

## The Idea of Impermanence in Rennyō's *Letters*<sup>1</sup>

Tomoyasu Hayashi

Ryukoku University, Kyoto

THE 500TH YEAR MEMORIAL Service for Rennyō Shōnin (1415–1499), the Eighth Head Priest of the Hongwanji, was observed over a ten-part, one hundred day period from March through October of 1998. This commemoration took place on a scale considerably larger than the two previous memorials for Rennyō, each of which was held over periods of eight days. The 400th Year Memorial Service took place from April 7 through 14, 1894, while the 450th Year Memorial Service was held from April 10 through 17, 1948.

Indeed, the flurry of recent activities concerning Rennyō has been very gratifying. Research projects, public lectures and symposia on Rennyō, as well as groups studying his writings—his *Letters* (*Gobunshō*, or *Ofumi*) and his memoirs, known as *Rennyō shōnin goichidaiki kikigaki* (*The Recorded Sayings of the Master Rennyō*)—are still taking place in many locales. Moreover, publications related to Rennyō are now being produced in greater numbers than before.

The popular writer, Itsuki Hiroyuki, has authored two books on Rennyō. The first is entitled *Rennyō: Seizoku guyū no ningenzō* (*Rennyō: A Human Being of the Sacred and Secular Worlds*).<sup>2</sup> The second book is a drama script entitled *Rennyō: Ware fukaki fuchi yori* (*Rennyō: From the Depths of My Abyss*).<sup>3</sup> It is said that Itsuki was writing this drama at the time when the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake of January 7, 1995, occurred and that the impact that the earthquake had upon him is strongly reflected in the work. In a booklet distributed at a performance of the drama,<sup>4</sup> Itsuki states the following,

Hōnen, Shinran, Rennyō. Each of these three religious individuals was uniquely different from the others in nuance and shading. This is the way that I would describe them:

First, Hōnen was a person who taught us about easily practicing a matter of utmost importance. Next, Shinran, who was Hōnen's disciple, was a person who sought to examine this easy matter truly and deeply. In contrast, Rennyō, who relied upon Hōnen and Shinran, was a person who, throughout his life, sought with all of

his might to transmit this profound matter as widely as he could.

To practice the important matter easily;  
To examine the easy matter deeply;  
To transmit the deep matter widely.

These three aims represent the intentions which I also first had when I set out as a writer; they remain my secret aspirations that I cherish even today. Now as we dramatize Rennyo's life, I believe that it is necessary for us to meditate anew on these three aspirations.

With these words, Itsuki presents his own view of the historical development of the *nembutsu*, which flowed through Hōnen (1133–1212), Shinran (1173–1262) and Rennyo. They also reveal the view of humanity of an author who has presented one literary work after another to the world.

\* \* \*

On August 30, 1996, a second year student in my class at the university died in a traffic accident. Both the young man and his father, who had been at his side guiding him, died. This young man, who had received his driver's license five days earlier, was practicing his driving on the road when he crossed over the center line while attempting to pass a vehicle in front of him. Colliding head-on with a truck that had been approaching from the opposite direction, the vehicle in which he was riding was crushed beneath the truck. Both the young student and his father died instantly.

I went with the chief of my section at the university to take part in the funeral service at the family temple in Hyōgo Prefecture. Standing before the two caskets for the family photograph the young student's mother fought back her tears as she simply repeated the *nembutsu*. According to the young man's mother, he had just decided that he wanted to succeed his father as priest of the temple and so had received his priestly ordination in March of that year. His father had just retired from his teaching post, at which he had worked for many years. He was also just at the point of regaining his health, having overcome an illness that had lasted for over one year. The young man was twenty years old; his father was sixty-two.

My relationship with this young student was very brief. He had attended twelve sessions of my class during the spring term from April 11 through July 4. Yet he was an excellent and serious student, having submitted all of his class reports and never once having been absent from

class. It was truly regrettable that his young life ended much too soon, with his goals only partially realized.

*Namoamidabutsu.*

\* \* \*

## RENNYO'S VIEW OF IMPERMANENCE

The centerpiece of Rennyo's propagational activities and teaching can be found in his Letters (*Gobunshō*, or *Ofumi*). It is said that over two hundred fifty letters exist today and in many of them Rennyo expounds his view of the impermanence of life. Among the eighty letters included in the *Letters in the Five Fascicle Collection* (*Gojō Gobunshō*), there are thirteen which make reference to this subject,<sup>5</sup> and we can find another twelve in *Jōgai no Gobunshō*, which collected those letters not included in the five fascicle collection,<sup>6</sup> for a total of twenty-five letters which make mention of impermanence.<sup>7</sup> The sixteenth letter in the Fifth Fascicle is the famous letter "On White Ashes" (*Hakkotsu no Gobunshō*).

