “One’s True Nature is Buddha” and “The Pure Land Exists in Our Mind”

In the Special Preface to the Chapter on Faith of his *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote,

“Monks and laypersons of this latter age and religious leaders of the times, who have fallen for the idea that “one’s true nature is Buddha” and that the “Buddha’s Pure Land exists in our mind,” belittle the True Enlightenment of the Pure Land. They are deluded by their practices of meditative and non-meditative good deeds and are thus blind to the diamond-hard *shinjin*.”

In other words, this is the Venerable Master’s criticism of those who attack the Pure Land teachings while following the Path of Sages, or who outwardly follow the Pure Land teaching but whostill cling to “self-centered effort” (*jiriki*). But even more, it is a disavowal of the following positions: 1) that there is no “Pure Land apart from what is in our mind” (*yuishin-no-jodo*), and 2) that “our basic nature is Amida Buddha” (*koshin-no-mida*). If these two positions are denied, then the positions of “birth in the Pure Land in the present” and “becoming a Buddha in this world,” are also denied.

These concepts are found in the Tendai school of Buddha-dharma. There, the concepts, “there is no Pure Land apart from what is in my mind” and “our true nature is Amida Buddha” are asserted, as is, “I am Amida. Amida, in other words, is myself,” and, “this *shuba* world, itself, is the world of ‘Ultimate Joy’ (*gokuraku*) and this world of ‘Ultimate Joy’ itself is the *shuba* world.” This position asserts that distinctions such as those between Amida and myself, between the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy and “this defiled land” (*shuba*) are no more than the differences between enlightenment and delusion.

Master Honen, who rejected the Path of Sages, also rejected these concepts. In Volume 5 of *Wago Toroku* (A Record of the Light), there is the following passage:

Amida Buddha in the “Pure Land teaching” (*Shingon-kyo*) is the Buddha based on *shinjin*, and we should not seek elsewhere. In this teaching, Amida Buddha is the Enlightened body of Hozo Bosatsu. He exists in the Western Direction and is quite different (from the Buddha spoken of in the Tendai teachings).

Again, in *Saiho Shinan-sho* (Notes on Leading to the Western Direction), Master Honen said in a dharma talk:

“That is why this teaching is about birth in the Pure Land. We do not speak about performing ‘practices’ through countless lifetimes; rather, we speak of a world of Ultimate Joy (*gokuraku*) that exists apart from this *shuba* world, that Amida Buddha exists apart from myself, and escaping transmigration in this world for birth in the Pure Land where we will attain the ultimate Enlightenment.”

As is clear from the Special Preface of his Chapter on Faith of his *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master accepted Master Honen’s position expressed above and clearly rejected the concepts of “one’s true nature is Buddha” and “the “Pure Land exists in our mind.” Since the Venerable Master rejected this Path-of-Sages position, it follows that there was nothing about “birth in the Pure Land in the present,” nor “becoming a Buddha in this world” in his thinking either. This raises the question of why people assert things that the Venerable Master did not say. I believe the reason is a desire to emphasize salvation in this present world. However, as I pointed out in the section, “Salvation in the Present,” the Venerable Master emphasized salvation in the present world as a result of being in the “rightly-established group” at the moment we receive *shinjin*. Being in the “rightly-established group” is the great benefit. Moreover, we are blessed while, or as, an “ignorant being filled with base passions.”

When we do not reflect on the sort of beings we truly are, I believe we tend to consider ourselves to not be especially bad. When we do reflect, however, and the more we do so, the more we become aware that we are filled with base passions and have not changed in the least. Only because we are “saved” *with all our base passions*, can we be “saved.” This is an extremely important point. I believe there is absolutely no meaning in considering salvation as a concept separate from our nature, and isolated from the problems that we have in making our way in the world.

I believe the reason concepts such as “birth in the Pure Land in the present” and “becoming a Buddha in this world,” which imply completely ridding ourselves of “base passions” in this world, and which are absolutely contrary to the Venerable Master’s position, constantly arise because those who raise them have not experienced being in the “rightly-established group,” which comes from having received *shinjin*. I believe that is how mistaken attempts to speak of such imaginary benefits in the present arise.

### **“Immediately “Becoming a Buddha in the Pure Land” and “Returning from the Pure Land”**

In the Chapter on *Shinjin* of his *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

“Regardless of class or rank, those born in the Pure Recompensed Land of the Great Vow will immediately attain the ‘unparalleled true way’; hence, it is referred to as ‘crosswise transcendence’.”

In other words, the Venerable Master asserted that we will attain the highest level of enlightenment, i.e., become a Buddha, at the moment we are born in the Pure Land. Further, in the Chapter on Faith he wrote:

Truly we know that because Miroku Bosatsu has realized the diamond-hard mind of the “state equal to bodhi,” he will attain the Highest Enlightenment. As a result of three dharma talks that he will give under a dragon-flower tree, those who (recite the) Nembutsu with the diamond-hard mind of “crosswise transcendence” (*shinjin*) will also attain the great, perfect Nirvana the moment they leave this world. That is why followers of the Nembutsu are said to be “equal” (to Miroku Bosatsu).

In his *Shozomatsu Wasan*, the Venerable Master wrote,

*Five-billion six-hundred-seventy million  
Years will pass  
Before Miroku Bosatsu  
Attains the highest Enlightenment,  
But those with shinjin  
Will attain it immediately  
(After leaving this world).*

As related above, those with *shinjin* will attain enlightenment before Miroku Bosatsu (who has the rank of toshogaku, the 51st stage on the Bodhisattva Path) attains the supreme Enlightenment 5,670,000,000 years from now. As already indicated, Pure Land thought before the Venerable Master was that only after being born in the Pure Land would you be in the “Rightly Established Group,” after which you must perform the religious practices required in order to become a Buddha (become enlightened).

The Venerable Master turned this thought around, and asserted that we are in the “rightly established group” when our *shinjin* is determined, and emphasized that we will become a Buddha simultaneously with our birth in the Pure Land.

After “becoming a Buddha,” we immediately “return to this world” (*genso*) and begin our activity of helping others.

In his Chapter on Teaching of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

“Reverently contemplating the “true teaching of Pure Land” (*Jodo-Shinshu*), I see there are two kinds of “merit transference.” One is the “phase of going” (*oso*), and the other is the “phase of returning” (*genso*), thus laying out the Jodo-Shinshu teaching in great outline. The Venerable asserted that *oso eko*, the “‘merit transference’ of the phase of ‘going (to the Pure Land)’” allows us to be born in the Pure Land where we become a Buddha. The activity of “benefitting self/benefitting others” that we engage in after being born there, are solely due to the power of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow.”

Regarding *genso eko*, the “‘merit transference’ of the phase of ‘returning from the Pure Land,’” the Venerable Master wrote the following in the part about Tenjin *Bosatsu* (Indian: Vasubandhu, 4th century) of his *Shoshin-ge*:

*Those who reach the “world where lotus blossoms  
Are stored” (the Pure Land)  
Are immediately enlightened to “thusness.”*

*Exercising their “transcendent powers”  
In the “forest of base desires”  
They transform themselves into forms  
Meaningful to those they wish to “save”  
In the “garden of life and death” (the sentient world).*

In the part on Donran Daishi (476 - 542 AD) of his *Shoshin-ge*, the Venerable Master wrote:

*When shinjin is received  
By the “ignorant with base passions,”  
They become aware that “birth and death”  
Are identical with Nirvana.*

*Such beings will unfailingly reach  
The land of Immeasurable Light  
And become able to “save”  
All sentient beings.*

As expressed above, after becoming enlightened in the Pure Land, we return to this world of delusion to save all the sentient beings here. Considering that to mean we need not help others or spread the teaching in this present world is incorrect because as I have already mentioned, that is the ninth of the Ten Benefits in the present world, “the benefit of always practicing the Great Compassion” (*jogyo daihi no yaku*).

Regarding this matter of “returning from the Pure Land” (*genso eko*), some wonder whether, rather than expressing it as engaging in community service and in spreading the teaching *after* being born in the Pure Land and returning to this world, wouldn't it be better to express it as engaging in “returning from the Pure Land” type of activity after receiving *shinjin*. But the Venerable Master never once said he had been born in the Pure Land, became a Buddha, and returned to this world in order to save the sentient beings here. As already indicated, the following *wasan* is contained in the *Shozomatsu Wasan* which the Venerable Master wrote at the age of 86:

*How difficult to renounce my evil nature...  
My mind is like snakes and scorpions,  
And since even the good I try to do  
Is tinted with the poison (of “self-centered effort”),  
It must be called the practice of an idiot.*

Further, in the *Ichinen Tanen Mon'i*, written when he was 85, the Venerable Master wrote:

“What we refer to as *bombu* is being ignorant and filled with base passions; it is being greedy, becoming angry, always jealous and filled with hate. These passions remain with us until the moment we die.”

And again, in Article Two of the *Tannisho*, compiled from the the Venerable Master’s words when he was past 80 years of age, he is quoted as saying,

“Since I am incapable of any practice whatsoever, hell will definitely be my dwelling.”

From the above quotations (and there are many others), you can see there is absolutely nothing that can be taken to mean that the Venerable Master felt he had returned from the Pure Land; rather, he continued considering himself to be an “ignorant being filled with base passions” all his life. On this matter, too, the Venerable Master’s *shinjin* expresses the thought of the “two aspects of deep faith.” That is where the deep personal self-reflection of the “deep faith on the part of the being to be enlightened” (*ki no jinshin*) based on *shinjin* is found. In other words, it is the feeling of, “I am an ignorant being filled with base passions incapable of doing anything but evil, and sinking and transmigrating from the endless past without hope of escaping...” so there couldn’t be any thought about having returned from the Pure Land.

