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A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF SHINRAN'S CONVERSION EXPERIENCE
FROM THE HOLY WAY OF BUDDHISM INTO THE JODO WAY
(THE IDEA OF SALVATION BY FAITH)

By

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Gift of the Author

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Chapter I

Introduction

A. The Problem of the Present Study

The size of the world is growing smaller every day. The development of means of rapid and safe transportation, the speedy supply of news materials, and all other modern inventions are bringing nations closer together. It is truly a happy thought that we are inevitably tending toward the direction of unity, because of the possibilities of constant interchange of life and thought which represent different types and varieties in human society, yet essentially the same.

All intolerance and prejudice against foreign elements in each nation are gradually being replaced by more sympathetic and more intelligent appreciation. Especially in the realm of religion we must congratulate ourselves that we no longer believe in any form of religious war or strife. By the help gained from the study of comparative religions and the modern psychology, we have begun to appreciate the rich experiences which have been accumulated in the different racial and national groups.

Therefore, as Dr. Cave expresses,

"Christianity and non-Christian religions are today in too intimate contact for the problem of their interrelation to be any longer ignored."¹

The author, as a Japanese Christian and a student in America, is confronted with the problem of the comparison between Christianity and other religions, especially Buddhism. The point of similarity and dissimilarity between Christianity and Buddhism is distinct. In Japan, the proportion of Christian population is very small in comparison with the Buddhist.² The following words, however, may indicate that something more than a matter of numbers is involved in our comparison with Buddhism and Christianity in Japan today:

"The most rushed and unobservant globe-trotter on his way through Japan on a fast express can hardly fail, if he looks out the train windows at all, to be impressed with the way in which Buddhism has seized upon every grove and every little hilltop not already preoccupied by Shinto, for the erection of a temple. If the globe-trotter visits the temples, he will find not only Buddhist monks chanting verses, but large numbers of the laity visiting the shrines and paying their respects to the Butsus. There can be no doubt that Buddhism is a living thing in Japan."³

B. The Importance of the Problem

In addition to the words of Pratt, the following

1. Cave, Sydney, Christianity and Some Living Religions of the East, p. 7
2. The number of the Protestants were about 250,000 and of Buddhists, 40,000,000 in 1933.
3. Pratt, James B., The Pilgrimage of Buddhism, p. 693

lines from "Buddhism and Buddhists In Japan" may well be quoted in order to impress the reader's mind with the importance of the present study:

"Japanese Buddhism, as it has been reorganized and purified by contact with the modern conditions, is manifesting a vitality, and producing an educated priesthood, which must command the respect and consideration of all who would understand Buddhism as it is."¹

Today, there are nine or ten strong Buddhist sects which are exerting a living influence among Japanese people. However, only two or three out of these ten sects are most important to our present consideration, because these three include the majority of the Buddhist population. Nearly one half of the forty million Buddhists are under one school of teaching, namely, the teaching of the Jodo-idea. One fourth belong to another type of Japanese Buddhism, and the third largest single school or denomination of Buddhism is occupied by Nichiren which takes ten per cent. of the rest of the Buddhist population.²

The mere survey of the statistics of the present day Buddhism in Japan shows a tremendous popularity of the

1. Armstrong, Robert C., Preface, p. vii
2. These three leading denominations of Buddhism are all originated by their native founders respectively. Of course, as we may see in our study, someone may object that Shinran could hardly be called a founder, for, his idea of salvation by faith was a consumation of a long evolution in Buddhistic thinking. But no one can deny that his new emphasis on faith and conscious effort of stressing a monotheistic belief are almost a new religion in Buddhism. Zen and Nichiren are purely a Japanese

Jodo sects which was established by Shinran-the-holy. Moreover, this sect was the first Buddhist group which heroically and daringly adopted Christian forms of worship and methods of education after the coming of Christianity to Japan. It was the forerunner and the frontline battalion of the Buddhist force in Japan to encounter the fresh attack of the new religion, namely, the Christian religion.

The strange similarity in its doctrine of salvation in Shinran's thought to that of the Christian doctrine very often causes us to wonder if, after all, religions are not seeking after the same thing, and through different means and ways, they attain exactly the same thing. Especially, when we look at the work which was accomplished by Shinran and the effect of his religious revolution upon the national life of Japan at that time, we cannot help thinking of the curious co-incidence which took place in Europe about two centuries later by the reformer Luther. Luther's doctrine corresponds precisely with the doctrine of Shinran.

How do we account for this? Should we conclude that all religions are seeking after the same thing and it does not matter whether man takes one way or another, because he

Cont'd from page 3:

origin and adapted to the peculiar genius of the race. However, we must not overlook another fact that Shinran and his disciples, as the teachers of the easy way of salvation, still hold more than fifty per cent. of the Buddhists in Japan as their followers. It is a point of vital interest for any student of religion in Japan.

will get to the place where he is intending to reach through the various ways? Or should we restrain ourselves from making a hasty generalization, but study into our own religion as well as other religions before we pass any judgment of that kind? The writer of this essay is interested to discover the truth in regard to the question which is raised above, that he will not have any uncertain generalization on this matter and may be able to appreciate the spiritual achievements of other religions with a true and intelligent understanding.

C. The Delimitation of the Problem

The problem and general approach to it are suggested in the previous discussion, but for the present purpose, we must limit the field of our study. Since the Shin-sect is the most popular and influential Buddhistic sect in Japan, and holds a similar view to that of Christianity on the doctrine of salvation, it is well justified to limit our field of study within this sect. However, the present sect is the offspring of the great religious genius Shinran. Therefore, it is obvious that the study of Shinran is the most important in this connection.

In our course of study, we may have abundant opportunity to appreciate his religious life and experience, but our final purpose is to understand the nature of his crisis experience which led him to hold the idea of the Jodo and Nembutsue - salvation by faith - as his conviction.

The primary necessity is to understand his exper-

ience correctly and to interpret it not as we would interpret but as he does it himself. We cannot assume any point which he expresses in a certain term before we fully understand exactly what he means by it. The danger is that we read our own ideas and imaginations into another's word and experience. Therefore, we must understand what Jodo means. Along with it, there are other important questions, such as, what is Nembutsu; who is Amida; what is his mission; what is his origin; how did he come to be accepted; why did Shinran emphasize the element of faith and absolute trust in Amida; what did he mean by faith; how did he manifest faith in his life; etc.?

When we consider the vastness of our field, we must limit ourselves to a very small area. It is, therefore, necessary to concentrate our study on the following two points, namely, the psychological nature of his experience and the exposition of faith as the explanation of his experience. Even this limitation will not allow us to go into a detailed study of these points. Consequently, for the present time, the writer is content to attempt an introductory study of these points and leave the more thorough work to his future study.

D. The Method of Approach

1. Since the idea of Jodo, Nembutsu, and Amida is not created by Shinran himself, but a product of a long process which was consummated in Shinran, we must trace briefly the development of the idea in India, China, and Japan up to Shinran.

2. In order to understand Shinran's crisis experience, we must know something about his background and life as a whole. We shall, therefore, touch briefly the important phases of the life and work of Shinran.

3. In addition to this study of his life and work, we must understand his age, and the direct factors which worked behind the scene to lead this young monk to search after this particular truth. We shall use well recognized scientific approaches, which are offered by the modern psychology, in our study, so that our findings will be influenced by no personal or group idea, but only by a spirit of the sympathetic understanding and intelligent appreciation of those facts which reveal the character of Shinran and the nature of his experience.

E. The Sources

For the study of Shinran's life, the following books are used:

"Source Materials of Shinran's Life", by Sasaki. The author of the book is a foremost scholar in the Shin sect, or the Pure land sect, and the president of Ohtani University (the denominational school of this sect). The book is in Japanese, and is a collection of source materials and criticism from the historical point of view.

"Life of Shinran-the-Holy", by Sasaki. It is written by the same author, and is a well recognized scholarly work.

"Life of Shinran-the-Holy", by Ohtani. It is written by the head of the sect.

For the study of his religious experience and of

his doctrine, we shall use for the most part two books as our primary sources:

"Kyo-Cyo-Shin-Sho" (Holy teachings and commentaries) This book was written by Shinran, and all scholars agree on its historical authenticity. It is a collection of teachings concerning Jodo and Amida from various Buddhist scriptures, and a commentary of his new doctrine.

"Matto-Shu" (the collection of his letters)

"Tan-I-Sho" (The Epitome of the Lamentation over the Strange Teachings). It was written after the death of Shinran by one of his direct disciples. Although the writer is not identified, the content of the writing proves its genuineness, and gives a vivid picture of Shinran's character and his belief.

For the psychological study of his religious experience we shall use the biographical method which was used by William James, and study briefly the general conclusion of the "American School" of psychologists on the matter of conversion in order to apply it to the religious experience of Shinran.

Chapter II.

Conversion According to the "American School"
Of
Psychologists

Chapter II.

Conversion According to the "American School" Of Psychologists

A. Introduction

Psychology of Religion found in America a fertile soil for pioneer work, and it received its most distinctive contributions in its early years from this source. The words of Professor Uren are very suggestive:

"America is notorious for the plethora of its religious sects. Moreover, in the New World religion has not become stereotyped, as is frequently the case in purely Roman Catholic countries."¹

A true scientific treatment in America of the subject was started by Professor G. Stanley Hall of Clark University. His great book, "Adolescence", treats of adolescence in all its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education.²

He was followed by two of his great pupils, namely, James Leuba and Edwin D. Starbuck. Leuba turned his attention to the special subject of conversion, while Starbuck was devoting himself to the study of the religious questions related to adolescence. "The Psychology of Religious Phenomena" which was written by Leuba as a

1. Uren, A. Rudolph, Recent Religious Psychology, p.1.
2. Ibid, p. 3.

result of this study became the first important contribution to the field of psychology.^{1.}

In 1899, Professor Starbuck published the first really elaborated treatment of religious phenomena by the scientific method, entitled "Psychology of Religion". Then in 1900, Professor Coe's "Spiritual Life" appeared and it indicated that Coe, although he worked independently himself, arrived at the same conclusions in the main with Starbuck. One year after the appearance of Coe's book, Professor William James of Harvard delivered the Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh University, during the years 1901-1902.^{2.}

Professor Pratt was the next to contribute to this rising branch of the modern psychology. His "Psychology of Religion" which was published in 1907 presents a strong case for Mysticism. The social origin and function of religion was strongly emphasized in the work of Professor Ames.^{3.} "The Psychology of the Religious Life" by Professor George M. Stratton was catholic in its range of instances and was based mostly on the scriptures and ethnic records of the world religions.

The second great work of James Leuba appeared in 1912, entitled "A Psychological Study of Religion: its Origin, Function, and Future". "Psychology of Religion" by

1. American Journal of Psychology, Vol. III, No. 3, April, 1896, pp. 309-370.
2. The Varieties of Religious Experience, 1903.
3. The Psychology of Religious Experience, 1910.