As we quietly consider the transient nature of human life, we realize that what is truly fleeting is our own life which is like an illusion throughout its beginning, middle and end. Thus, we have never heard of anyone living forever. Our lifetime passes so quickly. Could anyone now live for one hundred years? Will I die first, or will it be another? Will it be today or tomorrow? We do not know. It is said<sup>8</sup> that those who are left behind and those who go before are more numerous than the drops of dew that fall upon the roots of the trees and linger on the tips of their leaves.

Thus, in the morning we may have a radiant face, but in the evening come to be white ashes. When the winds of impermanence blow through, both eyes suddenly close and when our final breath is stilled forever, our radiant face turns lifeless and its beauty is altogether lost. Our family and relatives may gather and lament, but all is to no avail. Since this cannot go on for long, our body is then taken to a field and, when it has vanished as smoke in the night, all that is left is white ashes. Words cannot describe such sadness.

The transience of human life is not limited to the old or the young and so all people should immediately take to heart the most important matter of birth in the life to come, and, deeply entrusting in Amida Buddha, say the *nembutsu*.

Respectfully.<sup>9</sup>

This letter "On White Ashes" brings us into a head-on confrontation with the impermanence of human life. It counsels us to look immediately

at the nature of this transient world and take up the “most important matter of birth in the life to come” (*goshō no ichidaiji*), or, that is, the issue of eternal life. It guides us, in the midst of this impermanent world of delusion, to aspire for the eternal realm of enlightenment. For that reason it urges us to entrust in Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow and say the *nembutsu*.

The background of Rennyo’s view of impermanence can be found in an historical period which spanned three major conflicts: (1) the *Jōkyū* Disturbance of 1221, a conflict in the imperial court between the Retired Emperor Gotoba (1180–1239) and the Regent Hōjō Yoshitoki (1163–1224); (2) the War between the Southern and Northern Dynasties, a conflict between Ashikaga Takauji (1305–1358) supporting the Northern Dynasty and the Emperor Godaigo (1288–1339) of the Southern Dynasty in 1336; and (3) the *Ōnin* War, a war between the Eastern Army of Hosokawa Katsumoto (1430–1473) and the Western Army of Yamana Sōzen (1404–1473) beginning in 1467. This era of ongoing conflict culminated during the Muromachi Period (1338–1573), which was about to give way to the Period of Civil War that engulfed all of Japan.

Still, the background of Rennyo’s thought is not only limited to these historical events. It was also greatly impacted by Rennyo’s own life in which he experienced the repeated separation by death from important relatives and members of his family. Rennyo had five wives, but his first four wives passed away almost one after the other. His first wife, Nyoryō, died when he was forty-one years old. His second wife, Renyū, died when Rennyo was fifty-six years. His third wife, Nyoshō, died when he was sixty-four. His fourth wife, Shūnyo, died when he was seventy-one years of age. Finally, Rennyo was cared for by his fifth wife, Rennō, and himself passed away at the age of eighty-five years.

With his five wives, Rennyo had a total of twenty-seven children, thirteen sons and fourteen daughters, and a number of them also died at young ages. In particular, during a brief period of one year and nine months, from the twelfth month of 1471 through the eighth month of 1472, he lost five members of his family to death.

5th day of the 12th month of 1470: second wife, Renyū

1st day of the 2nd month of 1471: fifth daughter, Myōi (12 years old)

6th day of the 2nd month of 1471: eldest daughter, Nyokei (27 years)

1st day of the 8th month of 1472: eighth daughter, Ryōnin (6 years)

14th day of the 8th month of 1472: second daughter, Kengyoku (24 years)

The death of his second daughter, Kengyoku (1448–1472), is set forth in detail in the tenth letter of *Jōgai no Gobunshō*.

