

Selections from Rennyō's Collection of Poems

– W. S. Yokoyama, Trans.

NOTE: *This is a draft translation of poems that appear in Rennyō Shonin goeika ["Songs of Rennyō Shonin"], a poetry collection of 300 items in Shinshū Shōgyō Zenshō 5: pp. 488 ff. The numbers in parentheses correspond to those given in the collection.*

Year 1468, Onin 2, age 54

(1) Kaki oki-shi fumi no kotoba ni nokori keri, Mukashi-gatari wa kinou keu ni te

The words left behind in a letter set down by the brush --
What was recorded long ago seem [as fresh today] as if they'd been written yesterday.

Year 1470, Bunmei 2, age 56

(10) Mina hito no ga to okoranu shin zo kashi, Tanomu kokoro mo tariki nari keri

Eh? You people of the Name: Seems that ole self of yours has put a damper on the [spark of] faith! But even the hearts of those who turn [to the Buddha] do so out of a power outside themselves.

Year 1470, Bunmei 2, age 56

(11) Kike ya hito mukashi no en no areba tada, Onore to shin wa okori koso sure

Listen in, people: If, long ago someone told you [about the Vow], that's all you really need. Once [you realize] you've already given rise to faith, [the rest comes easy].

Year 1470, Bunmei 2, age 56

(12) Gokuraku e ware to yukan to hakarau wa, Amida no chikara wa tanomazaru nari
Scheming on how to get yourself to that Land of Bliss -- The way of thinking of those who do not turn to Amida for help.

Year 1471, Bunmei 3, age 57

(13) Tsukuzuku to omoi kurashite iriai no, Kane no hibiki ni Mida zo koishiki Got worked up to the point of distraction just thinking about things that I didn't notice the sun had set. [Then startled by] the evening bell [I thought to myself]: Oh, Amida, How I long [for that Land of yours] . . .

Year 1471, Bunmei 3, age 57

(14) Atsuki hi ni ngaruru ase wa namida ka na, Kaki oku fude no ato zo okashiki Sweat pouring out on this hot day like a flood of tears, My brush leaving the funniest trail in its wake!

Year 1472, Bunmei 4, age 58

(16) Obotsukana makoto no kokoro yo mo araji, Ikanaru tokoro no sumika naruran

If all one boasts is a true heart of the fuzziest dimensions, That does not bode well for the kind of place it will land you.

Year 1472, Bunmei 4, age 58

(17) Ima wa haya gosho no kumo mo harenuran, Gokuraku jodo wa chikaki kano kishi

When the clouds of the five impediments show no signs of clearing, That's a sure sign the Pure Land of bliss is near at hand.

Year 1474, Bunmei 6, age 61, Yoshizaki

(25) Onajiku Mida no chikai o shirase ba, Totemo tonau hito no kokoro ni Just let a person know the promise Amida has made, And it will call up in that very person the heart of one who eagerly chants [the nembutsu].

Year 1476, Bunmei 8, age 63

(27) Oya no toshi to onajiku ikiba nanika sen, Gappi o negau mi zo orokanaru I once swore I'd achieve something in my life if ever I lived to my father's age. But [now I'm of that age] I realize the folly of my thinking I could score a date with destiny.

Year 1477, Bunmei 9, age 64

(29) Tsumi fukaku Nyorai o tanomu mi ni nareba, Ho no chikara ni nishi e koso yuke When a person steeped in sin turns to the Tathagata, That person will be borne in the western direction by the power of the Dharma.

Year 1477, Bunmei 9, age 64

(30) Akekure wa shinjin hitotsu ni nagusamite, Hotoke no on o fukaku omoe ba

If by the strength of your shinjin/faith alone you attain the breakthrough that brings repose, You must truly understand this: you owe all you've achieved to the Buddha's concern for you.

Year 1484, Bunmei 16, age 71

(43) Naki ato ni ware o tazuneru hito ara ba, Mida no jodo ni mumaretaru to ie

After I'm gone, should someone ask my whereabouts, Tell them I've been born in Amida's Pure Land.

Year 1485, Bunmei 17, age 71

(45) Akatsuki no nezame no makura odoroki, Naku hototogisu kazukazu no koe Woke up with a start at the crack of dawn To the *hototogisu/nightingale warbling over and over again.

*A bird whose call resembles the sound Hokekyo [the Lotus Sutra].

Year 1492, Entoku 4, age 78

(80) Ho no ki ni jitsu koso nari nure yochu ni, Hiromaru mono wa Mida no hongan

The fame of the *Dharma tree depends on the fruit it offers those in this world immersed [in suffering]. That's why [the Word] spreading everywhere is that of Amida's vow.

*A double entendre for ho no ki (lit., tree of warmth). The statement perhaps alludes to the inefficacy of monastic teaching for ordinary people whose lives Rennyō's teaching addressed. With a different kanji, it is also a kind of magnolia whose broad leaves were used by wandering monks to heat food on.

Year 1492, Entoku 4, age 78

(82) Ato no yo ni wagamyō o omoidashi ba, Mida no chikai o fukaku tanome yo

Later on when I'm no longer around, should you happen to recall my name, Make it an occasion to seriously make that commitment to Amida's promise.

Year 1497, Meio 6, age 83

(99) Namu toiu niji no uchi ni wa Mida o tanomu, Kokoro ari to wa taremo shirubeshi

In the space of time it takes to utter those two words, Na-mu, we make that commitment to Amida. And all of you have the heart to do this, whoever you may be--- that's something I want you to be perfectly clear about.

Year 1497, Meio 6, age 83

(100) Mina hito no hishi tanomu toiu naraba, Mida wa shiriteya sukui tamawan

All of you people of the Name: strive to make that commitment! For Amida knows of your plight and stands ready to save you.

Year 1497, Meio 6, age 83

(101) Shinjitsu no shinjin nara dewa nochi no yo no, Takara to omou mono wa araji

If yours is the genuine article of shinjin/faith, that's all you need to embark upon the world to come, For [aside from that] there is nothing you can take of what people consider to be treasures.

Year 1497, Meio 6, age 83

(102) Mida tanomu kokoro hitotsu no tofosa ni, Namida moyohosu sumizome no sode

How encouraging it is to hear all of you make that commitment to Amida with such singleness of purpose! I dab the tears streaming forth from my eyes with the sleeves of my black robes.