Coe was published in 1916, and Professor Pratt's "Religious Consciousness" in 1920. The latter is "the most helpful, and best balanced single contribution which the American School has yet made to the psychological study of religion."^{1.}

The name "American School of Religious Psychology" does not represent a single school which has a uniform view on religion or on its approach. Therefore, the purpose of the term is to indicate a group of investigators who have made a scientific study of religious psychology in America since 1899. One thing in common among them is the naturalistic tendency, that everything in the religious consciousness may, in the last analysis, be explained in terms of natural law. In all else they do not agree either on the definition of religious consciousness, or on their methods to obtain data.^{2.}

For the study of Conversion, following the suggestion of Rev. Uren, we have selected seven leading psychologists in the field, namely, E. G. Starbuck, G. A. Coe, William James, J. B. Pratt, E. S. Ames, G. M. Stratton and J. H. Leuba.^{3.}

1. E. G. Starbuck.

His basic assumption is that law prevails in

1. Uren, Op. Cit., p. 8.
2. Coe, G. A., The Psychology of Religion, Preface, p.ix.
3. Psychology of Religion, p. 4.

the universe, and that therefore no psychic event of man's life is exempt from law. He says:

"Conversion is a phenomenon natural to religious growth", and is independent of revivals. It is distinctively an adolescent phenomenon," connected with the physiological growth of that period of life."1.

He defines and analyzes the conversion experience as follows:

"In conversion the person emerges from a smaller, limited world of existence into a larger world of being". And also, "Conversion is the surrender of the personal will to be guided by the larger forces of which it is a part."2.

2. G. A. Coe.

Coe describes "Conversion" as follows:

- (1) The subject's very self seems to be profoundly changed.
- (2) The change seems to be wrought not by the subject but upon him; the control seems not to be self-control, the outcome not a result of mere growth.
- (3) The sphere of the change is the attitudes that constitute one's character or mode of life. But one's whole world may acquire new meaning; or there may be a sense of divine presence, or there may seem to come new insight into a doctrine or into a whole system of doctrine.
- (4) The change includes a sense of attaining to a higher life, or to emancipation or enlargement of self. Not seldom there is victory over habits that brought self-condemnation.3.

Coe's approach is characterized by his emphasis upon social environment and pressure as the cause of the

1. Psychology of Religion, p. 146.
2. Ibid, pp. 130ff.
3. Psychology of Religion, p. 153.

conversion experience. He does not regard the religious conversion experience as unique nor as the work of the Supernatural, but "as the result of our automatic mental process."^{1.}

3. William James.

"James sets himself", says Uren, "to solve the problem, Is religion true? He begins by demonstrating the truth of the unique value of religion in human life."^{2.}

For this reason, his definition of conversion is one of the most fair and true. He says:

"To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance are so many phases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. This is at least what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring such a moral change about."^{3.}

4. James Bisset Pratt.

The definition of Pratt is neither theological nor sociological, since he considers both of these too narrow in their intellectual scope. He gives his definition as:

"that serious and social attitude of individuals or communities towards the power or powers which they conceive as having ultimate control over their interests and destinies."^{4.}

1. Psychology of Religion, pp. 166 ff.
2. Uren, Op. Cit., p. 61.
3. Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 89.
4. The Religious Consciousness, p. 2.

Pratt, in general, has a broader definition of conversion than any of the above mentioned, for he includes the whole process involved in the making of a moral self, which to him is a group of powers united in the service of a system of purposes. A moral self is a production of one's purposes and ideals. But in the actual lives of men, purposes and ideals clash. Then, man's noble task is to make these ideals real and true in his life, subordinating the less desirable ideals or purposes. When this process of subordination of one ideal to another is completed, the moral self is created and the man is no more a divided self.¹ He also admits that there are two distinct types of conversion; namely, the volitional and moral type, and the self-surrender type.²

5. Edward Scribner Ames

Ames's view on religion is based on the functional and biological theory of progress. His main thesis is that religion is a by-product of social evolution. Religion is, therefore, subject to the same determining factors as are the other social phenomena, such as hunger, art, domesticity, patriotism.³ He defines the term 'conversion' in its narrower sense, although he admits the possibility of a broader definition. He says:

"Conversion designates the more sudden, intense, and

1. Uren, op. cit., p. 239
2. Religious consciousness, p. 150
3. The Psychology of Religious Experience, p. 204

extreme emotional experience. It is the result of immediate, direct control and suggestion on the part of evangelists, parents, and teachers. It is common among certain evangelical protestant denominations. It requires elaborate technique to produce it. Such religious bodies are constituted largely by persons who themselves experienced religion in that way, and who therefore naturally value it highly.¹

6. George Malcolm Stratton

Stratton does not give any particular definition of conversion in his famous book, "The Psychology of Religious Life". His thesis is that tension and conflict are the very essence of the whole religious movement, and he supports his position by a plethora of citations from the religious literatures of the world. He concludes that:

"Religion is the appreciation of an unseen world, usually an unseen company; it is man's whole bearing toward what seems to him the Best and Greatest".²

7. James H. Leuba

According to Leuba religion must be considered in terms of behavior rather than of feeling or purpose, and that it originates in the desire to live and live well. Religion, therefore, has no supernatural origin. All the gods, from the most primitive to the Christian Father, are mental creation.³ Leuba goes further to explain his position in regard to the nature of religious experiences. As long as man's religious experience remains in a subjective

1. Cf. op. cit., p. 236

2. P. 343

3. A Psychological Study of Religion, p. 10

area, science cannot touch it. But the moment a religious man begins to claim that his subjective experiences have an objective reality corresponding to them, then, the science of psychology has its right to question his claim, and test the validity of its objective reality. No conscious phenomenon, whether it is caused by a supernatural power or not, is outside of psycho-physical laws. Thus, he concludes that there is no religious experience which cannot be explained either by the laws of general psychology, the psychology of suggestion, or the psychology of the subconscious.

B. The Cause, Age, Nature, And Result of Conversion

1. Its Age

Starbuck concludes from his study that the relation between bodily growth and conversion is co-incident, but the relation between puberty and conversion is supplemental. Conversion does not come the year of puberty and co-incides with bodily growth. He also asserts a connection between spiritual events and physiological changes. The average age for conversion according to Starbuck's conclusion is 16.4 years.¹

Coe agrees with him on almost every point. His careful study of the statistics concerning 1784 men yielded the same result on the average age of conversion.²

1. Psychology of Religion, pp. 28,29ff
2. Spiritual Life, p. 40ff

Pratt in his general approach accepted the preceeding conclusion without much doubt. The period of adolescence, as he stresses, is the most critical but favorable period for the religious awakening.¹

Ames also accepts the general conclusions of his predecessors in the matter of ages. Elmer T. Clark, however, in his careful study of 2174 individuals in reference to the religious awakening, came to a very interesting conclusion. This study in regard to the age of the religious awakening on a large scale gave a new average age for such an experience. The average worked out by Starbuck and Coe² now is 12 years.

As a by-product of this study, he concluded more or less decisively that Starbuck's emphasis upon the close relation between puberty and religious awakening could not be proved valid. He says:

"A slight suggestion that such dependence is not absolute nor so great as many have been led to believe may be drawn from the fact that the present data have shown that the age of religious awakening is variable and has actually shifted three and a half years in less than one generation, standing now at the very beginning of adolescence."³

2. Its Cause

Pratt does not agree to make the sense of sin the main cause of conversion, which was advanced by James,

1. Psychology of Religion, p. 108ff
2. The Religious Awakening, pp.64,65.
3. Op. cit., p. 68

who made the self-surrender type of conversion a matter of real importance. Starbuck stresses plainly: "The central fact in it all is the sense of sin, while the other conditions are various manifestations of this..."¹ According to Pratt, this type was not created naturally, but by a strong influence of certain types of theology, which insisted on the total depravity of human nature and utter hopelessness of man to recover without help from outside.

He denies Starbuck's assertion that conversion is a process of struggling away from sin, believing rather that it is a striving toward righteousness.² This, as Pratt asserts, is true only of the Bunyan-Brainard type, which just fits their kind of experience because of their early theological training and conception, and imitators influenced by these cases. Pratt, however, maintains that the process in conversion is mostly the reverse. It is a process of struggling toward something new as the result of a fascinating glimpse of the possible new life, and not a process of struggling away from sin at all. Then, as a conclusion, he makes out a convincing case for the proposition that the theological training and prepossessions of the religious subject determine the fact and mode of the conversion process.³

Coe and Ames stress the physiological causes

1. Psychology of Religious Behavior, p. 58
2. Starbuck, op. cit., p. 64
3. Psychology of Religious Behavior, p.154ff

during the adolescent age. "They are," says Coe, "a mental burden, a sense of lack, a general discontent, a feeling of wanting something and wanting to be something that is not clear.¹ He also made an interesting experiment on the temperament of people. He carefully examined seventy-seven cases, of whom fifty-two were men and twenty-five were women. Nearly all were college students, sound in mind and body, and all had positive moral and religious training, for the most part, of the Methodist type. As a result, two things became clear: (1) there were many differences between types of religious experience, and that these varied greatly in degree; and (2) the difference between the types of mental organization were also many and varied. Therefore, Coe concluded, as Pratt suspected, that the abrupt and striking religious changes happen among denominations that set out to get them.²

He went further to test out the group with an experiment on hypnotism. Those who expected such amazing transformations and realized it were very strong in their susceptibility to suggestion. But those whose expectation was unfulfilled were not very suggestible and belong to the spontaneous type.³ Thus, he proved an important determinative power of temperament upon the type of religi-

1. *Spiritual Life*, p. 51
2. *Ibid.*, p. 128
3. *Psychology of Religious Behavior*, p. 6

ous experience. William James also counted the temperament as an important factor in determining the type of individual religious experience.

3. Its Nature

We now come to study the nature of the religious conversion itself. Conversion according to James, means that an experience of shifting a group of religious ideas which previously inhabited the periphery of the mental field, to the central place; i.e., the former central system is flung out to the circumference, and the peripheral system rushes in as it were to the newly created vacuum.¹

James, after his careful observation and analysis, points out that four things at least are attained by conversion: a new level of spiritual vitality, power in place of former impotence, the birth of new endurances, and a transformation of the personality. James' analysis of the conversion experience yields the following: the sense of moral bankruptcy and extreme melancholy; the sense of a higher control at the time of crisis; the achievement of moral unity; and the consequent joyous conviction that all is well. In this affective experience, loss of worry, new insight, objective change in the physical world, and ecstasy are distinguishable elements.²

As it is analyzed by James, we must recognize three distinct stages in the conversion experience: pre-

1. The Varieties Of Religious Experience, pp.125
2. Uren, op. cit., p. 67

conversion crisis, conversion, post-conversion attainment. Therefore, we shall endeavor to study the nature of the experience as it is analyzed and presented by the psychologists.

a. Pre-conversion

Starbuck, in his first attempt scientifically to study the subject, classified conversion into three stages. In the pre-conversion experience, he stresses the sense of sin.¹ This sense of sin raises an inner conflict which leads one to the conversion experience. Although he admits three types of experience in this stage, he emphasizes one type, saying that "conversion is a process of struggling away from sin, rather than a striving toward righteousness,"² and obviously, it becomes greatly intensified in this pre-crisis period. Coe, avoiding the use of theological terms such as sin or conviction, discovers the following four things involved in the structural aspect of conversion: (1) traces of mental reproduction of the individual's own earlier experiences; (2) fresh sensory elements; (3) certain instinctive impulses; and (4) a law under which these elements are characteristically combined. All these four elements are either biological or social. Therefore, to him, conversion experience is nothing but an accumulation of these physio-social exper-

1. Op. cit., p. 58
2. Ibid., p. 64

iences in individual life.