Kengyoku-ni was a nun, who served originally as a servant at a Zen temple, but before long she became a follower of the Jōkein lineage. Yet, drawn by inconceivable conditions from the past, she came to realize, in recent days, the *shinjin* of our tradition. Here is the reason why. On the 5th day of the 12th month of the 2nd year of *Bunmei* (1470) the woman who had been her aunt passed away. Then, even as she was deeply mourning that loss, her older sister's life came to an end on the 6th day of the 2nd month of the 3rd year of *Bunmei* (1471). Her grief was boundless, and, as a result, she herself became incurably ill. Perhaps, in the end, we must say that her illness arose out of her grief and she was never able to recover. On the 10th day of the 5th month of this year (1472) she was confined to her sick bed, and after ninety-four days she passed away.<sup>10</sup>

When she was a child, Kengyoku was placed in the care of a Zen temple where she served as a *katsujiki* or child-servant. Later, she became a follower of the Jōkein temple. She worked very hard and finally, Rennyo says, she took up residence with Rennyo in Yoshizaki and realized *shinjin* in accord with the Jōdo Shinshū tradition. In setting out her experiencing of the deaths of her step-mother and sisters one after another, as well as her own illness and death, Rennyo gives expression to his own grief. And yet on the other hand, he also affirms his belief that, since Kengyoku was established in her settled mind (*anjin*), she realized birth in the Pure Land.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, at the end of this Letter, Rennyo refers to Kengyoku as a good teacher of the Way (*zenjishiki*), and states that, for all men and women who are settled in *shinjin* of the one-thought moment of entrusting and who recite the *nembutsu* as a response in gratitude for the Buddha's benevolence, she will be a condition for their certain birth in the Pure Land.<sup>12</sup> I believe that Rennyo's view of impermanence was deepened all the more through the deaths of these members of his family.

Rennyo's *Letters* contain many words and expressions that refer to impermanence. Here are some examples: "the winds of impermanence" (*mujō no kaze*), "dream-like illusion" (*yume maboroshi*), "the ephemeral human world" (*adanaru ningenkai*), "not determined by age or youth" (*rōshō fujō*), "vainly spend one's life; vainly pass one's days" (*itazura ni akashi, itazura ni kurasu*), "those who are vigorous and lively will certainly wither away; those we meet will certainly depart" (*jōsha hissui esha jōri*), "that those who are left behind and those who go before" (*okure sakidatsu*), "transient nature of life" (*fushō*), "fleeting world" (*ukiyo*), "fleeting, like a flash of lightning or the morning dew" (*denkō chōro*), "we depart alone" (*dokko*), "a light flickering in the wind"

(*fūzen no tomoshibi*), “bubbles floating on water” (*suijō no awa*), “leaf of a banana plant” (*bashō*), and “white ashes” (*hakkotsu*). What we must keep in mind here is that all of these phrases are simply references to impermanence; they do not represent some world-weary or misanthropic view on Rennyo’s part.

#### OTHER VIEWS OF IMPERMANENCE

*The current of the flowing river flows endlessly,  
and yet the water is not the same.  
Foam floating in the eddies now disappears, now forms,  
but it never lasts for a long time.  
Human beings and their dwellings in the world are just like  
this.*

This is the opening passage of *Hōjōki* (A Record of My Ten-Foot Square Hut) written by Kamo no Chōmei (1153–1216).<sup>13</sup> As we look at Kamo no Chōmei’s view of impermanence, we see that he combines a stark look at the impermanent state of the world during his time with an attitude that allows for an objective consideration of actual conditions. At the same time, his is the posture of a solitary recluse who lived in quiet retreat in the mountains of Hino. Although he devoted himself to the Buddhadharmā, he did not become a true seeker of the Path. In addition, even while he regarded as repugnant the state of the actual world, he did not absolutely negate it.

Rennyo’s view of impermanence differs from that of Kamo no Chōmei. For Rennyo, impermanence was a truth or principle that affirmatively takes on the reality of suffering. This we can surmise from various passages from his *Letters*:

However, life in the human realm is but a brief, transient moment of life (*ittan no fushō*). The life to come contains the blissful fruition of eternal life (*yōshō no rakka*).<sup>14</sup> (*Letters* II-7)

Human beings dwell in a realm of uncertainty (*fujō no sakai*). The Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is the eternal, unchanging world (*jōjū no kuni*). Therefore, we must aspire not to remain in the uncertain human realm, but rather for birth in the eternal world of Ultimate Bliss.<sup>15</sup> (*Letters* V-11)