In his *Koso Wasan*, the Venerable Master wrote:

*Upon reaching the Land Recompensed by the Vow,  
We realize the unsurpassed Nirvana;  
That is, Great Compassion is awakened in us.  
This is referred to as “merit transference.”*

Again, in Letter 20 of the *Mattosho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

“Only after going to the Buddha’s Land and returning to benefit sentient beings can we become close to and friendly with those given to wrongdoing. That, however, is not of our own doing. Only when we are saved by Amida’s Vow can we act freely.”

As indicated above, the Venerable Master’s understanding of “‘merit transference’ of ‘returning from the Pure Land’” (*genso eko*) is being born in the Pure Land, becoming a Buddha, and then acting to benefit sentient beings. Some might consider this to be a passive activity but I do not believe it is. The Venerable Master spoke of being in the “rightly-established group,” and emphasized being saved in the present. He said returning to this world came after birth in the Pure Land and attaining enlightenment. This is absolutely not a passive attitude in spreading the teaching; rather, I believe it is very positive.

As can also be determined from Letter 20 of the *Mattosho* already quoted, only after being born in the Pure Land and becoming Enlightened as a Buddha, will we be endowed with the great power that we do not have in the present world, and only through that power are we able to act to benefit sentient beings as we wish.

I believe this is very well expressed in Article Four of the *Tannisho* where the Venerable Master is quoted as saying:

“Compassion in the Path of Sages is to take pity on, sympathize with, and care for others. But it is extremely difficult to save others as we wish. Compassion in the Pure Land Path, however, consists of quickly becoming Buddha (as a result of birth in the Pure Land) through the Nembutsu and, with the mind of the Great Compassion and Great Mercy, freely benefitting sentient beings. Because it is difficult to save others as we may wish (without birth in the Pure Land and becoming a Buddha), however, regardless of how much sympathy we may feel towards others in this life, it is not enduring. Reciting the Nembutsu is the only enduring mind of Great Compassion.”

Three kinds of compassion are taught in Buddha-dharma:

- Between sentient beings (“small compassion”: *shohi*)
- Towards those with contact with the dharma (“moderate compassion”: *chahi*)
- Without reserve to all (“great compassion”: *daihi*)

The only compassion that we “ignorant beings filled with base passions” can express is “small compassion,” while the compassion of a Buddha is “great compassion.” Some differences of opinion exist regarding “moderate compassion,” but generally they can be said to be the compassion of a *shomon*, *engaku*, and *bosatsu*. As can be determined from the Venerable Master’s words, he considered teaching others and saving them as he wished, to be an extremely difficult matter: “Compassion in the Path of Sages is to take pity on, sympathize with, and care for other. But it is extremely difficult to save others as we wish.”

This may be related to the phrase “those given to wrong doing” in Letter 20 of the *Mattoshō* already quoted, or it may be related to the betrayal by his son Zenran who spread a wrong teaching, but because of the deep self-reflection due to his *shinjin* based on “Buddha-centered power,” the Venerable Master keenly lamented his ability to help others as he wished in the present.

Next is the phrase, “Compassion in the Pure Land Path, however, consists of quickly becoming Buddha (as a result of birth in the Pure Land) through the Nembutsu and, with the mind of the Great Compassion and Great Mercy, freely benefitting sentient beings.”

As indicated in this passage, when we are born in the Pure Land and become Buddha, the “small compassion” of an “ignorant being filled with base passions” changes completely to the “great compassion” of a Buddha, and we are able to save others as we wish.

This is the same thought expressed in Letter 20 of the *Mattoshō* already quoted: “That, however, is not of our own doing. Only when we are saved by Amida’s Vow can we act freely.” And, “Because it is difficult to save others as we wish, however, regardless of

how much sympathy we may feel towards others, it is not enduring. Reciting the Nembutsu is the only enduring mind of Great Compassion.”

Regardless of how much we may sympathize with others, since there is no way we can save them as we would like through our own efforts, our “compassion” is not absolute. And since we can save others freely only by becoming a Buddha through the Nembutsu, only the mind of Great Compassion that we receive through the Nembutsu can be considered absolute.

In other words, saving sentient beings as we would like with the mind of Great Compassion requires that we become a Buddha through birth in the Pure Land, and “return from the Pure Land.” The Venerable Master never spoke of his own “return from the Pure Land” as a result of his *shinjin* experience. I believe that is because of his deep self-reflection.

This is an extremely important point.

As long as we are in this world, we are only “ignorant beings filled with base passions.” That is our true self—the self that is absolutely unable to even approach being a Buddha. If we look at ourselves as someone who has “returned from the Pure Land,” we are not looking at our true selves.

Considering “returning from the Pure Land” to happen only after being born there and attaining the same enlightenment as a Buddha (after losing our physical body) rather than immediately after receiving *shinjin* means that rather than being able to “save” (which only a Buddha can do), what we can do in this world is spread the teaching.

Although the Venerable Master never referred to himself as a person who had “returned from the Pure Land,” he frequently considered *others* to have done so. For example, in the General Preface of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, he wrote:

“Since the conditions were ripe for the teaching of Birth in the Pure Country to be revealed, Daiba provoked Ajase to commit rebellious acts; and as the person to be saved by the Pure Act now appears, Shakyamuni lead Idaike (Queen Vaidehi) to choose (her birth to be in) the Land of Serene Sustenance. Out of compassion, the incarnated sages sought to save the suffering multitudes...and considered Daiba (Devadatta), Ajase (Ajatasatru), and Idaike (Queen Vaidehi), as described in the *Meditation Sutra* to have ‘returned from the Pure Land’.”

In the *Koso Wasan*, he wrote:

*Master Zendo*  
*Embodied the sea of Great Compassion.*  
*He called upon Buddhas in the ten directions*  
*To bear witness*  
*For the last age of this defiled world.*

and

*“I appeared as a Buddha (in this world),”  
Master Genshin said,  
“But because the conditions (to lead others)  
“Are exhausted,  
“I will return to my original land.”*

and

*Some worldly people have said  
That Master Genka’s (Honen’s) original state  
Was Master Doshuku,  
While others say he was Zendo.*

As indicated in the above *wasan*, the Venerable Master considered the Seven Patriarchs to be those who had “returned from the Pure Land.”

The Venerable Master Shinran never considered himself to have “returned from the Pure Land,” but he seems to have regarded those who brought about the conditions that brought him within the salvation of the Primal Vow to be those who had.

I believe that although we are heavily weighted down by our evil *karma* from endless past, as expressed in the phrase, “The Buddha’s Great Compassion takes many forms in revealing itself to those who come in contact with the Dharma,” we can sense those who have “returned from the Pure Land” from the countless ways in which we have benefitted from their help.

### **Chapter 3. The Venerable Master Shinran's Shinjin and Nembutsu**

As already noted in the section titled, “Being Rightly Established in the Present” of Chapter 2, the Venerable Master Shinran wrote in his *Kyogyoshinsho*, that *shinjin* is “... not mingled with doubt,” and in the *Ichinen Tannen Mon’i* he wrote that it is “... hearing the Tathagata’s Vow without the mind of doubt.”

As also stated in the section titled, “The Primal Vow” of Chapter 1, the Venerable Master faithfully maintained the “Buddha-centered power” teaching that he received from Master Honen which was criticized by scholar/monks such as Jokei and Koben who upheld the “self-centered effort” position. It was from that “Buddha-centered power” position that the Venerable Master developed his explanation of the “division of the sea of vows into the true and expedient” (*gankai shinké*), which divides the 48 Vows into the true vows and the expedient (provisional) vows.

The Venerable Master considered the “five true vows” to be: the 11th Vow that will “absolutely cause enlightenment” (*hisshi metsudo no gan*), 12th Vow of “limitless light” (*komyo muryo no gan*), 13th Vow of “limitless life” (*jumyo muryo no gan*), 17th Vow that “all Buddhas will recite Amida Buddha’s Name” (*shobutsu shomyo no gan*),

and the 18th Vow of “sincere mind, faith serene (and wish birth in the Pure Land)” (*shishin shingyo no gan*).

The 17th Vow is:

If, when I attain Buddhahood, the Buddhas in all lands in the ten directions do not praise and glorify my Name, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

The Venerable Master was attracted to the position of this 17th Vow that Buddhas in the ten directions will praise and honor Amida Buddha’s honorable Name (the *myogo*, Namo Amida Butsu) which contains great virtue. This developed from the position of other Buddhist groups that doing 120 “various goods through self-centered effort” (*jiriki shozen*) is the best practice, and criticized Master Honen’s “single practice of reciting the Buddha’s Name” (*Nembutsu ichigyō*) as being inferior.

In other words, the Name surpasses the virtue of doing “various goods” through “self-centered effort” because it was realized as a result of the Primal Vow. The Name “Namo Amida Butsu,” that was fulfilled as a result of this 17th Vow was solely due to the Buddha. What finally reaches our minds and hearts is *shinjin*, and what comes out of our mouths is the Nembutsu. Since this is the *shinjin* that is given to us by the Buddha, it is referred to as “the *shinjin* based on the ‘merit transference’ of the ‘power of the Primal Vow’” (as expressed in the Chapter on Faith of the *Kyogyoshinsho*), and “*shinjin* conferred on us by Tathagata” (as expressed in the *Tannisho*), and is the cause of our birth in the Pure Land. As also already related, this *shinjin* is the “faith of the being to be enlightened” (*shin-ki*) and the “faith of the dharma that enlightens” (*shin-ho*) of “the two types of deep faith” (*niju jinshin*).

That being the case, just when do we receive this *shinjin*? It is when the Name of the Buddha (the *myogo*) reaches our minds and hearts; in other words, as in the phrase, “hearing is faith” (*mon soku shin*), it is when the Name of the Buddha is truly heard.

In regards to “hearing” (*mon*), the Venerable Master wrote the following in the Chapter on *Shinjin* in the *Kyogyoshinsho*:

“To hear” in the *sutras* refers to the fact that sentient beings hear the origin, cause and effect of the Buddha’s Vow, and do not have doubt in them. That is what “to hear” means.

