

RENNYO SHŌNIN, GREAT TEACHER OF SHIN BUDDHISM

I. Rennyo Shōnin's Ten Epistles known as "Ofumi"¹

Epistle 1

In our religion received from Shinran Shōnin,² the awakening of faith is the most important.

Why is it so? Because, when you have laid aside all kinds of the *jiriki* endeavours³ and awakened single-hearted reliance on Amida, your rebirth in the Pure Land⁴ is firmly established by the Buddha through the

¹ Rennyo Shōnin (1415-1499) left many epistles, ten of which are here selected and translated.

² Shinran Shōnin (1132-1212) the founder of the Shin Sect of Buddhism.

³ The term here used in the original is *zōgyō* 雜行, which lit. means "confused works", "desultory endeavours aiming at deliverance"; as *zōgyō* comes out of our self-will (*jiriki*) whereas the true faith is actuated by the other-power (*tariki*) of the Buddha, it is rendered "*jiriki* endeavours". In Shin Buddhism, the *jiriki* endeavours are regarded as fruitless for attaining the rebirth in the Pure Land. They are also called *hakarai*, "contrivance".

⁴ *Jōdo* 淨土 in Japanese; "The conception of Amida and his Pure Land is in one way too complicated and in another way altogether simple. Too simple because when the relative plane of consciousness is abruptly transcended, an unexpected view opens before the devotee and all that has been annoying him emotionally as well as intellectually vanishes away—nothing can be simpler than this. But the problem becomes too complicated when it is approached from the logical and metaphysical point of view because it leads to many another problem involving the whole field of the philosophy of religion—which is the task to be undertaken by the specialists only." (D. T. Suzuki)

inconceivable working of His Vow⁵. This condition is expressed by Donran⁶ as follows:—"When your faith is awakened in one thought⁷, you are found joining the order of the steadfast⁹."

As to the reciting of the Buddha's Name from that time onwards, you should consider it the Nembutsu⁹ practised in requital of the favour of Nyorai¹⁰, who has assured you of this rebirth.

With reverence, I remain.....

Epistle 2

There is an old saying:—"Those who are not awakened to their eternal life¹¹ are ignorant, even though

⁵ Vow, *gwan* 願 in Japanese (pranidhāna in Skt.). The Vow is the Bodhisattva's intense determination to carry out his plan of universal salvation. A Bodhisattva as a rule makes a number of vows before he begins his career, for his desire to attain the final stage of Bodhisattvahood is not only for his own benefit but for all the worlds visible and invisible.

⁶ Donran (T'an-luan) (476-542), one of the seven patriarchs of Shin Buddhism. His chief work is the Commentary on Vasubandhu's *Discourse on the Pure Land*.

⁷ The one thought of faith, *ichinen no shin* in Japanese, represents the absoluteness and immediateness of the Shin experience of faith.

⁸ The order of the steadfast, *shōjōju* in Japanese, is a group of the Bodhisattvas who are assured of attaining Buddhahood.

⁹ Nembutsu (Buddhānusmṛiti in Skt.) originally meant "thinking of the Buddha." But it has come to be synonymous with *Shōmyō*, "reciting or pronouncing the Name". For the Shin followers *nembutsu* means *sōmōyō*, to think of the Buddha is to pronounce his Name, Namuanidabutsu. For further remarks see D. T. Suzuki's Zen Essays, Vol II. p. 159 et seq.

¹⁰ Nyorai 如來 (tathāgata in Skt) is one of the ten different names of the Buddha.

¹¹ The term here used in the original is *goshō* 後生 which literally means "after-life"; it does not necessarily mean the life after death, but it is rather the spirit-life; the life of no birth-and-death, situated, as it were, behind this life of birth-and-death.

they may understand eighty thousand sutras; but those who are awakened to their eternal life are wise, even though they may be unlettered women.”¹

In our doctrine, therefore, the hard study of many volumes of sutras, and erudition are of no avail, if there is no awakening of one thought of faith. That is the reason why Shinran Shōnin said that no men or women can be saved unless they are awakened to the significance of the Original Vow² of Amida.

As this is the case, you need not cherish a bit of doubt that those who have laid aside all kinds of the *jiriki* endeavours and place single-hearted reliance on Amida in regard to the salvation of their eternal life, are sure, all in all, ten out of ten, a hundred out of a hundred, to be reborn in Amida's Compensation Land of Purity.

With reverence, I remain.....

Epistle 3

“When we consider well and carefully the transient appearances of this human world, we realise that which is most fleeting is the phantasmagorical duration of human life on this earth.”³ So, “we have never heard of a man who has enjoyed a life of ten thousand years. Human life passes so soon. Who of our days can live even for a hundred years? Whether I die earlier than you, or you earlier than I, there is no knowing. My life may not extend over today or tomorrow. And yet it does not follow that you survive me because you are younger.

¹ Quoted from the *Tendai Myōmoku Shiruiju*.

² Hongwan 本願 in Japanese (Pūrvapranidhāna in Skt.); it is made by a Bodhisattva when he began his career as a Mahayana follower of the Buddha. Hence “the Original Vow.”

³ The passage is quoted from the *Zonkaku's Sayings*.

The falling of the dew-drops—so many, indeed—from the tree does not necessarily depend where they are lodged, on the leaves or on the stems.”¹

As this is the case, even if in the morning we have rosy faces, we cannot be sure that we shall not turn into bleached bones in the evening. Such is our karma. As soon as we are touched with the wind of transitoriness, our two eyes will close, our breathing stop for ever, and our rosy face, alas, is changed and gone! All the family come together and weep and wail, but in vain. As this ought not to continue, the body is sent to the waste and burnt on the midnight fire; nothing is left then but a mass of bleached bones. “Sadness” is indeed too weak an expression to be said of this experience.