In that regard, human beings dwell in a realm of uncertainty, not determined by old age or youth (*rōsho fujō*). Life in this world is but a brief, transient moment of life (*ittan no fushō*). Since the life to come contains the blissful fruition of eternal life (*yōshō no rakka*),

we should not desire to remain forever in this life. In the life to come we will never fall into the realms of hell for eternity, and so by all means we must quickly understand the most important matter of the life to come (*goshō no ichidaiji*) and, entrusting in Amida's Primal Vow, become settled in *shinjin* of Other Power.<sup>16</sup> (*Jōgai no Gobunshō*116)

The phrases “transiency of life” (*pushō*) or “the realm of uncertainty” (*fujiō no sakai*) refer to the world of delusion in which we attribute life with a substantialized nature and are uncertain as to our true place of refuge. In contrast, “eternal life” (*yōshō*) and “eternal, unchanging world” (*jōjū*) refer to the “birth of non-birth” (*mushō no shō*), or that is, the eternal, universal world of enlightenment and immeasurable life. The life to come should not be understood to be simply a substantialized world that exists after death. Rather, it is the realm of awakening to an eternal, universal reality, which pervades the three worlds of the past, present and future. This is the sense behind the expression “the most important matter of the life to come” (*goshō no ichidaiji*).

#### SOURCES OF THE LETTER “ON WHITE ASHES”<sup>17</sup>

Evident within the letter “On White Ashes” are passages from the works upon which it is based. They include excerpts from *Zonkaku hōgo*<sup>18</sup> (Dharma Words of Zonkaku) by Zonkaku (1290–1373) and a passage from *Mujōkōshiki*<sup>19</sup> (A Discourse on Impermanence) of the Retired Emperor Gotoba, which is quoted in *Zonkaku hōgo*. Rennyō composed his letter “On White Ashes” by quoting first from Gotoba's *Mujōkōshiki*, from various portions of the *Zonkaku hōgo*, and also from various literary works such as the *Wakan rōeishū* (A Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poetic Recitations).<sup>20</sup>

1. The passage, “As we quietly consider the transient nature of human life,” in the letter is a quotation from the *Zonkaku hōgo*.<sup>21</sup>
2. The passages, “. . . we realize that what is truly fleeting is our own life which is like an illusion throughout its beginning, middle and end. Thus, we have never heard of anyone living forever. Our lifetime passes so quickly. Could anyone now live for a hundred years? Will I die first, or will it be another? Will it be today or tomorrow? We do not know. Those who are left behind and those who go before are more numerous than the drops of dew that fall upon the roots of the trees and linger on the tips of their leaves,” is composed based on the passages in *Mujōkōshiki*.<sup>22</sup>

3. The passages, “Thus, in the morning we may have a radiant face, but in the evening come to be white ashes . . . ,” and “. . . and, all that is left is white ashes,” are composed based on a passage in *Wakan rōeishū* and a passage in a Noh play, *Kasasotoba*.<sup>23</sup>
4. The passage, “. . . both eyes suddenly close and when our final breath is stilled forever, our radiant face turns lifeless and its beauty is altogether lost”; “our body is then taken to a field and, when it has vanished as smoke in the night”; and “not limited to the old or the young and so . . . .” are composed based on the passages in *Zonkaku hōgo*.<sup>24</sup>

In the first year of Jōgen (1207) the Retired Emperor Gotoba brought about the suppression of Hōnen’s movement of the exclusive practice of the *nembutsu*. Gotoba is said to have made the imperial journey to Kumano some twenty-nine times, delighting in reciting *waka* poetry on the road back to the court. This has a close connection with the compilation of poetry, *Shin kokin wakashū* (New Collection of Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times).<sup>25</sup> The priests of the Tōdaiji and Kōfukuji in Nara, and Enryakuji of Mt. Hiei, had pressed Gotoba to suppress the *nembutsu* order and prohibit the practice of the *nembutsu*.

As it happens, during one journey to Kumano, two court ladies whom Gotoba held in great favor, Matsumushi and Suzumushi, came to hear the teaching of the *nembutsu* and became Buddhist nuns. As a result, the pretext for suppression of the *nembutsu* movement was established. The Master Hōnen was ordered to exile to Tosa province (modern Kōchi prefecture) in Shikoku (actually Sanuki province, modern Kagawa prefecture) and his disciple Shinran was exiled to Echigo province (modern Niigata prefecture). The records of this exile refer to this as the Jōgen Suppression (*Jōgen no hōnan*). It is set forth at the end of the “Chapter of the Transformed Buddha and Land” in Shinran’s *Kyōgyōshinshō*<sup>26</sup> (A Collection of Passages Revealing the True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way) and in the appended note in Renno’s copy of the *Tannishō*<sup>27</sup> (A Record in Lament of Divergences).

