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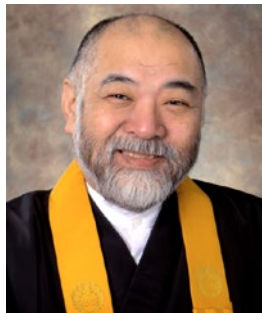
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"EVERY DAY MAY NOT BE GOOD...BUT THERE IS SOMETHING GOOD IN EVERY DAY."

- Alice Morse Earle, American Historian

REV. KAKEI NAKAGAWA, Rinban



"Shinran Shōnin's Teachings – Shōnin Ichirū no Shō"

What is taught by Shinran Shōnin and his school is that "Shinjin," the emergence of Buddha-nature, is fundamental to the teachings.

The reason for this is that by abandoning all unreliable practices and by relying upon Śākyamuni Buddha's amitābha, that means immeasurable merciful wisdom and kindness, the working of original Buddha-nature which contains the attribute of boundless-light, our deliverance is assured by the Buddha through such a power that benefits all others.

This state of being assured of deliverance is described by the commentary of the 3rd Master, the Donran Daishi T'an-luag, as "Entering the ranks of the Truly-Assured at that very instant of emergence of "Shinjin, the individual Buddha-nature."

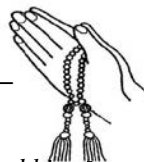
Then all subsequent Nenbutsu shall be realized as the Nenbutsu of thanksgiving to the Buddha for this assurance of the state of perfect peace and utmost bliss.

Every year in May, Fresno Betsuin and some C.C.Sanghas hold a yearly memorial service for Rennyō Shōnin, the 8th Monshū (head priest) of Honganji, who was born about 250 years after Shinran Shōnin. What we should know is, that in the history of Jōdo Shinshū, there is no one who has done more to accurately convey Shinran Shōnin's teachings to more people than Rennyō Shōnin. Rennyō Shōnin's life has been a marvel of achievement in many fields, but it is in the propagation of Buddhism that he really excelled.

When Rennyō Shōnin succeeded his father as the 8th Monshū of the Honganji sect of Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism, Honganji was a small temple with a Hondo of 18 square feet and a total of several hundred supporting members.

After Rennyō Shōnin's death at the age of 85, the teachings of Shinran Shōnin were spread all over Japan for 40 years. It is considered that more than 8 million people, about half of the total population of Japan at that time, became members of Honganji.

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REV. KAZ NAKATA



The Eight Essentials of our Jōdo Shinshū No. 3 "Neither master nor Stray Sheep" (Hi So Hi Zoku)

Hello, all Central California Sangha friends! We have not yet seen the 100-degree weather, but the hot Summer is coming closer! Next month in July, some Central California temples and Churches are planning to host in-person Hatsubon Service and, or Obon Dance activities. As a CC combined event, we will host the virtual Hatsubon Service, and Obon Dance on July 10 starting at 5:30pm. I hope I can see many of you at in-person activities. I miss you all!

In this article I would like to share one of the eight essential teachings of Jōdo Shinshū. It is *HI SO HI ZOKU*. This idea makes our Jōdo Shinshū unique. "HI" means negation. "SO" simply means master or priest, and "ZOKU" means people in general, but especially people who have blind belief. *HI SO HI ZOKU* can be translated as "Neither master nor Stray Sheep." In Buddhism, we understand that everyone, Buddhist, or non-Buddhist, has the capability of becoming a Buddha. And every single being is a unique, special, and valuable existence.

Do you remember my first article when I moved to CC? It was published in August of 2019, and the title was "What is Reverend?". I basically said there is no Sensei in humankind (in Jōdo Shinshū) and do not call me Sensei. Sensei means teacher or master. In Jōdo Shinshū, Reverend means a person who humbly shows reverence for Buddhism. In other words, a person who works hard to maintain Buddhist temples. In that sense, Jōdo Shinshū is widely known as a Lay Buddhism. That article made people think about what Jōdo Shinshū is. Nowadays, I see numbers of my Sangha friend respond same way as... Hi Sen... well... Hi Rev. Kaz! I am glad to see their reaction.