Human life is thus fleeting and uncertain. Therefore, let us all realise as early as possible the importance of the eternal life, and, trustfully relying upon Amitabha Buddha, say our Nembutsu.

With reverence, I remain.....

Epistle 4

You, men and women of this degenerated age, who, being trammelled in the karmic family life, are not awakened to the truth! You should place profound reliance on Amida Buddha all in one mind, without in any manner turning your thought towards other directions, and desire with singleness of heart to be delivered from the bondage of karma.

If you do so, it is sure that Amida Nyorai saves you, even though your sin may be grave. This is indeed the purport of the Eighteenth Vow² of Amida, which is called

¹ The passage is quoted from the *Zonkaku's Sayings*.

² Of the forty-eight vows made by Amida, the Eighteenth is regarded as the most important. On this Vow the Pure Land doctrines developed.

the Vow of Nembutsu Rebirth.

When you are thus established in your salvation, you should say the Nembutsu thenceforward night and day all your life through.

With reverence, I remain.....

Epistle 5

If it is asked what is "the peaceful heart" advocated in our religion, the answer will be as follows—In our religion, it is not necessarily demanded that you should destroy your evil nature or check the rising of confused thoughts and false attachments; nor does it matter in what kind of profession you are engaged; you may be a merchant or a servant, you may be a hunter or a fisherman. Of you this only is required; the realisation that the Vow of Amida Nyorai is started for the benefit of such shallow-minded creatures as you, who are involved night and day only in those sinful deeds; in the meantime placing reliance on Amida's Merciful Vow, in regard to your salvation of your eternal life, with singleness of heart and trueness of mind. If this one thought of faith is sincere, you are sure to be saved by Amida.

Now that your salvation has been thus established, in what frame of mind should you say the Nembutsu? As it is by the Buddha that one thought of faith is awakened in you, in virtue of which your salvation has been established, thanks are to be rendered to the Buddha. Therefore, with the intention of requiting Buddha's favour, you should say the Nembutsu, as long as your life lasts.

Any one who does so should be properly be called the true believer who has attained the peaceful heart advocated in our religion.

With reverence, I remain.....

Epistle 6

Those who wish to know fully what is "the peaceful heart" advocated in our religion, need not always be wise and ingenious. Realising that we are deeply sinful and shallow-minded, and that Amida Nyorai is the only Buddha who saves even such creatures as we, we should place reliance on Amida artlessly and straight-forwardly, in regard to the salvation of our eternal life, and abide in such frame of mind as that of clinging to the sleeves of this Amida Buddha. If we do so, this Amida Nyorai, filled with great joy, sends out from his body the great Saving Light of eighty-four thousand beams, and takes up us in that Light. So we should understand that this is the meaning of the passage in the *Meditation Sutra*¹, which runs thus: "The Light shines universally in ten quarters; sentient beings who believe in the Nembutsu are taken up in that Light; and if they are taken up into it, they are never forsaken."²

We see here that there is no difficulty in our attaining Buddhahood. Oh! How excellent is the Original Vow which goes beyond the reasons of the world! How merciful is the Light of Amida Nyorai!

Had we not come under the influence of the Light, we could not have been cured of the dreadful disease, which is ignorance and karma-hindrance accumulated from time immemorial. Fortunately, however, we have been taken up into the Light and obtained what is called the *tariki* faith.

¹ The Meditator's Sutra; *Kwanmuryōjūkyō* in Japanese, the Sutra on Meditation on the Buddha of Eternal Life (Sanskrit text is unknown). Translated in 424 into Chinese by Kalyanas, a priest in North-eastern India. This is one of the three canonical sutras of Shin Buddhism.

² 光明遍照十方世界 念佛衆生攝取不捨

For this reason, we perceive that faith is given by Amida to us. And thus we have clearly understood that this is not the faith excited by the believers but the great faith rendered by Amida to them.

As this is the case, all those who have once attained the *tariki* faith should feel grateful for Amida Nyorai, and always say the Nembutsu in order to requite the favour of the Buddha.

With reverence, I remain.....

Epistel 7

The reason why the Original Vow of Amida Nyorai is called the "Vow which goes beyond the reason of the world" is that it is the supreme vow of salvation fundamentally started for the benefit of ignorant beings such as we who, living in this later defiled world, commit sins and do evil things.

Then, if we wish to be reborn in His Land of Purity, in what frame of mind should we accept this Vow and in what way should we believe in Amida? Of this, we are entirely destitute of knowledge. Your kind instruction upon this point is most desirable.

The answer to your question is this. Sentient beings in this later degenerated age should place single-hearted reliance on Amida. In His great compassionate heart, Amida has made a vow to save those people who will rely on Him with singleness of heart, without turning their mind towards other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. He sends out the great Saving Light and embraces those believers in that Light. The following passage of the *Meditation Sutra* gives evidence to this: "The Light shines universally in ten quarters; sentient beings who believe in the Nembutsu are all taken up into it; and

when they are once taken up into it, they are never forsaken.”

Thus, through the inconceivable working of the Vow of Amida, the ways leading to the five evil paths or the six evil states of existence are closed, and those who were destined to go there are detained in safety. The following passage of the Great Sutra¹ bears witness to this: “[The bonds binding us to] the five evil paths are cut asunder in an inconceivable way, and those evil paths [to which we were destined to go] vanish away of their own accord”.²

As this is the case, those who believe in the Vow of Nyorai without the least shadow of doubt cannot go to hell, even if they desire to go there, because they are already taken up into the Saving Light of Amida Nyorai, and are assured to be reborn in His Land of Purity.