What the Venerable Master means by this is that the Buddha established his Primal Vow to save evil persons such as myself, and after a long period of the most difficult spiritual practices, brought that vow to fruition. Accepting that vow without the slightest doubt that it will bring about my salvation, is what “hearing” (*mon*) is.

In other words, “hearing” in the true sense occurs only after listening carefully to the Primal Vow, and receiving *shinjin* after all our doubts are cleared up.

In Article 193 of *Rennyō Shonin Goichidai Kikikaki* (Heard and Recorded During Master Rennyō’s Lifetime), it states:

Regardless of our doubts, if we listen intently with our entire being, we will be given *shinjin* because of Great Compassion. The Buddhist teaching (begins and) ends in hearing.

“Listening” (*chomon*), i.e., listening to the *dharma*, is our most important concern, and is how we receive *shinjin*.

### **Nembutsu (Reciting “Namo Amida Butsu”)**

Reciting the Nembutsu means saying, “Namo Amida Butsu” with our mouths. As already related, when the “name of Amida Buddha” (*myogo*) of Namo Amida Butsu fulfilled in the 17th Vow reaches our hearts, it becomes *shinjin*, and what comes out of our mouths is the Nembutsu. Accordingly, that Nembutsu is the Nembutsu given to us by the Buddha. In his *Shozo-matsu Wasan*, the Venerable Master wrote:

*How shameless  
And unrepentant I am!  
But because the virtue of Amida’s Name  
Pervades the ten directions,  
It reaches even  
My false and insincere heart.*

Here the Venerable Master expresses his understanding that since Amida Buddha’s salvation takes the form of his Name and reaches us in that form, the Nembutsu that we recite with our mouths is really the Buddha’s calling voice to us. He informs us followers of Jodo-Shinshu that, “Our voice calling the Buddha is (at the same time) the voice of the Buddha calling us.” The Venerable Master also says that “listening,” reciting the Nembutsu and placing our hands together in *gassho*, are all activities due to “Buddha-centered power.” Accordingly, “The ears with which we hear, the mouths with which we recite, and the hands that we placed together in *gassho*, are all due to the ‘marvelously mysterious’ power of Amida Buddha’s Vow.”

Since *shinjin* is the cause of our birth in the Pure Land, we use the phrase, “*shinjin* is the true cause” (*shinjin shoin*) in our Jodo-Shinshu teaching, and since recitation of the Nembutsu is how we express our gratitude for (our cause of birth being determined), we use the phrase, “reciting (the Name) in gratitude” (*shomyo ho-on*). That is the essence of our teaching.

### **Criticism of “Shinjin is the True Cause” and “Reciting (The Name) in Gratitude”**

Recently, a small group of scholars have criticized the main points of our Jodo-Shinshu teachings, namely: “*shinjin* is the true cause (of our birth in the Pure Land)” and “reciting (the Name) in gratitude (for our indebtedness).”]

These scholars do not seem to disagree that *shinjin* is the true cause of our birth in the Pure Land. They do argue, however, that reciting the Nembutsu to express gratitude for the cause of our birth in the Pure Land having been established by Amida Buddha is not part of the Venerable Master’s thought, but rather, is a later development. These scholars assert that this thought is something that Master Rennyo added.

Are these assertions true? In his *Shoshin-gé*, the Venerable Master wrote:

*We enter the “rightly-established group” without effort  
The moment faith in Amida’s Primal Vow is awakened.  
(How can we not) express our gratitude for that Vow of Great Compassion  
By reciting the Tathagata’s Name?*

Further, in the *Goshosoku-shu* (Collection of (the Venerable Master Shinran’s) Messages), it states:

Those who consider their birth in the Pure Land to have been determined should be grateful to the Buddha, and express their indebtedness by holding the Nembutsu deeply in mind and reciting it.

As can be determined from these quotations, there is no doubt that those who hold that “reciting (the Name) in gratitude” does not exist in the Venerable Master’s thought are incorrect. I believe, however, that there is a much more fundamental problem with those who hold such as position.

As already related, reciting the Nembutsu in gratitude for the assurance that we will be born in the Pure Land is the most important doctrinal point in our Jodo-Shinshu teaching. I believe the reason misunderstandings regarding this arise because those who hold such a position have not had the experience of receiving *shinjin*, and as a result, do not have any experience of being in the “Rightlyestablished group (of those assured of birth in the Pure Land) in the present.”

Those who criticize reciting the Nembutsu in gratitude generally make the following three assertions:

1. The Nembutsu that the Venerable Master speaks of is the “great practice” (*daigyo*) mentioned in the Chapter on Faith of the *Kyogyoshinsho*: “The ‘great practice’ is reciting the Name of the Tathagata of Unhindered Light,” and can be considered “great practice” even when recited without *shinjin*, i.e., even a Nembutsu that is recited without *shinjin* has the power to bring about *shinjin*. The Nembutsu is not only an expression of gratitude after the attainment of faith, it should have the power to awaken *shinjin* even before faith.

2. The Venerable Master does not make a distinction between the Nembutsu recited before receiving *shinjin* and the Nembutsu recited after receiving *shinjin*.

Although the teaching of “reciting (the Name) in gratitude” does speak of gratitude, originally, there was no difference in the Nembutsu before and after receiving *shinjin*.

3. The Venerable Master urged us to recite the “Nembutsu of the true gate” (the Nembutsu of the 20th Vow of “self-centered effort”), because by reciting it, it becomes the “true Nembutsu” (the Nembutsu of the 18th Vow of “Buddha-centered effort”). The Nembutsu is not only an expression of gratitude for our indebtedness; it helps us receive the *shinjin* based on “Buddha-centered power.”

Those who criticize the teaching of “reciting (the Name) in gratitude” assert that although it does refer to reciting the Nembutsu in gratitude for our indebtedness to the Buddha, the Nembutsu also has the power to arouse *shinjin*, and that the Venerable Master referred to the Nembutsu in that way too.

### **The Venerable Master Shinran’s and Master Rennyo’s Explanations of “Reciting (the Name) in Gratitude”**

Letter 6 in Fascicle 3 of the *Gobunsho*, written by Master Rennyo contains the following:

“Taking joy in *shinjin*” (*shinjin kangi*) means that we rejoice when our *shinjin* is determined. This is because we have absolutely no doubts regarding our birth in the Pure Land.

When we reflect on Amida Tathagata’s painstaking endeavors for five *kalpas*, and when we think of the graciousness and wonder of his saving us so readily, it is hard to express our feelings.

Further, in the *Shoshin-gé*, there is (the following passage):

*Always reciting Tathagata’s Name,  
We should express our gratitude  
For the Great Compassionate Vow.*

Hence (we realize) all the more that—walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, irrespective of time, place, or other circumstances—we should simply recite the Name of the Buddha in gratitude for the Buddha’s benevolence.

Again, in Letter 8 of Fascicle 3, Master Rennyo wrote:

In other words, know that this refers to “doers of the Nembutsu” who have received the *shinjin* of “Buddha-centered power” through the single-thought of taking refuge (in the Primal Vow) in their ordinary life. Accordingly, they should “recite the Name of the Buddha” (say *Namo Amida Butsu*) whether walking, standing, sitting or lying, in acknowledging their in-debtedness to Amida Tathagata’s deep and boundless benevolence.

(The Venerable Master Shinran) expressed the above in the following way:

*“We enter the “rightly-established group”  
Without effort  
The moment faith  
In Amida Primal Vow is awakened  
(How can we not) express our gratitude  
For that Vow of Great Compassion  
By reciting  
The Tathagata’s name?”*

These are the ways in which Master Rennyo expressed the thought of “reciting (the Name) in gratitude.” But as can be determined from these quotations, he does so by quoting the Venerable Master’s *Shoshin-gé*. From this we see that Master Rennyo is not asserting something that is not found in the Venerable Master’s writings, but rather, is what he inherited from the Venerable Master. Further, and this is the important point, both the Venerable Master and Master Rennyo refer to the Nembutsu that is recited after receiving *shinjin* and entering the “rightly-established group (of those assured of birth in the Pure Land)” (*shojoju*) as the Nembutsu of “repayment for our indebtedness.”

Essentially, both the Venerable Master and Master Rennyo who inherited his teaching, wished us to enter the “rightly-established group” in our present life, which is the world of true salvation, and is the Venerable Master’s unique insight. They both urge that the most important point is receiving *shinjin* and reciting the Nembutsu in gratitude from then on.

### **The Passage in the Chapter on Shinjin of the Kyogyoshinsho: “The Great Practice is Reciting the Name of the Tathagata of Unhindered Light”**

Let me now comment on the first of the items in the section, “Criticism of ‘*Shinjin* is the True Cause’ and ‘Reciting (the Name) in Gratitude.’”

A critic of the “reciting (the Name) in gratitude” position uses the opening passage of the Chapter on Practice of the *Kyogyoshinsho* to justify his position that the Nembutsu is the “great practice,” and that even a Nembutsu recited without *shinjin* has the power to awaken *shinjin*.

Clearly, the opening passage of the Chapter on Practice, “The ‘great practice’ is reciting the name of the Tathagata of Unhindered Light,” does not say anything about having or not having *shinjin*. This does not mean, however, that the Venerable Master said that the Nembutsu recited without *shinjin* is the “great practice.” The fact that he wrote, “recite the Name of the Tathagata of Unhindered Light,” rather than “recite Namo Amida Butsu,” clearly indicates that he is following the commentary given in the second volume of Donran *Daishi’s Ojo Ronchu* (Commentary on Birth in the Pure Land) where

Donran *Daishi* refers to “recitation of the Name” with the *shinjin* that is endowed with *dharma* and reality.

Further, in the Chapter on Practice, the Venerable Master quotes Master Honen as follows:

Know clearly that (reciting the Nembutsu) is not a practice that anyone, whether ordinary person or sage, must perform to gain merit. That is why it is referred to as the “practice of no ‘merit transference’” (*fueko no gyo*).

The practice that is clarified in the Chapter on Practice is not the “self-centered effort” practice that depends on personal striving, but rather, is the practice based on the “merit transference of ‘Buddha-centered power’” that is received from the Buddha and also the “practice of no ‘merit transference.’”

