

## Shinran's Conversion

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From the ages of nine to twenty-nine, Shinran devoted himself to the practices to Tendai Buddhism on Mt. Hiei in search for a way to transcend *samsara* (birth-and-death) only to find himself a complete failure after the experiences of hardships.

In several former articles, I have discussed the meanings of the aporias he was confronted with in his youth. Despite the lack of sufficient historical documentation, I concluded that the consciousness of *samsara* was the most fundamental crisis consciousness and though he strongly searched for salvation, he was swakened to the fact of his being just 'an ordinary man' (*bonbu*). Thus he felt bound to distance himself from traditional Buddhism. There was no possibility for Shinran to settle at Mt. Hiei. He could not but leave.

It was through the teaching of the "Larger Sutra" depicting Amida Tathagata's Vow that he broke through his crisis and found the way to Nirvana. He wrote about this spiritual revolution at the age of twenty-nine most impressively in the postscript of the *Kyogyoshinsho*: "I, Gutoku Shaku Shinran, in the 1st year of *Kennin* (*Kanoto-no-Tori*), abandoned the sundry practices and took refuge in the teaching of the Vow".

As is well known, Shinran seldom referred to his personal matters. But the fact that he here wrote down his encounter with Amida's Vow

shows how important this event was to him.

At the same time, we must not forget the crucial role played by Honen (Genku) in Shinran's conversion.

Even through long kalpas and many births,  
 We did not know the powerful condition for release.  
 If our teacher, Genku, had not appeared,  
 This life, too, would have passed in vain.

(Koso Wasan)

For Shinran, this encounter with the Vow was made possible through Honen's teaching of '*senju-nembutsu*' (the single-minded calling of Amida's Name). The advent of Honen was the symbol of hope to him.

However, the following questions arise here: how did Shinran's conversion take place? what was its meaning? why did Honen have such profound influence on Shinran? .....

In this paper, I focus on some problems and meanings of Shinran's conversion. The content is as follows.

## I. Conversion

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2. Decision and Faith
3. The Arising of Tathagata in Time and History
4. The Human Being as the Outcome of Karma

## II. Honen, the Spiritual Leader

1. Honen's Philosophy as Crisis Theology

2. The Logic of ‘*Senjaku*’ (Selection of Vows)
3. Shinran’s Understanding of Encounter