For this reason, we, who owe to the Nyorai's great compassion, should say the Nembutsu day and night all our life through, and this should be done with the intention of requiting the favour of the Buddha. This is the very thing meant by “obtaining the true faith”.

With reverence, I remain.....

¹ The Great Sutra. The *Daikyō* in Japanese, being an abbreviation of the *Dai-muryōju-kyō*, “the Larger Sutra on the Buddha of Eternal Life”. The Sanskrit text is called the *Sukhāvativyūha*. In Shin Buddhism, this is one of the three canonical sutras, and the most important one.

² 横截五惡趣 惡趣自然閉.

Of this passage, Shinran said in his *Songō-Shinzō-Mei-Mon* as follows. “By 横 is meant ‘crosswise’. By ‘crosswise’ is meant that, because of the faith in the working of the Vow of Amida, and not because of the fruitless desultory endeavours of the believer, the latter is enabled to cut away the relations with the evil paths and get free from the four kinds of birth. This is the *tariki* (other power), which is the crosswise transcendence of the birth-and-death. This is the purport of the true *tariki* doctrine. By 截 is meant ‘cutting asunder the bonds which bind us to the evil paths.’”

Epistle 8

Those who wish to realise the teaching of our religion and to be reborn into the Land of Purity should first of all awaken the *tariki* faith.

What use is there in the *tariki* faith, then? It is a preparatory for us ordinary mortals to be easily reborn into the Land of Purity.

In what manner does the *tariki* faith manifest itself, then? When we, in the awakening of one thought of faith, place reliance on Amida, in regard to our salvation, artlessly, straightforwardly, and single-heartedly, Amida Nyorai sends out the great Saving Light and embraces us in it as long as we live in this world. This state of being embraced in the Light is no other than that in which our salvation has been established. As this is the case, we should know that Namuamidabutsu, the Buddha's Name, represents our having obtained the *tariki* faith, while this faith represents Namuamidabutsu having disclosed itself. Therefore, where we obtain faith, there we attain the rebirth in the Pure Land. In this, then, there is no difficulty at all! Ah! How excellent is the *tariki* Vow of Amida Nyorai!

How should we requite Amida's favour, then? We should requite His favour by saying Nembutsu day and night.

How should we take that saying of Nembutsu, then? It should be taken as the expression of our exultation in which we remember the excellence and benevolence of Amida Nyorai by whom we are saved.

With reverence, I remain.....

Epistle 9

The doctrine of faith advocated in our religion is expressed in Na-mu-a-mida-but-su, the Buddha's Name in six characters.

To illustrate—a man is saved by Amidabutsu, when he places reliance on Him (reliance being *namu*). As this is the case, the two characters of *namu* represent the *tariki* faith. By the *tariki* faith is meant in the one hand that sentient beings, laying aside all kinds of the *jiriki* endeavours, rely on Amidabutsu with singleness of heart in regard to the salvation of their eternal life; and on the other hand that Amida Nyorai, well knowing those sentient beings who rely on him, saves all of them without leaving any.

Thus, Amidabutsu saves those who do *namu* (place reliance on the Buddha).—For this reason, it is clear, Namuamidabutsu is something representing that we sentient beings are saved equally and universally. The awakening of the *tariki* faith, therefore, is no other than Namuamidabutsu having realised itself.

This is why it is said that all scriptures exist only to make Namuamidabutsu believed.

With reverence, I remain.....

Epistle 10¹

To be confirmed in faith means to understand the Eighteenth Vow. To understand this Vow means to understand the frame² of mind the “Namu-amida-but-su” brings about in you.

Therefore, when you attain a state of singleminded-

ness by saying the "Namu" with absolute trust [in Amida], you grasp the signification of Amida's "Vow which is directed towards [awakening a faith-state in you]".³ For herein we realise the sense of AmidaN yorai's "turning towards" us ignorant beings. This is pointed out in the *Larger Sutra of Infinite Life* by saying that "Amida has completed all the merit for all sentient beings".

Thus it follows that with all the evil deeds we have committed, with all the evil passions we have cherished, in our former lives since the beginningless past, we are, owing to the miraculous power of Amida's Vow, thoroughly cleansed of them with no residue whatever left, and set up in the Order of Steadfastness⁴ with no fear of regression.

This is what is meant by the statement that Nirvana is attained without destroying the evil passions.

This is the teaching exclusively elucidated by our school, and you are warned not to talk this way to people of other schools. Let me ever remind you of this.

Ana kashiko! Ana kashiko!

¹ Translated by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki.

² The original Japanese *sugata*, means "figure" "image," "form," "pose," "frame." "state," "condition," etc. It is difficult to find its good English equivalent as it is used here by Rennyo. We may take it as meaning a state of consciousness which is induced in the mind of the devotee when he utters the *nembutsu* in absolute confidence in Amida's Vow. It is a faith-state of mind.

³ *Hotsu gwan Eko* in Japanese. This is one of the key terms in the Shin doctrine of *Tariki* "other.power." *Hotsu gwan* refers to Amida's "making the vows" to emancipate all beings from sin and ignorance and *eko* is "turning" all the merits "towards" the enlightenment of all beings, that is all merits Amida acquired while disciplining himself in every possible deed of goodness during a countless number of kalpas.

⁴ "Steadfastness", that is, steadfastness in faith, is a technical term in the Shin teaching, and means that one's faith is absolutely confirmed and there is no turning back and that thus the devotee is assured of his enlightenment in the Land of Purity.