Further, in the explanation of practice in the *Jodo Monrui Jusho* (A Collection of Passages on the Pure Land), it states:

“Know that in the words of the *sutras* and commentaries on them, that (the Nembutsu) is not a ‘practice for “the ignorant filled with base passions” to offer their merit to the Buddha (*bombu eko no gyo*). Rather, it is the ‘practice of “merit transference” of Great Compassion (by the Buddha towards sentient beings)’ (*daihi eko no gyo*), and also “no ‘merit transference’” (*fu-eko*) by sentient beings.”

Here too, it states that the “great practice” is not something done with “self-centered effort” that is based on the strength of “ignorant beings filled with base passions,” but rather, is the “‘merit transference’ of from Great Compassion” that is given to us by the Buddha. That is why we are unable to “transfer merit,” and why, for us, it is the “practice of no ‘merit transference.’”

In the *Shozomatsu Wasan*, the Venerable Master states:

*Reciting the Name with shinjin*

*Is the “merit transferred” (to us) by Amida.*

*That is why it is called*

*“No ‘merit transference’ (by us),”*

*And why reciting the Name with “self-centered effort”*

*Is looked down on.*

As is clear from this *wasan*, from the Chapter on Practice, and from the passage in the *Jodo Monrui Jusho*, what is referred to as our “practice of no ‘merit transference,’” is really the “practice of ‘merit transference’ through ‘Buddha-centered power.’” That is what the practice of true *shinjin* is. It is absolutely not recitation of the Name through “self-centered effort.”

As related in the first section of this chapter, “*Shinjin*,” the “name of the Buddha” (*myogo*) that fulfills the Primal Vow reaches our minds and hearts, becomes *shinjin*, and is expressed through our mouths in the form of “Namo Amida Butsu.” Accordingly, in order to be the practice based on the “‘merit transference’ of ‘Buddha-centered power’” (*tariki eko*), it must be “Namo Amida Butsu” with *shinjin*. If it is “Namo Amida

Butsu” without shinjin, then it is not the “Namo Amida Butsu” based on “‘merit transference’ of ‘Buddha-centered power.’”

From the above, you should now see that the “great practice” mentioned in the opening passage of the Chapter on Faith, “The “great practice” is reciting the name of the Tathagata of Unhindered Light,” is the Nembutsu with *shinjin* based on “‘merit transference’ of ‘Buddha-centered power,’” and not a Nembutsu recited without *shinjin*. It is only because the Name (Namo Amida Butsu) is given to us by Amida Buddha that the Venerable Master could write, “The ‘great practice’ is reciting the name of the Tathagata of Unhindered Light,” and then continue,

This practice embodies all good and contains all virtues. It enables sentient beings to quickly attain the all-complete merits. It is the ocean treasure of the virtues of “true thusness,” or “one truth.” That is why it is called the “great practice.”

Again, in the *Shozomatsu Wasan* previously quoted:

*How shameless  
And unrepentant I am!  
But because the virtue of Amida’s Name  
Pervades the ten directions,  
It reaches even  
My false and insincere heart.*

As also expressed here, only because it is the Name (Namo Amida Butsu) that is the result of Amida Buddha’s “merit transference” based on completion of the Primal Vow, can it be said that its virtues pervades the ten directions. It is not reference to a Nembutsu not based on *shinjin*. Accordingly, it is clear that using the opening passage of the Chapter on Practice as the basis for stating that even a Nembutsu without *shinjin* is the “great practice,” and asserting that it has the power to bring about *shinjin*—the view that denies “reciting (the Name) in gratitude (for our indebtedness)” (*shomyo ho-on*)—must be considered incorrect.

### **The Nembutsu With and Without *Shinjin***

I will now take up the second problem, namely, the Nembutsu with *shinjin* (the Nembutsu that is recited after receiving *shinjin*) and the Nembutsu without *shinjin* (the Nembutsu that is recited before receiving *shinjin*).

Master Rennyo frequently urged reciting the Nembutsu in “gratitude for our indebtedness (to the Buddha for creating the conditions that allow us to be born in the Pure Land)” (*ho-on*) after receiving *shinjin*. He expressed this in terms such as, “‘reciting the Nembutsu’ with *shinjin*” and “‘reciting the Nembutsu’ in ‘gratitude for our indebtedness.’” Some scholars criticize the position of “‘reciting the Nembutsu’ in ‘gratitude for our indebtedness’” (*shomyo ho-on*), and assert that the Venerable

Master did not make a distinction between reciting the Nembutsu before receiving *shinjin* and after receiving it.

In the previous section, I made clear that for the Venerable Master, there was a difference in reciting the Nembutsu *before* receiving *shinjin* (reciting it with “self-centered effort”) and *after* receiving it (reciting it with “Buddha-centered power”).

The Venerable Master made a clear distinction between the 19th and 20th Vows, and the 18th Vow. He considered the 19th Vow to be the “Nembutsu of the ‘essential gate’” (*yomon nembutsu*), that is, the Nembutsu as one practice among many. He considered the 20th Vow to be the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’” (*shinmon Nembutsu*), that is, the Nembutsu that transcends the many practices. The Venerable Master considered both the 19th and the 20th Vows to be based on “self-centered effort.”

The Venerable Master considered the 18th Vow to be the “Nembutsu of the ‘broad vow’” (*gugan Nembutsu*), based on “Buddha-centered power” (*tarikiki*). He discerned the intent of the 20th Vow (the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’”) and saw that it is close to the intent of the 18th Vow (the “Nembutsu of the ‘broad vow’”). He then made a distinction between “true gate” and “broad vow,” and clearly indicted that the true Nembutsu is the “Nembutsu of the ‘broad vow’ based on ‘Buddha-centered power’” (the 18th Vow).

In his Chapter on *Shinjin* of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote,

“The true *shinjin* is necessarily accompanied by (recitation of) the Name. (But recitation of) the Name is not always accompanied by the *shinjin* based on (Amida Buddha’s) vow power.”

As indicated above, the Venerable Master made a sharp distinction between the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’” (20th Vow, before receiving *shinjin*) and the “Nembutsu of the ‘broad vow’” (18th Vow, after receiving *shinjin*).

Further, in Letter 12 of the *Mattosho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

“... even though the Name is recited fervently, if there is no *shinjin*, (birth in the Pure Land) will not take place. Only those with faith they will be born there through the Nembutsu, and recite the Name will be born in the true Buddha Land. Accordingly those who recite the Name without faith in “Buddha-centered power” based on the Primal Vow, will only be born in the borderland.”

Here, too, the distinction between the “Nembutsu of the ‘broad vow’” that is recited with *shinjin* and the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’” that is recited with “self-centered effort” and without *shinjin*, is made clear. I will make this clearer a little later, but the Venerable Master made a clear distinction between reciting the Nembutsu *before* receiving *shinjin* (which is reciting it with “self-centered effort”) and reciting the Nembutsu *after* receiving *shinjin* (which is reciting it with “Buddha-centered power”).

To say the Venerable Master did not make a distinction between the Nembutsu that is recited before and after receiving *shinjin*, and criticizing the teaching of “reciting (the Name) in gratitude (for assurance of our birth in the Pure Land)” is a great mistake.

## The Problem of the Practice of the “Nembutsu of the ‘True Gate’”

I will now comment on the third problem.

As related in the previous section, the Venerable Master pointed out that the 20th Vow (the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’ based on ‘self-centered effort’”) is very close in thought to the 18th Vow (the “Nembutsu of the ‘broad vow’ based on ‘Buddha-centered power’”).

The criticism implied in the third problem is that the Venerable Master urged practicing the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’ based on ‘self-centered effort’” in order to attain the “Nembutsu of the ‘broad vow’ based on ‘Buddha-centered power.’” In other words, this point of view holds that the primary purpose of reciting the Nembutsu (putting the Nembutsu into practice) is to attain *shinjin*. This is the point of view that criticizes “recitation of (the Name) in gratitude.”

In the Takada copy of the *Jodo Wasan*, in the part where the 20th Vow (the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’”) is discussed, is the *wasan*:

*Arouse the “sincere mind,” the “mind to transfer”  
And the “desire for birth (in the Pure Land)”  
(This is how Amida) opened the “true gate”  
Of the Name  
To expediently lead sentient beings  
In the ten directions  
With his “vow that eventually causes  
Birth (in the Pure Land).*

Next to the passage, “With his ‘vow that eventually causes birth (in the Pure Land),” is the comment, “(Amida) absolutely guaranteed to do so.”

The next *wasan* is:

*Through the “vow that eventually causes birth  
(In the Pure Land)”  
Shakyamuni expressed the root  
Of good  
And the basis of virtue  
In the Amida Sutra,  
Encouraging those who follow  
The Mahayana teaching (to practice it).*

Next to the passage, “those who follow the Mahayana teaching” is the comment, “Absolutely lead them to the Pure Land.” The next *wasan* is:

*Those who recite the Name with  
With “self-centered effort,”*

*Whether meditatively or non-meditatively,  
Will naturally and without effort,  
And even without being instructed,  
Enter the “gate of true thusness”  
If they trust the “vow  
that eventually causes birth  
(In the Pure Land).”*

Next to the term, “vow that eventually causes birth (in the Pure Land),” is the comment, “Even those who recite the Name with ‘self-centered effort’ will eventually be born (in the Pure Land).”

Further, in the *Kugan-mon* (The Nine Vows), the Venerable Master explains the text of the 20th Vow in the following way:

“This vow guarantees that all those who recite the Nembutsu with ‘self-centered effort’ will be born in the Pure Land. It is referred to as the vow in which ‘(Amida Buddha) directs his thoughts towards those who seek to be born in his Pure Land through “self-centered effort” and absolutely guarantees their birth there’.”

All these passages contain hints that we should strive to accomplish the goal of the 20th Vow, that is, to use the “Nembutsu of ‘self-centered effort’” (*jiriki Nembutsu*) to attain *shinjin*.