However, it is said that history has a way of repeating itself. Later, after having been defeated by the Hōjō Regents in the *Jōkyū* Conflict (*Jōkyū no ran*, 1221), the Retired Emperor Gotoba, who had suppressed the *nembutsu* movement and sent both Hōnen and Shinran into exile, was himself exiled to Okinoshima (a remote island in Japan Sea, belongs to modern Shimane prefecture). In addition, his children, Retired Emperors themselves, were also sent off into exile: his eldest son, Tsuchimikado (1195–1231) to Tosa and his third son, Juntoku (1197–1242) to Sado. This remarkable incident of three Retired Emperors being



made to experience exile was an occurrence unprecedented in history.

Gotoba, the eighty-second Emperor, possessed the name, Takahira. He was the fourth son of the Emperor Takakura (1161–1181). Tsuchimikado, who was the eighty-third Emperor, was called Tamehito. Finally, Juntoku, the eighty-fourth Emperor, had the name Morinari. The poems of Gotoba and Juntoku appear as the ninety-ninth and hundredth verses in the *Hyakunin isshu* (Collection of Single Poems by a Hundred Poets).<sup>28</sup>

The poem of the Retired Emperor Gotoba

There are those who are beloved;  
 There are those who are despised.  
 Thus thinking about this meaningless world  
 I am lost in thought. (99)

*hito mo oshi*  
*hito mo urameshi*  
*ajikinaku*  
*yo wo omou yue ni*  
*mono omou mi wa*

The poem of the Retired Emperor Juntoku

It was an ancient time  
 (So long ago) that it is beyond the length  
 Of the tangled creeping vines  
 On the decaying eaves  
 Of the ancient palace. (100)

*momoshiki ya*  
*furuki nokiba no*  
*shinobu ni mo*  
*nao amari aru*  
*mukashi narikeri*

Gotoba was never, until his death, able to escape from Okinoshima. However, in his final years, the Retired Emperor who had suppressed the *nembutsu* movement himself came to take refuge in the exclusive practice of the *nembutsu* and wrote the *Mujōkōshiki*. The whereabouts of the original manuscript of the *Mujōkōshiki* are today unknown. In 1918, a copy of the text, written in the original classical Chinese characters, was discovered in a repository at the Ninnaji temple in eastern Kyoto. It is now considered to be a National Treasure.<sup>29</sup>

At the outset of the *Mujōkōshiki*, there are two lines of verse. It then proceeds in three sections, first, middle and last. Written at the end of

each section is the Name, *Namoamidabutsu*. The passages quoted within *Zonkaku hōgo* are from the middle section. In the first and last sections, the following passages are set forth respectively.

First Section:

Rejecting the suffering of the five paths and six paths of *samsaric* existence,<sup>30</sup> what we must aspire for is the pure realm of peaceful sustenance. Born between Buddhas of the past and future,<sup>31</sup> we must entrust to the compassionate Vow of Amida.

Simply recite the Name of Amida, and wish to be born in a lotus blossom.

Thus, not rising with the smoke of the verdant mountains in the east, though we hasten, we should hasten to receive the virtues of the *nembutsu*; not wiping away the dew of the mountains to the north,<sup>32</sup> though we endeavor, we should endeavor to perform the practice leading to birth.

Last Section:

Though we vow, we should vow to be companions in the assembly of *bodhisattvas* and sages; though we entrust, we should entrust in the salvation brought about by the Primal Vow of Amida.

Perfecting our contemplation of the twelve-fold chain of causation,<sup>33</sup> we lament the impermanence of *samsaric* existence and, wishing to be guided to birth for the nine grades of beings,<sup>34</sup> we recite the Name of Amida.

It is my wish that, when my life comes to an end, I may behold the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and the body of unlimited virtues. I wish that, after we have seen that Buddha, I and other believers will realize the eye of wisdom that eliminates defilement and be born in the Land of Peace and Bliss.

During his exile, the Retired Emperor Gotoba experienced with his own body the teaching that “all things are impermanent” (*shogyō mujō*) and “all things flourishing with life will certainly wither away” (*eiko seisui*). He then came to take refuge in Amida Buddha and recited the *nembutsu*, wishing to be born in the Pure Land. All beings, friend and foe alike, can be born in the Pure Land of Peace and Bliss together, in exactly the same way, through the *nembutsu*.