II. Life of Rennyō Shōnin, the Author of the Epistles

1

One of the major types of Japanese Buddhism is that which centres round faith in Amitabha Buddha and rebirth in His Pure Land. This type of Buddhism is called the Pure Land doctrine. Among a number of sects which belong to this, there is the Shin. The Shin was founded by Shinran Shōnin (1173-1262). He specially emphasised the awakening of religious consciousness, which is technically known as the "*taniki* faith of one thought."

Shin Buddhism was divided in course of time into several branches. Of these, the Hongwanji branch led by Shinran's descendants is at present in the most flourishing state. But this was not always the case in the early stage of the history of the Shin Sect. The Hongwanji Temple, the seat of this order, was originally a shrine erected on the tomb of the founder. Therefore it is the most sacred place for all adherents of Shin Buddhism. The Temple, however, gradually lost its prestige from the middle of the fourteenth century onwards, and in the beginning of the fifteenth century it had come to be rarely visited by pilgrims, and it is said that "quietness and loneliness prevailed in the precincts of the Temple".¹ It was thus in 1415 when the influence of the Hongwanji was at its lowest ebb, that Rennyō Shōnin, the restorer of Shin Buddhism and the writer of the *Ofumi* some of which are translated here, was born at the Temple at Otani, Kyoto, as the first son of Zonnyō, the seventh abbot of the Hongwanji.

2

Early in his childhood, Rennyō's mother from some unknown cause left her home. He was barely six years old. Exact facts about her life are not known, yet it seems that she was a woman of deep piety, and her influence on the boy was a big factor in his spiritual career. According to a record, the mother, when she was about to leave her son, said to him: "In your lifetime, you should bring back Shinran Shōnin's religion to its old glory"; and this parting injunction impressed the boy so deeply that, when he grew up and was old enough to understand the state of affairs, he made up his mind to accomplish this work of revival.

When seventeen, he was sent to Shōren-in Temple, where he was made priest. Here he disciplined himself in Buddhist studies. He did it with all his heart. "Neither the heat of summer nor the cold of winter could check his ardour in disciplining himself in Buddhist studies."² After some years' stay there, he came back to his Temple at Otani, where he was taught by his father in the doctrine of his own school. The works of Shinran the founder and those of Zonkaku and other expositors were perused. "Never a day passed without reading those works, so that the covers of the books wore out and had to be replaced several times."³

As was mentioned before, the Hongwanji was at that time not in prosperous condition, and Rennyō found it difficult to prosecute his studies. "As he had not enough money to buy oil for lighting, he read in the

¹ The *Honpukuji Temple Records*.

² *Rennyō Shōnin Itokuki*.

³ *Rennyō Shōnin's Sayings and Doings*, ed. by M. Inaba, p. 64.

evening by the light of burning wood in the hearth or by the moonlight that shone into his room."¹ For him it was indeed a period of trial. Not only poverty, but many other worldly cares troubled him.

In the midst of these tribulations, he was one day awakened to the Mercy of Amida. He told this experience of salvation to some of the adherents who happened to come to Otani, but he thought that he was not yet qualified for publicly announcing it. He wished to devise the proper means to express it so as to be understood by the masses. In 1449, he made a tour to the Northern and the Eastern Provinces. The tour was a kind of religious exercise for the abbot or abbot-elect of the Hongwanji. For as it was in these provinces that Shinran the founder proclaimed his doctrine, one who assumed the abbotship of the Hongwanji was required to take a journey there and make a pilgrimage to the sites where the founder had gone through various kinds of hardships and privations. For Rennyō, however, this tour had another meaning. It was a good opportunity to study the conditions of the masses and how to express his faith so as to be grasped by them. In this tour, therefore, he visited rural people living in places far away in the country, and talked with them about the faith in Amida. Thus he prepared himself for the work of reviving Shinran's religion.

3

In 1457, he succeeded his father to preside over the Hongwanji, and began to lead an active life. His activities are divisible into four periods; the first period (1457-1471) when he worked chiefly in the province of

¹ In the same work, p. 64.

Ōmi; the second (1471-1475) in the Northern provinces; the third (1475-1489) in the Home provinces; and the fourth (1489-1498) after the retirement from the abbotship of the Hongwanji.

In the first period, his activities were rather on a small scale. He went round the places of worship where the small group of believers assembled and preached the doctrine of the Nembutsu. His unassuming attitude, sincerity, his fervent faith, soon attracted people, and followers assembled about him. Day by day the group increased in number.

The revival of Shinran's religion thus rapidly progressed. In consequence of this the monks of Mt Hiei resented the presence of Rennyo and his work. They attacked the Hongwanji Temple at Otani and destroyed it. The event showed that the older school of Buddhism represented by these monks did not hesitate to use any means in order to check a new faith. Rennyo resisted this oppression not by force of arms—for, it was he that commanded his followers to break up an assembly, when they wanted to take up arms;¹ he resisted it by force of faith, against which violence is powerless. He left Kyoto and lived among his followers; and changing his dwelling from place to place, he continued to propagate Amida's mercy; the sphere of activities was found in those provinces of Ōmi, Owari, and Mikawa. For the latter three years of this period, however, he lived at Ōtsu, where a temple was built as a centre of worship and preaching.

4

The second period in which his talent as a religious

¹ Hompukuji Yuraiki

leader was exhibited successfully, began in 1471. In the spring of this year he came down to the Northern provinces. According to an epistle addressed to one of his disciples living in the province in Ōmi, the motive of this travel was twofold. As he had been informed of a number of heresies rising among the Shin followers in the Northern provinces, he wanted to examine them. He also wanted to prevent the rising of another strife which was brewing between his followers and the monks of Mt Hiei. The Shin believers who flocked to his Otsu temple might have caused another trouble.