William James, believing that the unification of the inner self is a normal evolution of character, sees that the intensified melancholy state of the morbid mind can only be released by a sudden change.¹ Therefore, in the pre-crisis period, one experiences an almost unbearable sense of depression and melancholy.

b. Crisis Experience

Starbuck is too scientific to make any guess at the moment of crisis which changes the whole scene. He recognizes a great contrast between pre-conversion state of mind which always can be characterized by dejection and sadness, and the post-conversion state, which can be characterized by peace and joy.² He discovers two types of conversion, namely, 'escape from sin' and 'spiritual illumination' respectively. The former always closely connected with breaking a habit, but the latter with a normal adolescent type.³ In the study of his data, Starbuck was not very successful in receiving adequate materials from his correspondents for the reconstruction of the psychological moment in the conversion experience. As a consequence, he is able to say simply that "it is an experience in which the new life bursts forth spontaneously as the natural recoil from the sense of sin, or as a result

1. Op. cit., p. 187
2. Op. cit., p. 83
3. Ibid., p. 100

of a previous act of the will in striving toward right-
eousness.¹"

In this connection we must study his analysis of unconscious forces and of the place of the will in conversion. He agrees that some unconscious forces are at work in the moment of conversion, but he cannot discover any definite sign of the divine operation. He says, "Spontaneous awakenings are, in short, the fructification of that which has been ripening within the subliminal consciousness."² Therefore, his conclusion of this matter is purely materialistic, and the conversion experience, according to him, is not a phenomenon unique and peculiar exclusively to the religious world.³ In this matter Coe, James, and others agree with Starbuck; therefore, the divine element, even if there is any, cannot be discerned by their investigation.⁴

Self-surrender is very often necessary in order that the normal processes of growth may be unified and flow into harmony, and as Starbuck says, "the person is completely relaxed. Then faith comes in, which means that soul is in a receptive attitude."⁵

Now we must understand the place of the con-

1. Starbuck, op. cit., p. 100
2. Ibid., p. 108
3. Ibid., p. 116
4. Ibid., p. 28
5. Ibid., p. 117

scious will in this automatic working of the mind. According to Starbuck, the conscious will does two things: (1) it will strive to clarify the ideal we should be; and (2) it will initiate the effort after the ideal. Therefore, the function of the conscious will is not the means by which the great transformation can be attained, but the means by which the machinery of the sub-conscious is set in motion. Supplementing the study of Starbuck, James gives a psychological history of conversion as follows:

"An individual's ideas tend to fall into groups which are relatively independent. The habitual center of a man's personal energy is the set of ideas to which he devotes himself. When his interest is fixed upon incompatible aims, we have the phenomenon of a divided self, for no man can have two habitual centers of personal energy. Conversion then simply means that a certain set of religious ideas which inhabited the periphery of the mental field, becomes central."¹

c. The Post-conversion Experience

In his simple analysis of the experience Starbuck points out the following four points as characteristic of the post-conversion period: (1) a new sense of the worth of self; (2) the newness in his environment; (3) the sense of the reality of things which they never had before; and (4) the substitution of altruism for self-centeredness.²

Coe gives the following four points as the major characteristics of the experience: (1) the subject's very self seems to be profoundly changed; (2) this change seems

1. Uren, op. cit., p. 64ff
2. Starbuck, op. cit., p. 132

to be wrought not by the subject but upon him; (3) the sphere of the change is the attitudes that constitute one's character or mode of life; and (4) the change includes a sense of attaining to a higher life, or the emancipation¹ or enlargement of the self.

C. General Conclusions

The previous study naturally yielded the following points:

1. Conversion is distinctly an adolescent phenomenon, according to the conclusion of the modern psychology.
2. It is always conditioned by the convert's early training, environment, physical development, temperament, personality, and social influences.
3. It is a process of the integration of a distressed self. The Christian conversion is regarded by most of these psychologists as very valuable, because it gives not only a refined personality, but also gives a new level of spiritual vitality, a new power to make possible things formerly impossible, new endurance, and the transformed personality.² In other words, conversion achieves a change which is helpful to the convert and to society.
4. However, the psychologists agree that the mental mechanism works the same miracle in the non-religious field,

1. Coe, Psychology of Religion, p. 153
2. Leuba, A Psychological Study of Religion, p. 268

concluding that it is far from unique. In consequence, there is no possibility of finding any positive sign for the transcendental power at work behind the scene.

The words of Professor Leuba naturally become typical of the conclusion of the modern psychologists on the matter of the transcendental Being - God:

"It is theoretically possible for one to affirm the presence in religious experience of special psychic elements and special forms of consciousness. But I am not aware that any competent person has seriously attempted this... Religious experience is made up of the same elements as the rest of conscious life, and...these elements are connected and elaborated according to laws holding for mental life generally."¹

1. Leuba, Psychological Study of Religion, p. 268

Chapter III.

An Outline Of The Development

Of

The Jodo-Idea (An Element Of Faith) In Buddhism

Chapter III.

An Outline Of The Development Of The Jodo-Idea (An Element Of Faith) In Buddhism

A. Introduction

It is obvious that the contribution of Shinran to the idea of salvation is unique and original in its central emphasis, but we must not regard it as an entirely new creation in the history of Buddhism. It had its roots deep in the main stream of Buddhistic thinking, although the idea itself was absolutely foreign to the founder of Buddhism.

Therefore, in this chapter, we shall study the development of the Jodo-idea in India, in China, and in Japan up to the time of Shinran. It is a most interesting study in the history of religion, because it indicates a process of a non-theistic religion becoming a theistic religion, and finally becoming a mono-theistic religion.¹

B. The Development of the Jodo-idea in India

The rise of Mahayana (the Great Vehicle) definitely set a course for creating a deity in an atheistic religion. The conception of eternal Buddha created a new object of their life and worship.²

For the development of a personal god, Ashvaghosha,

1. Moffat, History of Religion, pp. 241ff
2. Pratt, Pilgrimage in Buddhism, pp. 259ff

a great poet of the first or second century A. D. contributed a great deal. He was a converted Brahman of the Little Vehicle (the primitive doctrine preached by Buddha himself) and later formulated and adopted the principles of the Great Vehicle. (Great weight is put on bhakti, loving devotion to Buddha as a divine savior, an element foreign to primitive Buddhism.)¹ The following story is told by Tasuku Harada:

"The first of the sutras mentioned above gives the story of a certain king, Mushonen by name, who being filled with a desire for salvation both for himself and others, abandoned throne and kingdom, and became a priest under the name of Hozo. This man greatly excelled in wisdom and courage. Not content with an ordinary degree of excellence, he besought Sejizai... Lord of the World, to teach him the way of becoming a buddha. Sejizai revealed to Hozo the nature and condition of the 21,000,000,000 heavens of the buddhas, and all the countries of men. When Hozo had seen the condition of all these buddhas, and had profoundly meditated upon them, he went into the presence of Sejizai and made forty-eight vows, which he promised to perform should he become a buddha. These vows include the primal vow already referred to, even the vow to save living beings, one and all, so that all who call upon his name may be born in the "Happy Land of the West" or Paradise. After Hozo made these vows, the earth quaked, flowers rained from heaven, superhuman music was heard, and a voice was heard saying: "Thou shalt surely become a buddha." He is now Amida Buddha and dwells in the heaven of Perfect Peace, which is ten billion heavens to the west of us."²

This was by no means a belief in a mono-theistic god, but rather a belief in a polytheistic thinking. However, from numerous Buddhas past, present, and future, the believers single out a few Buddhas as the special object of their ador-

1. Hopkins, E. W., History of Religion, pp. 197f
2. Harada, Tasuku, The Faith of Japan, p. 99f

ation and worship. Out of this background the idea of a personal savior God who can save all those who trust Him came to exist. The idea was attached to a certain Buddha by the name of Amitaba or Amida.¹ Thus, the germs of the Jodo (the Pure Land) where Amida reigns and receives his believers were well formed and preserved. But the further development and completion of the conception must be seen in China and Japan.

C. The Development of the Jodo-idea in China

Early in 186 B.C. sutras of the Pure Land school such as "Mu-ryo Jukyo" (Dharmakara) and other shorter sutras were translated many times. These sutras belonged to two Sukhavati Sutras. These sacred writings advocated the doctrine of salvation which was promised by Amida Buddha, and taught the joy of the Western-Paradise (Sai-Ho-Jodo).

When the work of translation was completed, we see a rise of a new school or sect of Buddhism, which was founded on this sutra. It was established by a Buddhist monk named Hin Yuan, who had been converted from Taoism and brought something of the Taoistic mystic feeling into his adopted faith.

Later from India Bodhisatsuryushi came to China³ and taught Donran (Chinese, Tanluan) the shorter sutras.

1. Pratt, op. cit., p. 244
 2. See Reicht, Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism, Ch.V
 3. Pratt, op. cit., p. 277f
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During the sixth century Doshyaku (Chinese, Taoch'o) read the writings of Donran, which led him to believe in the Pure Land doctrine. Zendo, (Shantao) in the seventh century, finally established his own sect of the Pure Land doctrine. There were others who also made special preference to the shorter sutras and the Pure Land doctrine, but Zendo was the most influential person in developing the Pure Land (Jodo) sects in Japan.

Zendo wrote a commentary on the shorter-sutras and expounded the idea that the rebirth in the Pure Land or the Western Paradise of Amida was possible only when the believers called Namu-Amidaba - "We trust the name of Amida Buddha."¹

D. The Development of the Jodo-idea in Japan

The early sign of the Jodo faith can be seen in the reign of Prince Shotoku (A.D. 500) who was a great patron of Buddhism. In his study notes of the Buddhistic sacred writings, we can find quotations from "Dai-Muryoju-Kyo" which was a basic sutra for this school of faith.

Between the sixth and the fifteenth centuries, we see a gradual development of the two schools within the tenet of the Jodo faith. The one school expressed the desire to be born in the Western-Paradise (Sai-Ho-Jodo), where there was Amida Buddha, and the other school desired to enter the

1. Hiyane, History of Japanese Religions, p. 452; also, Parker, Studies in Chinese Religions, p. 255f

Buddhist Olympus (To-Sotsu-Jodo).