And then in the Chapter on Transformed Land of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

“Monks and lay persons of this corrupt age should promptly enter the ‘true gate’ of the ‘perfectly accomplished utmost virtue’ and aspire for that marvelous birth in the Pure Land which is incapable of being thought of ... (that is why) Shakyamuni Buddha opened his treasure-house of virtue and urged all those in the ten directions of this corrupt age (to avail themselves of it). Amida Tathagata had previously established his ‘vow that eventually causes birth (in the Pure Land)’ to guide all beings...”

This is in the Chapter on Transformed Land, so it is considered a “provisional gate,” but it does recommend the “true gate” of the 20th Vow, which is also referred to as the “vow that eventually causes birth (in the Pure Land).”

The above passages are generally the ones that are used as the basis for asserting that the Venerable Master recommended using “‘self-centered effort’ to enter the ‘true gate’ of the Nembutsu” (*jiriki shinmon nembutsu*) before *shinjin* is determined. As already indicated, there are passages in the Chapter on Transformed Land, which is the chapter on the expedient and the provisional, that seem to urge following the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’ (20th Vow)” but as might be expected, there are also passages that admonish against following it.

In the same Chapter on Transformed Land, is the following passage:

“I realize that those who perform the ‘exclusive practice’ with ‘mixed minds’ do not attain the ‘great joy’ (serene faith) ... How sad that common and ignorant persons who

are defiled and hindered, from beginningless past to the present, have not had an opportunity to be saved because of their inclination to indiscriminately perform ‘auxiliary acts’ and perform meditative and nonmeditative good. Reflecting upon our cyclic transmigration, how difficult, even with the passage of *kalpas* as countless as dust particles, to turn to the Buddha’s Vow-Power for refuge and enter the Ocean of Great Faith. This is something we should lament and deeply deplore. Because sages of the Mahayana and Hinayana teachings, and good men consider recitation of the sacred Name of the Primal Vow to be a good action that they perform, they cannot attain *shinjin* nor accept the Buddha’s Wisdom. And because they are ignorant of the Buddha’s reason for establishing the cause (for our birth in the Pure Land), they cannot enter the Recompensed Land.”

Here, the Venerable Master severely criticizes the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’” (the 20th Vow), and says that not only will you not attain *shinjin*, you will not even be born in the Recompensed Land (*hodo*) as a result of it.

Again, in the “Hymns on Doubt” section of the *Shozomatsu Wasan* are the following:

*Doubting the Tathagata’s wisdom  
Is proof of not having received it.  
Making distinctions between good and bad,  
And believing that doing good (will cause birth in the Pure Land),  
Only results in terminating at the border land.*

*The evil of doubting the Buddha’s wisdom  
Stops us at the border land  
Of sloth and complacency.  
This evil is so grave,  
We will be bound there for eons.*

*Those who recite the Name  
With “self-centered effort,”  
Doubt the Tathagata’s Primal Vow.  
This is so grave an offence,  
It results in being imprisoned  
In the jail of seven treasures.*

In all of these wasan, the Venerable Master severely criticizes the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’ based on ‘self-centered effort’” (*jiriki shinmon nembutsu*, i.e., the 20th Vow). There are twenty-three of these “Hymns on Doubt,” at the end of which is the passage: “The above twenty-three verses (were written to) show the gravity of doubting Amida’s ‘marvelously mysterious’ vow.”

All twenty-three verses in the “Hymns on Doubt” section warn against “self-centered effort.” Most of the verses admonish against the “true gate” (20th Vow) but the eighth verse seems to admonish against the “essential gate” (19th Vow) of performing “goods” actions through “self-centered effort”:

*Those who perform “good deeds”  
Through “self-centered effort”  
(In trying to be born in the Pure Land),  
Doubt the “marvelously mysterious”  
Wisdom of the Buddha.  
Because they will “reap as they sow” (jigo jitoku)  
They confine themselves in the prison  
Of seven treasures.*

The remaining twenty-two verses, and not just the three that I quoted, all admonish against the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’ based on ‘self-centered effort.’” As can be determined, the number of passages that criticize it, is rather large.

There are many theories as to when the Venerable Master’s absolute reliance on the 18th Vow took place, but as I indicated in Part One, I believe it was when he was 29 years of age. I believe that was when he was absolutely sure of his birth in the Pure Land, and that he felt a relief and peace of mind regarding it that did not change in the slightest from then on.

Some scholars, however, believe that the Venerable Master’s *shinjin* was not completely settled until the age of 42. These scholars point to two indications contained in Letter Five of the Venerable Master’s wife’s letters (collected in a work titled, *Eshinni Shosoku*).

In this letter, *Eshinni-ko* records that when the Venerable Master was 42 years of age, he began chanting the *Three Pure Land Sutras* a thousand times from a feeling that he had to do something for the benefit of all the dead bodies that he saw on the wayside, and the masses of people dying from malnutrition because of famine then stalking the land. After four or five days, however, the Venerable Master realized that he could not transfer the merit in the sutras to sentient beings, and so quit his chanting.

In that same letter, it states that at the age of 57, 17 years after deciding to chant Three Pure Land Sutras a thousand times and then quitting also during a time of great famine the Venerable Master was in sickbed with a high fever when he began chanting the *Larger Sutra* in delirium, but again quit when he realized there was no merit in doing so.

These scholars believe the Venerable Master’s *shinjin* was not completely settled until after he quit chanting the *Three Pure Land Sutras* a thousand times for the benefit of others at the age of 42. I believe, however, that the reason the Venerable Master began his chanting was due to the sympathy he felt for the people and from a desire to do something to help them, but that this chanting had nothing to do with *his own birth in the Pure Land*, which had been settled long ago. In other words, I believe it had nothing to do with the Venerable Master’s own *shinjin*.

I believe the Venerable Master’s *shinjin* was settled at the age of 29. That does not, however, mean there were no changes in his thought after that. As might be expected, his thought deepened and changed as he got on in years. In this regard, I believe his

treatment of the “Nembutsu of the ‘true gate’” in his later years should be carefully considered.

The *Jodo Wasan* previously quoted, contains wasan in which the Venerable Master seems to urge reciting the Nembutsu with “self-centered effort” in order to receive *shinjin*. At the end of the Takada copy of the *Jodo-Wasan*, is the inscription:

“Completed on the 1st day of the last 10-day period of the 1st month during the zodiac year of tsuchi-no-eno-saru (2nd year of Hogen, 1248 AD), when I *Gutoku Shinran*, was 76 years of age.”

From this, we know that the Venerable Master was 76 years of age when that work was completed.

There are many theories regarding when the *Kyogyoshinsho* was compiled, and it is very difficult to determine exact dates. From the fact that it was during 1257 AD (5th year of Kangen) that the Venerable Master allowed his disciple Sonren to make a copy, the *Kyogyoshinsho* is considered to have been in some state of completion when he was 75 years of age. The *Kyugan-mon* is considered to have been written before the *Kyogyoshinsho*.

For the above reasons, we see that the texts that are considered to urge reliance on the “‘true gate’ of the Nembutsu” (the 20th Vow)—i.e., the texts of the *Jodo Wasan*, the *Kyugan-mon*, and the statement on the “‘true gate’” in the *Kyogyoshinsho*, namely, “should promptly enter the ‘true Gate’ of the perfectly accomplished Utmost Virtues”—were written before the *Jodo Wasan* was compiled, when the Venerable Master was 76 years of age.

As already mentioned, the “Hymns on Doubt” section of the *Shozomatsu Wasan* severely criticized entering the “‘true gate’” by reciting the Nembutsu through “self-centered effort.” There is absolutely no encouragement in that direction.

The Takada copy of the *Shozomatsu Wasan* contains the inscription: “Written on the 1st day of the 3rd month during the zodiac year of *hi-no-to-no-mi* (1st year of Shoka, 1257 AD) when I, *Gutoku Shinran* was 85 years of age.”

Further, the same work copied by Takada Kenchi contains the indication:

The original indicates: “24th day of the 9th month during the 2nd year of Shoka (1248 AD). Shinran, 86 years of age.”

From these indications, we can determine that the *Shozomatsu Wasan* was written during the Venerable Master’s 85th to 86th years.

Clearly, there was a change in the Venerable Master’s thought regarding entering the “‘true gate’ of the Nembutsu through ‘self-centered effort’” as expressed in his *Kyogyoshinsho* and the *Jodo Wasan* which were written before the age of 76, and the thought expressed in his *Shozomatsu Wasan* that he wrote after the age of 85. I believe a big influence in this change was the “self-centered effort” recitation of the

Nembutsu that his son Zenran probably taught when the Venerable Master was 84 years of age, and which caused the Venerable Master to disown Zenran.

Reciting the Nembutsu through “self-centered effort,” is calculating to do “good,” which is completely contrary to the heart of the Nembutsu. Further, in *Jodo Sangyo Ojo Monrui* (Passages on “Birth in the Pure Land” through the Three Pure Land Sutras) which was written after the Venerable Master was 85 years of age, he wrote:

“Those who rely upon the sacred vow that urges ‘recitation of the “name of the Buddha” as the source of virtue’ to enter the ‘true gate’ ... try to be born in the Pure Land by transferring the merit gained from reciting the sacred name. In other words, (those who rely on the 20th Vow, i.e.,) those who, while reciting the “‘marvelously mysterious’ Name of the Buddha” that cannot be expressed in words nor thought of in the mind, attempt to be born in the Pure Land while harboring doubt regarding the efficacy of the sacred vow of Great Compassion. The result of this great evil, which is absolutely unpardonable, is imprisonment in the seven-jeweled jail which they cannot leave for five-hundred years.”

As already mentioned, the Venerable Master in his *Jodo Wasan* seems to recommend birth in the Pure Land through the “true gate of the Nembutsu” (20th Vow), but it is clear that here he adamantly warns against such a position.