He came first to a place called Kitanoshō in Echizen province, where he preached the true doctrine as propounded by Shinran the founder. All classes of men, lay as well as clerical, came to listen to him and were converted. The age in which Rennyo lived was one of the transition periods in Japanese history. The old system was about to collapse and a new one was not yet established. Politically, socially, and economically, things looked uneasy. The masses did not know where to go, and they wanted a leader who would cast in his lot with them and lead them. Rennyo was the very man they wanted. For the uneasiness of the world is in essence the uneasiness of soul.

In the autumn of the same year, he selected a site in the mountainous district called Yoshizaki situated in the frontier between two provinces, Kaga and Echizen, and built a temple there. It was meant to be the central place of worship for the believers in the Northern Provinces. For he thought that the time to promote the *tariki* faith had come and was determined to stay there for some time to continue the work of propagating Shinran's religion. Soon after the erection of the temple at Yoshizaki, his followers came from all directions and

formed a community around the temple, whereby "the wild mountain with wolves and other beasts" turned into a prosperous township.

Rennyō stayed at Yoshizaki for five years. The growth of the order during these years were remarkable. The fame that the doctrine appealed to the spiritual needs of the people of those days reached as far as Ōshū, the furthest eastern province of Japan. Followers came from the remotest quarters. It was only three years after the founding of the Yoshizaki temple that he wrote: "It is a wonderful event in these later days that multitudes of followers, men and women, lay and clerical, should assemble at this mountain and pay homage to Amida at the temple, coming especially from the seven provinces of Kaga, Noto, Etchū, Echigo, Shinano, Dewa, and Ōshū. It is miraculous, indeed!"¹ The influence of Shinran's religion grew suddenly and largely by his untiring efforts.

When Rennyō perceived that his followers increased, he gave them rules for their life. Herein the obtainment of the *tariki* faith was set as the most important foundation, and some other points were added that seemed necessary for a consistent manner of life. The claim that faith is the most important is that which was maintained by him throughout his life. "The prosperity of the sect does not mean that a large number of people just gather and exercise their influence all around; but it does mean that those who have obtained faith are numerous." It was during this period that a number of "Ofumi" (epistles) were written by Rennyō.

5

It was in 1475 that he came to Deguchi in the pro-

¹ Rennyō Shōnin's Works, ed. by M. Inaba, p. 105.

vince of Settsu, and third period begins. It was during this period that he was engaged in proslytising the people of the Home provinces. It was also during this period that he built several temples. Of these the most important one is the Hongwanji at Yamashina.

In 1475, Zenjū, one of his old disciples came to him, who was then staying at Deguchi, and asked him to rebuild the Hongwanji which had once stood at Ōtani; the site was to be donated by a follower at Yamashina near Kyoto. It seemed as if Zenju's desire represented that of all the followers. Now that the order had become so much prosperous, it should have had the central place of worship for all of them. Hereupon, in the next year, Rennyō inspected the site and determined to rebuild the Hongwanji. The work started in 1479 and was completed in 1483. This rebuilding of the Hongwanji was not only the desire of the followers but also that of Rennyō himself, as the Hongwanji at Ōtani was destroyed in 1465 by the monks of Mt Hiei. Rennyō's joy was exceedingly great, when the Founder's Hall was re-erected and Shinran's portrait was enshrined. On this occasion he wrote: "While I was wandering in the country from place to place—Oh! How I wished to rebuild this Founder's Hall. Now my wish is attained. Gladness and gratitude are more than I can express. Last night I could not sleep until dawn."¹

6

In 1489, Rennyō Shōnin, being then in his seventy-fifth year, transferred the management of the Temple to his successor, Jitsunyo, and retired to a separate mansion. On the night when he retired from abbotship, he said: "Now that I have retired from office, I feel at ease

¹ Rennyō Shōnin's Sayings and Doings, p. 84.

in mind. I shall pass my time in devotion more than ever."²

He passed his time in devotion, indeed. "Go-Ichi-daiki-Kikigaki", in which are recorded his sayings and doings in this period, shows this fact to the full extent. He would say to his attendants: "Obtain faith. If you do not obtain faith, all your efforts will come to naught." "Is it not a miracle that we ordinary mortals should attain Buddhahood in one thought [of faith]." His attitude towards things enjoyed is seen in the following remark: "Everything is not mine but Buddha's; when you enjoy it, you should be grateful to Amida." Whenever he sat down to dinner, he would say: "Thanks be to the Buddha! By His favour, I can take this meal now." Finding out a piece of paper thrown away in the hallway: "Even a sheet of paper is Buddha's. How should we waste it?"

Another temple built in this period is the Ōsaka Hongwanji. It was erected in 1493. On its erection, he said: "The temple is built in my heart-felt wish that believers in Amida's mercy may increase in number, even by one."³

7

In the summer of 1498, he fell sick in Osaka. During his sickness, he made Ryūgen the attendant read several of his own "Ofumi," and said to those around him: "You should be awakened to Amida's mercy."

In February, next year, his illness became severe. He came back to the Main Temple at Yamashina, wishing to die there. When he was near death, he sum-

¹ *Rennyō Shōnin's Works*, p. 317.

² *Rennyō Shōnin's Sayings and Doings*, p. 3.

³ *Rennyō Shōnin's Sayings and Doings*, p. 42.

moned his children, and told them that they should be awakened to the mercy of the Buddha and live in amity; and, if they did so, Shinran's Shōnin's religion would prosper.

