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## HO-ONKO and GRATITUDE.

Celebrating Ho-onko every year, we think about Shinran Shonin's life and death and we try to find the meaning of what this man did for us and our every-day-living. Through many years, through centuries, the meaning of Shinran Shonin's life and death gained in interpretations and commentaries. Some people even started to talk about "the religion of Shinran Shonin" and about "the thoughts of Shinran Shonin", and some of them demand that we have to feel gratitude for Shinran, because he was so kind leaving behind for us his writings. Such feelings are just the manifestation of the understanding Shinran Shonin as just a very ordinary person comparable, for example, with today's businessman.

But actually, it wasn't like that. Shinran Shonin wasn't just an ordinary man being involved only in samsaric, this-world-things. He was a SHINJIN person. It means he was in touch with Buddhahood through the Name, Namu-Amida-Butsu, and whole his life used to be an experience of transformation. The transformation of a very ordinary person into Buddha, through the passage of the Pure Land.

The Pure Land of Shinran Shonin was not visible like any geographical place. It was an intimate, individual experience of Shinran, which was noticeable to others as SHINJIN. Every SHINJIN-person experiences his/her individual Pure Land and his/her individual spiritual growing up there as he/she is physically just a human and living among all of us.

Such SHINJIN experience is the ultimate goal of the message delivered by Shakyamuni Buddha, transmitted later by so-called 7 patriarchs and pronounced finally by Shinran Shonin about 780 years ago. It is the very goal, because in SHINJIN our painful karma, all our troubles burn and are melted, are transformed into the karma of Buddha.

To be transformed into Buddha is the best thing that ever could happen. Our pain disappears for ever, our limitations are left behind, we don't make any troubles to ourselves, either to others. Our mind becomes calm, but dynamic and bright. Our passions gradually are changed into compassion for all beings. Our mental and physical fixations are step-by-step gone. We can solve any problem just acting naturally, without special effort, and always find the best way to get out of any difficulties.

SHINJIN status makes us able to run our life in this world in the best for us way, as well as it makes us free from any other troubles for ever, because getting SHINJIN we become equal to Maitreya Buddha. We become the person able to listen to Buddha directly, able ask Buddha directly.

Such experience was of Shinran Shonin and his writings are all about it. It is NOT any teaching of Shinran Shonin. It is absolutely genuine teaching of Buddha Shakyamuni. And Shinran Shonin proved how this teaching can individually work in any human case. He reported this experience in his writings.

Do we owe any gratitude to him? Yes, we do. We owe him our gratitude as to any person kind to us, and helpful. But, first of all, we should be grateful to the Cause of our transformation, to the very Cause of our possibility to become Buddha, to get rid of our troubles. And this very Cause is not Shinran Shonin, but HONGAN, the merits of Amida Buddha put into His Name - NAMU AMIDA BUTSU.

Shinran Shonin responded to the Energy of HONGAN, which is not visible, but

works. And this is the essence of Jodo Shinshu - the responding to HONGAN first by saying NAMU AMIDA BUTSU, later by listening to NAMU AMIDA BUTSU, finally by becoming NAMU AMIDA BUTSU itself.

Such transformation is the most exciting, most fantastic experience for every human being. This experience dominated Shinran's life. And Ho-onko is the occasion to refresh our awareness about HONGAN, the most unusual Gift of Amida Buddha to all humans and other beings, HONGAN which can dominate our life, making us one with Amida Buddha through His Name - NAMU AMIDA BUTSU.