Gotoba, however, could go no further than desire for a birth appropriate for the nine grades of beings or desire to be guided to birth at the

moment of death. This is referred to as birth through various practices set forth in the Nineteenth Vow. Rennyo Shōnin, on the other hand, speaks of birth through *nembutsu* of Other Power as provided by the Eighteenth Vow.

In the first letter of *Mattōshō*, a collection of Shinran's letters, he states,

The idea of Amida's coming at the moment of death is for those who seek to gain birth in the Buddha Land by doing religious practices,<sup>35</sup> for they are practitioners of self-power. The moment of death is of central concern for such people, for they have not yet attained true *shinjin* . . . .

The practitioner of true *shinjin*, however, abides in the stage of the truly settled,<sup>36</sup> for he has already been grasped, never to be abandoned. There is no need to wait in anticipation for the moment of death, no need to rely on Amida's coming. At the time *shinjin* becomes settled, birth too becomes settled; there is no need for the deathbed rites that prepare one for Amida's coming.<sup>37</sup>

Shinran explains that abiding in the "stage of the truly settled" (*shōjōju*) is a benefit bestowed now, in this life, in the one-thought moment of *shinjin*. Kakunyo (1270–1351) and Rennyo referred to this benefit with the phrase, "the karmic cause of birth is perfected in ordinary life" (*heizei gōjō*), since the karmic cause of birth in the Pure Land and the realization of enlightenment is perfectly established during ordinary, everyday life and not at the moment of death.

Rennyo explains this in his letter "On Leaving One's Home in the Aspiration for Enlightenment" (*Shukke hosshin no shō*, *Letters I-2*)

In our tradition, the fundamental teaching of the Master Shinran is not that one must leave one's home in the aspiration for enlightenment; nor does it declare that one must renounce one's family and discard all worldly desires. It is simply that, when *shinjin* of Other Power is settled in the one-thought moment of taking refuge, there are no distinctions as to whether one is male or female, old or young. The *Larger Sutra* describes this as "they immediately attain birth and dwell in the stage of non-retrogression." It states in [T'an-Luan's] *Commentary*<sup>38</sup> that, "In the one-thought moment of *shinjin*, one enters the stage of the truly settled." This, then, is the teaching that one need not depend upon Amida Buddha's coming to welcome one at the moment of death" and the meaning of "the karmic cause of birth is perfected in ordinary life."<sup>39</sup>

Here Rennyo reveals that the various notions which give explanation to the realization of *shinjin*, such as "they immediately attain birth

and dwell in the stage of non-retrogression,” “the stage of the truly settled”, “not depending on Amida Buddha’s coming to welcome one at the moment of death” and “the karmic cause of birth is perfected in ordinary life,” all have the same meaning. The notion that “the karmic cause of birth is perfected in ordinary life” (*heizei gōjō*) is not taken from the standpoint that something takes place after death. Rather, it means that, in this life, one transcends death and is established in the stage of the truly settled in which birth in the Pure Land is assured. Thus, Rennyo states, one is able affirmatively to accept—and transcend—death.

### MEANINGS OF ANAKASHIKO (RESPECTFULLY) IN RENNYO’S *LETTERS*

Finally, Rennyo’s Letters invariably end with the word *anakashiko* written two times. What is the meaning of this phrase? An examination of *anakashiko* reveals that it possesses three possible meanings.<sup>40</sup>

1. An expression of deep respect and awe, such as “Respectfully yours” or “Sincerely yours.”
2. A concluding phrase: a word or expression which appears at the end of a letter.
3. A declarative adverb: a word which is followed by a proscriptive or imperative phrase, such as “by no means” (*kesshite*), “not at all” (*yume yume*) or “by all means” (*kanarazu*).

The following sentences are examples from classical Japanese literature where *anakashiko* is used in the third sense, as a declarative adverb.<sup>41</sup>

You must never behave foolishly.  
*anakashiko orokani subekarazu*  
(*Konjaku monogatari* 20-36)

By no means should you reveal this to anyone else.  
*kono koto anakashiko hito ni hirō suna*  
(*Heike monogatari* 5, Kanyōgū)

By all means, keep this a secret; by all means keep this a secret.  
*anakashiko anakashiko hisu beshi hisu beshi*  
(*Otogizōshi*)

I believe that the word *anakashiko* in Rennyo’s *Letters* functions as something more than just a simple, pro forma concluding expression. It

also functions, more importantly, as a declarative adverb. For example, compare the following:

By all means, one must never disparage them.