On the 25th of March at noon he died. He was at that time in his eighty-fifth year. His body was placed in the Hall, to which his followers paid their last respect, and a funeral ceremony was held next day. Many believers came to attend it and lamented that "the Great Light of Dharma is extinguished."

III. Rennyō Shōnin's Teaching

8

Rennyō was a rare religious genius. He was a witness to the Shin experience of salvation. He had it himself and expounded it in his own way. His was a new doctrine, while not violating what had already been given in tradition. He proclaimed this doctrine in decisive terms. He was "the messenger sent by Amida", faithful in delivering His message. He had authority over the gifts and distributed them. His life and deeds revived Shinran's Order, and he was an example of a genuinely pious life repleted with Buddha's mercy, his whole life being the embodiment of Amida's benevolence to save sentient beings. Lastly, he was an avatar, one of those who are born directly from Tathagathahood.

According to him, our salvation is an established fact: it has been achieved on the part of the Buddha. Amida is always living in the midst of our misery, while we are always embraced in the Saving Light of Amida.

We are, however, not aware of this fact; for this reason all kinds of troubles, by which we are harassed,

come into existence. "Although Amida has accomplished the work of saving all sentient beings, the latter do not believe it; which makes them migrate in the world of birth-and-death. The sun shines all over the world; but a blind person does not see it—not that the sun does not shine, but because he is blind. This is just the case with them: Amida has attained that Buddhahood which is called *Namu-amidabutsu*, attesting that all sentient beings are sure to attain salvation; yet they do not believe it, and, in consequence of that, they are found suffering in the world of birth-and-death."¹

From this it follows that if we do believe salvation effected on the part of the Buddha we are no longer troubled about the destiny of our lives here. For if salvation is an established fact, why need we worry over salvation? And if salvation is not something to worry over, does it not follow that we need not be troubled about our destiny? "Since our salvation is an established fact, you need not bother about why the legs of a wild duck are short and why those of a crane are long; you have only to remain just in your state and believe in the inconceivable working of Amida's Vow."² Here we see that the believer in Amida, while still staying in the world of birth-and-death with all its limitations, lives at the same time in the world where there is no birth-and-death. In other words, it is when we refuse simply to accept life as it is and search for something different that we come to feel this life unendurable. But if we are enabled to accept life in some way or other and stop to seek for something different, quite naturally this life becomes the best place for us to live with our karma.

Believing in Amida's work of salvation, however,

¹ *Rennyō Shōnin's Sayings and Doings*, p. 6.

² *Rennyō Shōnin's Works*, p. 51.

does not mean to analyse the statement and accept it, for it is not a matter of reasoning. It should be a spiritual awakening of dynamic nature. For the believing in Amida's work of salvation has this in view that the believer, while staying just in his state as he is, lives an active life as an independent personality, quite free from all kinds of hindrances surrounding him on all sides; and it is natural that such an end cannot be attained by a mere acknowledgment of something on the plane of intellectual ratiocination; nothing but self-assertion by experience can achieve this end. It is for this reason that Rennyo censured those heretics who maintained that, as their salvation had been already established long time ago when Amida had attained Buddhahood, they are only needed to acquire the knowledge of it. Rennyo says: "Even though we acquire knowledge how Amida has achieved the work of saving us sentient beings, it is of no avail, if we do not awaken faith by which we find ourselves saved." Another heretic who regarded the reciting of the Buddha's Name as the most essential is also wrong, falling in the same kind of fault. This view is dependent upon the literal interpretation of the Vow of Amida. Accordingly, Rennyo censured it, too. He says; "The view commonly accepted in the present days is that those who utter Namuamidabutsu repeatedly will be reborn in the Pure Land, but this view is wrong and fruitless." "Those who do nothing but saying the Nembutsu leave an essential point out of account; the mere uttering of Namuamidabutsu does not make them reborn in the Pure Land. Those who are awakened to the significance of the Name, will become Buddha. The sincere, single-hearted reliance on Amida

¹ *Rennyo Shōnin's Works* p. 123.

² *In the same Work*, p. 211.

makes the believer reborn in the Pure Land."¹

Then, if faith is effected not by the exercise of the intellect but by the awakening of a spiritual experience, how can we attain the faith? The problem is the most essential one in Shin Buddhism; for it is the nucleus of the Shin experience, the fountainhead of Shin religion from which all the Shin doctrines flow out. The faith in Shin Buddhism—to believe that salvation, being achieved on the part of the Buddha, is an established fact—is not something effected or attained by the believer himself. In order that the believer may be able to believe it, salvation should be asserted in the particular situation of the believer; Amida, coming to the believer, should attain Buddhahood there and actually achieve the work of saving him. In other words, salvation effected on the part of the Buddha should be transferred to the believer. It is only then that he can believe that salvation becomes an established fact. As this is the case, the faith is not the one attained by the believer himself, but is that which is given by the Buddha; hence it is called the *tariki* (other-power) faith. Therefore, Rennyō says: "Faith is Buddha's wisdom; it is reliance caused by Buddha's wisdom. Amida Nyorai causes us to rely on Him, and saves us. Therefore, all is done by the other-power from the beginning to the end."² Rennyō once asked Junzei, his attendant, "Do you know who is he that taught us faith in Amida?" When Junzei replied in the negative, Rennyō said: "Amida Nyorai is. It is no other than Amida Nyorai that taught us to rely on Him."³

On this experience of the *tariki* faith, Rennyō maintains the oneness of faith and salvation. As it is clear

¹ *In the same work*, p. 213.

² *Rennyō Shōnin's Sayings and Doings*, p. 141.

