



The Answer

真如法界



Q @ A for Shinshu Buddhists

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This question will feature excerpts from: "Honen the Buddhist Saint: Essential Writings and Official biography." This book is edited by Joseph A. Fitzgerald with an introduction by Alfred Bloom.

What was Honen's Parting Message?

As Honen was drawing to the end, Seikwambo (Honen's disciple) said to him, "I have for many years been indebted to you for instruction and counsel in the way of faith in the *Nembutsu*. But now will you not write me something with your own hand, that you think will be good for me, that I may preserve it as a memento?" At this he took up his pen and wrote as follows:

"The method of final salvation that I have propounded is neither a sort of meditation, such as has been practiced by many scholars in China and Japan, nor is it a repetition of the Buddha's name by those who have studied and understood the deep meaning of it. It is nothing but the mere repetition of the 'Namu Amida Butsu,' without a doubt of His mercy, whereby one may be born into the Land of Perfect Bliss. The mere repetition with firm faith includes all the practical details, such as the threefold preparation of mind and the four practical rules.¹ If I as an individual have any doctrine more profound than this, I should miss the mercy of the two Honorable Ones, Amida and Shaka, and be left out of the Vow of the Amida Buddha. Those who believe this, though they clearly understand all the teachings Shaka taught throughout his whole life, should behave themselves like simple-minded folk, who know not a single letter, or like ignorant nuns or monks whose faith is implicitly simple. Thus without pedantic airs, they should

fervently practice the repetition of the name of Amida, and that alone."

The foregoing is without question Honen's autograph, and a truly worthy model for all men in these later degenerate times, and it is still in circulation, known as the *Ichimai Shishomon*, "One-Sheet Document."

¹The "threefold preparation of mind" refers to the three "mental states" described in Chapter 9 *intra*; the "four practical rules" as prescribed by Zendo are 1) treating with profound reverence and respect all sacred objects, 2) practicing nothing but the *Nembutsu*, 3) leaving no intervals of time between the *Nembutsu* repetitions, but keeping them up continuously, and 4) the continued practice throughout one's whole life of the foregoing three.

I will be following up with an excerpt from "The Essential Shinran: A Buddhist Path of True Entrusting" compiled and edited by Alfred Bloom. Here is a defining moment of Faith as described by Honen Shonin to his followers on page 38-40, *Life of Shinran*, Part 1, Chapters 6 to 7.

Was the Faith of Honen Different than Shinran's?

While the Venerable Genku was still alive, he was always devoted to the propagation of the doctrine of salvation through "Other-Power" and rebirth in Amida's country, and the entire world was then anxious to listen to this teaching. Not only were imperial personages ready to pluck the golden-colored flowers of the Pure Land, but noble lords of the highest ranks were glad to gaze at the silvery moon shining on the Forty-eight Vows of Amida. Nay, even people, remote and humble, were glad to come to the Venerable Teacher and pay him homage. Thus, his followers, noble and lowly, coming thick upon him, converted his residence into a sort of prosperous market. Those

who constantly attended him numbered about three hundred and eighty. Despite this, however, those who were personally cared for by the Teacher and who earnestly followed his instructions were not many, hardly numbering more than five or six.

The Shonin Zenshin (Shinran) once said to his Teacher: "Since my abandonment of the Path of Difficult Practice for that of Easy Practice and my entrance into the Gate of the Pure Land away from that of Holy Path, I have ever been under your wise guidance whereby I was made to hoard up the good seeds of release and emancipation. If not for you, what would become of me? For that reason, I know not how to give vent to my feeling of happiness and gratitude. There are, however, many fellow-believers of mine, all of whom are enjoying the friendship of belonging to the same company under one director, and yet we know not one another well as regards our inner faith, whether it is such as to enable us to be born in the country of Amida or not. Besides, I have a desire to know who among us could be real spiritual friends in our coming lives, and also to have a sort of meeting to test our faith while still living here. Will you kindly permit me to say a few words to my fellow-believers on such an occasion as seems proper?"

To this the Teacher replied, "Your request is most reasonable. You shall speak to them when they all come here tomorrow."

The next day When they were assembled, the Shonin requested them to arrange themselves into two groups according to their views attained by faith or by work. Some three hundred fellow-believers of his, were present at this meeting, seemed not to comprehend fully the sense

of this request. There were two, however, who declared themselves as belonging to the group of those who believed in the all-importance of faith: they were Seikaku who was a Hoin, Daikwashō-i, and Shaku Horen called Shinku Shonin.