In the fifteenth century the Sai-Ho-Jodo school became more dominant, and chapels were donated for the spiritual exercise, the calling "Namu-Amida-Buddha". During this period, this faith was not yet recognized as a different teaching which might organize a definite sect, but was regarded as a part of the general Buddhistic faith. Therefore, those who were striving hard to attain the Holy Way believed also in the Jodo-way at the same time. Thus, we find many Buddhist leaders of various sects in this period expressing their interest in the Jodo faith.

From this time on, we notice an accelerating development of the Jodo-idea in Japanese Buddhism. After nearly ten centuries of development the religion of atheism became more and more distinctively theistic. At the end of the Heian Period (A.D. 980-1080), the Jodo faith welcomed a great genius and champion for the furtherance of its cause. His name was Honen and he was born A.D. 1125. At the age of fifteen, he was sent to Hiei-san (one of the great centers of the Buddhist learning). Subsequently, he devoted his whole life in an endeavor to discover the truth and salvation in Buddhism. The library of the sacred books was the holy place of his religious exercise. After thirty years of study and devotion, he suddenly discovered a few passages from Zendo's writings, which said:

"The only appropriate work for obtaining the right to enter the Paradise is to call the name of Amida Buddha

incessantly with the single mind and sincere heart, regardless of the length of time. Because it is the only work which is in accordance with the great vow of Amida Buddha. 卍

Having read the passage, Honen abandoned all other works of attaining holiness and called the name of Amida Buddha. After this discovery, he left Hiei-san and built a humble cottage in Yoshimizu, expounding his newly discovered way of salvation, which could be obtained by any person who would devote himself to Amida. The spirit of the age was looking for his doctrine, and multitudes flocked together to hear his teachings. His doctrine was not only accepted by the multitude of common people, but also by the people of the aristocratic families and of the Samurai (knights class).

Thus, the Jodo faith reached its blooming height under Honen; yet, it lacked one thing which had to be done in order that it might become the most influential religion in Japan for ages to come. This was the task of Shinran-the-holy who after twenty years of struggle met Honen and accepted his faith with true understanding and penetrating religious insight. His conviction and trust in the faith of Honen was absolute and unmovable. In one of his early writings, he says:

"I heard from Honen-Shonin that there was only one way through which either good or bad people could attain the assurance of future life; therefore, whatever others may say, and even though they say that I shall fall into the Devil's Way with him, I shall not change my mind, even throughout the endless repetition of birth and re-birth."

D. Summary

Our preceding study has yielded the following points of interest:

1. The Jodo-idea was a branch of the Mahayana school which was a bold attempt to deify Buddha in a later period.
2. The Jodo-idea originated in India and developed in China, but had to wait its final completion in Japan.
3. Shinran, though a reformer, may not be rightly called a founder of a new religion, because his contribution was to collect the teachings of the Jodo school in India and China, and systematize them into a simple doctrine of faith.
4. Shinran, though he may not be a founder of a new religion, still can be rightly called a founder of a new sect, which is undoubtedly Buddhistic in its philosophical background; nevertheless, in many respects, it is unlike most of the Buddhistic teachings.
5. Another point of interest is Shinran's central experience around which he could focus his whole life's activities as a great religious leader in Japan.
6. The important question at the present stage of the discussion is, what was the nature of his experience, how did he arrive at it, what influences were brought to bear on this experience, and what was the outcome of it?

Chapter IV

Social, Intellectual, And Religious Background

Of

Shinran's Age

Chapter IV

Social, Intellectual, And Religious Background Of Shinran's Age

A. The Social Background

1. The Change in the Political World

The great stability and peace in the government under the Fujiwara family, which lasted over one hundred years, were finally broken by the war cry of the Samurai class. From the twelfth century through the fifteenth, people suffered from constant warfare and civil strife, in towns and in villages. The War of Red and White, which took place between the Taira (Peace) and Minamoto (Source) families continued until 1185 A.D., with its tragic rise and fall of these vigorous clans to power.

"In certain respects the wars of the Taira and Minamoto are analogous to the Wars of the Roses in England. The comparison can be extended to the color worn by the Japanese parties, the standards of the Minamoto being white, and those of the Taira red. The events of these wars form the subject of the most famous Japanese epic story, "Heike Monogatari" and "Genji Monogatari", which are today the delight of young and old in Japan."¹

Following this prolonged warfare, for more than four centuries people suffered from anarchy, war, famine, and all other disasters which were caused either by nature or by men. Dr. Bryce with his expressive pen describes the situation:

1. Bryce, History of the World, V.II., pp. 18,19

"Law and order are non-existent, treachery and murder are of daily occurrence, and our contempt for the faithlessness of the nobles to the Mikado, the Shogun, and the regent is increased by the numerous instances of the fidelity displayed by the lower order toward their master. Each individual is concerned only with his own advantage and the easiest means of obtaining it. The one inspiring feature of the period is the stoical courage with which the conquered, who as conquerors were merciless, met their death, - they fell upon their own swords, after the manner of the ancient Romans."¹

2. The Fall of the Great Heike Family

Although Shinran might have constantly witnessed wars and strife, the downfall of the mighty Heike family in the latter part of the twelfth century would have been one of the most impressive incidents in his early life. The final downfall of the Heike in 1185 at Dan-no-Ura (the bay of Alter) meant to them almost a complete extinction of the entire family. No one could have even suspected that such a powerful family could be extinguished from the scene by their foes. The family once boasted of beckoning back the setting sun, and claimed that if a man did not belong to the Heike family, he was not a man, but should be counted among animals. But now they were gone for ever, and their luxury, their pleasure, and their glory vanished like dew before the sun.

It impressed upon the people's mind in a forceful manner the fact that the pomp and glory of the present life was just a passing dream, for those who were living

1. Bryce, History of the World, V.II., p.19

like gods yesterday were trampled down like homeless dogs. Professor Sasaki gives us a vivid picture of the contemporary life:

"It was the time when the Heike people were fleeing for their lives that Michimori-Kyo (one of the high officials and famous warriors among the Heike family), visited Honen Shonin's hermitage, and asked him to look after his body if he received word that Michimori had fallen in the battlefield, which as a warrior Michimori expected to happen.

"Later, having received the news of Heike's defeat at Ichinotani, which was the death blow to the Heike troop, Honen sent two of his disciples to the field to find the corpse of Michimori. These two disciples therefore went to the battlefield at the request of their master, and saw numerous corpses lying on the ground. Allowing the sleeves of their robes to be freely blown by the blood-soaked breeze, they went to and fro to find the body of Michimori, but without success. However, it was too inconsiderate and foolish of them to return without the body of Michimori, they went further searching for the body along the shore of Suma and Akashi (near the harbor of Kobe), and then they turned to the river bed of Minatogawa. Finally, they found a body lying under the shadow of a thick foliage. Having seen a costly armour which clad the body, they approached it and found the name Michimori on the inside of the arm's sleeve.

"When they returned to Honen with the relics and ashes of Michimori-Kyo, they heard a sad story that Kosai-sho, the wife of Michimori, had also drowned herself off the coast of the Naruto sea. Honen-Shonin, therefore, performed a special mass for the lost souls of Michimori and his wife."

3. The Economic Unrest

The breakdown in the political system inevitably invited a wide-spread economic unrest among the people. Merchants and traders had to face a constant danger of be-

1. Sasaki, The Life of Shinran Shonin, pp. 32,33

ing robbed by the bandits and the thieves. The acquisition of wealth did not bring happiness, but frequently tragedy and sorrow to a household.

The agricultural life as well as urban trade and business activities was often paralyzed by the unpredictable outbreak of war and strife. Thus, the joy and happiness of the present life were sadly impaired, and poverty and misery spread all over the land.¹

4. The Wide-spread Sense of Discontent and of Uncertainty

The age could be defined as the age of general discontent and unrest. The following excerpts from a contemporary writing give a most vivid description of the period:

"For over two years, there were all sorts of difficulties and sufferings caused by famine. People in the different provinces wandered out of their own native land, and some forsook their homes, having gone into the mountains to live simply. Various ceremonies and prayers were offered to cure the disaster, but in vain. The streets of the Capital were full of beggars and the air was filled with the groaning of the sufferers..."²

The reports of constant riots and civil wars indicated the internal discontent of the age. Even the monks of the leading monasteries were rebellious, and there were many instances of destruction of their temples as the punishment for their misdemeanors.³

1. Sasaki, *The Life of Shinran Shonin*, p. 27ff
2. "Hojo Ki", by Chomei Kamo; this is written in 1210 by the author who was strongly influenced by the teaching of the Jodo-sect.
3. See "Meigetsu Ki", by Fujiwara, quoted by Sasaki, *op.cit.*, p.4

B. The Intellectual Background

1. The Rise of Pessimism

The general condition which was described above produced an inevitable result upon the intellectual life of the age. The sense of uncertainty and loss of the interest in life led the thinking mind toward a pessimistic view of life. The contrast between the contemporary life and the age which just preceded was most striking, for the latter represented a peaceful dreamy age of the idle nobility, and the former an age of distress and of misery. The following words are a true picture of the idle age of Fujiwara, which never expected the war and destruction of the era that should follow:

"The contemporary life (the life during the Fujiwara era) seemed like but a game of the nobility. The life was just like a beautiful dream and the administration of the border tribes was smoothly executed. The government was the place where the nobility assembled and played games, and the populace was the tax-paying machine. Hedonism and egoism which were the basis of the contemporary philosophy of life aptly illustrated in a poem by Michinaga:

'I know the world is mine,
For I am like a full moon
Which lacks no heart's desire.'

Since such was their life philosophy, such a man as Michinaga must have been the ideal person of the age. Therefore, to them the present life was itself the Gokuraku Jodo (the Extreme Happy Pure Land)."¹

This dream land, however, was now completely shattered by the terrible blow of the warlike conditions. The

1. Hiyane, History of the Japanese Religions, p. 410

nobility and populace without discrimination had to face catastrophic changes. The present life was no longer promising and happy. Everything seemed dark, hopeless, and desperate. Pessimism loomed over the horizon like a mighty peak of black storm clouds. Cheerful, easy-going, and optimistic islanders of Yamato¹ (an old name for Japan) were compelled to change their disposition. Thus, the need of a new religion which could meet this particular condition, was acute.

2. The Change in the World Outlook

The life in this period had no longer retained its color and glory of the Fujiwara era. These were all gone for ever. The leaders in the high places lost their hope and courage to look forward, but lived in the colorful memories of the past.

