

MON

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Hearing and Gate

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*Life is not the only thing that's ours.
Along with life, Death is equally "ours."*

—Kiyozawa Manshi, religious philosopher (1863–1903)

Source: Kiyozawa Manshi zenshū, vol. 6 清沢満之全集 (第六卷)
(Collected Works of Kiyozawa Manshi, vol. 6) (Iwanami Shoten: 2003), p. 111.





INTERVIEW 03.

Rev. Renato Landim de Souza

Missionary of the Nambei (South America) District

Meirō kaikatsu 明朗快活 (bright and cheerful) wagen aigo 和顔愛語 (a gentle face and friendly words)

Perhaps there are no better words to describe him than these.

Rev. Renato Landim de Souza is a Shinshū Ōtani-ha Buddhist monk who continues his daily studies of Shin Buddhism while serving as a minister at the Campinas Nambei Honganji in Campinas, a city about 100 km north of São Paulo. As the words of the lead caption show, Renato is always smiling and brimming with energy, and is beloved by the followers.

Looking back, Renato recalled that “my family was Catholic, but I wasn’t interested in religion when I was a child.” However, he said that he became conscious of religion for the first time when he faced the grief from the loss of his maternal grandfather. “I was my deceased grandfather’s first grandchild. Perhaps because of that he was very affectionate to me, and I really loved him. My grandfather’s Christian funeral was held at the local church, and that was the first event that made me conscious of religion.”

Afterwards, when he was 13 years old, Renato encountered Shin Buddhist teachings. “When I was

working with my family on the farm of a Japanese Brazilian, the father of our foreman, Mr. Nobuo Takano, passed away, and the funeral was held at Mr. Takano’s home. I felt a strange emotion at the sight of the mourners chanting loudly the Shōshinge (Hymn of True Faith). Until then I had thought that a funeral was simply an occasion of a sad parting from the deceased, and that it was normal for the mourners to shed tears of grief. I learned then the teaching that even within the grief encountered in a Shin Buddhist funeral, we grasp clearly just what ‘death’ really is, and we learn that for ourselves through the deceased.”

Renato continued, “Three years after that, the funeral of an acquaintance was held at the Pereira Barreto Nambei Honganji temple. That was my first chance to worship in a Shin Buddhist temple. A person I met there, Ms. Sakako Toyoda, taught me many things about the practice of the nenbutsu, starting with the basics. As a result, I became deeply interested.”

He began to study Japanese from the age of 18, and participated in regular Buddhist services and study groups. At 28, he felt a desire to learn more about Shin Buddhist teachings, and resolved to study overseas in

Japan.

“I studied Shin Buddhist teachings for one year at Ōtani Senshū Seminary in Kyoto while living in a dormitory. In that dormitory, I lived together with the friends I made there, studying and laughing together, and sometimes working out together. During that time, whenever I met with a situation I couldn’t deal with by myself, I was able to discover the way to proceed thanks to my teachers and friends. I believe that those encounters made me what I am today.”

Renato said, “Brazil is a multiethnic nation, but I would like to go beyond differences of language and culture, and convey Shin Buddhist teachings widely to many people.” His favorite maxim is “Shōgai monbō 生涯聞法 (listening to Buddha’s teaching for a lifetime).”

Renato became 40 years old in 2020. His desire to study Shin Buddhist teachings grew stronger, and he decided to make his second overseas study trip to Japan. He said, “From this spring, I will study even more deeply at Otani University’s Graduate School in Kyoto.” His journey for “listening to Buddha’s teachings for a lifetime” still continues.



The truly venerable (Honzon)

When people visit a temple, we see them place their hands together in *gasshō* as they stand before a Buddha statue. This act of worship is directed toward the statue of the Honzon, the main object of veneration. They *gasshō* before it with heads bowed to “the truly venerable.”

Shinran regarded the six-letter Name *Namu Amida Butsu* as his Honzon throughout his life. But what about us? What do we truly venerate in our life? What makes us naturally want to bow our heads in worship?

To answer that, we have to stand before the Honzon with hands together in *gasshō*. By this act of worship, as we stand there with heads bowed in humility, we realize we have yet to realize what is ultimately important to us. Instead, we trust in things not worthy of our trust. We are tricked all the time by the small stuff dangled before our eyes.

We encounter all kinds of situations in our lives. They all influence us to some degree. But what supports our life so that we can live no matter what?

And does our way of life reflect our understanding of it?

Seen in this light, the present age might be called “the age of Honzon loss.” We have lost sight of what is really important—the “truly venerable”—in our lives. Instead we try to get through life by using our heads, the human intellect, to think our way, decide our way, choose our way through.

People believe human intellect has created our flourishing civilization. They think only human wisdom is important and direct their energies toward developing it. They think intellect and effort is all they need to get by in life. They do indeed make progress. But time and again they find themselves saying, “What? It wasn’t supposed to turn out like this!”

Human wisdom may have wonderful powers. But it can neither see through the situation we face nor foresee what lies ahead. That is why we have reached an impasse.

As we are unable to live any other way, we need to humbly stand before

the Honzon “just as we are.” By placing our hands together in *gasshō* and bowing our heads in worship, this shows we really want to know the truth, we really want to settle the doubts in our hearts, we really want to live life vividly once again.

Placing our hands together in *gasshō* is a form of greeting that originated in India. Gently placing our hands together before our chest works to restore balance to our mind. Where once our minds were beset by constant clashes between good and evil, purity and defilement, right and wrong, where once we were faking it and struggling for advantage, we are now restored to our senses and resume being our good old self.



03 Hieizan Enryakuji

A Pilgrimage to Historic Sites Related to Shinran's Life

From days of old, people who lived in Kyoto have always referred to Mount Hiei simply as “the Mountain.” It is not known for sure at just what age Shinran (or Hannen as he was called at time of ordination) ascended the Mountain. It is generally thought that after spending 20 years training there he descended from it at age 29. If we accept this as fact, he must have ascended the Mountain soon after his ordination at age nine.

The Enryakuji on Mount Hiei where Shinran spent his days is not a single temple. It is the collective name for more than 150 temple buildings scattered over three stupa areas, Tōdō, Saitō, and Yokawa, from peak to eastern base.

The Yokawa Chūdō and the Eshindō are located in a quiet place lined with giant cedar trees about five kilometers from the Konpon Chūdō, located in the Tōdō area. It is likely that soon after Hannen entered the monastic order he studied the teachings intensively while doing


menial chores such as serving food there.

While continuing his training, Hannen served as dōsō or hall monk at the Constantly-Walking Samadhi Hall or Jōgyō Zanmaidō. Hall monks did the constant recitation of nenbutsu, a severe ascetic practice in which they are confined to the hall for 90 days during which time they neither sleep nor rest (except to eat or use the lavatory). They must walk around the statue of Amida Nyorai constantly, with hands placed together as they chant nenbutsu.

Hannen resolved in his heart to devote himself to the path, persisting in it so to have no regrets at the end, as it says in the Tanbutsuge. He singlemindedly devoted himself to that harsh ascetic practice. But the more he studied, the more doubts arose in his mind; the more he piled on the ascetic practices, the deeper his anguish grew. In the end, he descended from the Mountain.

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