Later came in Horiki, Kumagai Naozane, a lay-disciple of the Teacher and asked, "My Venerable Teacher Zenshin, what are you engaged in?" Replied the Shonin, "Sir, we are trying to make a distinction between those who believe in the all-importance of faith and those who believe in work as most essential." Said Horiki, "If this be the case, I must not be left out, for I will join the rank of those who believe in the all-importance of faith." Thereby, Zenshin took down his name as requested, while the rest of those present numbering several hundreds said not a word to say concerning the matter in question. Perhaps this silence was due to their inability to free themselves from the bondage of "self-salvation" and to their minds still being dark as regards the true diamond-like faith. Thus, as they remained silent, the Shonin who was acting as recorder, put his own name down. After a while, the Venerable Teacher said, "I also will take a seat with those who believe in the all-importance of faith." Then among his disciples, some mumbly and devoutly express their willingness to follow his example while others felt dejected over their weakness of faith.

Said the Shonin, "When we once gathered in the presence of the Teacher, the Venerable Genku, including such personages as Shoshimbo, Seikwambo, and many others, we entered unexpectedly into a heated discussion. This was raised by my remark to the effect that the faith entertained by the Teacher and myself so completely coincided that there could not be any distinction whatever between his and mine. The others present did not agree with me and raised an objection, saying 'We cannot see any reason in your remark that the faith of the Teacher and your own are one and the same. How could they be one?' I then said, 'Why should I not say that they are one? Of course, I am not so presumptuous as to imagine for a moment that I am equal to the Teacher in deep wisdom and wide learning; but as far as my faith in the Pure Land of Amida is concerned, it has been firmly established since my listening to the doctrine of salvation by "Other-Power" and I have been free from the notion of "by myself." Now, the faith of the Teacher is based upon a power other

than the Self, and so is mine. Hence my declaration that they are both one and the same.'

"Thereupon, the Venerable Teacher truly observed: 'Faith varies so long as it is based on "Self-Power," for we all have different intellectual capacities, and the faith based upon them cannot be identical; whereas the faith based upon a power other than the Self is one that is given by the Buddha to us, ignorant beings, regardless of our moral attainment and therefore, what makes up my faith cannot in any way differ from the faith embraced by Zenshin, they are identical. My faith is not the outcome of my ingenuity. Those who entertain a faith other than that which has just been referred to, may not go to the same Pure Land where I am bound for. Let this be thoroughly understood by all.'"

"With this, they held their tongues and did not speak a word."

Although Jodo Shinshu varies from Jodo Shu as explained by Jitsuen Kakehashi's book, *Bearer of the Light: The Life and Thought of Rennyo* where this is written: "...Seeking to appease the Buddha by reciting the Name for the sake of the Buddha's benevolence is like seeking to purchase a thing. That is self-power. Reciting the name means saying 'Thank you! Thank you for saving me!...Rennyo states that the meaning of saying the Names is simply to say that we are truly grateful for having been saved.'" And not "Please save me" which is a form of self-power. In everything, when it comes to interpreting

our Shin Doctrine, the final adjudicator is the Amida Buddha.

However, Shinran Shonin, Honen Shonin and Rennyo Shonin all have pointed to the way of faith in the Nembutsu. As in the case of Honen's followers, many had their own ideas, the real question is what happened when he died, and who asserted the doctrine? Those in a position to assert their points of view did what they believed to be true. In Jodo Shinshu we are very lucky to have the CWS, the Gobunsho, and the Jodo Shinshu Creed which help us understand our Jodo Shinshu Buddhist beliefs.

In the United States today, we also have many interpreting the teachings of Shinran Shonin, I can only say as Honen did, "Faith varies so long as it is based on 'Self-Power,' for we all have different intellectual capacities, and the faith based upon them cannot be identical; whereas the faith based upon a power other than the Self is one that is given by the Buddha to us, ignorant beings, regardless of our moral attainment and therefore, what makes up my faith cannot in any way differ..."

Where did Opus Go?

Opus is gone now, where did he go? I think he went to the Pure Land embraced by Wisdom and Compassion that allows him to rest in peace. So Opus, rest in peace.

I have read Opus for many years now and will miss his Sunday strip, but as in life, all things will change and now this too has passed. NAMO AMIDA BUTSU