The age could be characterized as the atmosphere of pathos and discontent after extreme pleasure. In addition to this, the people were deeply impressed by the fact that even the throne, the home, or treasure could not be relied upon as solid foundations of life. It naturally led them to realize the vain glory of life and the impotence of man to make himself happy. Therefore, the tendency of conceit and self-reliance was replaced by that of man's impotence and disillusionment.²

1. Tsunoda, Lectures on Shinran Shonin at Columbia University, Nov., 1934
2. Hiyane, op. cit., p. 474

The general trend of philosophy in the Fujiwara era was characterized by the philosophy of the Holy Way in Buddhism; i.e., that man could attain his holiness by his own power, as in the case of Buddha himself. Man attains the highest stage of Buddhahood through severe self-discipline and devotion to the law. But the claim of this school was gradually disowned by many religious leaders, as well as by the popular minds, because the fruit of a thousand years which the Holy Way produced was not confirming, but rather discouraging. Therefore, the stress among some scholars was becoming more and more on the point that the Holy Way was suitable only for those who lived in the golden age of Buddha. Since then, the possibility of man's attaining holiness by his own merit was entirely lost.¹

3. The Need of a New Life Force

This great change in the outlook on life demanded a new life force which could lead the mind of the age. It would not be the philosophy of the Holy Way nor even the middle way which would synchronize the Holy Way with the Pure Land Way (Jodo Way). Thinking minds of the day were longing for the new light which could lead them out of their utter despair and disillusionment. It was obvious and true that the new emphasis upon the other worldliness and the salvation by the other's power were to be the new emphasis.²

1. Sasaki, op. cit., ch. 13, p. 155
2. Hiyane, op. cit., ch. 11, p. 499ff

C. Religious Background

1. The Institutionalized Religion

The monasteries of Dengyo Daishi (767-802) and Kobo Daishi (774-835), which were founded to purify the Japanese Buddhism, and to open the way for the true disciples of Buddha, who devoted themselves to the hard and difficult path of Holiness with a burning desire to reach the true Buddhahood by man's own effort, became merely the places of fame and glory.

True disciples of Buddha who taught the renunciation and suppression of worldly ambitions and lusts for power could no longer find a true religion left in these famous centers of the Japanese Buddhism in the Genpei period (1067-1218) - the Source and Peace period. The author of the doctrine and history of the Shin sect describes the age as follows:

"We must give our special attention to the existence of Hijiri (holy men) and Shyami (Sramanera) who despised the temples and led a life of sincere quest for truth in towns and villages. The temple life during the Heian period (784-848) gradually became places for earthly fame, and Jiye (Mercy-Grace), who was the teacher of Honen, confessed himself that if he would really like to lead a true spiritual life, he would of necessity have to leave the temples.

"There were many reasons why the temples became purely institutionalized. However, the foremost reason was that the system of nobility government blocked the way for the geniuses who had no privileged family background. Therefore, the only possible way for them to satisfy their unquenchable ambition was in the temples, because the priesthood was open to the people, regardless of class or wealth. Thus, the temples were used as the instrument to make successful ecclesiasts.

"In the latter half of the Heian period we could hardly find any sincere devotees in the temples. Then, those Hijiri or Shyami who despised the temples were fomenting a new atmosphere which naturally led to the sudden blossoming of the Jodo-movement in the Gempei period."¹

Consequently, the temple religion was gradually losing its ground among the populace. Yet, the enormous wealth and social prestige, which had been accumulating for centuries kept them alive and prosperous for the time being.

2. Religions Speculative Rather Than Personal and Vital

Dengyo Daishi who started the holy place of the Hiei stressed the Holy Way of attaining the Buddhahood. He introduced the strictest disciplines and rules into his order which soon became a dominant factor in the contemporary religious life. As Dr. Armstrong admirably states it:

"Tendai and Kegon sects, which represent the highest idealism in Buddhist philosophy, are valued for their philosophy rather than for their religious appeal to the people."²

Thus, on the one hand, the contemporary Buddhism was highly speculative and philosophical rather than religious in its main emphasis, but on the other hand, the institutionalized religion externally imposed all sorts of difficult works and restriction upon its followers. The following words of protest from Meiye Shonin against the new religion of Honen, which emphasized faith and trust in

1. Hashikawa, History of Shin Sect, p. 4ff

2. Armstrong, Buddhism and Buddhists in Japan, p. 65

the grace of Amida may throw some light upon the general attitude of the high ecclesiastics toward religion and the religious life:

"The main objection against Honen is in the fact that he rejects the Bodai-Shin (the will to seek the way) and regards the Shodo-mon (the Holy Way) as a group of thieves and robbers. What is the true meaning of Bodai? It is the will to uplift one's own life. Bodai, in other words, is the way for the highest enlightenment which in turn becomes the sum total of the Buddhistic wisdom. Will in this sense is the supreme desire, which is the highest wisdom and the desire of all question.

"Therefore, the Bodai is the foundation for any believer who wishes to enter into the Jodo (the Pure Land). It is perfectly legitimate to believe that Nembutsu (calling on Amida) is a way to the Jodo, but it is absolutely wrong if the Jodo believers claim their monopoly of the access to Jodo.

"Zendo never put the Bodai-Shin in a secondary place. On the contrary, he urged that one should concentrate one's devotion to Amida with the will as well as with the verbal repetition of His name. The true meaning of 'continual devotion to Amida with the will and the verbal repetition of the name' clearly indicates Zendo's belief that the Nembutsu must have its foundation upon the will. It proves that Nembutsu is the external result of the inner Bodai-Shin (the will to seek the way)"¹

3. The Corruption of the Priests

The corruptions of the religious circle were not only in their apostasy from the original Buddhistic teachings and piety, but in all other realms of their human relationships. For instance, Koya and Hiei (the two greatest centers of Buddhistic learning and devotion), as well as less prominent temples, fed a large number of monk soldiers

1. Sasaki, op. cit., p. 196-199

or mercenaries, so that they could appeal to the imperial court by force in order to put through their unjustifiable claims or desires.¹

The immorality which existed between priests and court ladies was almost an open secret. The celibacy of priests was nothing but a name. Prominent ecclesiastical leaders of the day kept not only a secret wife, but very often two or three concubines and illegitimate children.²

D. Summary

In spite of all these tendencies to discourage the people from finding any answer to life's serious questions from the contemporary religions, there were strong indications of religious hunger among the people. As we have learned, one reason for this religious hunger could be accounted for from its background. The change, uncertainty, strife, famine, and suffering in the contemporary life painted such a dark picture of despair that the mind of the people naturally turned from the fleeing world to the world of reality, which was certain, unchangeable, pure, and unearthly.

The stories which were told in the Heike Monogatari (Epic of the Peace Family) well illustrated the spiritual hunger of the age. Triumph of faith against utter

1. Ohtani, The Life of Shinran Shonin, p. 19ff
2. Sasaki, op. cit., p. 133ff

despair and death was forcefully presented in this impressive epic drama. When man faced serious matters like life and death, no mere philosophy nor ethics could satisfy him. Such satisfaction could be found only in a faith which made him feel some reality which transcended human comprehension.

Thus, our study has revealed to us the picture of the age, which was the stage for Shinran who was the champion for the faith in Amida, which faith grew out of his deep experience. Therefore, in the coming chapter, we must proceed to study his life and experience.

Chapter V.

The Contributing Religious Influences
Upon His Life

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The Contributing Religious Influences Upon His Life

A. His Home Life

When the spring was approaching with its beauty and splendour, a lovely child was born in a country village of Hino (the Sun-field) which was located in the south-eastern part of Kyoto. This event took place under the reign of Emperor Takakura, 1143 A.D. The father of the child was Arinori Hino, who belonged to the great Fujiwara family and ranked high in the Imperial Court at that time. As a legend tells us, Arinori, who had no son to succeed his family, prayed to the gods and Buddha to give him a son. This new-born babe was the answer to his prayer.^{1.}

If we take the preceding account of his birth and of his family background, Shinran Shonin had the lineage of a noble family. As a matter of fact, the loyal followers of his teaching always advocate his noble lineage because it increases the splendour of his life and personality. However, there is another tradition which gives us a different picture of his family background. It stresses the common origin of Shinran, denying his

1. Cf. Ohtani, S., The Life of Shinran Shonin, p. 3.

noble lineage. Whether we accept either view is not very important to us in our study. Probably the words of Professor Hashikawa are very adequate to follow:

"The doubt which was expressed by some critics as to the family background of Shinran was never substantially proved. On the contrary, in one of the oldest lists of family lineage of Shinran¹ we find a clear statement that Shinran was the son of Arinori Hino. However, since Arinori only belonged to a branch family of the great Fujiwara, it is easy to suspect that the social prestige which he enjoyed could not be the same as that was enjoyed by those who belonged to the main family. Moreover, it is quite unnecessary to insist that he should come out of a noble family. We should rather stress the fact that the Hino family was noted for its scholarly endeavors and religious devotion."²

Thus, the safest way for us to judge this matter is to take a moderate view. We may admit that he had an indirect relation to a great noble family, but we need not exalt his high social background. On the contrary, it is more desirable to know that his home was religious, scholarly, and well-bred. Due to the fact that the historical criticism on the biographical materials of Shinran are not yet completed and that there is much to be said in regard to many stories attached to his early life, we cannot study adequately his early home background. Nevertheless, the following two remarks which are found in

1. Honganji Rusushiki Soden Keizu (the Prime Vow Temple's Traditional Genealogy).
2. Hashikawa, T., A Short History of Shin Sect, pp.11-12.

the legend may reveal something of his home experiences. Professor Sasaki, as well as Ohtani Hossu, (Lord Abbot), record the fact that Shinran could not speak a word until he became two years old. Then, suddenly one autumn day, while he was sitting on his father's lap, he recited the six letters of the Amida faith (Namu-Amida-Buddah).^{1.} Furthermore, when he was three years old, he was found making statues of Buddha with clay, and bowing towards the West where the Jodo was supposed to be located.^{2.} We may not accept these traditions as they are recorded, but still they are enough proof that he was surrounded by a very religious home atmosphere which made him acquire attitudes such as making a bow or repeating the name of Amida. In addition, his father had a title called Nyudo (which indicated the one who entered the way of Buddah), although he was not a priest.

B. His Religious Traits

From the brief study of his early home life, we can safely conclude that Shinran had an early religious training from his parents and he himself showed astonishing response to it. Further proof of his religious traits can be seen in the fact that he renounced his worldly course of life and entered a monastery at the age of nine.

1. Ohtani, Op. Cit., p. 13 and Sasaki, Op. Cit., p. 2.
2. Ibid.

The historians of the sect are not at all in harmony as to what was the basic reason for Shinran's entering the monastery at such an early age. However, the following events undoubtedly influenced the young mind to make this decision:

(1) He could not enjoy his home life very long, for either by death or political flight Shinran had to lose his father and to be adopted by his uncle, Noritauna, when he was four years old (some say at the age of nine.)

(2) His mother died in the year 1150, which was a year before the suspected death of his father.