Further, in his *Jodo Sangyo Ojo Mon-rui*, the Venerable Master quotes the “text showing completion” (*jojumon*) of the 20th Vow (“true gate”) which does not appear in the discussion of the 20th Vow in his *Kyogyoshinsho*. What is referred to as the “paragraph on ‘womb-like birth’ and ‘transformative birth’” (*taikedan*) in the *Larger Sutra* is quoted in the *Kyogyoshinsho* as being the “text showing completion” of the 19th Vow (“essential gate”). That same text is quoted in the *Jodo Sangyo Ojo Monrui* as being the “text showing completion” of the 20th Vow, and is used to criticize the “‘true gate’ of the Nembutsu” (20th Vow).

The change in the Venerable Master’s position regarding the “‘true gate’ of the Nembutsu” (20th Vow) as he got on in age can be seen from the above.

In the Chapter on Transformed Land of his *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote: I, *Gutoku shuku Shinran*, abandoned the sundry Acts and took refuge in the Primal Vow during the 1st year of Kennin (1201 AD).

As can be determined from the above, the Venerable Master met Master Honen and “took refuge in the Primal Vow (the 18th Vow)” in the year 1201. That was when he was 29 years of age.

Master Honen abandoned up all religious practices and followed the single path of the Nembutsu. In Volume Two of the *Wago Toroku* (A Record of the Light) is the following:

**Question:** Will all who recite the Nembutsu be born in the Pure Land?

**Answer:** Those who recite the Nembutsu with “Buddha-centered power” will but those who do so with “self-centered effort” absolutely will not.

As can be determined by the above, Master Honen also made a distinction between reciting the Nembutsu with “self-centered effort” and with “Buddha-centered power.”

Further, in the document that is said to be the last that Master Honen wrote before leaving this world, the *Ichimai Kishomon* (The One Page Document), it states:

“I believe there is no way to be born in the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy other than by reciting Namo Amida Butsu without doubt. You can speak about the ‘three minds’ and the ‘four practices,’ but these things are contained within faith in Namo Amida Butsu. Wanting to know more about this goes against the compassion of the two sacred beings (Shakyamuni Buddha and Amida Buddha) and is not within the spirit of the Primal Vow.”

From this, it appears that the Venerable Master also considered *shinjin* while reciting the Nembutsu to be important. In *Shui Gotoroku* (Sacred Words, Picked and Collected), however, is the passage:

“In the ‘three minds’ there are the ‘wisdom of the three minds’ (*sanshin no chigu*) and the ‘practice of the three minds’ (*sanshin no gyo-gu*) ... The reason we single-heartedly recite the Nembutsu and are born in the Pure Land without doubt is because of this ‘practice of the three minds’.”

Further, in the *Saiho Shinan-sho* (Notes that Guide towards the West), it states:

“Recite the *myogo* single-mindedly with faith in the commentary on the phrase, ‘That Buddha is presently becoming a Buddha.’ When you recite the *myogo*, the three minds automatically accompany the recitation.”

(The phrase, “That Buddha is presently becoming a Buddha,” seems to be a contradiction, but it points to the fact that a Buddha has lowered itself from the Absolutely Enlightened State in order to engage in the process of “saving” all sentient beings, after which it will revert to its Absolute Enlightened State.)

As can be determined from the above, Master Honen’s Nembutsu makes a distinction between “self-centered effort” and “Buddha-centered power,” and emphasizes faith. In passages such as, “the ‘three minds’ are fulfilled in reciting the ‘name of the Buddha’ (*myogo*),” however, he shows some aspects of the practice of “three minds.”

I believe that although the Venerable Master strongly denied the “‘true gate’ of the Nembutsu” (the 20th Vow), as a 29-year-old he still accepted the thought of, “the ‘three minds’ are fulfilled in reciting the ‘name of the Buddha,’”—at least to some extent—until about the time he felt he had to disown his son Zenran.

As discussed previously, the Venerable Master’s position on this matter clearly changed as he got on in years. His final position regarding the “‘true gate’ of the Nembutsu” (20th Vow) was expressed in his *Shozomatsu Wasan* and *Jodo Sangyo Ojo Monrui*, which were written after disowning Zenran. This position can be considered to caution against the 20th Vow. Since he considers the 20th Vow to be an “expedient, provisional gate” (*hoben kemon*) even in his *Kyogyoshinsho* (in the Chapter on Transformed Land), he cannot be considered to recommend it.

This is an extremely important point, so I will repeat it. At the age of 29, the Venerable Master met Master Honen and entered the world of the 18th Vow. That was when he had the conviction that his birth in the Pure Land was absolutely determined. This is referred to as *ketsujo ojo-shin*. There was absolutely no wavering in his conviction from that time on. Although you can take the position that there were differences in how the Venerable Master treated the “‘self-centered effort’ of the ‘true gate’” (20th Vow) even after he attained the conviction that his birth in the Pure Land was absolutely determined, this does not mean that he wavered between the positions expressed by the 20th Vow and the “‘Buddha-centered power’ of the ‘broad vow’” (18th Vow). Further, the result of the Venerable Master’s treatment of the 20th Vow can be considered to be an admonition, and absolutely not recommended for everyone. Using personal effort in building up to “‘Buddha-centered power’ *shinjin*” must therefore be considered contrary to the Venerable Master’s intent.

The doctrinal way in which the above is expressed is, “*Shinjin* is the true cause; (the response is) ‘reciting the Name’ in gratitude” (*shinjin sho-in, shomyo ho-on*). The problem probably arises because of not making a distinction between “reciting the Nembutsu with ‘self-centered effort’” (before receiving *shinjin*) and “reciting it with ‘Buddha-centered power’” (after receiving *shinjin*). I believe the reason for not making this distinction is the lack of spiritual experience, namely, the lack of conviction regarding the fact that our birth in the Pure Land is already determined. Another way of saying it is that this misunderstanding arises because those making such assertions do not feel they are among the “rightly established group (of those assured of birth in the Pure Land) in the present” (*gensho shojoju*).

In the *Shozomatsu Wasan* is the *wasan*:

*Through the compassion  
Of Shakyamuni and Amida.  
Our determination to be enlightened  
Is awakened.  
Only after receiving the transcendent wisdom  
of shinjin,  
Can we become vessels  
To return the Buddha’s benevolence.*

When our *shinjin* is determined and we are blessed with its transcendent wisdom, we naturally and without effort feel indebted to the Buddha. That is when we experience what it means to recite the Nembutsu in true gratitude, which is completely different from reciting the Nembutsu before receiving *shinjin*.

When we are blessed with the conviction that we will be born in the Pure Land, therefore, we know the difference between reciting the Nembutsu before receiving *shinjin* and after receiving it, and also what the Nembutsu that is recited in gratitude is.

Asserting the value of reciting the Nembutsu with “self-centered effort” arises when we have not experienced the Nembutsu that comes after receiving *shinjin*, as does the

desire to criticize “reciting the Nembutsu in gratitude.” But as already indicated, the Venerable Master criticized the “‘self-centered effort’ of the ‘true gate’” (20th Vow), and in the Chapter on Transformed Land of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, he wrote that those who, “...consider reciting (the Nembutsu) to be “good roots” that they create, cannot have faith nor accept the Buddha’s wisdom.”

Further, in his *Jodo Sangyo Ojo Mon’rui* (Passages on Birth in the Pure Land Based on the Three Pure Land Sutras), the Venerable Master severely criticized doubt (reciting the Nembutsu in order to create “good roots”), by stating:

“Reciting Amida Buddha’s sacred Name in order to create ‘good roots’ (that we think will) cause our ‘birth in the Pure Land’ means that although we recite the ‘marvelously mysterious’ ‘Name of the Buddha,’ we really doubt the Great and Compassionate Vow that is ‘impossible to recite (because we did not create it)’ (*fukasho*), ‘impossible to explain’ (*fukasetsu*) and ‘impossible to conceive’ (*fukashigi*). Our doubt causes us to be imprisoned in the seven-jeweled jail from which we cannot escape for 500 years.”

Reciting the “name of the Buddha” based on completion of the Primal Vow to create our own “good roots” is a great mistake. Many problems can arise if we attempt to do so. They include:

- Should those whose *shinjin* is not yet determined recite the Nembutsu?
- How should infants recite the Nembutsu?
- Is it wrong to recite the Nembutsu in order to receive *shinjin*?
- What should we do in order to receive *shinjin*?

It is, of course, wrong to say that those without *shinjin* should *not* recite the Nembutsu. There presently is a Jodo-Shinshu group that forbids reciting the Nembutsu before receiving *shinjin*, but that clearly is incorrect.

I believe that since the Nembutsu we recite in our Jodo-Shinshu tradition is to express indebtedness to the dharma, we should not recite it for the purpose of receiving *shinjin*. But I also I believe that reciting the Nembutsu even without completely understanding the heart of gratitude will nurture us and that we will eventually come to recite it with true gratitude.

As already stated, “hearing” (*chomon*) is considered extremely important in Jodo Shinshu. As the Venerable Master wrote in his *Jodo Wasan*:

*Those who pass through the fires  
Of the “great thousand worlds”  
To hear the sacred Name of the Buddha  
Will be included in the “stage  
of never falling back.”*

As can be determined from this, the path to *shinjin* is “hearing” (*chomon*) and is the way to reach the “stage of never falling back” (*futai*), which is the same as being in the “rightly-established group (of those assured of birth in the Pure Land).”

Further, Master Rennyo is quoted in the *Kikigaki* (Heard and Recorded [During Master Rennyo's Lifetime]):

“Do not listen to (the teachings) of Buddha-dharma in your free time; rather, perform your worldly duties in the free time you have when not listening to the dharma.”

As Master Rennyo said, we should concentrate on “listening” to the teaching, regardless of how important we may consider matters in the secular world. Further, Master Rennyo said, “If those without *shinjin* listen (to the *dharma*), it will be given to them because of the Great Compassion. Buddha-dharma (begins and) ends with ‘listening.’”

