

TRANSLATION

Rennyō's Letters *Rennyō Shōnin Ofumi* Fascicle Five

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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Introduction

The publication of the May 1949 issue of *The Eastern Buddhist* (8:1) signaled the resumption of activities of the Eastern Buddhist Society following their suspension during the war years. The issue featured a translation of ten of the eighty letters in five fascicles which comprise *Rennyō Shōnin Ofumi* 蓮如上人御文 in the Buddhist canon (*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, No. 2668). The author of the article, "Rennyō Shōnin, the Great Teacher of Shin Buddhism," is Shizutoshi Sugihira; the year, 1949, is the four-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of Rennyō's death. Noteworthy is the fact that, of the ten letters translated to present the core of Rennyō's teaching, eight were selected from the twenty-two in fascicle five.

Rennyō (1415–1499) was the eighth head priest of the Honganji branch of the Jōdo Shin sect, which recognizes Shinran (1173–1262) as its founder. Within the Honganji, Rennyō is revered as the restorer of Shinran's teaching; under Rennyō's leadership the Honganji emerged as the most widespread and powerful religious movement in medieval Japan. He is best known for his several hundred pastoral letters, *Ofumi* 御文 or *Gobunshō* 御文章, written in colloquial Japanese for the instruction of participants in the Shin tradition.

Collections of Rennyō's letters began to appear during the tenure of his son, Jitsunyo 実如 (1458–1525), as ninth head priest of the Honganji. The letters were hand-copied, a few at a time, and authorized for circulation under Jitsunyo's official seal. A memoir by another son, Jitsugo 実悟 (1492–1584), attests to the authority with which they were invested: "The letters are to be regarded as the Tathāgata's teaching. . . . when you hear the words, you are listening directly to Amida" (T83:818a). Gradually a plan evolved for a standardized collection: eighty letters, the *Gojō ofumi* 五帖御文, were selected out of the several hundred available.

The *Gojō ofumi* is divided into five fascicles, of which the first four are arranged chronologically. Fascicle one contains fifteen letters written between Bummei 3 [1471].7.15 and 5 [1473].9.22 from Yoshizaki in the Hokuriku. The fifteen letters in fascicle two are also from Yoshizaki; they were written between Bummei 5 [1473].12.8 and 6 [1474].7.9. Fascicle three contains thirteen letters written between Bummei 6 [1474].7.14 and 8 [1476].7.18; ten of these were written from Yoshizaki, two from Deguchi. The fifteen letters in fascicle four are written between Bummei 9 [1477].1.8 and Meiō 7 [1498].11.21, the year before Rennyo's death. The twenty-two letters in fascicle five are undated; certain ones, however, are identical to passages in dated letters. Although the letters appear untitled in the Taishō edition, we have provided traditionally-used titles based on the first lines of the text.

Major issues in the translation of Rennyo's letters into English focus on the terms *shinjin* 信心, *anjin* 安心, and *tasuke tamae* たすけたまへ. How should the first two, concepts of deep significance for the tradition, be translated, and should the third be translated in as direct a manner as it appears to be written?

In sixty-three of the eighty letters, the term *shinjin* occurs a total of two hundred and seventy-four times in various contexts, including quotations; the negative, *fushinjin* 不信心, twice. In thirty-two of the letters, the term *anjin* occurs a total of forty-seven times and *mianjin* 未安心, three. In addition, the first character *shin* of the compound *shinjin* serves as a noun on ten occasions and the negative *fushin*, on five.

Until recently, translators of Shinran's writings, including Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki, have rendered *shinjin* into English as "faith"; translators in the Ryukoku Translation Center in Kyoto continue to do so, clarifying their choices of these and other terms with rich annotation. Previous translations of Rennyo's letters, recognizing that, in many instances, the meaning of *anjin* is indistinguishable from that of *shinjin*, have translated both terms as "faith."

On the other hand, we have noted the precedent set by the translators of the Shin Buddhism Translation Series (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1978-). In their task of translating the entire corpus of Shinran's works, they have chosen to introduce the unitalicized term "shinjin" into the English text; they argue eloquently that most of the possible connotations of the English word "faith" are entirely inappropriate for their tradition and cannot convey the nuances of *shinjin* free of misleading preconceptions. It is possible that Rennyo's core concept *anjin* might be treated similarly and introduced unitalicized, with the prospect of both terms becoming part of our English vocabulary. The Shin Buddhism Translation Series approach has much to commend it and will continue to contribute an essential perspective to the ongoing translation of the Shin Buddhist sense of the oneness of the sentient being's heart and mind and that of the Buddha.

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Here, however, we have chosen to translate *shinjin* as "faith" and *anjin* as "settled mind" or "faith," depending on context (see, for example, letter 5:13). To clarify what Japanese term other than *shinjin* is being translated as "faith," we have inserted the Japanese term into the text following each occurrence of the nouns *shin*, *fushin*, *fushinjin*, *anjin*, *mianjin*, or *shingyō* 信樂. While the Shin Buddhism Translation Series approach preserves what is unique to Shin Buddhist tradition, we have found that the particular meaning of these terms in the tradition does in fact draw out and underscore the deepest meaning of "faith" and "settled mind" as general religious terms. As Rennyo clearly explains, *shinjin* has two aspects in dynamic interrelationship: one of these is the entrusting mind of sentient beings who turn to Amida to save them; the other is the mind of the Buddha, which is itself the entrusting mind given to sentient beings, bringing them to buddhahood in the afterlife. *Shinjin* is a concept perhaps best translated consistently by the word "faith"—a faith that is salvific truth empowered and given by that which is entirely beyond human effort and calculative thinking. Granted that the term "faith" tends to focus on the mind of the person to be saved, what other English term could at the same time hint at the other pole of the paradox, in this instance, the salvific mind of the Buddha Amida?

Anjin, "settled mind," suggests the mind in which "the peace that passes all understanding" is settled once and for all, beyond all shadow of doubt. Since *anjin* is translated literally as "serene mind" (letter 2:7), it might seem that "serenity," rather than the compound "settled mind," would be the choice more closely parallel to "faith." "Serenity," however, fails to suggest the paradox implicit in *anjin*, in that it emphasizes the quality of mind of the person saved at the expense of the underlying decisiveness—the diamondlike quality—of the mind of Amida. This is evident in translating the term *anjin ketsujō* 安心決定: it seems quite possible to speak of a person in whom "the settle mind is established" (letter 1:3), but somewhat awkward to refer to one in whom "serenity is established." Since it is the fact of definite establishment that leads to serenity, "settled mind," despite the lack of parallelism, may be an acceptable choice.

A final point: of the fifty occurrences of *anjin* and *mianjin* in the five fascicles, the term "faith" has been the translation preferable to "settled mind" on at least nineteen occasions. Thus "faith" appears to be able to serve in many instances for both *shinjin* and *anjin*—each of which lends a particular emotional overtone to their shared meaning. "Faith" seems appropriate in this context as well, for it has the capacity to convey a sense of fundamental wholeness suggested by few other English terms.