You may wonder why Reverend in Jōdo Shinshū (or Buddhism, in general) does not mean teacher nor master. One of the early discourses of the Buddha, *Majjhima Nikaya*, says that people should be treated equally, based on their words and deeds, not their origin or current status.

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Today, Rennyo Shonin is praised as the founder of the present Honganji school and the restoration of Shin Buddhism, and his portrait is hung to the right side of the Buddha's image in the Hondo of the temple.

In fact, without the work of Rennyo Shonin, the teachings of Shin Buddhism would not have reached the present day. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Honganji School in reality was practically started by Rennyo Shonin. Unlike Shinran Shonin, Rennyo Shonin has written very little; but knowing that most of his life was on the road, like the Buddha and his disciples, it is easy to understand why Rennyo Shonin, who was also an eminent scholar of Buddhism, has written so little. It is known that Rennyo's feet were constantly bleeding due to the cord of a straw rope digging into them.

So what was his miraculous method of propagation?

It was a series of letters called "Gobunsho," which are unanimously agreed upon by all as his method of propagation. The "Gobunsho" is a collection of letters that Rennyo Shonin sent to his followers. Although Rennyo Shonin's writings are limited in number, this "Gobunsho" had a very great influence on those who sought the Buddha Dharma.

In fact, it is very difficult to convey the teachings accurately through human transmission. Even if one learns from Rennyo Shonin's direct disciples, it is very difficult for the listeners to hear and understand the teachings accurately, and it is also very difficult to convey the teachings accurately through lectures. However, if Rennyo Shonin writes directly in a letter, there is no need to worry about this.

Even today, Rennyo Shonin is recognized as one of the greatest classic writers in the history of Japan prior to the 19th century who excelled in simple expression. Even uneducated ordinary people could learn the correct teachings by reading or listening to his letters.

Rennyo Shonin's writings, written mostly in Hiragana (simplified Japanese), are said to be a mirror for ordinary people to become Buddhas.

The "hand mirror for ordinary people to become Buddha" means that all the important points for all of us to live as real human beings according to the Buddha's teachings are written in the text, so keep it with you and read it like a hand mirror that you use every day.

This is why in Jodo Shinshu one of the "letters" of Rennyo Shonin is read in the morning and evening, after the chanting of the "Shoshinge" by Shinran Shonin. And, before going to bed, Rennyo Shonin's "Ryoge-mon" is recited also.

One of Rennyo Shonin's "Gobunsho" was copied from one person to another, and it was as if there were 10 Rennyo Shonins and 100 Rennyo Shonins. Then, the teachings of Shinran Shonin spread like wildfire all over Japan through the "Gobunsho" of Rennyo Shonin. The "Gobunsho" at the beginning of this article is one of the most well-known letters. I have interpreted it so that ordinary people living today can understand it.

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In Buddhism, it matters not what one believes or does not believe, but the way one lives, that is the basis for equality.

Our Jodo Shinshu founder, Shinran Shonin, expressed his understanding on equality in *A Record in Lament of Divergences*. It says, "for all sentient beings, without exception, have been our parents and brothers and sisters in the course of countless lives in many states of existence." (C.W.S. 664) He did not see boundaries of discrimination based on belief, ethnicity, culture, or social status.

Although he was an ordained priest at Mt. Hiei in Japan under the Tendai Buddhist order, he realized that he was not able to control his human desires. He deeply sensed that there should not be any distinction between priest and lay. Hence, his understanding of Jodo Shinshu led him to believe in true equality. Later in life, he commented that he did not have a single disciple, because he was simply a follower of the Nembutsu teachings. Such his idea was a key to denote transcending the typical homage relationship between priest and adherent in an organization. This was a very unique concept. Many religious leaders talk about equality and no distinction between leaders and followers, but these leaders do not behave as ordinary members of the group, and their followers regard them as special beings.