(3) Some ancient documents say that Shinran, after the death of his parents, could never recover from the melancholy state of mind. His uncle did his best to equip him adequately as a son of a noble family, employing for him the first-rank teachers of the composition of poetry, of the writings, and of the readings of the Chinese Classics. Yet these teachers could bring no cheer to the heart of Shinran. Having seen the futility of consoling him by those things, one of his teachers finally gave him "Hoke Kyo Shiyohon" (One of the Lotus Flower Sutras),^{1.} which made him seem satisfied.

In addition to these preceding reasons, we must not forget the general conditions which existed at that time. The political unrest which brought much suffer-

1. Cf. Sasaki, Op. Cit., p. 6; Cf. Ohtani, Op. Cit., pp. 4, 13, and Hashikawa, Op. Cit., p. 12.

ing and destruction to the beautiful and peaceful ancient city of Kyoto must have been a strong factor in influencing Shinran to renounce the world so early.

Thus we see a very early religious awakening which came to Shinran. The Buddhistic ceremony of tonsure and of consecration was certainly most impressive to young Shinran and was recalled from time to time during the course of his life in the monastery. This undoubtedly made him ever determined to find the truth of salvation in Buddhism.^{1.}

C. His Monastic Life

The sincerity, as well as the seriousness of the determination in his childhood, could be seen in Shinran's earnest devotion to the monastic duties, rules, and vows. He entered one of the Tendai monasteries on mount Hiei.^{2.} We have already studied in the last chapter the general conditions existing among the priests and the monks. This monastery was no exception. Although the founder of the Hiei monastery upheld the pure doctrine and practice of the Holy Way, his followers, after three hundred years, were keeping only the letter of his strict rules. Therefore, this great center of Buddhistic learning and training, which boasted its three thousand cloisters,

1. Sasaki, Ibid., p. 7; Cf. Armstrong, Op. Cit., p. 87.

2. Armstrong, Ibid, pp. 11 ff.

and its immeasurable wealth, was nothing but a great haven for ambitious youth who were in some way handicapped in gaining a worldly fame other than through the ecclesiastical channel.¹ Consequently, the true spiritual and religious atmosphere was almost, if not entirely absent from the general life in the monastery. However, we must not overlook a small minority who were always sincere in devoting themselves to the truth which they were seeking. Moreover, there were numbers of scholarly saints who could command the respect of the people and kept the fire of the holy altar burning.²

Such was the condition in the Hiei when young Shinran entered, but he stayed there for twenty years striving with unceasing effort to reach the truth and enlightenment which he was earnestly seeking. The words of the Lord Abbot Ohtani are appropriate to describe his life in the monastery:

"Shinran spent twenty years for the quest of truth in this mountain. Undoubtedly, he studied intently the doctrine of Tendai and other sacred books in order to discover the path of salvation and highest truth of Buddhism. From time to time, he might have visited the lecture halls of the leading scholars in Nara (the ancient Buddhistic center). It was a life of quest for the final enlightenment of Buddhahood and the supreme wisdom of Nirvana through the path of the Holy Way. It was a long story of a pilgrim's untiring progress toward the final discovery of the Jodo-way."³

1. Sasaki, op. cit., ch. II
2. Hashikawa, op. cit., pp., 4,5
3. Ohtani, op. cit., pp. 26,27

It is therefore not hard to imagine how he felt toward the existing conditions in the monastery and the conduct of his fellow monks. Thus, he writes in his great work:

"Whenever I contemplate the matter of religion, I see a sad decline of the holy practice and achievements among the followers of the Holy Way, but the evidence of the true enlightenment through the Jodo-way is eminent. I see that the leaders in the temple are so ignorant about the true teachings that they cannot even distinguish the Jodo-way, which is true and permanent, from the Holy Way, which is false and temporal. Even the teachers of ethics in the holy city are wondering how to choose the right path, without a clear knowledge of right and wrong."¹

D. His Indebtedness to Hichi Koso

To our great regret, he did not leave any writings which could be assigned to this period of his life. However, in his later writings, we have sufficient materials to work back to this period in order that we may find the religious influences which he received during this period of learning and struggle. Shinran, as he confessed freely in his later writings, had seven ideal personalities throughout India, China, and Japan; namely, Ryuju (Nagarjuna) and Tenshin (Vasubandhu) in India, Donran (Tanluan), Doshyaku (Taoh'o), and Zendo (Shanto) in China, and finally, Ganshin and Genku in Japan.²

It is therefore important to know something about the thought and belief of these people. For instance, the

1. "Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho" (Holy teach. and commentaries)
2. Harada, op.cit., p98; Also, "Koso Wasan", by Shinran

gradual development of the idea of Amida among them must be briefly surveyed.

Ruyju taught that Amida was the Supreme Ruler who could command our highest respect and devotion. Tenshin also advocated the idea of the Supreme Universal Ruler, so that just as the imperial decree would reach even the furthest corner of the border countries, the Light of Amida would cover the whole world. He therefore named him as Jin-Juppo-Mugeko-Nyorai (the Blessed One whose light shines in the whole Universe without being interrupted).

Donran in his new approach brought up an idea of a filial relationship of man to Amida, yet, his main emphasis was still on the fidelity between the Imperial ruler and his subjects. Doshyaku, learning the idea from Doran, stressed more of the filial relation. Since then the relation of Amida to men became not so much of the royal relationship but of the filial relationship of a child to his father. Consequently, this idea of man's filial relation to Amida became more and more strong in the later period. Thus, the main emphasis of Ganshin and Genku in Japan was always on the latter idea.¹

Undoubtedly Shinran came to the writings of these leaders often in the course of his reading on the Buddhist Scriptures. The passages such as the following might

1. Sasaki, op. cit., pp. 421, 422

have been a perplexing problem to him who was trying to lift himself up by his own power and to reach the holiness of Buddhahood:

"The teaching in the Scripture (Kwan Muryoju Kyo) concerning the ten recitations of Amida's name is an indication of that by which the enlightenment and salvation are achieved. Although the number is designated as ten, it is not necessary to take the number literally."¹ Or,

"When one sets a fire upon the frozen lake, the fiercer the flame becomes, the sooner the frozen surface melts. Then, in proportion as the ice melts, the fire loses its power. Therefore, even if the common people, who may be ignorant about the nature of enlightenment that excludes the desire for birth, still wish to be born into the Jodo, believing that the recitation of Amida's name is all-sufficient, their wrong desire, which ordinarily is an obstacle in the way of salvation, shall be melted away, because the Jodo is the land where there is no birth and no desire."²

The meaning of these passages is not hard to grasp, but for Shinran who was struggling under the influence of the Holy Way, they looked too simple and good to believe. The time was not ripe for him to take these and other words of faith as his own. He had to go on fighting an almost impossible battle in order that he might attain the holiness by his own power.

E. His Devotion to the Prince Shotoku

Aside from these seven men, we can trace Shinran's special devotion and indebtedness to the Prince

1. "Rontchu", by Donran Daishi, quoted in "Faith and Criticism", by Shugaku Yamabe, p. 89
2. "Tai Kyo", by Donran Daishi, quoted by Yamabe, op.cit., p.90

Shotoku (the Prince Holy Virtue, who was a great patron of the early Buddhism in the seventh century and left many excellent commentaries on the Buddhists' writings, including the writings containing the Jodo ideas).¹

As the biographers unanimously tell us, one of his most significant experiences during this period had much to do with the Prince Shotoku. At the age of nineteen, he left the Hiei mountain for a few months, and made a series of pilgrimages on the various temples and holy places. Finally, he reached the temple which was erected upon the grave of Prince Shotoku at Isonaga, near Kyoto. Since Shotoku Taishi was the patron of his religion and the object of Shinran's reverence, he decided to stay there and to have a special ceremony and meditation for three days. On his second night, he heard a voice and saw a shining figure of the Prince Shotoku in his trance. The Prince Shotoku told him:

"We holy trinity of Buddhism come to the earth to uplift men; and the nation of the Sun-rise is well fitted for the teaching of the Great Vehicle (later Buddhism). Hearken to my words with care, for thy life shall be but for ten odd years: Thou shalt end thy life and enter into the Pure Land. Retain, therefore, the good faith, the good faith of the true Bosatus."²

The interpretation of these words is not uniform

1. Armstrong, op. cit., p. 6ff. Cf. Discussion on Shinran's relation to the Prince Shotoku, by Umehara, in the "Study of Shinran", V. 32,33
2. Sasaki, op. cit., p.51

among the Japanese scholars. But it is safe to follow Professor Sasaki's interpretation which advocates the idea that Shinran in this experience realized the shortness of human life and the desirability of the teachings of the Great Vehicle for the Japanese.

This experience spurred Shinran's religious devotion and made him more zealous to reach the truth which would solve the maze of life and death. His devotion and zeal in his scholastic achievement made him stand above the crowd. Before he reached the age of twenty, he won the reputation of being the most learned man in the mountain, and he was appointed head of Seikoin (Holy Light Cloister). He was often called by his fellow students, "Hokurei no Shinryu" (the divine dragon of the Northern Peak), and if his future could be predicted by his past and present success, this brilliant young scholar would have been appointed as the Tendai Zasu (the supreme head of th¹ Tendai monastery).

Furthermore, he was fortunate to have such influential friends as Jien and Kanazane, for the former was the powerful high ecclesiast who had been already appointed as the Tendai Zasu four times, and the latter was the prime minister of the empire. Thus, all the circumstances pointed toward his sure success. However, the most important problem for Shinran was unsolved; namely,

1. Sasaki, op. cit., pp. 56,57

the quest for the true salvation. Would he be satisfied by the worldly success and fame which were so richly bestowed upon him?

D. Summary

In this chapter we have studied Shinran's life from his birth to his experience of the trance at Isonaga temple. His home life was a brief and unhappy one, because he had to lose his parents while he was still very young.

However, we noticed that his parents were religiously inclined, and Shinran showed his keen interest in religious things even from his early childhood. The decision to enter the monastery was made at the age of nine. Although the reason for his action could not be determined positively, we judge from his fidelity and sincere devotion to the life of the monastery, that the experience at age nine was no mere accident, but made some impact upon the tender heart of Shinran.

Then we studied the influence and possible relation of the Hichi koso (the seven High Priests) to Shinran. It indicated his early acquaintance with the teaching of the Jodo, although it did not bear fruit until a much later period of his life. At the end of the chapter we have observed his experience of trance at the memorial temple of the Prince Shotoku at Isonaga.

At the same time, we noticed the success and fame which adorned his life of sincere devotion. All these things were contributory factors to his crisis experience. Especially, the experience at Isonaga set him thinking more than ever. Although we know very little about his life between this experience and the final experience of conversion, the ten years which divided these two experiences were quietly fermenting the germ which was laid in his soul at this time.

Chapter VI.