In regard to the issue of *tasuke tamae*, it is apparent from the thrust of Ren-

nyo's writings that the phrase should not be interpreted literally as a request to Amida to "please save me." The practice of reciting the nembutsu as a plea for salvation was common among participants in other strands of Pure Land tradition. Rennyō, in contrast, stated in his earliest extant letter (not included among the eighty) that Honganji followers were not even to think "Buddha, please save me" in saying the nembutsu, but to understand it solely as an expression of gratitude. For this reason, in an attempt to avoid the suggestion of self-power, we have translated the phrase indirectly, with slight variations according to context. For example, letter 1:7 reads, "For when the one thought-moment arises in which we entrust ourselves to Amida without any double-mindedness and realize *that [Amida] saves us*"; letter 3:2 reads "'Na-mu means . . . entrusting ourselves without double-mindedness [to Amida] *to save us, [bringing us to buddhahood] in the afterlife*" [italics added]. Our position is that Rennyō adopted a phrase which was familiar to many of those attracted to his leadership of the Honganji Shin sect in the Hokuriku, bringing to it an Other-Power interpretation which was radically different from the customary understanding in the Pure Land tradition as a whole.

To Professors Masatoshi Nagatomi, Michio Tokunaga, Dennis Hirota, John B. Carman, Paul S. Groner, and Edwin D. Craun, may we express our particular gratitude for their guidance, support, and example over the years at the moments they were most needed. Any errors that remain are entirely our own. The Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai has kindly granted us permission to publish the translation of fascicle five of *Rennyō Shōnin Ofumi* in this annotated form.

English Translations

- "The Epistles (Gobun Shō)," *Shinshū Seiten: Jōdo Shin Buddhist Teaching* (San Francisco: Buddhist Churches of America, 1978), pp. 269-390.
- Sugihira, Shizutoshi. Letters 1:3, 2:4, 5:1, 5:2, 5:5, 5:9, 5:10, 5:12, 5:16, and 5:22 in "Rennyō Shōnin, Great Teacher of Shin Buddhism," *The Eastern Buddhist*, 8 (May 1949):5-35.
- Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. "Rennyō's Letters [5:5]," *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), pp. 126-131.
- Troup, James, tr. Fascicle five (entire) in "The Gobunsho, or Ofumi, of Rennyō Shōnin," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 17 (1889):101-143.
- Yamamoto, Kosho, tr. Letters 2:7, 3:4, 4:4, 4:13, 4:15, 5:1, 5:2, 5:5, 5:10, 5:11, 5:13, and 5:16 in "The Gobunsho," *The Shinshū Seiten: The Holy Scripture of Shinshū* (Honolulu: The Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, 1955), pp. 287-298.
- Yokogawa, Kensho. Letters 2:4 and 5:12 in "Shin Buddhism as the Religion of Hearing," *The Eastern Buddhist*, 7 (July 1939):336-339.

Rennyō's Letters: Fascicle Five¹

(1)

[On lay men and women, lacking wisdom in the last age]²

Lay men and women, lacking wisdom in the last age,³ [should realize that] sentient beings who rely deeply and with singleness of mind on Amida Buddha and entrust themselves singleheartedly and steadfastly (without ever turning their minds in any other direction) to the Buddha to save them⁴ are unfailingly saved by Amida Tathāgata, even if their evil karma is deep and heavy. This is the essence of the Eighteenth Vow⁵ of birth [in the Pure Land] through the nembutsu.

Once [faith] has been decisively settled in this way, they should—sleeping or waking—repeat the nembutsu, saying the Name of the Buddha⁶ as long as they live.

Respectfully.

¹ The text for this translation is *Rennyō Shōnin Ofumi*, Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaikyoku, eds., *Taishō shinshū datzōkyō* (cited in this study as T), 85 vols. (Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932), vol. 83, pp. 803–808.

² Letter titles do not appear in the Taishō text; those bracketed here are translations of titles found in Ōe Junjō and Ōhara Shōjitsu, eds., *Shinshū seiten* (1956; rpt. Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1969), pp. 780–802. Titles also appear, in slightly different form, in Kashiwabara Yūsen, ed., *Shinshū seiten* (1935; rpt. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1969), pp. 853–65.

³ *matsudai* 末代. This term, commonly used by Rennyō, is synonymous with *mappō* 末法.

⁴ *tasuke tamae* たすけたまへ. See introduction for a discussion of this term and the issues involved in translation.

⁵ For a citation of the Vow, see the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life* (*Daimuryōju kyō* 大無量壽經), T12.268a. The eighteenth vow is central to the forty-eight made by Amida Buddha as bhikṣu Dharmākara (*Hōzō biku*). Rennyō's reading of the Chinese text followed that of Shinran in *Kyōgyōshinshū*, T83.601a:

If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma (Yoshifumi Ueda, gen.

(2)

[On the 80,000 sutras and teachings]

It has been said that those who do not know about the afterlife⁷ are foolish, even though they may understand 80,000 sutras and teachings; those who know about the afterlife are wise, even though they may be unlettered men and women who have renounced the world while remaining in lay life. The import of our tradition is, therefore, that for those who do not realize the significance of the one thought-moment of faith⁸—even though they may diligently read the various holy texts and be widely informed—all is in vain. This you should know.

Therefore, as Master [Shinran] has said, no man or woman will ever

ed., *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way: A Translation of Shinran's Kyōgyōshinshō*, vol. II, Shin Buddhism Translation Series [Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1985], p. 205).

⁶ *shōmyō nembutsu* 称名念仏. *Shōmyō* is defined as "saying the nembutsu," and although nembutsu has several possible meanings based on the connotations of *nen* 念, from the time of Shan-tao (Zendō; 613–81), "nembutsu has been considered to mean the saying of the Name. Hōnen [1133–1212] emphasizes nembutsu as utterance of the Name to be the core of the Pure Land way. . . . Shinran further teaches that the saying of the Name is nothing other than the Name (the call of Amida) working in man and awakening shinjin [faith] in him" (glossary entry, Yoshifumi Ueda, gen. ed., *Passages on the Pure Land Way: A Translation of Shinran's Jōdo monrui jushō*, Shin Buddhism Translation Series [Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1982], pp. 98–99, s.v. "Nembutsu").

⁷ *gose* 後世: synonymous with *goshō* 後生, *raishō* 来生, and *raise* 来世. Rennyō makes frequent reference in his letters to "the most important matter of the afterlife," *kondo no ichidaiji no goshō* 今度の一大事の後生.

⁸ *ichinen no shinjin* 一念の信心. See the introduction for a consideration of the significance of the term, *shinjin*, for the tradition and the issues involved in translation. In Shinran's words, "One thought-moment is time at its ultimate limit, where the realization of shinjin [faith] takes place" (Yoshifumi Ueda, gen. ed., *Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling: A Translation of Shinran's Ichinen-tanen mon'i*, Shin Buddhism Translation Series [Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1980], p. 32; T83.694b). The glossary entry, "One moment," in *Notes on Once Calling*, further clarifies: "This moment is not just another moment in the conventional sense; it is the shortest possible instant of time, and thus is both time at its threshold and beyond time. It is in such a point of time that the heart-water of sentient beings, whether good or bad, returns to and enters the ocean of the Vow (Buddha's heart and mind) and becomes one in taste with it" (p. 80).

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be saved without entrusting to Amida's Primal Vow.⁹ Hence there should be no doubt at all that those who abandon the sundry practices¹⁰ and, with [the awakening of] the one thought-moment, deeply entrust themselves to Amida Tathāgata to save them in [regard to] the afterlife will all be born in Amida's fulfilled land,¹¹ whether ten persons or one hundred—whatever sort of [men or] women they may be.

Respectfully.

