

Seeking Enlightenment in the Last Age

Mappō Thought in Kamakura Buddhism

PART I

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BY THE LATTER PART of the Heian Period (794-1185), a majority of Japanese believed that the world had entered a dark era known as *mappō* 末法, the age of the Final Dharma. Buddhist tradition held that in this age, owing to human depravity, the teachings of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni would become obscured, and enlightenment all but impossible to attain. By the mid-eleventh century, natural disasters, social instability and widespread corruption among the Buddhist clergy lent seeming credence to scriptural predictions about the evil age of *mappō*—predictions which in turn gave form to popular anxieties, feeding the growing mood of terror, despair and anomie known as *mappō* consciousness.

Mappō thought was the heritage of the founders of the new Buddhist movements of the Kamakura period (1185-1333). Whether they chose individually to assign the *mappō* doctrine central or peripheral importance in their teachings or to reject it outright, all of them were compelled to answer in some way the fears and aspirations that it represented. What did individual Buddhist leaders of the Kamakura period teach about the Final Dharma age? What did they perceive as the major doctrinal issues involved in *mappō* thought? Did some of their responses prove better suited to contemporary religious needs than others? Can we find any common elements in their response to *mappō* consciousness that would help us to characterize Kamakura Buddhism in general? What connection do we find between *mappō*

thought and the quality of universality often pointed to as the outstanding characteristic of Kamakura Buddhism?

This paper will briefly explore these questions by considering the views of seven Kamakura-period Buddhist leaders representing four distinct streams of Buddhism: Hōnen and Shinran of the Pure Land tradition; Myōe and Jōkei of the vinaya restoration movement; Eisai and Dōgen of Zen; and Nichiren, founder of the Buddhism that bears his name. To aid in our discussion of their views, we will first give a brief outline of the history and development of *mappō* thought.

Textual and Historical Background

Buddhist tradition maintains that as the world moves farther and farther away from the age of Shakyamuni Buddha, understanding of his teachings grows increasingly distorted and people's capacity to practice and benefit from those teachings accordingly declines, until eventually Buddhism is lost. Sutras and treatises divide this process of degeneration into three sequential periods beginning from the time of the Buddha's death: the age of the True Dharma (Skt. *saddharma*, Jap. *shōbō*) the age of the Counterfeit Dharma (*saddharma-pratirūpaka*, *zōhō*) and the age of the Final Dharma (*saddharma-vipralopa*, *mappō*). K'uei-chi (Tz'u-en, 632-682), founder of the Fa-hsiang school in China, discusses the three periods in terms of "teaching, practice and proof" in his *I-lin-chang* (The Grove of Meanings). In the age of the True Dharma, he wrote, the Buddha's teaching flourishes, people correctly put it into practice, and can thereby obtain its proof (i.e., the merit, or strictly speaking, enlightenment, deriving from practice). In the age of the Counterfeit Dharma, the Buddhist teaching and practice remain, but people can no longer gain any proof. By the age of the Final Dharma, only the teaching remains; one finds neither practice nor proof. This became a standard definition of the three periods in both China and Japan during the ensuing centuries.

The "True Dharma," "Counterfeit Dharma," and "Final Dharma" originally arose as independent concepts, although all three reflected a desire to ensure the continued orthodoxy of the Buddhist teachings after Shakyamuni's death. The term "True Dharma" (*saddhamma* in Pali) appears in the very earliest texts. Though technically redundant, as the Dharma preached by the Buddha is by definition

“true,” the expression “True Dharma” may have been used by early Buddhists to distinguish Shakyamuni’s teachings from heterodox views.¹ The term “Counterfeit Dharma” was employed to express forebodings about a time when Buddhism would decline and heterodox views would eclipse orthodox ones, just as counterfeit coinage drives out the genuine.² The term “Final Dharma” referred to a time when Buddhism would die out altogether. The concept is thought to have derived from self-reflection in the Sangha or Buddhist Order on the danger to Buddhism’s survival posed by internecine quarrels and external threats. It would thus have served as a warning to monks to be diligent in their observance so that Buddhism might long endure.