*aikamaete henshū wo nasu koto yume yume nakare, anakashiko  
anakashiko*

(*Letters IV-4*)<sup>42</sup>

By no means should you speak of this to anyone. By no means should you speak of this to anyone.

*aikamaete aikamaete tare nimo tare mimo katari tamaunayo,  
anakashiko*

(*Otogizōshi*)

The two sentence patterns above are quite similar. In Rennyo's Letters, when *anakashiko* appears at the conclusion of the letter and immediately follows an imperative clause in the body of the letter, it takes on the added function of a declarative adverb. That is to say, it is used to emphasize and underscore the content of the letter. It follows then, that in the letter "On White Ashes" the phrase *anakashiko anakashiko* emphasizes and calls our attention once again to the words that immediately precede it, which are,

The transience of human life is not limited to the old or the young and so all people should immediately take to heart the most important matter of birth in the life to come, and, deeply entrusting in Amida Buddha, say the *nembutsu*. (*Letters V-16*)

As we humbly read this letter anew, we should accept it as the testament of Rennyo's aspiration to transmit this deep matter widely to all beings. It is Rennyo himself saying to us, "This is my wish, so, by all means, please do so! Please do so!"

Translated by David Matsumoto

## NOTES

1. This article was originally published in Japanese as *Rennyō shōnin ni manabu* (Kyoto: Hyakkaen, 1996). An edition of English translation by David Matsumoto was published under the title, “Learning from Rennyō Shōnin,” in Hayashi Tomoyasu, *Rennyō kyōgaku no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1998), pp. 1–18. This revised translation was prepared by David Matsumoto, with editorial assistance of Eisho Nasu and Lisa Grumbach. Unless otherwise noted, all of the quoted passages have translated into English by David Matsumoto.
2. Itsuki Hiroyuki, *Rennyō: Shinzoku guyū no ningenzō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1994). This book is published based on the textbook written for a twelve broadcasts of “NHK Ningen Daigaku: Denshō ni ikiru Rennyō” at NHK educational television from April through June, 1993.
3. Itsuki Hiroyuki, *Rennyō: Ware fukaki fuchi yori* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1995). The scripts was originally published in *Chūō kōron* serially from January through April, 1995.
4. The author attended an impressive four-hour long performance of this drama produced by Zenshinza at Gion kaburenjō in Kyoto performed July 14–30, 1995. The drama was also performed at various theaters in Japan including Nagoya (December, 1995), Osaka (February, 1996), and Tokyo (November–December, 1996).
5. *Gobunshō*, I-6, 10, 11; II-1, 5, 7; III-4; IV-2, 3, 4, 13; V-11, 16, in *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. 3 (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941).
6. *Jōgai no Gobunshō*, 10, 24, 27, 38, 42, 44, 50, 51, 54, 68, 116, 117, in *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. 5 (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941).
7. For more detailed discussion of this issue, see Hayashi Tomoyasu, “Rennyō Shōnin to *Gobunshō*,” in *Rennyō kyōgaku no kenkyū*, pp. 45–57.
8. Rennyō begins the passage with the words, “It is said that . . .,” because this passage is an excerpt from the *Mujōkōshiki* (Discourse on Impermanence) by the Retired Emperor Gotoba (1180–1239) quoted in *Zonkaku hōgo* (Dharma Words of Zonkaku). For more detailed discussion of this issue, see pages 37–42 of this article.
9. *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. 3, pp 513–514.
10. *Jōgai no Gobunshō*, pp. 306–307. For a complete English translation of this letter, see David Matsumoto, “Rennyō’s Letter on Kengyoku-ni,” in *Pacific World*, Third Series (1999): pp. 23–29.
11. *Jōgai no Gobunshō*, p. 307.
12. *Jōgai no Gobunshō*, p. 308.