⁹ The source of this quotation is unclear. Possible references include a hymn in Shinran's *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 正像末和讃 (T 83.665a). For a translation of the hymn, see Ryukoku Translation Center, trans., *Shōzōmatsu Wasan: Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age*, Ryukoku Translation Series, vol. VII (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1980), p. 11. For a particular reference to women, see Shinran's *Kōsō wasan* 高僧和讃 (T83.662b), a hymn based on a passage from Shan-tao. For a translation, see the Ryukoku Translation Center, trans., *The Kōsō Wasan: The Hymns on the Patriarchs*, Ryukoku Translation Series, vol. VI (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1974), p. 87. The vow referred to is the thirty-fifth (see n. 30); it is central also to the twentieth letter of this fascicle.

¹⁰ *moromoro no zōgyō* もろもろの雑行. For Shinran, "sundry practices" cannot lead to birth in the Pure Land, for they are not free from self-power. The right practice (*shōgyō* 正行) is the saying of the nembutsu, but this is to be considered "not-practice" and "not-good," being totally Other-power (*Tannishō* 歎異抄, T83.729b; Dennis Hirota, trans., *Tannishō: A Primer* [Kyoto: Ryukoku University], p. 26). Shinran explains that the nembutsu is inseparable from the one moment of faith, which is "to hear and not doubt that you are saved by only a single pronouncing, which is [Amida's] fulfillment of practice. . . . Nembutsu and shinjin [faith] on our part are themselves the manifestations of the Vow" (*Mattōshō* 末燈抄, T83.715c; Yoshifumi Ueda, ed., *Letters of Shinran: A Translation of Shinran's Mattōshō*, Shin Buddhism Translation Series [Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1978], p. 40). Rennyo follows Shinran in emphasizing that the saving practice is accomplished wholly on the part of Amida, and that the nembutsu is said solely in thanksgiving.

¹¹ *Mida no hōdo* 弥陀の報土. Based on the expositions of Tao-ch'ō 道綽 (Dōshaku, 562–645) in *Passages on the Land of Happiness* (*Anraku-shū* 安楽集), T47.4–22, and Shan-tao in his *Commentary on the Meditation Sutra* (*Kangyōshō* 觀經疏), T37.245–278, Pure Land teaching equates the fulfilled land with Amida's Pure Land. Shinran, however, taught that within Amida's fulfilled land there is the true fulfilled land (*shin-jitsu hōdo* 眞実報土) where the person of true faith becomes "one with the light that is the heart of Tathagata" at the end of his present life (*Letters of Shinran*, p. 44; T83.716c), and an expedient temporary land (*hōben kedo* 方便化土) of various names and aspects where, in accordance with the nineteenth and twentieth vows, those whose practices are mixed with self-power are born and must remain until they realize faith (Ryukoku Translation Center, trans., *The Tanni Shō: Notes Lamenting Differences*, Ryukoku Translation Series, vol. II (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1980), p. 41, n. 1).

(3)

[On women who have renounced the world while remaining
in lay life and on ordinary women]

Women who have renounced the world while remaining in lay life and ordinary women as well should realize and have absolutely no doubt whatsoever that there is deliverance for all those who, without any calculation, rely deeply (singleheartedly and steadfastly) on Amida Buddha and entrust themselves to [the Buddha] to save them, [bringing them to buddhahood] in the afterlife. This is the Primal Vow of Other Power, the Vow of Amida Tathāgata. Once [they have realized] this, if they then feel the thankfulness and joy of being saved in [regard to] the afterlife, they should simply repeat “*Namu-amida-butsu, Namu-amida-butsu.*”

Respectfully.

(4)

[On men and women]

Those of deep evil karma, both men and women, [should realize that] even if they entrust themselves to the compassionate vows of the various buddhas,¹² it is impossible for them [to be saved] by the power of those buddhas since the present period is the evil world of the last age. Therefore, the one we revere as Amida Tathāgata, surpassing all [other] buddhas, made the great Vow that he would save even evildoers who have committed the ten transgressions¹³ and the five grave

¹² Sugi Shirō, *Gobunshō kōwa*, (1933; rpt. Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1979), pp. 108, 319, explains that buddhas other than Amida have pitied sentient beings but have been unable to save them in their condition as foolish beings. Rennyō refers, in the eighth letter of the second fascicle, to Amida's vow to save those omitted from these buddhas' vows and abandoned—women and those guilty of the ten transgressions and the five grave offenses (see nn. 13 and 14).

¹³ *jūaku* 十惡. The ten transgressions are violations of “the Buddhist precepts against (1) destroying life, (2) theft, (3) adultery, (4) lying, (5) harsh words, (6) speaking ill of others, (7) idle talk, (8) greed, (9), anger, and (10) wrong views” (glossary entry, Yoshifumi Ueda, gen. ed., *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone': A Translation of*

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offenses;¹⁴ [fulfilling the Vow,] he became Amida Buddha. Since it is Amida who vowed that he would not attain enlightenment without saving sentient beings deeply rely on this Buddha and, with [the awakening of] the one thought-moment, entrust themselves to [the Buddha] to save [them], there is no doubt at all that they will be born in the land of utmost bliss.¹⁵

Hence it is certain that those who, without doubting, deeply (singleheartedly and steadfastly) entrust themselves to Amida Tathāgata to save them, abandon the depths of their sin, and (leaving everything to the Buddha) experience a settling of the one thought-moment of faith will all be born in the Pure Land—ten out of ten, one hundred out of one hundred. Once [they have realized] this, then when a sense of awe wells up in their hearts, they should say the nembutsu, “Namu-amida-butsu, Namu-amida-butsu,” whatever the hour, wherever they may be. This, in other words, is the nembutsu of gratitude for the Buddha's benevolence.

Respectfully.

Shinran's Yuishinshō-mon'i, Shin Buddhism Translation Series [Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1979], p. 105). The first three pertain to bodily actions, the next four to verbal, and the last three to mental.

¹⁴ *gogyaku* 五逆. The five grave offenses in the early tradition are listed as: “(1) killing one's mother, (2) killing one's father, (3) killing an arhat, (4) causing blood to flow from the body of a Buddha, (5) disrupting the harmony of the assembly of monks. Another tradition gives them as: (1) destroying stupas and temples, burning sutras and Buddhist images, or plundering the three treasures; causing other to do these acts; or being pleased at seeing them, (2) slandering the disciples [Skt. *śrāvakas*] and solitary-Buddhas [Skt. *pratyekabuddhas*] or the Mahayana teaching, (3) harassing the practice of a monk or murdering him, (4) committing any of the five grave offenses of the early tradition, (5) committing the ten transgressions with the conviction that there will be no karmic recompense and without fear for the next life, or teaching others such an attitude” (glossary entry, *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, p. 88).

¹⁵ *gokuraku* 極樂. A synonym for the Pure Land (*Jōdo* 淨土), created as a result of the fulfillment of the forty-eight vows made by Amida as bhikṣu Dharmakara.

(5)

[On realizing faith]

Realizing faith means understanding the Eighteenth Vow. Understanding this Vow means understanding what “*namu-amida-butsu*” is. For within the one thought-moment of taking refuge—“*namu*”—there is aspiration for birth and directing of virtue.¹⁶ This, in other words, is the mind that Amida Tathāgata directs¹⁷ to foolish beings.¹⁸ In the

¹⁶ This sentence, and similar references in letters eight and nine, are based on a passage from the section “The Essential Meaning of the Sutra” (*Gengibun* 玄義分, T37.250ab) in Shan-tao’s *Commentary on the Meditation Sutra*; the passage also appears in *Kyōgyōshinshō*, T83.594c. Rennyō quotes it partially in letter eleven and fully in thirteen.