I believe that “listening” (*chomon*, in a broad sense, this includes studying Buddha-dharma and Jodo-Shinshu, as well as attending Jodo-Shinshu services, and in fact, everything in our life) is extremely important for *shinjin*. This “listening” has already been completely prepared for us by the Buddha, and is the world where absolutely nothing is required on our part.

The world of “reciting the Nembutsu in gratitude” that opens up when we accept the Primal Vow and are included in the “rightly-established group,” is the world of salvation in Jodo-Shinshu. It is the world in which we are blessed with the true benefit of “absolute salvation” in the present. I firmly believe this world will be the Light and the Strength to support all the peoples of the world.

### **PART THREE. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VENERABLE SHINRAN'S TEACHING TODAY**

IN PART TWO, I related the things about the Venerable Master Shinran's teaching that I thought important. As already stated, his unique insights are emphasizing joining the “‘rightly-established group’ of those assured (of birth in the Pure Land) in the present” (*gensho shojoju*) and transforming the Pure Land teaching from a “next-world centered” teaching to a “this-world centered” teaching. His teaching emphasizes an extremely deep, profound and thorough world of self reflection; it is the salvation of the evil person and of the “ignorant who are filled with base passions.” I seem to keep repeating myself, but I firmly believe that this teaching has much to teach our present world that is so confused.

Here, I would like to briefly take up several problems that are considered important today and consider how they are related to the Venerable Master's teaching. They include matters such as the relationship between religion and medicine, and environmental problems.

#### **Chapter 1. Religion and Medicine**

RECENTLY, problems that used to be considered the province of religion, such as educating the terminally ill and whether organ transplants should be performed, are now being taken up in the world of medicine.

This is especially pointed out by the fact that the medical profession, which until now was concerned solely with saving people from dying, now seriously considers the care of terminally-ill patients and how such patients can be gently brought to face their impending death.

Not wanting to grow old and die is probably the greatest desire of humankind since the realization that death is a condition of life. The fact that life is transient, that it consists of being born, growing old, becoming ill and finally dying as taught in Buddha-dharma in general, is apt to be forgotten because of the great strides made by medical technology going into the 21st century. Because of the limitations that have recently been realized, however, the fact that death cannot be escaped is recognized even in the world of medicine, and interest in religion and how it can help, has heightened.

The problem of the value and place of religion in our lives has been discussed very well from the side of religion, but I believe it is significant that such matters are now being taken up from the side of science (medical technology). I believe this is not only a splendid opportunity to explain the meaning and value of religion to society in general, but is also the proper time to speak about such matters.

I firmly believe that the Venerable Master's teaching of "absolute 'Buddha-centered power'" (*zettai tariki*) which overturns the traditional Pure Land teaching that laid so much stress on "Amida Buddha welcoming those on the verge of death to the Pure Land" (*rinju raigo*), and which opens the door for the salvation of all sentient beings by teaching that salvation takes place while "continuing to live in this world" (*heizei gojo*), is what will best respond to the religious quest of modern man.

As related in Part Two, the Venerable Master's unique insight was emphasizing that we are included in the "rightly-established group (of those assured of birth in the Pure Land)" at the moment we receive *shinjin*, and that "salvation" begins in the present. I have already described this world so I will not go into details here. It results, however, in the great relief and reassurance of knowing that we will be born in the Pure Land without fail.

This is the world of, "All right if I live, and all right if I die." It is the world of: I am a most fortunate person who lives within the "great salvation" of the Buddha while in this world, and regardless of when I die, will remain within that great salvific activity.

I believe it is this great realm of "All right if I live, and all right if I die," in which we find ourselves as a result of the *shinjin* given to us by "Buddha-centered power," that replies to the great expectation that the medical world has of the religious world.

The biggest problem that the medical world has about terminal care is the patient's fear of dying—how to relieve the patient from anxiety about dying. I have already mentioned the story about Emperor Shih who founded the Ch'in dynasty, the most

powerful person of his time. Because of his fear and anxiety about dying, he ordered his retainers to go as far as Japan in search of the elixir of life.

A nobleman during the Heian Period, Fujiwara Michinaga (966 - 1027 AD), who probably was then the most powerful man in Japan, boasted of his secular authority with the following words:

*Like a full moon  
That never wanes,  
(My authority  
Is unchallenged.)*

In *Eiga Monogatari* (Tales of Prosperity), however, this same Michinaga is described on his death-bed as follows:

"(Michinaga) wanted only to recite the Nembutsu in his death bed. He did not want to look at anything other than the Buddha, nor listen to anything other than the Buddha's voice. He did not consider anything other than what would happen after his death. He wanted to see only Amida Buddha's figure, hear only the Buddha's words, and direct his thoughts to the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy. Holding the strings (from a portrait of Amida Buddha) in his hands, he lay with his head directed towards the north and his face towards the west..."

In order to escape his fear and anxiety regarding death, Michinaga desperately tried to turn his thoughts towards Amida Buddha. There is no difference today and yesterday among even those with power and riches, to seek relief from the fear and anxiety of death. Regardless of how much medical science and technology advances, that is an impossible request. In his book *Waga Shoji-kan* (My View of Life and Death), the religious scholar Hideo Kishimoto who, when confronted with death as a result of cancer, wrote:

The times when we become crazed with real desire to continue living come when we are sent into battle, become terminally ill, or at other times of real crisis. But that is limited to the short period while we are so confronted.

If we have the slightest chance of overriding that danger, however, and place all our hopes on that chance, that crazed desire will not arise.

In order for the true crazed desire to continue living to arise, there must be absolutely no chance that life will continue, as when there is no possibility that your execution will be stayed, the day you must leave on your *kami-kaze* flight has arrived, or your doctor informs you that your cancer has progressed too far for medical help.

When death appears before our very eyes and we are brought to the depths of despair—that is when we are suddenly and unexpectedly brought to a position of being crazed with the desire to continue living. And that is when attachment to life appears and true fear of death that cannot be described in words, arises.

I believe this sort of “crazed desire” to continue living that comes to everyone who becomes aware that his or her death is near, can only be resolved by the salvation of religion, in other words, the relief that comes from *shinjin*.

A woman who followed the Jodo-Shinshu teachings, who while aware that she was near death as a result of her illness, left the following words:

In our human world, there is are many above us when we look up, and many below us when we look down. Although half paralyzed, I have my right arm and I have my right leg. I have a tumor in my brain but I can see colors, hear sounds and sense differences in taste. I am fast getting to where even these will fade away, but I still have the Buddha, I have the Pure Land and I have the Great Compassion. How fortunate I am!

This truly is the “realm of salvation in the present” that is taught in Jodo-Shinshu. It is the world of “All right if I live, and all right if I die.”

I believe the words quoted above demonstrates how the Venerable Master’s teaching of Jodo- Shinshu best responds to the present world of medicine’s request of the world of religion, and shows Jodo-Shinshu’s true worth.

## Chapter 2. The Jodo-Shinshu View of Life

MANY ETHICAL PROBLEMS regarding life confront us today. They include matters such as when death actually occurs (which is related to the transplanting of human organs), how to allow patients who have no possibility of recovery to die with dignity, dying peacefully and the ethical problems of altering human genes.

Further, there is the problem in Japan of children who commit suicide as a result of being bullied, and conversely those who think so little of life that they bully others so much that the bullied feel the only way left is suicide. The problem of life is widely discussed in these sorts of circumstances so I would like to consider the Jodo-Shinshu view of life while keeping these sorts of problems in mind.

Buddha-dharma teaches that sentient beings are deluded about the three periods of the past, present and future because of their *karma* (actions). We continually transmigrate between the three worlds of suffering and delusion which are 1) the “world of delusion” (*yokkai*), 2) the “world of form” (*shikikai*; the beings in this world have no desire; they feed on light), 3) the “formless world” (*mushikikai*; where there is no matter, only subtle consciousness). Human beings are considered to exist in the “world of delusion.” The Venerable Master Shinran’s view of life can be considered to be based on this position. In the Chapter on Faith of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, he wrote:

...from “beginningless past” to this day and moment, the ocean of multitudinous beings has been defiled, is evil and filthy, and do not possess a pure mind. Again, they have been deluded, flattering and deceitful, and without a true mind.

Again, in the same Chapter on *Shinjin*, the Venerable Master quotes the words of Zendo *Daishi* as follows:

“I am an ignorant and evil person filled with base passions. From ‘boundless *kalpas* ago,’ I have sunk in my base passions and live without conviction. I therefore have no cause to escape the world of delusion.”

And in the *Tannisho*, the Venerable Master is quoted as saying,

“It is hard to leave our native land of sufferings where we have been transmigrating from ‘*kalpas* in the distant past’ to the present. We feel no longing for the Pure Land of Serene Sustenance where we are yet to be born.”

This is a realization that from the “beginningless past” (*mushi*), “boundless *kalpas* ago” (*kogo*) and “*kalpas* in the distant past” (*kuon go*) to the present, we have continued transmigrating in this deluded world where we continue suffering while being born and then dying, and will continue doing so until the extremely distant future. But such a life can leave this world of delusion when it receives “*shinjin* based on ‘Buddha-centered power’” that is grounded on Amida Buddha’s power of the Primal Vow, and is transformed into an eternal life that dwells in the World of Enlightenment.

Regarding this, the Venerable Master is quoted in Article Five of the *Tannisho* as follows:

“... all sentient beings in some previous birth or life have been my parents or my brothers...”

In other words, all sentient beings, from “beginningless past,” “boundless *kalpas* ago” and “*kalpas* in the distant past” to the present, while being born and dying, were our parents and brothers and sisters.

Living things are said to have first appeared on our earth some billions of years ago, which is the same as from the “beginningless past,” “boundless *kalpas* ago” and “*kalpas* in the far distant past.” That first living thing evolved and developed over a long period of time, and became the animals and human beings that exist today.

Considered in this way, the phrase, “... all sentient beings in some previous birth or life have been my parents or my brothers...” must be considered to be not only a religious truth, but a scientific truth as well.