13. *Hōjoki* in *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, vol. 30 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1957), p. 23.
14. *Gobunshō*, II-7, *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. 3, pp. 434–436.
15. *Gobunshō*, V-11, *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. 3, pp. 507–508.
16. The letter 116 of the *Jōgai no Gobunshō*, in *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. 5, pp. 306-8.
17. For more detail analysis of the sources of this letter, see Hayashi Tomoyasu, “Rennyō Shōnin to *Gobunshō*,” pp. 50–56, and Ishida Mizumaro, *Nihon koten bungaku to Bukkyō* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shoten, 1988), pp. 63–69.
18. *Zonkaku hōgo*, in *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, vol. 3 (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941), pp. 353–374.
19. For the text of *Mujōkōshiki*, see Hosokawa Gyōshin, “*Hakkotsu no ofumi sōgen kō*,” in Hiramatsu Reizō sensei koki kinenkai, ed., *Nihon no shūkyō to bunka: Hiramatsu Reizō sensei koki kinen ronshū* (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1989), pp. 409–423.
20. *Wakan rōeishu* in *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, vol. 73 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1968).
21. *Zonkaku hōgo*, p. 360.
22. Hayashi Tomoyasu, “Rennyō Shōnin to *Gobunshō*,” pp. 51–52.
23. Compare with “though in the morning we may have a radiant face and boast of worldly paths, in the evening we become white ashes and decay in a barren field” from the *Wakan Rōeishu* (p. 255) and also with the Noh Chant of *Kasa Sotoba* “though in the morning we may have a radiant face and enjoy the worldly paths, in the evening we result in becoming white ashes, decaying in a barren field.” (*Kasasotoba*, in *Yōkyōkushū*, vol. 2, in *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, vol. 41 [Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1963], p. 261.)
24. *Zonkaku hōgo*, p. 359, and 363.
25. *Shin kokin wakashū*, in *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, vol. 28 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1958).
26. *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1 (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), pp. 289–290.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 681.
28. Munemasa Iso’o, ed., *Ogura hyakunin isshu* (Kyoto: Chūō Tosho, 1975): pp. 99–100.
29. See Hayashi Tomoyasu, “Rennyō Shōnin to *Gobunshō*,” note. 50, p. 66.
30. Five paths (*godō*) and six paths (*rokudō*) of *samsaric* existence refer to the realm of delusion; Samsara. The six paths refer to the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, fighting spirits, humans and heaven. In the five paths, the realm of fighting spirits is omitted.
31. Buddhas of the past and future (*zen-butsu go-butsu*) refers to Śākyamuni

Buddha, the Buddha of the past, and Maitreya Bodhisattva, the Buddha of the future.

32. Mountains to the north (*hoku bō*) refers to mountains to the north of Loyang in China. This range was famous for its many grave sites of nobles and warriors.

33. The twelve-fold chain of causation (*jūnien*), or twelve-linked chain of dependent origination. It consists of ignorance, actions, consciousness, mental functions and matter, six sense organs, contact, perception, desire, attachment, existence, birth, and old age and death. Śākyamuni Buddha taught that, through contemplating this twelve-fold chain of causation, one comes to know that the cause of suffering is ignorance, and that by eliminating ignorance one will eliminate suffering.

34. Guided to birth for the nine grades of beings refers to the notion that Amida Buddha will come to welcome and guide the person who is to be born in his Land to a lotus pedestal set out for the each of the nine grades of beings. In the *Contemplation Sutra* it is taught that, depending of the merits accumulated during one's lifetime, an ordinary being will realize one of nine grades of birth. Each of three levels of beings (upper, middle and lower) is capable of three kinds of birth (upper, middle and lower), thus, nine grades of birth. Depending on the grade of birth, the lotus pedestal to which one is guided is also said to differ.

35. Those who seek to gain birth in the Buddha Land by doing religious practices refers to those who strive to attain birth by performing various religious practices, accumulating the good roots of virtue thereby and relying on those merits as the cause of birth.

36. The stage of the truly settled (*shōjōju*) refers to the group of those who, in the moment when they have realized *shinjin*, are assured of gaining birth in the Pure Land and attaining enlightenment.

37. *Lamp for the Latter Ages*, in *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1, p. 523.

38. This is a reference to T'an-Luan's *Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land*.

39. *Gobunshō*, I-2, p. 404.

40. See *Kadokawa kōgojiten* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1974), p. 46, and Hayashi Tomoyasu, "Rennyō Shōnin to *Gobunshō*," p. 61.

41. Satake Akihiro, "Ofumi-sama," in *Bungaku* 41, no. 4 (1973): p. 87, and "Anakashiko," in *Bungaku* 41, no. 5 (1973): p. 101. See also Hayashi Tomoyasu, "Rennyō Shōnin to *Gobunshō*," p. 61.

42. *Gobunshō*, IV-4, pp. 479-481.