Shinran Shonin lived as an example of HI SO, not behaving like an ordinary priest or master, and HI ZOKU, not treating his Sangha friends like Stray Sheep. Now you really know why Jodo Shinshu is a perfect example of a Lay Buddhism, and how it treats everyone equally with a humble and sincere attitude. So, do not call me Sensei, it is Jodo Shinshu!

Gassho

毎年五月になると、中加では、フレスノ別院といくつかのお寺で、蓮如上人の年忌法要である『蓮如忌』が勤まります。

8代目の蓮如上人は、親鸞聖人から約250年後のお方です。

われわれが、知っておくべきは、浄土真宗の歴史で、親鸞聖人の教えを正確に、そして多くの人に伝えた人物として、蓮如上人を超える人物は現在まで誰もいないという事実です。

蓮如上人の人生は、あらゆる方面に、驚嘆にあたいする業績を残されましたが、やはり彼の本領が発揮されたのは、仏教の伝道でした。

蓮如上人がお父様の跡を継いで浄土真宗本願寺派の8代法主となられたときは、本願寺の本堂は18 feet squareの小さな小さな寺でした。Memberの総数もせいぜい数百人でした。

それが、中年以降の40年間にわたる布教で、日本全国津々浦々に親鸞聖人の教えを伝道されたので、85才で亡くなられた時には、なんと！当時の日本の総人口の約半分の800万人以上が本願寺のメンバーになっていたと考えられています。

蓮如上人は、今日、真宗中興の祖、ご再興の上人とたたえられて、お寺の本堂の仏さまの右にその肖像画が掛けられてあります。

実際には、蓮如上人の働きがなければ、浄土真宗の教えが時代を経て現在まで届くことはなかったとされています。現実の本願寺派は実質的に蓮如上人によって始まったと言っても過言ではありません。

親鸞聖人と違い、蓮如上人には著作がほとんどありませんが、その人生のほとんどを、仏陀やそのお弟子たちのように、ご布教の旅に過ごされたことを知れば、仏教の大学者でもあった蓮如上人に著書が少ない理由もうなずけるでしょう。

上人のみ足にはフラジの緒が食い込み、常に出血していたと伝えられています。

それでは、その奇跡的ともいえる布教の方法とはなんだったのでしょうか？

それは、衆目の一致するところ「御文章」と呼ばれる数多くの手紙です。「御文章」とは蓮如上人がご門徒に出されたお手紙を集めたものです。蓮如上人の著作は数が限られていますが、この「御文章」が仏法を求める人々に非常に大きな影響を与えました。

実は、人の手で教えを正確に伝えることは非常に難しいのです。蓮如上人の直弟子から教わっても、聞く側が正確に聞いて理解することは非常に難しいし、講義で正確に伝えることも非常に難しい。しかし、蓮如上人が直接手紙で書いていけば、その心配はありません。おまけに、蓮如上人は今でも、19世紀以前の日本の歴史の中で、平易な表現を得意とする最も偉大な古典作家の一人として認められています。教養のない一般人でも、彼の手紙を読んだり開いたりすることで、正しい教えを学ぶことができました。

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蓮如上人の文章は、ほとんどが平仮名で書かれており、庶民が仏になるための鏡とも言われています。庶民が仏になるための手鏡とは、「私たち全員が仏の教えに従って真の人間として生きていくための大切なポイントがすべて書かれているので、手元に置いて、毎日使う手鏡のように読みましょう」ということです。

ですから、浄土真宗では、朝夕、親鸞聖人の「正信偈」の読誦とともに、蓮如上人の「テキスト」が、蓮如上人の音楽とともに読まれます。寝る前には蓮如上人の「領解文」が読まれた。

蓮如上人の「御文章」の一つが、人から人へとコピーされ、あたかも10人の蓮如上人と100人の蓮如上人がいるかのように広がったのです。そして、親鸞聖人の教えは、蓮如上人の「御文章」を介して、日本全国に燎原の火のように広がっていったのです。

冒頭の「御文章」は、その中でも最もよく知られた手紙の一つです。それを現代に生きる一般人にもわかるように解釈してみました。