The first of the Four Great Vows is, “I vow to save all sentient beings without limit.” The purpose of Buddha-dharma is the salvation, not only of human beings, but of all living things. In this regard it is different from Christianity and Islam which holds that God created human beings first and then created animals and plants for the benefit of those humans. The unique characteristic of Buddha-dharma is reverence for *all* forms of life.

As you know, the greatest problem confronting us today is the destruction of our environment. Fluro-chlorocarbons are destroying the ozone layer, the increasing

amount of carbon dioxide is raising the level of warmth, and other damages to our environment are taking place.

The view of life that “human beings are a species of living things that has evolved like all other living forms,” is due to Darwin’s theory of evolution. The position of those who are concerned about ecological matters, that “human beings are a part of the world of nature and only when we live in harmony with that world can the life of human beings be guaranteed,” is just another development of Darwin’s theory. That is why I believe the Buddhist reverence for all living things, and not just human beings, should be given more attention. In particular, the Venerable Master’s statement that I just quoted, “... all sentient beings in some previous birth or life have been my parents or my brothers...” perfectly expresses the intimate bonds that we have with all life.

I believe the Venerable Master’s attitude expressed in the above passage from the *Tannisho* has a great deal to teach our present society which seems so hell-bent on destroying the ecological system within which it lives because of a too human-centered world view. The Venerable Master’s spirit of mutual brotherhood and sisterhood towards all living things should be the basis of all human endeavors.

In the Chapter on Faith of his *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

“Contemplating the ocean-like Great Faith, I see that it does not choose between those of high and low social positions, priests and lay persons, nor does it discriminate between male and female, old and young. The amount of evil committed is not questioned nor is the length of religious practice discussed.”

As indicated in this passage, all things are treated the same in the world of *shinjin*. There is no difference between persons of a high or low social position, whether priests or lay persons, male or female, young or old, amount of evil committed, or even the length of religious practices. All are the same.

In Article One of the *Tannisho*, it states,

“Know that Amida’s Primal Vow does not discriminate between young and old, good and evil; *shinjin* alone is of supreme importance.”

As stated here, Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow is directed to everyone, whether young, old, good, bad... everyone.

As is made very clear in the above passages, everyone, without exception, is considered impartially and treated with respect. The Venerable Master Shinran’s position regarding the sanctity of life is not limited to human life, but extends to all living things. His position can be summarized in phrases such as “all sentient beings are brothers” (*issai ujodobo*) and “respect towards all existence” (*seimei soncho*).

As already mentioned, the Venerable Master accepted the traditional Buddhist position that all sentient beings transmigrate through the “three worlds” of delusion during the “three periods.” In that sense, our life is eternal from the very beginning. But because that is just continuing to transmigrate (being born and then dying) in the world of delusion, however, it is not the eternal existence of non-death.

At the beginning of his Chapter on Faith of his *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master Shinran listed the “twelve virtues of *shinjin*.” The very first virtue is “long life without dying” (*chosei fushi no shinbo*). This means that the *shinjin* with which we are blessed by “Buddha-centered power” in this world, is how we transcend the world of transmigration and how we are given the eternal life of nondeath.

As already stated, life is said to have appeared on this planet some billions of years ago, but only the human species is said to *know it will eventually die*. Further, humans are considered to have become aware that they must of necessity eventually die was some 60,000 years ago (by Neanderthal man). Living forever without dying seems to have been the universal desire of all human species since then.

As also previously mentioned, the transiency of human life is the foundation on which Buddhadharma stands, and because of the position of modern medicine regarding death, the expectations of religion by medical science has been heightened. I seem to keep repeating myself, but it was the Venerable Master who emphasized that when our *shinjin* is determined, we enter the “rightly-established group (of those assured of birth in the Pure Land),” that our salvation is assured in the present, and that we will become a Buddha simultaneously with our birth in the Pure Land.

In the *Ichinen Tanen Mon’i*, it states:

“Amida Buddha’s purpose in causing our birth in the Pure Land of Ease is to transform us into Flowers of Enlightenment with the same Great Enlightenment as his own.”

In other words, when we enter the “rightly-established group (of those assured of birth in the Pure Land),” we are absolutely guaranteed of the Great Enlightenment that is the same as Amida Buddha’s “immeasurable life” (*muryoju*) and “immeasurable light” (*muryoko*). That is, we will transcend the world of transiency and become eternally enlightened.

In the Chapter on *Shinjin* of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, the Venerable Master wrote:

... (when) the single mind (of “merit transference”) in the “phase of going (to the Pure Land)” is raised, there are no (new) existences into which to be born, nor any realms to which to go. Since the causes and effects of the “six realms” and the “four births” are annihilated, the births and deaths in the “three existences” are instantly destroyed.

In other words, when our *shinjin* is fixed or determined, we are cut off from the “six realms”<sup>28</sup> and the “four births” in the “three existences” .

Further, in the *Koso Wasan*, the Venerable Master wrote:

*The moment shinjin,  
Hard as a diamond,  
Is received,  
Amida’s spiritual light  
Embraces us,  
Completely cutting us off  
From the cycle*

*Of birth-and-death.*

As can be determined from this, the moment our *shinjin* is established, our deluded life of birth-and-death that has existed from the “beginningless past,” “boundless *kalpas* ago” and “*kalpas* in the far distant past,” is cut off by the “Buddha-centered power” of the Primal Vow and turned into a world of Enlightenment.

This is explained in the *Shoshin-gé* in the following words:

*When shinjin is established  
in the “ignorant with base passions,”  
They are made aware that “birth-and-death”  
Is identical with Nirvana.*

And again in the *Koso Wasan* as:

*The “merit transference”  
Of the “phase of going (to the Pure Land)”  
Refers to realizing the “faith and practice”  
Of Amida’s Compassionate Vow.  
Because of this expediency,  
Birth-and-death, itself, becomes Nirvana.*

When our *shinjin* is established, “birth/death,” itself, turns into Nirvana. The deluded life of birth and death from the “beginningless past,” “boundless *kalpas* ago” and “*kalpas* in the distant past,” becomes blessed with a life of enlightenment that is measureless (eternal life) based on the “merit transference” of “Buddha-centered power.”

Further, in the *Ichinen Tanen Mon’i*, the Venerable Master wrote:

“A *bombu* is an ignorant being filled with base desires. Greed, anger, hatred and jealousy constantly arise within him, and does not cease until the last moment of life.”

As can be determined from the above, even when our *shinjin* is settled and we are placed in the “rightly-established group (of those assured of birth in the Pure Land),” as long as we live in this world we remain “ignorant beings filled with base passions.” In spite of that, however, we are cut off from the deluded world of birth-and-death and receive eternal life. We are therefore blessed with the great assurance of being in a realm where we cannot be obstructed by anything.

As explained above, the Venerable Master is quoted in Article Five of the *Tannisho* as saying, “... all sentient beings in some previous birth or life have been my parents or my brothers...” This is an expression of love and affection that is directed not only towards human beings, but towards all living things. It holds all life in respect. This attitude has a great deal to offer modern man (and women) regarding our present problem of opposition between the interests of humankind. It also has a great deal to say regarding the problems of environmental pollution that we have created as a result of inconsiderate use of our material resources. And as the Venerable Master said using the

phrase, “marvelous teaching of living eternally and not dying” (*chosei fuchi no shinbo*) in describing the Jodo-Shinshu teaching, that is how we are given eternal life.

I believe what greatly responds to the recent interest and hope in the medical community regarding care of terminal patients, is the Venerable Master’s “marvelous teaching of living eternally and not dying.” This is the world of salvation offered by the Jodo-Shinshu teaching of *shinjin* based on “Buddha-centered power.”

Finally, I would like to offer my opinions on the problem of organ transplants. This is associated with the problem of brain death because, of course, you would not want to remove an organ such as the heart until the donor is dead. In the traditional work, *Gaijasho* (Notes on Correcting Errors) Master Kakunyo quotes the Venerable Master as saying, “When I die, throw my body in Kamo River to feed the fish.”

The Venerable Master asked that his remains be used to feed the fish in Kamo River which runs through the city of Kyoto. Considering his statement in terms of the present, it is obviously a request that his physical remains (organs) be used for the benefit of others. Since he was already in the “rightly established group (of those who are assured of birth in the Pure Land,” and blessed with the life of immeasurable life in the world of enlightenment, the Venerable Master was not concerned about how his remains would be treated in this life; all there was, was his desire to be of benefit to others.

The problem of whether to consider death to have occurred when the brain dies has arisen because of developments in medical technology. During the recent past when there was no artificial means of maintaining breathing, death was considered to have occurred when the heart stopped beating. The three indications of death were no breathing, no reaction in the pupils of the eyes, and no heart beat. We must, of course, be very cautious about the standards that we adopt to determine whether death has occurred or not, but if the death of the brain is absolutely irreversible, I believe it should be considered death of the individual.

Those who deny that brain death is the same as the death of the individual point to passages in the *sutras* and commentaries on them in which death is said to occur when the indications of life are absent, i.e., when “‘animation’ (*ju*), ‘warmth’ (*netsu*) and ‘consciousness’ (*shiki*) leave the body.” From this, they deny that an individual who is brain dead is really dead because his (or her) body is still warm. That implies death does not occur until all the cells of the body are dead. I have doubts, however, about using passages from *sutras* and commentaries on them written centuries ago to directly respond to the urgent matter of brain death raised by modern medical technology.

Further, since our body is comprised of billions of cells, and because the cells of our hair and nails continue growing even after the heart has stopped beating, I believe that if you hold that death does not occur until all of those cells die, you cannot say death has occurred even after the traditional “three indications of death” listed above have been observed.

The important point is that Jodo-Shinshu teaches us to become persons whose “*shinjin* is decided” (*shinjin ketsujo*) and to live in the “rightly-established group (of those assured of birth in the Pure Land) in the present.” The result is that we are able to take joy in the fact that we are blessed with an eternal life and can say, “All right if I live, and all right if I die.”