¹⁷ *ekō* 回向. A term literally meaning “turning toward another” or “redirecting” (often rendered “merit-transference”) is a central concept in Mahayana thought. It “was born in the bodhisattva tradition, in which religious practices are undertaken for the benefit not only of oneself but of others also. . . . The deep wish or vow of the bodhisattva is for the spiritual and moral elevation of all beings, traditionally expressed as ‘going out from birth-and-death’. . . . [I]n traditional Pure Land Buddhism, . . . *ekō* came to mean the directing of one’s merits not towards others but towards the attainment of birth in the Pure Land, where one could realize enlightenment and then return to this world to work for the salvation of all beings. . . . Shinran, however, . . . used the term to signify . . . (Amida Buddha’s) directing and giving his merits to practitioners. Shinran speaks of two modes of giving: one is outgoing or *ōsō ekō* (i.e., outward from birth-and-death), which effects man’s birth in the Pure Land. Thus, the Name working in the *nembutsu*—and *shinjin* as its realization by us—are said to be given by Other Power. The second is returning or *gensō ekō* (into birth-and-death), by which the person of *shinjin* comes back into the defiled world in order to work for the salvation of all beings. Both activities are manifestations of the working of Amida, that is, of Amida’s directing virtue to us” (glossary entry, *Passages on the Pure Land Way*, pp. 79–80).

Futaba Kenkō, a historian of Japanese Buddhist thought, has argued that in the case of Rennyō, the symmetry of *ōsō* and *gensō* in Shinran’s thought is lost. Rennyō’s emphasis on *ōsō ekō* “[Amida’s] directing of virtue for going forth [to the Pure Land]” leads to a devaluation of this present world as defiled in sharp contrast to the Pure Land attained at death. Yoshifumi Ueda identifies a comparable shift in Shin tradition regarding Shinran’s concept of birth: “in Shinran two meanings of birth are established simultaneously, but it appears that the self-contradictory character of the concept [*ōjō* 往生] . . . has prevented its implications from being well understood. Most commentators after Zonkaku [存覚; 1290–1373] follow his interpretation, and it remains the dominant understanding among Shin scholars even today” (“The Mahayana Struc-

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Larger Sutra, this is explained as "causing all sentient beings to fulfill their virtue."¹⁹ Thus it is taught that the evil karma and blind passions accumulated from the beginningless past are extinguished (with no traces remaining) by the inconceivable working of the Vow, and that we dwell in the company of those [whose birth in the Pure Land is] truly settled, in the stage of nonretrogression. This, then, is what we mean by "attaining nirvana without severing blind passions."²⁰ This is a matter presented exclusively in our tradition; there should be no discussion of the above with those of other traditions. Let this be thoroughly understood.

Respectfully.

(6)

[On the great benefit bestowed with (the awakening of)
the one thought-moment (of faith)]

In the *Hymns [on the Last Age]*, Master [Shinran] states that virtue of unsurpassed and great benefit is bestowed on practitioners²¹ who, with

ture of Shinran's Thought [II]," *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series 17:2 [Autumn 1984], p. 54, n. 39).

¹⁸ *bombu* 凡夫. The term suggests translation as "ordinary person," in the sense of one who is caught in the cycle of birth-and-death, reaping the effects of karma stemming from erroneous views and blind passions. Rennyo's interpretation, however, like that of Shinran, goes beyond this:

This term, . . . is not to be understood in the conventional sense, . . . for it points to a profound religious awakening in which even the so-called intelligent person . . . comes to realize himself as a foolish being who is forever motivated by blindly self-centered desires, attached to the fascinations of this evanescent world, and unable to resolve the contradictions of human existence thoroughly. In fact, Shinran says that true wisdom is brought forth only from the heart and mind of the person who has awakened to Amida's great compassion, and in the light of that compassion realizes himself to be a foolish being (glossary entry, *Passages on the Pure Land Way*, p. 88).

¹⁹ *Larger Sutra*, T12.269c.

²⁰ *Kyōgyōshinshō*, T83:600a.

²¹ *gyōja* 行者. Although this term refers generally to one who has entered the Bud-

[the awakening of] the one thought-moment, entrust themselves to Amida:

When sentient beings of this evil world of the five defilements²²
Entrust themselves to the selected Primal Vow,²³
Indescribable, inexplicable, and inconceivable
Virtue²⁴ fills the existence of these practitioners.²⁵

dhist path and is engaged in various forms of religious practice and discipline, in Shin tradition, the practitioner

is one who, having awakened to the great compassion embodied in Amida's Name and entrusted himself to it, lives in the working of the Primal Vow, which unfolds the supreme enlightenment in him just as he is. He is, therefore, one who has become free of all calculation and effort to attain enlightenment through his own goodness and wisdom (glossary entry, *Passages on the Pure Land Way*, p. 104).

²² *gojoku akuse* 五濁惡世. The five types of defilements prevalent in the last dharma-age are defined as:

[1] defiled age (*kalpa*) when war, pestilence, famine, natural calamities, and pollution abound; [2] defiled view (*dr̥ṣṭi*), characterized by confrontation of ideologies, confusion of values, and prevalence of nihilistic attitudes; [3] defiled passion (*kleśa*), the flourishing of greed, anger, ignorance, and evil ways; [4] defiled beings (*sattva*), an increase in human life of inferior quality, dull minds, weak bodies, and egotism; and [5] defiled life (*āyus*), the wasting and shortening of human life. The five are ultimately interrelated with each other (Yoshifumi Ueda, gen. ed., *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, Shin Buddhism Translation Series [Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1981] p. 104).

²³ *senjaku hongan* 選擇本願. The term may refer in general to the forty-eight vows chosen by Dharmakara; it has come to refer specifically, as here, to the eighteenth because of that vow's selection of the nembutsu as the cause of birth in the Pure Land. This was a crucial point in Hōnen's teaching. See *Passages on the Pure Land Way*, p. 109).

²⁴ *kudoku* 功德. Shinran explains that, without any calculation of the part of practitioners, all their evil karma is transformed into the highest good, "just as all waters, upon entering the great ocean, immediately become ocean water. We are made to acquire the Tathagata's virtues through entrusting ourselves to his Vow-power; hence the expression, 'made to become so'" (*Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,'* p. 32; T83.700a).

²⁵ *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, T83.665c. For the translation (adapted here), see Ryukoku Translation Center, trans., *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, p. 31.