³ *In the same Work*, p. 72.

in the quotations cited just above, Rennyo expresses this experience of faith by the words "reliance on Amida". By reliance, however, is not meant relative reliance but absolute reliance. The absolute reliance differs from the relative one in that the latter belongs to the experience on the plane of relativity in which two items exist, he who relies and he who is relied on; but the former belongs to the experience transcending the sphere of relativity, where the relying and the relied are one. In the *tariki* experience, the faith is no other than the self-assertion of Amida; for it is Amida Himself that places the absolute reliance on Amida. Hence the *tariki* faith is the absolute reliance. According to Rennyo, the true believer is one in whom the absolute reliance on Amida is established and every attempt to elude care is abandoned; he finds himself embraced in the Saving Light of Amida; and, depending upon the inconceivable working of Amida's Vow, leads a life of activity in this world. He goes the way in which there is no obstruction. It is evident such a believer is identical with the true Bodhisattva of the Mahayana, and such a state of faith is no other than deliverance or salvation which is aimed at by him. This is why Rennyo, citing Donran, calls the believer a Bodhisattva and says: "When one thought of faith is awakened, the believer attains salvation, while staying in his ordinary life."¹

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In his religion, therefore, Rennyo places stress on the awakening of one thought of faith. "In our religion, the awakening of faith is the most important."² As we mentioned before, this awakening is the self-assertion of

¹ cf. *The Ofumi*, no. 10

² cf. *The Ofumi*, no. 1

Amida Himself ; or the absolute reliance on Him in which there is no separation between subject and object. In this point, faith advocated in Rennyo's religion is not intuition upheld in some philosophical doctrine. In intuition, it seems, there is still a residue of duality. While we still remain in the domain of dualistic view, we cannot attain deliverance. Deliverance comes only when we enter into the world of absolute values. The world absolute values is called, in the Shin terminology, "one thought". Shinran says: "What is meant by 'one thought' ? Faith has no two items of thought ; for this reason, it is called 'one thought.' It is also called 'one mind'."¹ Rennyo says: "By 'one mind' is meant that when the believer places reliance on Amida, Buddha's mind and his are made one. Therefore, it is called one mind."² Again, this is why he says in the one of the Ofumi³ that, when we awakened faith, the three way of activity of Amida become those of our own. He says also: "When we obtain faith, we shall realise Namuamidabutsu."⁴ The realisation of Namuamidabutsu makes believer the one who is master of the universe.

But this is never the state of mind of an antinomianistic nature, in which a self-conceited person asserts himself as no other than Buddha. In such a person, it is he himself that is filled with evil passions and commits evil deeds, asserting himself as Buddha ; whereas, in the *tariki* believer, it is the Buddha that comes to him and asserts himself. The difference between them as to the solution of the problem by whom the absolute values are rendered is significant in its bearing upon their way of living in this world. For in the *tariki* be-

¹ *The Kyōgyōshinshō.*

² *Rennyo Shōnin's Sayings and Doings* p. 94.

³ *Rennyo Shōnin's Works* p. 230.

liever there follows a life of replete with Buddha's mercy; whereas in the self-conceited person a self-willed and dissolute life may begin. This is why Rennyo refuted those "heretics who did not worship Buddha"; and those heretics who maintained "the doctrine of our being Buddha solely and simply", which does not take this into account, that we still remain in the world of relativity. Rennyo says: "Amida 'qualifies' sentient beings. By 'qualifying' is meant that Amida, leaving evil nature of sentient beings as it is, gives them his good mind and makes them good; and not that he destroys their nature and replaces it by a new one made solely of the Buddha's wisdom."¹

Still more it is not to be confused with the view held by the extreme mystic, who abrogates the division between subject and object; and, retiring from the world, goes to the "waste", which is void. Differing from this type of mystic, a true Buddhist sees the absolute value in each situation of the relative world, and never fails to perceive the division between subject and object. Rennyo says: "Everything should be done in accordance with its circumstances, only in the Buddhist state of mind."² He was never tired of repeating that the believer should pass his life in gratitude for Amida's favour.

10

Rennyo's doctrine centres round "Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu", the Buddha's Name in six characters. To begin with, that salvation is an established fact is represented in and made known by Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu. The reason

¹ *Rennyo Shōnin's Sayings and Doings*, p. 116.

² *In the same work*, p. 255

³ *In the same Work*, p. 78.

is as follows. According to the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*, long, long years ago, Hōzō² the Bodhisattva vowed that unless all beings in ten quarters were assured of their salvation he would not attain Buddhahood; and after many years' austerities he attained Buddhahood. According to the *Smaller Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*, He is now preaching the Dharma in His Pure Land; all the Buddhas in ten quarters praise Him of His inconceivable merits. "*Namuamidabutsu*" stands for the Buddhahood attained by Hōzō the Bodhisattva; what made up the substance of His Buddhahood is no other than the salvation of all beings in the ten quarters of the world. The Name has been transmitted to us and exists before our eyes. Is this not the proof of the truth that salvation is an established fact? Does it not serve as an evidence of the fact that salvation is achieved on the part of the Buddha? It is quite natural that "the believer in the Nembutsu, each time they hear the name pronounced, should realise that their salvation was already established."¹ Rennyo says: "It is *Namuamidabutsu* that evidences the fact that ordinary mortals are saved."²

Namuamidabutsu expresses that those who will rely on Amida shall be saved. For Hōzō the Bōdhisattva vowed that all beings in ten quarters who would rely on Him should be saved, and represented His will in the Name. Zendo³ the commentator expounded Amida's will represented in the Name as follows. "'*Namu*' means our reliance on Amida, and '*amidabutsu*' means His

¹ *Dharmakāra* in Skt.

