



# The Answer

真如浄土の御



## Q & A for Shinshu Buddhists

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This issue will cover a variety of items from different sources. The first is a preface to a translation of the *Shoshin Ge*, and the other from a 1990 resource.

### *What is the essence of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism?*

In the preface of the "Shoshin Ge: The Gatha of True Faith in the Nembutsu (third edition)", Ryukoku University, Tsuchiyama Printing, Kyoto, Japan, 1963, a wonderful description of the essential characteristic of Shin Buddhism is written:

"Buddhism is a great spiritual asset bequeathed to humanity by Sakyamuni, the enlightened One. But its scope is so large and variegated that people today may be at a loss as to how to get access to the treasure-store of Dharma. We cannot possibly read all the scriptures, nor successfully practice the methods of attaining Bodhi while busily occupied in earning a living. Besides, our intellect and practice are deceptive and misleading due to the deep-rooted, delusory self attachment which blinds us spiritually. This impossibility of attaining Bodhi on our side is made a possibility by Amida Buddha, who channels the way for us to the Castle of Enlightenment by turning all the truths and merits of Dharma over to us. Herein lies the essential characteristic of Shin Buddhism."

This description of the essential character of Shin Buddhism can clear the way for each and everyone of us to begin to understand who we are as Shin Buddhists. If you have any questions regarding this, please send them to the Answer.

### *Can you explain the Ryogemon in depth?*

Ryogemon in Romanji:

Moromoro no, **zogyo zasshu jiriki** no kokoro

o furisutete, **isshin** ni Amida Nyorai warera ga **kondo no ichidaiji no gosho, ontasuke** sorae to **tanomi** moshite soro.

**Tanomu ichinen** no toki, **Ojo ichijo ontasuke** jiji to zonji, kono ue no **shomyo** wa, go-on hoshia to zonji yorokobi moshi soro.

Kono onkotowari **chomon** moshiwake sorokoto **Gokai Shonin** no **goshusse** no go-on, shidai sojo no zenjishiki no asakarazaru gokanke no go-on to, arigataku zonji soro.

Kono ue wa, sadame okaseraruru **on-okite**, ichigo o kagiri mamori mosu beku soro.

Ryogemon (Creed) in English:

Casting aside all **auxiliary-mixed practices** and the mind of **self-centered effort**, with singleness of heart, I rely upon Amida Tathagata for the **enlightenment in this life to come**.

I believe that at the **moment of entrustment**, birth in the **Pure Land is assured**. Any Nembutsu recited thereafter shall only express gratitude to Amida.

That I am able to **hear this teaching** is due to the **coming into this world** of our **founder Shinran Shonin** and the untiring efforts of the succeeding masters, to whom I feel most grateful.

Henceforth, throughout my life, I shall be true to the **way** laid down before me.

**Auxiliary-Mixed Practices** (*Zogyo-Zasshu*) has been defined as miscellaneous, sundry or auxiliary practices. This is in light of Shan-tao's (5th Patriarch) explanation of the 5 Right Practices necessary for realization of the Pure Land: 1. Chanting Sutras (*Dokujū*), 2. Meditation (*Kansatsu*), 3. Reverence (*Raihai*), 4. Utterance of the Name (*Shomyo*), 5. Offering (*Kuyo*).

Because each of these practices are single-heartedly directed towards Amida Buddha, they are called the 5 Right Practices. Shan-

Tao divided this group into 2 categories; The Act of Right Assurance (Truly Settled) and Auxiliary Acts. The Utterance of the Name (*Shomyo*) is the Act of Right Assurance and all others are considered Auxiliary Acts. According to Shan-tao, the Act of Right Assurance (for realization of the Pure Land) is the exclusive, single hearted utterance of Amida's Name (*Namo Amida Butsu*). This is aside from any form or number of utterances.

**Zasshu or Mixed Practices** contains the meaning of auxiliary of or sundry performances, however it also refers to acts of prayer and petitions with the intent for earthly gains. Therefore, attachment to auxiliary and mixed practices implies that one's mind is "mixed" and not "truly settled" with singleness of heart. Honen Shonin simply stated, "Sundry and mixed teachings are not the practice of the Pure Land."

**Self-centered effort** (*Jiriki*) has often been called "self-power in reference to "other-power" (*Tariki*) or the power of Buddha. Self-centered effort refers to the actions of those who ignore their inherent nature and continue to practice auxiliary and mixed teachings. From the Letters of Shinran, this is written, "Self-power is the effort to attain birth, whether by invoking the names of Buddhas other than Amida and practicing good acts other than the Nembutsu, in accordance with your particular circumstances and opportunities; or by endeavoring to make yourself worthy through amending the confusion in your acts, words, and thoughts, confident of your own powers and guided by your own calculations."

**Singleness of heart** (*Isshin*) is sometimes referred to as "one-mind" or "single-heartedly." *Isshin* traditionally carried three meanings, that of: 1. The mind that is non-dualistic, 2. The mind that is exclusively focused in one direction, 3. The mind that is united with the

mind of Buddha.

It is to single-heartedly embrace the Act of Right Assurance, void of self-centered efforts and all auxiliary/mixed practices.

Regarding **Enlightenment in this life to come** (*Kondo no ichidaiji no gosho*) many translators of Rennyo Shonin's writings have been cautious with the word *gosho* (*gosho no ichidaiji*). Although it would appear to have the meaning of the "most important matter in the next life" (the birth coming immediately after this life), historically we must examine the circumstances that confront Rennyo Shonin to fully appreciate his usage of the term.