These three concepts were clearly organized into a sequential process in the *Yüeh-tsang-ching* (Moon Matrix Sutra)³ and later incorporated with other texts into the *Ta-chi-ching* (The Great Collection of Sutras). Its warnings about the Final Dharma age may have stemmed in part from the invasion of India by the Ephthalite king Mihirakula (r. 518-529?), whose anti-Buddhist atrocities must have made the extinction of the Dharma appear imminent.⁴

The *Ta-chi-ching* exerted a major influence on the development of *mappō* thought in both China and Japan. In addition to establishing the three-period sequence, it also divides the decline of Buddhism into five consecutive 500-year periods, commencing with the Buddha’s death. The fifth 500-year period, an age when “quarrels and disputes

¹ For the arguments presented in this section I am deeply indebted to Yamada Ryu-jō, “Mappō shisō ni suite: Daijikkō no seiritsu mondai,” in *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 4, 2 (March 1956), pp. 54-63.

² Āgamas, T. 2.226b-c and 2.419b-c.

³ The *Yüeh-tsang-ching* (full title: *Ta-fang-teng yüeh-tsang-ching*) was translated into Chinese by Narendrayāśas (517-589) in 566. Actually, the earliest extant text to set forth the three periods as a sequential process is a treatise by Hui-ssu (515-577) entitled *Li-shih-yüan-wen*, dated 558, which clearly specifies that the True Dharma age lasts for 500 years, the Counterfeit Dharma age for 1,000 years, and the Final Dharma age for 10,000 years (T.46.786c). Since Hui-ssu had dealings in the capital of the Northern Wei, where Narendrayāśas had lived since 556, Yamada (p. 55) suggests that Narendrayāśas may have told Hui-ssu about the three-period thought before his translation of the *Yüeh-tsang-ching* was completed.

⁴ Yamada, pp. 56-57.

will arise among the adherents to my [Shakyamuni's] teachings, and the Pure Dharma will be obscured and lost,"⁵ was later identified in Japan with the beginning of *mappō*. Much of the standard terminology associated with Japanese *mappō* thought, such as the "five defilements"⁶ said to prevail in the last age, also appears in the *Ta-chi-ching*.

In China, the anti-Buddhist persecutions conducted in 574-577 by Emperor Wu of the Northern Chou dynasty invested the *mappō* thought introduced by the *Ta-chi-ching* and other texts with a sense of immediate historical reality. For the first time, Buddhist schools began to emerge claiming a specific suitability to the Final Dharma age. These included the short-lived Sect of the Three Stages (San-chieh-chiao) founded by Hsin-hsing (540-594), and somewhat later, the Pure Land movements of Tao-ch'o (562-645) and Shan-tao (613-681), both of whom considered themselves to be living in the Final Dharma age.

When does this age begin? To arrive at an answer, one needs two data: the length of each of the two preceding periods and the date of Shakyamuni Buddha's death. Different texts gave rise to varying opinions on the first point.⁷ The two that ultimately gained currency in Japan were: 1) the True Dharma age lasts for 500 years, and the Counterfeit Dharma age for 1,000 years; and 2) the True and Counterfeit Dharma ages each last 1,000 years. The Final Dharma age was generally said to last 10,000 years, or for an indefinite length of time. Some texts postulate a period of complete Dharma-extinction (Jap. *hōmetsu*) following the Final Dharma age, while in others, the Final Dharma age simply corresponds to the last age that the world passes through.

Opinion also differed as to the date of Shakyamuni's death. While re-

⁵ *Ta-chi-ching*, T. 13.363b.

⁶ Five defilements, or *gojoku*, are the defilements of the kalpa (*kōjoku*); of desires (*bonnōjoku*); of living beings (*shujōjoku*); of views (*kenjoku*); and of life itself (*myōjoku*).

⁷ The four most prevalent theories were: 1) True Dharma age 500 years, Counterfeit Dharma age 1,000 years; 2) True Dharma age 500 years, Counterfeit Dharma age 500 years; 3) True Dharma age 1,000 years, Counterfeit Dharma age 1,000 years; and 4) True Dharma age 1,000 years, Counterfeit Dharma age 500 years. For a list of citations from representative texts, see Yabuki Keiki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1927), pp. 215-218.

cent archeological studies tend to place it around the sixth or fifth century B.C., pre-modern Asian scholars generally fixed it earlier. The two dates most commonly used come from the Chinese tradition. The *Chou-i-shu* (Record of Unusual Events of the Chou Dynasty) gives 949 B.C., while the *Li-tai-san-pao-chi* (History of the Three Treasures in Successive Reigns) gives 609 B.C.