² *The Ajnin-Ketsujō-shō*.

³ *Rennyo Shōnin's Sayings and Doings*, p. 78. Cf. *The Works* p. 222, 358, 456.

⁴ Zendo (Shan-tao) (613-618), one of the seven patriarchs of Shin Buddhism; his chief work is the Commentary on the *Meditation Sutra*.

saving those who will rely on Him; hence ‘*Namuamidabutsu*’ represents the state of salvation in which all beings in ten quarters are saved.”¹

That faith is given by the Buddha is also expressed by *Namuamidabutsu*. According to Zendo, the first part of the Name, *namu*, besides the meaning of ‘reliance’, has another meaning of ‘vowing and transferring merits’. By whom vow is made and merits are transferred, is the question here. Ordinarily it is understood to mean the works done by sentient beings, who desire to be reborn in the Pure Land and direct all their stock of merits for that end. But Rennyō interpreted this vowing and transferring merits as those done by the Buddha in order to make sentient beings reborn in His Pure Land. Amida vows universal salvation and manifests Himself in each particular situation of the believer and actually attains Buddhahood there and achieves the latter’s salvation, which results in the awakening of faith in the heart of the believer. Rennyō contends that this is what is meant by the second meaning of *namu*; and in this interpretation he clarifies what the *tariki* faith is. That we are awakened to faith in Amida is not by any means due to our own work but to Amida’s absolute mercy to us who cannot by ourselves work out our salvation—and the Name expresses this fact. Again, here is also the expression of the simultaneousness of the awakening of faith and the establishing of salvation. By means of the vowing and transferring merits done by the Buddha, our faith that is *namu* and Buddha’s saving that is *amidabutsu* are simultaneously caused—and this is expressed by the Name, in which *namu* representing our faith and *amidabutsu* representing Buddha’s saving are united and made into the Name. Faith and salvation

¹ The Commentary on the *Meditation Sutra*.

are the dual aspects of one and the same experience ;
namu is *amidabutsu* and *amidabutsu* is *namu*.

11

The Ofumi was written by Rennyo. It is a kind of tract in the form of an epistle, given by the writer to an individual believer or a group of believers. It contains expositions of faith, or directions as to discipline, or both at the same time. The impermanency of life, the disturbance of the world, the prevalence of pestilence, the vicissitudes of the fortune of the writer, or other incidents of the world, are often introductory remarks to the exhortation of faith. Various kinds of heterodox doctrines are the subjects of refutation.

It was solely with the view of promoting the *tarikī* faith that Rennyo wrote the Ofumi. He says: "The Ofumi may not be a good composition, but do not call it in question. It was written in my heart-felt wish that people, as many as possible, may attain faith."¹ One of the Rennyo's biographers says: "In order that people may understand the meaning of Amida's Vow easily and quickly, he selected out one out of ten, which itself was selected out of a hundred, and made this one contained in the Ofumi."²

The Ofumi was written apparently as occasion arose, either on special inquiry for advice on the part of the follower, or when the writer found opportunity while pursuing his work as the spiritual adviser and the director of the order. Thus, the Ofumi served as the reminder of faith to those in whom the *tarikī* faith had been awakened, or as an encyclical letter to be read

¹ *Rennyo Shōnin's Sayings and Doings*, p. 43.

² *In the same Work*, p. 65.

among a group of followers, who wished to be enlightened in the *tariki* faith.

The Ofumi was composed in easy Japanese, and not in Sinico-Japanese or Japanico-Chinese in which most Buddhist literature was once clothed. Rennyō's followers largely consisted of (as he said in one of the Ofumi) tradesmen, servants, fishermen and hunters.—This was indeed the peculiar characteristic of his order. One of the reasons that Ofumi was written in easy Japanese is found in the fact that his followers to whom it was addressed, were common people preferring practicality and immediateness, and not the scholars who were addicted to abstruse ratiocination.

The language used in the Ofumi is colloquialism in the medieval times. Therefore, the Ofumi was easy to understand at the time when it was written, but it is at present not so lucid. Some words—some important words, indeed,—have undergone change in their meaning. The forms adopted in the Ofumi are various—some Ofumi are written exegetically, others are in items, still others are in an diary manner. But the form of questions and answers is frequently used; for it is a popular method of exposition.

The number of the Ofumi amounts to more than two hundred. Throughout these epistles, there are many repetitions; some portions of different ones being absolutely identical. This is because each of these epistles is complete in itself, and each is given by itself to a special addressee. Soon after Rennyō's death these epistles were copied and collated. Among these, eighty pieces of the Ofumi were selected out and compiled into five fasciculi, and this five fasciculi compilation of the Ofumi has attained the position of a canonical book of the sect.

The influence of the Ofumi is very great in the development of Shin Buddhism. It served as the means not only of reviving Shin Buddhism, but also of preserving and developing it. To many followers of Shin Buddhism, the words of the Ofumi have often given a clue to their awakening of faith.

One more word will be added as to the naming of the Ofumi (the particle 'o' expresses respect, and 'fumi' means a letter). When Rennyō composed the first of the kind and read it to his disciple, Dōsai, the latter said, "This is indeed a golden word, an excellent sacred literature. Any one will understand it, however unlearned he may be." Thereupon, Rennyō said, "It is too much to call it a sacred literature. Besides, when it is called so, it seems that it contains something difficult to understand...As it is composed with a view to enlightening common people, it should be called fumi."¹ Hence the name of the fumi.

Shizutosh Sugihira.

¹ The *Kanagamori Monogatari*.