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In this hymn, "sentient beings of this evil world of the five defilements" refers to all of us, [including] women and evildoers. Therefore, although we are such wretched beings who commit evil throughout our lives, there is no doubt at all that those who rely singleheartedly and steadfastly on Amida Tathāgata and entrust themselves to [the Buddha] to save them in [regard to] the afterlife will unfailingly be saved. Amida bestows "indescribable, inexplicable, and inconceivable great virtue" on those who entrust themselves in this way. "Indescribable, inexplicable, and inconceivable virtue" means unlimited great virtue. Because this great virtue is directed to us sentient beings who entrust ourselves to Amida in the one thought-moment, karma-hindrances of the three periods of the past, future, and present are instantly extinguished, and we are established in the stage of those who are truly settled, or in the stage equal to perfect enlightenment.²⁶ Again, this is expressed in the *Hymns [on the Last Age]*:

Entrust yourselves to the Primal Vow of Amida.
All those who entrust themselves to the Primal Vow will,
Through the benefit of being embraced and never abandoned,
Reach [the stage] equal to perfect enlightenment.²⁷

"Being embraced and never abandoned" also means that sentient beings who entrust themselves to Amida in the one thought-moment are received within the [Buddha's] light, and since the entrusting mind does not change, they will not be forsaken. Although there are various teachings besides this, there should never be any doubt that sentient be-

²⁶ As explained by Shinran in *Mattōshō*:

Since the person who has realized shinjin necessarily abides in the stage of the truly settled [*shōjōju* 正定聚], he is in the stage equal to the perfect enlightenment. In the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life* the person who has been grasped, never to be abandoned, is said to be in the stage of the truly settled, and in the *Assembly of the Tathagata of Immeasurable Life* he is said to equal the perfect enlightenment. Although the names differ, the truly settled and equal to enlightenment have the same meaning and indicate the same stage (*Letters of Shinran*, p. 26; T83.712c).

²⁷ See Shinran's *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, T83:664bc, 665b. This quotation appears to be a combination of the first two lines of an opening hymn preceding the first, and the last two lines of the twenty-fourth.

ings who entrust themselves solely to Amida in the one thought-moment will, each and every one, be born in the fulfilled land.

Respectfully.

(7)

[On the five obstacles and the three submissions]

Because the bodily existence of women is defined by the five obstacles and the three submissions,²⁸ they are burdened with deep evil karma exceeding that of men. For this reason, the buddhas of the ten directions²⁹ can never, by their own power, bring any woman to buddhahood. Yet Amida Tathāgata, having made the great Vow³⁰ that he himself would save women, delivers them. Without entrusting herself to this Buddha, a woman is unable to become a buddha.

What attitude should [a woman] have, then, and how should she entrust herself to Amida Buddha and become a buddha?

There need be no calculation, for by just entrusting ourselves solely to Amida Buddha (with no double-mindedness, with steadfastness,

²⁸ *goshō sanshō* 五障三従. The "five obstacles" said to be inherent in the nature of a woman is that she cannot become (1) a Brahma-king, (2) Indra, (3) a Māra-king, (4) a Cakravarti-king, or (5) a buddha. The "three submissions" for a woman are: first, to her parents; then to her husband; and, finally to her sons (Izumoji: Osamu, ed. *Ofumi*, Tōyō bunko, no. 345 [Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1978], p. 64; Ryukoku Translation Center, trans., *The Jōdo Wasan*, Ryukoku Translation Series, vol. IV [Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1965], p. 92; *The Kōsō Wasan*, p. 87).

²⁹ These are buddhas other than Amida throughout the universe, the ten direction beings the four cardinal points, the four intermediate directions, the zenith, and the nadir.

³⁰ The thirty-fifth of the forty-eight vows in the *Larger Sutra* (T12.268c) reads:

After I have attained Buddhahood, if those women in the innumerable and inconceivable Buddha Lands of the ten quarters who, having heard My Name, awaken the joyful Serene Faith, raise the Bodhi Mind, and thus despise their female bodies, after death, should again assume female forms, may I not attain the Perfect Bodhi (*The Jōdo Wasan*, n. 1, p. 92).

Rennyō's paraphrase of the vow in this letter appears to put a particular emphasis on "Amida alone."

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and with the single thought that [Amida] saves us in [regard to] the afterlife), we will readily become buddhas. Since this mind is free of the slightest doubt, we will most certainly go to the land of utmost bliss and become splendid buddhas.

Once [we understand] this, what we must then bear in mind is that whenever we say the nembutsu, we say [it] only to express our joy and thankfulness for the benevolence of Amida Tathāgata who readily saves such wretched beings as ourselves. Let [this] be understood.

Respectfully.

(8)

[On the meditation of five kalpas]

Both the Primal Vow following the meditation of five kalpas and the practice of innumerable, measureless kalpas are simply compassionate means to save all of us sentient beings without fail. To this end, Amida Tathāgata underwent painstaking endeavors and made the Primal Vow, "namu-amida-butsu"; he became "namu-amida-butsu," having vowed that he would not attain enlightenment if he did not save sentient beings (erring beings) who, with [the awakening of] the one thought-moment, entrust themselves to Amida Buddha, abandon the sundry practices, and rely on Amida steadfastly and singleheartedly. We should know that this is precisely why it is that we are to be born readily in the land of utmost bliss.

The meaning of the six characters "na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu" is, therefore, that all sentient beings are to be born in the fulfilled land. For when we take refuge—"namu"—Amida Buddha immediately saves us. Hence the two characters "na-mu" express sentient beings' turning to Amida Tathāgata and entrusting themselves [to Amida] to save them, [bringing them to buddhahood] in the afterlife. We must realize that those who entrust themselves to Amida in this way are saved without exception; this itself is the essence of the four characters "a-mi-da-butsu." Therefore, those who abandon the sundry practices and wholeheartedly entrust themselves [to Amida] to save them in [regard to] the afterlife (even if they are women burdened with the ten transgressions and the five grave offenses, the five obstacles and the three

submissions) will be saved without exception—each and every one, whether there are ten persons or one hundred. Those who, without doubting, entrust themselves to what is set forth here will be born in Amida's true and real Pure Land.

Respectfully.

(9)

[On all the holy texts]

The meaning of settled mind³¹ in our tradition is wholly expressed by six characters, “na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu.” That is, when we take refuge—“namu”—Amida Buddha immediately saves us. Hence the two characters “na-mu” mean “taking refuge.” “Taking refuge” signifies the mind of sentient beings who abandon the sundry practices and steadfastly entrust themselves to Amida Buddha to save them, [bringing them to buddhahood] in the afterlife. [The four characters “a-mi-da-butsu”] express the mind of Amida Tathāgata who, fully knowing sentient beings, saves them without exception.

Accordingly, since the truth is that Amida Buddha saves sentient beings who entrust themselves—“namu”—we know that the import of the six characters “na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu” is precisely that all of us sentient beings are equally saved. Hence our realization of Other-Power faith is itself expressed by the six characters “na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu.” We should recognize, therefore, that all the holy texts have the sole intent of bringing us to entrust ourselves to the six characters “na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu.”

Respectfully.

³¹ *anjin* 安心. See introduction for discussion of translation of *anjin*. Noteworthy is that Shinran uses the term only on three occasions in his literary corpus: twice in *Kyōgyōshinshō*, T83.602a and T83.620a, and once in *Gutokushō*, T83.650a. In each instance, the usage is part of a quotation. Rennyo's identification of “faith” (*shinjin*) with “settled mind” (*anjin*) may derive from his study of and devotion to the *Anjinke-tsujōshō* 安心決定鈔, a text attributed to the Seizan branch of the Pure Land School, unavailable to Shinran. For a discussion of Rennyo's notion of *anjin* in relation to Shinran's *shinjin*, see: Minor L. Rogers, “The Shin Faith of Rennyo,” *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series 15:1 (Spring 1982), pp. 56–73.

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(10)

[On faith as fundamental]

What is taught by Master [Shinran] and in his school is that faith is fundamental. For when we cast away the sundry practices and singleheartedly take refuge in Amida, birth [in the Pure Land] is assured by the Buddha through the inconceivable working of the Vow. [Attaining] this state is also described as "entering, with the awakening of the one thought-moment [of entrusting], the company of those [whose birth in the Pure Land is] truly settled."³² The nembutsu, saying the Name of the Buddha, should then be understood as the nembutsu of grateful return for Amida's benevolence, through which the Tathāgata has established our birth.