The Conversion Experience

Of

Shinran Shonin

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The Conversion Experience Of Shinran Shonin

A. The Pre-Conversion Period

1. The restlessness intensified.

In spite of the fame and success which he accumulated as the result of his sincere devotion to the life of Buddhism, it could not give him any sense of satisfaction. He grew more and more restless as days went by. From the fall of 1171 to the spring of 1172, the year of his final experience, we see his desperate effort to find salvation, which was indicated by his frequent observances of fast and meditation in this period.

September of 1171 he held a special mass for seventeen days in honor of his deceased parents, which was undoubtedly an indication of his new determination to fight through his religious battle. After the ceremony he sent presents to two of his former teachers, by which he expressed his appreciation of their assistance, but at the same time, he meant the gifts to be a souvenir, in the event that he had to depart from these friends during his final struggle of religious devotion.

Then, he announced a special retreat and meditation for twenty-one days, beginning October 1st of the

same year. The rumor that Shinran had started his fasting for twenty-one days reached the ear of Jien, his aged teacher. Because of Jien's pleading Shinran came back from the meditation after twenty-one days; otherwise, he would have stayed there longer. Shinran could not obtain his solution by this act, and the learned teacher, who did his best to help Shinran, failed miserably.

2. The Trance in The Rokkaku-do.

The sense of grief and sorrow was increasing every day. In the early part of December Shinran again went up into the mountain and secluded himself in a hut called the Rokkaku-do for a long meditation. The monks of the hut worried about Shinran, because if he stayed in seclusion too long, they felt he would surely starve to death.

However, Shinran kept his special act of devotion for twenty-one days. At the end of this hard exercise he had another trance similar to the one which he had ten years previously. He saw in his trance a shining "Nyorai Kwanzon" (the Omnipotent Mercy Goddess), and heard her speak, "Well done, well done, for thy desire is now about to be satisfied and my desire is also well satisfied."^{1.}

Being encouraged by this experience he made a

1. Prof. Sasaki, G., Studies in the source material for the biography of Shinran, pp. 18 ff.

fresh determination to continue his hard exercise in a different form. During the severe winter season, he attended the hut of Rokkaku-do every night for the period of a hundred days. The heavy snow, piercing wind, and all other hardships could not daunt his spirit. No clue was left for anyone to know exactly what happened to Shinran, but some extraordinary decision was reached after the hundred days. At the last day of this series of exercises, the authority of the Hiei was alarmed by the letter of his resignation and withdrawal from the order. His letter reads:

"I submit this letter through the Hyobu (a rank of the Hiei monastery). Though I stayed in the mountain, gathering the fruits of the tree of the supreme wisdom, and drawing of the water from the well of the unfathomable mystery, the slowness of my mind always kept me away from the path of deliverance which would have assured me the freedom from error and sin, and made me afraid of death; but as a result of my strict observance of the holy rules and of the divine protection, I finally received a revelation from Sanno Gongen (the Spirit of the Holy Mountain) and a message from Bosatsu, which fully satisfied my long desire.

"Therefore, I humbly submit my resignation to you from my former prominent and glorious position. This is my last greeting to you before I bury myself entirely from the world."¹.

B. The Crisis Experience and Conversion

1. Honen Shonin's Hermitage

The crisis was reached. The promising and suc-

1. Sasaki, Op. Cit., p. 69.

cessful young monk left the place of fame with a new outlook on life, which could only be satisfied by one thing, viz., an experience of the heart.

The dawn was near but the twilight was still lingering around him. Early the next morning, Shinran, who left the abode of the Hiei, was walking aimlessly on a street of Kyoto in a brooding mood. Lo, here came a monk who was once his fellow monk at the Hiei! He noticed Shinran and asked him why he was not staying at the Hiei. After listening to Shinran's confession of spiritual grief and sorrow, he told him that Shinran should go to the hermitage of Yoshimizu, which was the dwelling place of Honen Shonin, because he was such an unusual teacher for a man's spiritual enlightenment.

Being led by this friend, Shinran came to the presence of Honen Shonin. The last hold of darkness disappeared and the ray of the dawn softly spread over the horizon. The following words in the "Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho" must have been a true reflection of his experience of that memorable morning:

"The light which penetrates through a thick wall of tempting flesh and reaches the depth of our heart is the light which destroys the darkness which spreads all over our cold and frozen hearts and warms them."¹

The quiet, fatherly words of Honen Shonin soaked into the

1. Quoted by Prof. Sasaki, Op. Cit., pp. 75-76.

thirsty soul of Shinran like the dew on the grass. Honen opened his own heart and poured his whole conviction into the heart of this earnest seeker. "Stop to think", said Honen Shonin,

"that we are evil, degraded, and sinful, but if Amida made his primal vow to save us from sin, then why does our sinful nature interfere with the will of Amida? If we just believe firmly that we shall be born into the Jodo and repeat 'Namu Amida Butsu' (we trust in the name of Amida), regardless of whether we are good or bad, or man or woman, we shall all be saved. If ten people repeat 'Namu Amida Butsu', every one of the ten shall be saved; if a hundred people repeat 'Namu Amida Butsu', every one of the hundred shall enter the Jodo."

"In my deep sorrow I was desperately struggling to find the way of salvation. With tears and moans I explored the store of the old library of the Hiei. Accidentally, my eyes fell upon the lines from the 'Ohojo yoshyu' ('the Teachings to Attain the Jodo'), which was written by Genshin. It gave me a dim light in the distance. Finally, one day I came across the words of Zendo in his 'Sanzen gi'. It said, 'If a man concentrate his mind to repeat the name of Amida without ceasing, whether he sits or stands, or in day or at night, and never cease to repeat, he is the one who does the true work and follows the primal vow of Amida.' When I finished reading it, I felt as though a million thunders fell upon me and a ray of bright light flashed through the darkness of my mind like lightning. Then, mysteriously my sense of burden and of sin was shattered by the thunder and the grief on my heart disappeared instantly. Thus, I realized the only way of salvation from sin and death. It was the reason why I gave myself up to the vow of Amida, who attained the excellence of Buddhahood in millions of aeons before.

"The faith that the sinful man of common stock can enter into the Jodo through the gate of Nembutsu is proved by the earnest words of

Buddha himself and it is not made by a foolish desire of common men."¹.

After having told these things, Honen concluded and said:

"If I am mistaken about the will of Amida, which is one chance out of a million, be sure that you are coming to the place where I Genku am."².

2. Conversion Attained

The light finally reached the young heart of this earnest seeker. In the pages of "Tani sho"³. Shinran's beloved disciple, Yuien-bo, caught the vivid words of Shinran which expressed his trust and devotion to Honen:

"There is no other reason for me to believe in Amida than to believe the words of my good teacher (Honen) who told me, 'Shinran, you had better offer Nembutsu and receive the mercy of Amida.' Therefore, I really don't know whether Nembutsu is the true way to be born into the Jodo, or the way to fall into hell. But even if I might be fooled by Honen Shonin and fall into hell because of my Nembutsu, I shall have no regret whatsoever, for were I a man who could attain the Buddhahood by my own work, and I had fallen into hell because of my Nembutsu, then, I might have some reason to be angry about my teacher's having fooled me. But I knew at that time, that my inevitable abode would be in hell, regardless of whether I was trying to keep the Holy Way or not; then, why should I be angry that through my teacher I was fooled?"⁴.

1. Quoted by Prof. Sasaki, Op. Cit., pp. 75-76.
2. Ibid, p. 77.
3. See P. 81 of this thesis.
4. "Tanisho", Part I., Chapter I.

The absolute faith in Amida was attained through the mediatorship of Honen Shonin. Shinran humbly stated his change of life in the following words:

"I, Shinran, a common man and a fool finally decided to forsake all impure works (required by the Holy Way) and expressed my absolute trust in the primal vow (of Amida) in the year of Kennin, (1172, A.D.)."1.

C. The Post-Conversion Period

1. The Unified Self

His experience of conversion was one of the most striking instances among Buddhists. Shinran, both emotionally and intellectually, made a complete turn through this experience. The former restless and divided self was at last unified, and the light of salvation came upon his life. He was looking for this one thing all through his twenty years of struggle in the Tandai Monastery. Therefore, when he found his answer, his joy was overwhelming. He expressed his joy freely and threw his whole personality into the fatherly love of Honen Shonin with adoration and trust. This conversion experience stayed with him always and he never lost its flavor nor its color. Therefore, when he wrote his main scripture (Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho), he could not help recording the following words:

"It is so true that the vow of Amida is the true word which should not be rejected, and is the

1. "Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho", Epilogue.

hope which transcends the world. Therefore, do not hesitate to believe it, if you are fortunate enough to hear it. How happy I am, for I, Shinran, could read the rare collections of the holy writings which were prepared in India and in China; moreover, I could meet the unusual teacher who taught me the Primal Vow of Amida. Therefore, I adore the wisdom and enlightenment of the true belief, which led me to be more and more thankful to the mercy and grace of Amida. Thus, I rejoice over the teachings which I heard and enjoy the experience which I received."¹.

At the end of the same writing he records his joy, thus:

"O how happy I am! My heart which received the salvation by his Grace clings fast to the vow of Amida, and my joyful thought is floating in the wide sea of Mercy. The more I contemplate on the great mercy of Amida and the gracious teachings of my teachers, the more I feel the rising tide of joy and thanksgiving within me."².

The conversion experience of Shinran Shonin on March 14, 1172 wholly changed his life. The altruistic attitude which he attained through the faith in Amida at that time formed a fixed and permanent habit. His thankful heart toward Amida's mercy and grace kept him constantly upon a higher level of life.

2. The Growth in His Faith Attitude

His radical and catastrophic change brought him a unified personality which was once miserably divided. Therefore, the more he grew into his new life, the stronger his desire to contrast the faith attitude over against the system of accumulating merits or self-power. During this period Shinran and his fellow monks had some arguments on the nature of faith. As Yuien-bo recorded it in his

1. "Shin Shu Seitan" (the Holy Bible of Shin Shu), p. 5.
2. Ibid., p. 337.

1.
book, Shinran said to his friends that the nature and essence of his faith was the same with that of his teacher Honen Shonin. Having heard this, his friends angrily protested that Shinran placed himself with Honen who should be far above any one of his followers. In turn, Shinran said that if he had made a comparison between his wisdom and ability with that of his teacher, of course, he wronged him grievously. But since he had just compared his faith in Amida with his teacher's faith, why it should not be wrong, for there should be no difference in the attitude of faith toward the mercy of Amida. It must be the same. The following account well illustrates this controversy:

"In spite of his clear-cut answer, his friends were not satisfied, and presented the case before Honen Shonin. The answer of Honen Shonin was simple. 'My faith', said he, 'is given by Amida and Shinran's faith is also from Amida. Therefore, they are one. If, then, anyone has a different faith, in all probability he shall not come to the same Jodo toward which I am heading.'²

This story well illustrated his conscious effort to grow into faith. The world of "Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho" and "Tani sho" reveals an inside world of Shinran's life of faith.³

1. "Tani sho", postlude, in "Shin Shu Seiten", Op. Cit., pp. 31-32.
2. Ibid, p. 32.
3. Umehara, Op. Cit., Vol. XI.