Rennyo Shonin often used the word *konjo* in referring to "this life" (secular world). *Konjo* was a life filled with political chaos and religious persecution. The growing Nembutsu movement was a threat to established schools of Buddhism, and their political allies in government equally shared their jealousy and outrage. Rennyo Shonin himself had often times issued decrees outlining codes of social behavior for the Nembutsu followers in order to avoid provocation and persecution. Therefore, in keeping with the Mahayana ideal of change and constant "birth," his use of the term *gosho* can be interpreted to imply one's "eternal (spiritual) life." It is from the moment *Shinjin* is determined ...to the endless future (from "this" moment on).

Such passages by Rennyo corresponds to other frequently used words such as *Anjin*. *Anjin* implies "peace of mind" and is often equated with *Shinjin*. However, Shinran and Kankunyo had rarely utilized this term. Rennyo on the other hand, used the word *Anjin* frequently in place of *Shinjin*, and cited a quotation from Shan-tao found in Kakunyo's *Gaijasho*, "...the mind that is established as "peace of mind" (*Anjin*) is determined as the right cause for birth in the Pure Land."

And, directly, quoting Kakunyo, "...it is quite natural to understand, that "*Anjin*" is determined as the right cause for birth in the Pure land." Thus we can see how Rennyo Shonin's sensitivity for the predicament and level of understanding of the common person motivated him to interpret Shinran's teaching in an appealing and understandable way.

**Ontasuke** presents a similar problem in interpretation as the word *gosho*. During Rennyo Shonin's time, a common practice was to petition or pray for assistance: *Butsu tasuke tamae* (Buddha, please save me!). Rennyo adamantly advised against reciting the Nembutsu with such an attitude. He stated very clearly that the Nembutsu is for "expressing our gratitude to Amida Tathagata" (*On o hojiru*). However, he

was very sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the common person, and later expanded the utilization of the phrase *tasuke tamae* to accommodate mistaken beliefs so that they may be remedied.

In his usage of the phrase *tasuke tamae*, Rennyo Shonin attached a particle and verb *to tanomu*. *To tanomu* literally means to "rely upon" or "trust in," but within his own definition, his utilization of the phrase *to tanomu* implied "to take refuge" (*Kimyo*).

Honen Shonin had taught that a person reciting the Nembutsu should be mindful of the concept of *Tasuke tamae*. Although Shinran Shonin denied such a thought, Honen's interpretation had found prevalence even among Hongwanji followers. Therefore, Rennyo again, ignored a very strict sense of doctrinal rigidity and utilized the popular notion of *tasuke tamae* as an expedient vehicle to enter into the hearts of those who held mistaken views. By attaching the particle and verb *to tanomu*, Rennyo emphasized Shinran's intent by stressing the idea of entrusting oneself (*Kimyo*).

**Utterance of Nembutsu** (*Shomyo*). The mind of *Shinjin* is the manifestation of the power of Buddha or Truth. It embodies the spiritual state of mind of the true devotee of Shinran Shonin's teaching of Nembutsu. The entirety of Shinran's thought can be crystallized in the phrase *Shinjin Shoin Shomyo Ho On* (*Shinjin* is the true cause [for realization of the Pure Land], and utterance of the Name [*Namo Amida Butsu*] is to express gratitude [for Buddha's compassion]). Therefore, Rennyo Shonin reminds us that the recitation of Nembutsu is an expression of gratitude only after the attainment of *Shinjin*. Kakunyo Shonin said this, "The embracing power of Amida Buddha makes us utter *Namo Amida Butsu*."

**Way** (*on-okite*). *On-okite* would literally imply "norms of conduct." Although in contemporary translations, *on-okite* is translated as "laws" or "way," its intended use is distinctly in reference to "norms of conduct" that the Nembutsu followers are to graciously observe.

As was previously mentioned, during the time of Rennyo Shonin, propagation of the Nembutsu teachings flourished while other schools suffered from lack of activity. This

created much resentment and jealousy. It was also a period of peasant uprisings, therefore the powers of traditional Buddhist schools and the government held suspicious feelings towards Hongwanji.

Thus, it was necessary for Rennyo Shonin to openly warn his members to refrain from provocation. He repeatedly admonished his followers to:

Maintain their faith within the depth of their own minds and not force it upon others nor demonstrate openly

Be respectful and obedient towards public officials, and not openly boast of their faith.

Not display disrespect for the gods and Bodhisattvas of other schools.

Live in accordance with the laws of the government.

This article was written as part of an appendix for a publication put out by the Southern District Dharma School Teachers' League as part of their Special Projects publication, [Buddhism and Jodoshinshu: For Dharma School Teachers](#). It was funded by Senshin Buddhist Temple's Sunao Kikunaga Memorial Scholarship for Hanamatsuri 1990. I will be selecting articles and other materials in future issues. I have slightly edited the text for space saving considerations. I liked the article because it explains the Ryogemon in a way we Shin Buddhists in the USA can understand.

## *A Final Thought*

Happy New Year, the Year of the Ox 2009!

As we embark into the new year, I hope by reading the Answer, you will begin to understand the Joy I receive by sharing my "taste" of the Nembutsu. To realize Joy is to realize Gratitude, the Jodo Shinshu Gratitude as described in the previous article.

The past year has had many good and bad occurrences happen. To us, the USA, the world. This is reality, like it or not. But with these occurrences comes a change. It is the buzz word many are using to describe the current events of our time. And this too is a principal of Buddhism we adhere to, everything is in flux. May the new year bring us nothing but Happiness & Joy!



# 2009 THE YEAR OF THE OX



OX 2009



TIGER 2010



RABBIT 2011



DRAGON 2012



SNAKE 2013



HORSE 2014



SHEEP 2015



MONKEY 2016



ROOSTER 2017



DOG 2018



BOAR 2019



RAT 2020

HEALTH, HAPPINESS & JOY TO ALL!

THE ANSWER NAMOAMIDABUTSU