Respectfully.

(11)

[On the anniversary (of Master Shinran's death)]

Among those who will make the pilgrimage, bring offerings and come before the [portrait of] Master [Shinran] to repay their indebtedness and express their gratitude during this anniversary³³, there

³² See the *Larger Sutra*, T12.272b; T'an-luan's *Commentary on the Treatise of Birth* (*Ōjō ronchū* 往生論註), T40.826b; and *Kyōgyōshinshō*, T83.597b.

³³ During Shinran's lifetime, his followers in the Kantō gathered each month on the twenty-fifth, the day of Hōnen's death, for fellowship and nembutsu recitation. Offerings of food, money, and clothing were made for local needs, and donations were sent to Shinran. After Shinran's death, the meeting day was changed to the twenty-eighth, the day of his death; donations were made to maintain his burial site at Ōtani Higashiyama.

It was Kakunyo 覚如 (1270–1351), Shinran's great-grandson, who institutionalized these practices; during his lifetime, annual thanksgiving services lasted for seven days, from the twenty-first of the eleventh month until the twenty-eighth. One of the earliest extant copies of a thanksgiving service written by Kakunyo in honor of Shinran, the *Hōnkōshiki* 報恩講式, is a copy made by Rennyo in 1468. After Rennyo's arrival at Yoshizaki, he began to write letters especially for the monthly and annual memorial services; the first of these is date 1472.11.27. For a discussion of the historical context for

will be those who have realized faith. There will also be those who are lacking in faith [*fushinjin*]. This is an extremely serious matter. For unless there is a decisive settling of faith, the birth that is to come in the fulfilled land is uncertain. Therefore, those whose faith is lacking [*fushin*] should in all haste attain the decisive mind [of deep entrusting].

The human realm is a place of uncertainty. The land of utmost bliss is one of eternity. Hence we should not make our abode in the uncertain human realm, but rather, aspire to [birth in] the eternal land of utmost bliss. In our tradition, therefore, the matter of faith is placed before all else; unless we are fully aware of the reason for this, everything is meaningless. We must promptly experience a decisive settling of faith [*anjin*] and aspire to birth in the Pure Land.

What is widespread in the world and what everyone has understood is that if they just say the Name with their lips, without any discernment, they will be born in the land of utmost bliss. That is a thoroughly dubious understanding. Receiving Other-Power faith is a matter of fully knowing the import of the six characters "na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu" and, by this, experiencing a settling of faith.

As for the substance of faith, [a passage] in the [*Larger*] *Sutra* states: "Hear the Name and realize faith and joy."³⁴ Shan-tao has said: "'Namu' [means] 'to take refuge.' It also signifies aspiring to be born and directing virtue. 'Amida-butsu' is the practice."³⁵ The meaning of the two characters "na-mu" is that we abandon the sundry practices and, without doubting, entrust ourselves singleheartedly and steadfastly to Amida Buddha. The meaning of the four characters "a-mi-da-butsu" is that [Amida] saves sentient beings who, without any calculation, singleheartedly take refuge in him. This is the very essence of the four characters "a-mi-da-butsu." To understand "namu-amida-

the development of Rennyo's thought as expressed in his letters, see Minor L. Rogers, "Rennyo and Jōdo Shinshū Piety: The Yoshizaki Years," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 36:1 (Spring 1981), pp. 21-35.

³⁴ This phrase appears also in the fifteenth letter of the first fascicle. For sources, see the *Larger Sutra*, T12:272b, and *Kyōgyōshinshō*, T83:601a, 605a. Shinran also quotes the phrase in a larger context and explains it in *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, p. 32; T83.694ab.

³⁵ "The Essential Meaning of the Sutra," T37.250ab; *Kyōgyōshinshō*, T83.594c. See n. 16.

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butsu" in this way is, therefore, to receive faith. This, in other words, is [the understanding of] the nembutsu practitioner who has fully realized Other-Power faith.

Respectfully.

(12)

[On (Amida's) sleeve]

Those who wish to know in full what settled mind means according to our tradition need no wisdom or learning at all. For when we simply realize that we are wretched beings of deep evil karma and know that the only Buddha who saves even such persons as this is Amida Tathāgata, and when, without any calculation but with the thought of holding fast to the sleeve of this Buddha Amida, we entrust ourselves [to him] to save us, [bringing us to buddhahood] in the afterlife, then Amida Tathāgata deeply rejoices and, sending forth from himself eighty-four thousand great rays of light, receives us within that light. Hence this is explained in the [*Meditation*] *Sutra*: "The light shines throughout the worlds of the ten directions, and sentient beings mindful of the Buddha are embraced, never to be abandoned."³⁶ This you should know.

There is, then, no anxiety over becoming a buddha. How incomparable is the all-surpassing Primal Vow! And how gracious is Amida Tathāgata's light!

Without encountering the [receptive] condition of this light,³⁷ there can be no cure at all for the fearful sickness of ignorance and karma-hindrance, which has been ours from the beginningless past. And yet, prompted by the condition of this light, good from the past comes into being, and we assuredly attain Other-Power faith now. It is immedi-

³⁶ *Meditation Sutra* (*Kanmuryōju kyō* 観無量壽經), T12:343b. This quotation also appears in the fourth and thirteenth letters of the second fascicle.

³⁷ For the basis of this metaphor, see *Kyōgyōshinshō*, T83.597b, which analyzes the causes and conditions of birth. Shinran's *Mattōshō*, T83.722a, closes with the same metaphor: "The Name fulfilled in the Primal Vow is the active cause of our mother; in other words, it is our father. The radiant light of great compassion is the receptive condition for our birth; it is our mother" (*Letters of Shinran*, p. 64).

ately clear, however, that this is faith granted by Amida Tathāgata. Hence we know now, beyond question, that this is not faith generated by the practitioner, but that it is Amida Tathāgata's great Other-Power faith. Accordingly, all those who have once attained Other-Power faith should reflect gratefully on Amida Tathāgata's benevolence and repeat the nembutsu, saying the Name of the Buddha always, in gratitude for Buddha's benevolence.

Respectfully.

(13)

[On the unsurpassed, most profound virtues and benefits]

Since the phrase "namu-amida-butsu" consists of only six characters, we may not realize that it has such virtue;³⁸ yet the magnitude of the unsurpassed, most profound virtues and benefits³⁹ within this Name of six characters is absolutely beyond measure. We should know, therefore, that the realization of faith is contained in these six characters. There is absolutely no faith apart from this, outside of the six characters.

Shan-tao explains the six characters of this "na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu," saying, "'Namu' means 'to take refuge.' It also signifies aspiring to be born and directing virtue. 'Amida-butsu' is the practice. Because of this, we unfailingly attain birth."⁴⁰

How should we understand this explanation?

[The answer is that] if, with [the awakening of] the one thought-mo-

³⁸ *kunō* 功能: literally, "virtuous working" or "virtuous activity."

³⁹ See *Kyōgyōshinshō*, T83.594a, where Shinran quotes Shan-tao's explanation of these virtues and benefits. As translated in *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way*, vol. 1, pp. 105-6:

Question: What virtues and benefits in the present life accrue from saying the Name of Amida Buddha and worshipping and contemplating him?