3. The Manifestations of Faith in His Life

Briefly, we must observe the effect of his faith upon his subsequent life. Judging from the ordinary standards of the world, his life after the conversion was not happy nor successful, because the path which he had chosen was the thorny path of religious pioneers who have always had to endure all sorts of hardships.

As the first manifestation of his new faith attitude, he dared to break his priestly celibacy and marry a daughter of Kanezane Fujiwara.^{1.} This was two years after his conversion. His marriage occasioned fierce criticism from all quarters. Although his marriage was a happy one, he could not enjoy the peace and rest of his home life very long. It was rather his first step toward a long journey of pathfinding.

A few years after the marriage, a long smouldering opposition against Honen's group became ablaze. The protest and pressure from the high ecclesiastical quarters became too strong even for the Imperial power to resist. Because of Honen and his followers' policy of absolute non-resistance, the final outbreak of the persecution had been postponed indefinitely for many years until that moment. But, at last the Imperial decree was published against the Honen tenet, and even a private repetition of Nembutsu brought punishment upon all the individuals concerned.

1. Sasaki, Op. Cit., Chap. IX, pp. 103-110.

Honen at the age of seventy-five was exiled to a distant island of the inland sea and Shinran to the north-eastern wilds of the main land. Four out of twelve outstanding disciples of Honen were executed, and eight were exiled. The meeting places were closed and no one would dare to repeat Nembutsu. In this time of crisis, Shinran's faith shone out beautifully. Having heard that he was sentenced to exile, he said:

"If my great teacher were not exiled, how could I go into exile? If, then, I do not go into exile, who can teach the people in the far distance the mercy of Amida? Therefore, this is a great gift from my teacher that I am going to be exiled. My teacher Honen is the manifestation of Seishi (Bosatsu of the Wisdom personified) and the Prince Sholtoku is the incarnation of Kwannon (the Bosatsu of the Mercy personified). Therefore, I am following the lead of these great Bosatsus in order that I may propagate the primal Vow of Amida."¹.

His statement was no fool's brag, because he knew very well the difficulties and dangers which he had to encounter in Echigo (a cold, uncultivated region in the northern part of Japan) with his young wife and a child. His faith in Amida carried him through and in spite of difficulties, he gradually gathered a small band of believers around him, which before the death of Shinran became a strong body of a vital faith movement in the northeastern provinces.

1. "Goden sho" quoted by Umehara, "Studies of Shinran Shonin", Vol. 19, pp. 15-16.
2. Hashikawa, Op. Cit., pp. 16-25.

His unflinching faith and love won the admiration of people everywhere he went, and his followers increased their number year after year. But the increase of his followers did not always mean a joy to him, because this did not give him much material return, but gave causes for anxiety. The most tragic experience in this period of his life was the apostasy of his own son from the Jodo faith into a kind of witchcraft. Under the necessity of keeping the unity and discipline of the group, he had to write a fiery letter of condemnation to his son.^{1.}

Besides his own son, there were a few more who claimed strange doctrines. Therefore, he had to write letters constantly to confirm his followers who were confronted by various heresies among their leaders. Even in such difficult situations his faith never failed. While his days drew nigh to their end, his material difficulties increased. His livelihood was sustained by small contributions which were coming from his followers in the northeastern region, but they were by no means enough to allow him comfort and ease.^{2.}

Finally the day came, when this blessed soul could enter his long desired rest. When the end of

1. Sasaki, Op. Cit., pp. 606 ff.
2. Hashikawa, Op. Cit., pp. 26 ff.

earthly life was approaching, he wrote:

"Trust the Vow of Amida.
Everyone who believes in the Primal Vow shall
receive the supreme blessing; for it rejects
none but receives everyone."¹.

1. Umehara, Op. Cit., Vol. 32.

Chapter VII

General Conclusion

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The purpose of our study has been, as it was stated in the introductory chapter, two-fold; namely, to present the psychological nature of Shinran's religious conversion, and to analyze the faith experience which caused and carried it to the fulfilment. The method of our study was presented in the second chapter; i.e., we endeavored to apply the general conclusion of the modern Psychology of Religion advanced by the "American School". They give the following points as their conclusion of the study of conversion:

1. It is distinctly an adolescent phenomenon;
2. It is conditioned by the convert's early training, environment, physical development, temperament, personality, and immediate social influence;
3. It is a process of the integration of a distressed self;
4. It is a phenomenon not limited to the religious field, but one possible to any mental activity;
5. It is not the working of any transcendental being.

Therefore, as it was suggested by Professor Leuba that "religious experience is made up of the same elements as the rest of conscious life, and that these elements are connected and elaborated according to laws holding for mental life generally",¹ we applied carefully the methods

1. Leuba, op. cit., p.268

and theories advanced by him and other modern psychologists to our study of Shinran's conversion experience. In the main, Shinran's conversion runs true to the psychologists' theories.

The direct and indirect causes which led him to the final experience were carefully studied for the general background. The intellectual, social, and religious change which took place in the contemporary life of his age was very significant and striking. The age was characterized by pessimism and dissillusionment. His early religious training at home was fair, and he responded quickly to religious matter. The life in the Tendai Monastery was characterized by a constant religious devotion and untiring scholastic pursuits. His genius was well recognized by his fellow monks as well as by his superiors, so that if he had stayed in the Tendai Monastery, he would have become the head of the order.

Then, we have made a study of the teachings of the Hichi koso (the seven High Priests), since he expressed his great indebtedness to them. The life in the monastery went on smoothly and before he reached the age of twenty, he was appointed head of a large cloister. In his nineteenth year, he had a trance which was closely connected with the Prince Shotoku, who was one of the two most influential persons in his life.

In the fifth chapter we analyzed his conversion experience according to the general classification of the

psychologists of religion, namely, the pre-conversion period, the crisis experience, and the post-conversion. The restlessness of Shinran was intensified in the first phase of his conversion, and his inner struggle was manifested in his frequent pilgrimages to the holy places and the temples. An outstanding experience of trance again occurred during this period which undoubtedly influenced his final decision to leave the monastery.

In the second phase of his conversion, Shinran visited Honen Shonin, and it was the culminating point in his experience. In the post-conversion period, we noticed the changes which came into his life, his growth in the new faith and its effect upon his later life.

Our study has revealed the possibility of applying the general findings of the modern psychology of religion on conversion, to the experience of Shinran. However, some phases of Shinran's experience do not co-incide with the analysis of the modern psychology. Although the psychologists agree that the conversion is distinctly an adolescent phenomenon, the final experience came to Shinran in his adulthood. Furthermore, the sense of release did not come as the conviction of emancipation from the bondage of sin, but as the assurance of delivery from the inherently evil world into the ideal Pure Land of the West. The basic idea of sin in Buddhism is that sin is not something which man commits against the will of God, but the state of things in which man suffers the inescapable grip of evil.

Therefore, the salvation which Shinran was seeking was the assurance of complete deliverance of his life from this evil world.

Although his conversion could be described as of the self-surrender and catastrophic type, it was not purely emotional, but also volitional and normal, because he realized the logical impossibility of the Holy Way and the reasonableness of salvation offered by the Jodo teachings, which was confirmed by his own experience in the exercise of the act of faith. Furthermore, we must not overlook the fact that he was trained for over twenty years in the strict teaching of the Holy Way. Consequently, his conversion followed the Buddhistic idea of salvation from this evil world, but it did not follow the way he had been trained, which was the Holy Way. It came as a completely new idea. Professor Pratt states that the self-surrender type is not created naturally, but by a strong influence of a certain type of theology, which insists on the total depravity of human nature and utter hopelessness of man to recover from it without help from outside.¹ Shinran was constantly taught that man could obtain his salvation through his own effort and self-discipline. Therefore, he took this step not because he was taught to believe the inability of man to save himself, but because he found that

1. Pratt, Psychology of Religious Consciousness, p. 58

after twenty years of trying to save himself according to this method he had failed to do so. And he turned to the method directly opposed to his training; namely, the teaching of Honen that faith was the true way.

In this connection, we must notice that his experience came quite spontaneously without any previous anticipation of such a sudden change. The modern psychologists tell us that the self-surrender type is always produced among those who expect to have such an experience. The pressure which drove him to this final experience was both external and internal. But the dominant motivation was from within; namely, his desire for salvation. There was no revival meeting nor hymn singing. He went through the whole experience with a distinctive spontaneity. When he met Honen privately on that memorable morning, he made the complete turn by his own will. The psychological nature of the faith act, and the objective elements in the persons, writings, and discipline involved, and the character of Amida, in whom he put his trust for mercy and grace have not been fully developed. A conclusion of the modern psychologists that the self-surrender type is produced by the suggestions and social pressure of a group could not be sustained in Shinran's case.¹

Now we come to the most important phase of our study in this connection. The general conclusion of modern psychology excludes the working of any divine being. Does

1. Coe, Spiritual Life, p. 51

Shinran's experience confirm the conclusion of modern psychology in regard to such a being? The complete answer to this question cannot be given in this short study, but we may point out a few suggestions, which may throw some light upon this matter. In the first place, Shinran was dissatisfied by the teachings and working of his subjective religion, which religion excluded the working of any transcendental reality, and taught that man reaches the super-human life only through his own power. Secondly, in his struggle, Shinran attended the holy places and the temples most of which were dedicated either to some gods or some divine Buddhas. Therefore, his whole personality was under the influence of some being who was above the human. Thirdly, he staked his faith on the vow of Amida, who was the supreme being in his conception. Honen's talk was all about Amida and his supreme vow, and Shinran's response was to trust in the fidelity of Amida, his mercy and grace. Therefore, it is impossible to believe that his experience was possible without the faith in the objective reality of Amida. To him Amida was objective and all of his psychological methods of establishing relations with Amida were objective and personal; e.g., the Trust and Vow, and the dispensation of Mercy and Grace. This method does use all the automatic mental mechanism which psychologists agree is at the disposal of a human being, but this mechanism is, as in the case of the will, the instrument used, because it is the personality of the one concerned in the experience. But

When that is granted, the problem has not yet been solved, because the inner experience of Shinran at that particular moment is not accounted for. For in psychology we have studied just the behavior and experience in behaving.

Therefore, we conclude that these early psychologists of the American School have been too limited and provincial in their study of this problem of religious conversion and cannot therefore adequately account for Shinran's experience. Their positive conclusions seem to be sound as far as they go, but their negative conclusions are unwarrantable.

This study presents a close similarity between Shinran's faith experience and that of Christian experience, such as the experience of St. Paul, Martin Luther, and John Wesley. The author hopes to make a further study to compare the faith experience of Shinran with that of Evangelical Christians; in which such questions as to what is the relation of the God of the Christian to that of Shinran? or What, if any, is the relation of the Christ of this experience to that of Amida? will be carefully treated.

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1. [Faint, illegible text]

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