Answer: If one utters a single voicing of "Amida Buddha," one immediately eradicates the grave karmic evil that will bind one to eighty billion kalpas of birth-and-death.

⁴⁰ "The Essential Meaning of the Sutra," T37.250ab; *Kyōgyōshinshō*, T83.594c. See n. 16.

ment [of entrusting], a person takes refuge in Amida Buddha—even if [his is] an existence like ours, burdened with evil karma and blind passions—[Amida], knowing that person, will save him without fail. In other words, “taking refuge” means that we entrust ourselves [to Amida] to save us. [Amida’s] bestowal of unsurpassed and great benefit on sentient beings who entrust themselves in the one thought-moment is called “aspiring to be born and directing virtue.” Because [Amida] bestows on us sentient beings great goodness and great virtue⁴¹ through [his] “aspiring to be born and directing virtue,” the evil karma and blind passions accumulated over myriads of kalpas from the beginningless past are instantly extinguished; hence our blind passions and evil karma all disappear, and we dwell even now in the company of those [whose birth in the Pure Land is] truly settled, in the stage of non-retrogression.⁴²

We understand more and more clearly, then, that the six characters “na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu” affirm that we are to be born in the land of utmost bliss. Therefore, one who fully understands the meaning of the six characters of the Name—settled mind, or faith—is said to be a person who has realized great faith, Other Power. Since there is this incomparable teaching, let us deeply entrust ourselves.

Respectfully.

⁴¹ *daizen daikudoku* 大善大功德. This term would seem to correspond to *zengon* 善根 “roots of good”—good acts which produce good results (Sugi, p. 372). Here, this is a manifestation of the working of Amida, not of the practitioner. See glossary entry, *Passages on the Pure Land Way*, pp. 108–9, for further discussion of *zengon*.

⁴² See n. 26, on the truly settled (*shōjōju*). Originally, the term described a bodhisattva whose enlightenment was assured; in Pure Land thought, it describes those whose birth in the Pure Land enables them, through further practice, to attain enlightenment. For Shinran and Rennyo, those truly settled are assured of birth through the realization of faith in this life. Non-retrogression (*futaiten*), a stage linked with being truly settled, is explained as a term originally descriptive of the bodhisattva who will not regress, having “realized suchness non-dichotomously . . . even though he continues to live in a dichotomous world” (glossary entry, *Passages on the Pure Land Way*, p. 100).

(14)

[On (women of) noble and humble birth]

We must realize that, unbeknownst to others, all women have deep evil karma⁴³; whether of noble or humble birth, they are wretched being. How, then, should they entrust themselves to Amida?

[The answer is that] women who rely firmly and without any anxiety on Amida Tathāgata and accept that [Amida] saves them in [regard to] the most important matter, the afterlife, will unfailingly be saved. If, casting off the depth of their evil and leaving everything to Amida,⁴⁴ they simply rely singleheartedly on Amida Tathāgata to save them in [regard to] the afterlife, there is no doubt that [Amida], fully knowing those beings, will save them. Whether there are ten persons or one hundred, they need not have the slightest doubt whatsoever that all—each and every one—will be born in the land of utmost bliss. Women who entrust themselves in this way will be born in the Pure Land. They should entrust themselves ever more deeply to Amida Tathāgata, realizing how shameful it is that until now they have not trusted such an easy way.

Respectfully.

(15)

[On the Primal Vow of Amida Tathāgata]

What sort of sentient beings does the Primal Vow of Amida Tathāgata save? Also, how do we entrust ourselves to Amida, and through what attitude are we saved?

⁴³ The traditionally-held contrast is between women's outward appearance and their inner condition—outwardly, like bodhisattvas; inwardly, like demons (Sugi, p. 376).

⁴⁴ To do this is to take the necessary step of abandoning self-power. Shinran clarifies this process in his *Yuishinshō-mon'i*:

'To abandon the mind of self-power' admonishes the various and diverse kinds of people . . . to abandon the conviction that one is good, to cease relying on the self, to stop reflecting knowingly on one's evil heart, and further to abandon the judging of people as good and bad (*Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*, p. 40; T83.701c).

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To begin with, in regard to the persons [to be saved], even if they are evildoers who have committed the ten transgressions and the five grave offenses or women burdened with the five obstacles and the three submissions, they should not be concerned about the depth and weight of their evil karma. It is only by great faith alone, Other Power, that we realize birth in the true and real land of utmost bliss.

As for faith, then, what should our attitude be, and how should we entrust ourselves to Amida?

The realization of faith is free of calculation. We simply cast off the sundry practices and disciplines and the evil mind of self-power and, without any doubts, singleheartedly and deeply take refuge in Amida. This we call true and real faith. Amida Tathāgata, fully knowing the sentient beings who singleheartedly and steadfastly entrust themselves in this way, graciously sends forth rays of light, receives these beings within the light, and causes them to be born in the land of utmost bliss. We speak of this as “[Amida’s light] embracing sentient beings [who are practitioners] of the nembutsu.”⁴⁵

Beyond this, even though we say the nembutsu throughout our lives, we should understand that it is the nembutsu of gratitude for the Buddha’s benevolence. With this, one is to be declared a nembutsu practitioner who has fully realized faith according to our tradition.

Respectfully.

(16)

[On whitened bones]

When we deeply consider the transiency of this world, [we realize that] what is altogether fleeting is our own span of life, which is like an illusion from beginning to end. Hence we have not yet heard of anyone

⁴⁵ Cf. Shinran's comment in *Kyōgyōshinshō*, T83.597b, referring to Shan-tao's statement in *Hymns of Birth in the Pure Land* (*Ōjō raisan* 往生禮讚), T47.439c. Shinran's comment as translated in *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way*, vol. I, p. 137, reads: “Even more decisively will the ocean of beings of the ten quarters be grasped and never abandoned when they take refuge in this practice and shinjin. Therefore he is called “Amida Buddha.” This is Other Power.”

living for ten thousand years.⁴⁶ A lifetime passes quickly. Can anyone now live to be one hundred? Will I die first, or will my neighbor? Will it be today, or will it be tomorrow? We do not know. Those who are left behind as well as those who go before us are more numerous than the dewdrops beneath the trees and on their leaf tips.⁴⁷

Hence we may have radiant faces in the morning, but in the evening be no more than whitened bones. With the coming of the wind of impermanence, both eyes are instantly closed, and when a single breath is forever stilled, the radiant face is drained of life, and its vibrant glow is lost. Then family and relatives may gather and grieve brokenheartedly, but this is to no avail. As there is nothing else to be done, [the once-familiar form] is taken to an outlying field, and when it has vanished with the midnight smoke, nothing is left but whitened bones. This is indeed indescribably pitiful.

And so, because the impermanence of this world creates a condition of uncertainty for young and old alike, we should all immediately take to heart the most important matter, the afterlife, and say the nembutsu, deeply entrusting ourselves to Amida Buddha.

Respectfully.

(17)

[On all women]

All women—if they are concerned about the afterlife and have a sense of reverence for the buddha-dharma—should, without any

⁴⁶ During Rennyo's time, there were various explanations in regard to the period in which Śākyamuni appeared in the world, but it was widely held to be the ninth of the kalpa of existence; the lifespan was then one hundred years, but decreasing. In the second letter of the fourth fascicle, Rennyo says, "If we calculate the length of human life, the allotted span at this time is fifty-six years." See *Izumoji*, pp. 254–55.

⁴⁷ This passage differs only slightly from one by Zonkaku, Shinran's great-great-grandson, who, despite his failure to become the fourth successor to Shinran, came to be recognized as the first "theologian" of the Jōdo Shin sect. See *Zonkaku hōgo* 存覚法語 in *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. III (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941; rpt. ed. 1969), p. 360. The dewdrop imagery provides a metaphor for the uncertainty of human life; for a detailed discussion, see *Izumoji*, pp. 349–50.

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calculation, entrust themselves deeply to Amida Tathāgata, cast off the sundry practices, and rely singleheartedly and firmly [on Amida] to save them, [bringing them to buddhahood] in the afterlife. They should have no doubt whatsoever that [such] women will be born without fail in the land of utmost bliss. After they have understood this, then—sleeping or waking—they should just say, “Namu-amida-butsu, Namu-amida-butsu,” realizing deeply and wholeheartedly how gracious and priceless it is that Amida Tathāgata readily receives them within his saving work. We speak of these [women] as people of the nembutsu who have received faith.

Respectfully.

(18)

[On Master (Shinran) of our tradition]

[In realizing] the settled mind expounded by Master [Shinran] of our tradition, we first (without any calculation) cast off our wretchedness and the depth of our evil and dismiss any inclination toward the sundry practices and disciplines; then, with [the awakening of] the one thought-moment, we entrust ourselves singleheartedly and deeply to Amida Tathāgata to save us, [bringing us to buddhahood] in the afterlife. All those who do this will be saved without exception, ten out of ten, or one hundred out of one hundred. There should not be the slightest doubt about this. Those who fully understand in this way are called “practicers of faith.”

Once [we have realized] this, when we then think of the joy of being saved in the afterlife, we should—sleeping or waking—say “Namu-amida-butsu, Namu-amida-butsu.”

Respectfully.

(19)⁴⁸

[On evildoers of the last age]

Let all evildoers and women of the last age deeply entrust themselves with singleness of mind to Amida Buddha. Apart from that, whatever dharma they may rely upon, they will never be saved in [regard to] the afterlife.

How, then, should they entrust themselves to Amida Tathāgata and how should they aspire for the afterlife? They should have no doubt at all that there will unfailingly be deliverance for those who, without any anxiety, simply rely singleheartedly and firmly on Amida Tathāgata and deeply entrust themselves [to Amida] to save them, [bringing them to buddhahood] in the afterlife.

Respectfully.

(20)

[On women attaining buddhahood]

All women who firmly rely on Amida Tathāgata and entrust themselves [to Amida] to save them in [regard to] the afterlife will unfailingly be delivered. For Amida Tathāgata himself made the supreme great Vow,⁴⁹ thinking, “If I do not save women abandoned by all the buddhas, which of the other buddhas will save them?”

Going beyond all [other] buddhas and aspiring to save women, he meditated for five kalpas; undergoing practices for measureless kalpas, he made the all-surpassing great Vow.⁵⁰ Thus it is Amida who originated the incomparable Vow, “Women’s Attainment of Buddhahood.” For this reason, women who deeply rely on Amida and en-

⁴⁸ This letter is similar to the tenth of the fourth fascicle. At the end of that letter, Rennyo notes that he is 83; the year is Meiō 6 [1497].

⁴⁹ The Vow referred to in this letter is the thirty-fifth. See n. 30.

⁵⁰ Sugi points out, more correctly, that after meditating for five kalpas, Amida made the Vow; undergoing practices for measureless kalpas, he brought the Vow to fulfillment (p. 402).

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trust themselves [to him] to save them in [regard to] the afterlife will all be born in the land of utmost bliss.

Respectfully.

(21)

[On passages in the (*Larger*) *Sutra* and in (T'an-luan's) commentary]

[The meaning] of settled mind in our tradition [is that], without any calculation, we abandon the inclination towards the sundry practices and disciplines; whatever our evil karma may be (even though it is deep), we leave that to the Buddha and simply, with [the awakening of] the one thought-moment, entrust ourselves singleheartedly and deeply to Amida Tathāgata. Sentient beings who rely on [Amida] to save them will all be delivered, ten out of ten or one hundred out of one hundred. There should not be the slightest doubt whatsoever about this. We speak of those who entrust themselves in this way as people in whom faith [*anjin*] is firmly and rightly settled.

Passages in the [*Larger*] *Sutra* and in [T'an-luan's] commentary express this clearly, stating that “with the awakening of the one thought-moment [of entrusting], we dwell in the company of those [whose birth in the Pure Land is] truly settled”;⁵¹ this refers to “practicers who have completed the cause [for birth in the Pure Land] in ordinary life.”⁵² We must, therefore, bear in mind that simply entrusting ourselves deeply to Amida Buddha with [the awakening of] the one thought-moment

⁵¹ See the *Larger Sutra*, T12:272b; the *Commentary on the Treatise on Birth*, T40.826b; and *Kyōgyōshinshō*, T83.597b.

⁵² *heizei gōjō* 平生業成. Izumoji (pp. 20–21) notes that Zonkaku uses the term in a number of works, including *Jōdo shinyōshō* 淨土真要鈔. Here he states, “In Shinran Shōnin's school, we teach ‘completion of the cause [for birth] in ordinary life’ and do not stress the expectation of birth at life's end. We speak in terms of [Amida's] not coming to meet [the practicer at the time of death] and do not adhere to the teaching of his coming.” The passage concludes, “If one encounters the dharma at the end of his life, then that person is born [in the Pure Land] at life's end. We do not speak of ‘ordinary life’ or ‘life's end’; it is simply that when a person attains faith, he is born, or settled” (T83.759b).

is of the utmost importance. Other than this, we should say the nembutsu always—walking or resting, sitting or lying down—realizing the depth of the benevolence of Amida Tathāgata who readily saves us.

Respectfully.

(22)³³

[On the import of our tradition's teaching]

Those who seek to know thoroughly the meaning of our tradition's teaching and be born in the land of utmost bliss must first of all know about Other-Power faith.

What is the importance of Other-Power faith? It is the provision by which wretched foolish beings like ourselves go readily to the Pure Land.

In what way does Other-Power faith find expression? Without any calculation, we simply entrust ourselves exclusively to Amida Tathāgata, singleheartedly and steadfastly; and with the awakening of the one thought-moment in which we realize that Amida saves us, Amida Tathāgata unfailingly sends forth his embracing light and keeps us safe within this light as long as we are in this world.³⁴ It is precisely in this state that our birth is assured.

Thus "namu-amida-butsu" expresses the attaining of Other-Power faith. We must bear in mind that this faith is the source of "namu-amida-butsu." Then, because we receive this one Other-Power faith, there is no doubt at all that we will be born readily in the land of utmost bliss. How incomparable is Amida Tathāgata's Primal Vow!

How are we to respond to this gracious benevolence of Amida?

Simply by saying, "Namu-amida-butsu," sleeping or waking, we respond to Amida Tathāgata's benevolence.

With what mind, then, do we say "namu-amida-butsu"?

³³ This letter is almost identical to the latter half of the fourteenth letter, second fascicle, which is dated Bummei 6 [1474].7.5.

³⁴ *shaba* 娑婆, a term indicating the present world, in which sentient beings undergo various afflictions and pains.

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Think of it as the rejoicing mind that realizes how gracious and priceless it is that Amida Tathāgata saves us.

**Respectfully.
Shōnyo, disciple of Śākyamuni
[seal affixed]**