The word *mappō* appears in Japanese texts almost from the time of Buddhism's introduction. The commentaries on the Lotus, Vimalakīrti and Queen Shṛīmālā sutras traditionally attributed to Prince Shōtoku (572-622) contain scattered references to *mappō* and indicate that their author subscribed to the "True Dharma 500 years, Counterfeit Dharma 1,000 years" theory.⁸ Kyōkai (c. 822), author of the *Nihon ryōiki* (Miraculous Tales of Japan), adopted the same explanation and evidently believed that he was living in the age of the Final Dharma.⁹

However, the idea of *mappō* made little impression on the Japanese in the days of Prince Shōtoku and Kyōkai. Culturally still too young and unsophisticated to be troubled by thoughts of religious decline, they turned with enthusiasm to the new Buddhist religion as a source of superior magic with the power to convey worldly benefits and protection from evil. The building of temples and Buddha images, the copying of scriptures, and the public ceremonies with their prayers for rain and for the cessation of epidemics were all conducted with this expectation.¹⁰ Buddhism was incorporated into the central government via the provincial temple (*kokubun-ji*) system so that it might confer its blessings and protection upon the state. This continued to be Buddhism's official role long into the Heian period, though the Tendai and Shingon sects which predominated during that time were established independently of the court. This optimistic, in some respects rather naïve approach to Buddhism was hardly compatible with the kind of existential terrors implicit in *mappō* thought. Not until both religious and secular institutions began to decay and collapse did the scriptural predictions

⁸ Ozawa Tomio, *Mappō to masse no shisō* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1974), pp. 15-17.

⁹ Kyōko Motomochi Nakamura, trans., Introduction to *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 9-11. References to *mappō* appear only in the Maeda manuscript of the *Nihon ryōiki*, in a passage regarded by some scholars as a later interpolation.

¹⁰ Ozawa, p. 18.

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about the Final Dharma age acquire relevance and seize hold of the popular imagination, inspiring a profound dread.

During the Heian period, 949 B.C. came to be generally accepted as the date of the Buddha's death, and beginning with the Hossō sect, Buddhist circles for the most part adopted the explanation that the True Dharma and Counterfeit Dharma ages each last for 1,000 years. This placed the onset of *mappō* in 1052 or Eijō 7, which fell in the reign of Emperor Go-reizei (r. 1045-1068). The imperial chronology *Teiō hennenki* observes: "Eijō 7 (1052), cyclical sign *mizunoe-tatsu*. We enter the age of the Final Dharma."¹¹

Had nothing unusual occurred, any forebodings about the beginning of the evil age might have faded away. But by the eleventh century, the foundations of Heian court society were already beginning to crack. Abuses of the *shōen* system of tax-exempt estates were undermining the economy. Bribery and intrigue flourished at court, while in the provinces the military families steadily consolidated power. In the religious realm, monks increasingly neglected practice, and the Tendai "doctrine of original enlightenment" (*hongaku shisō*)—one of the sect's most profound teachings—was subverted to rationalize their negligence. If one was enlightened already, they argued, then what need was there for further exertions? In addition to widespread violation of the monastic precepts, corruption in the Buddhist establishment found expression in the growing and uncontrollable violence of the *sōhei* or monastic armies maintained by the larger temples to settle disputes with one another and with the imperial court.

From the mid-eleventh century on, rebellions of the warrior clans grew more frequent, culminating in the Hōgen insurrection of 1156 that marked an irrevocable turning point in the decline of aristocratic fortunes and the rise of the samurai class. Nor did political and social turmoil constitute the whole of that era's troubles. From the time of the bloody and protracted Gempei wars, Japan was ravaged by a series of natural disasters including repeated and devastating earthquakes, fires, storms, floods, drought, famine and epidemics that continued through the greater part of the thirteenth century. All this helped convince people that they were indeed living in the benighted age of

¹¹ Cited in Hashikawa Tadashi, *Sōgō Nihon Bukkyō-shi* (Tokyo: Meguro Shoten, 1933), p. 279.

mappō.

The word *mappō* had been popularized by Genshin (942-1017) in his *Ōjōyōshū* (Essentials of Rebirth), and by the late Heian period it began to exercise a morbid fascination on the public mind. The *mappō* doctrine provided a way to account for the horrors multiplying daily, but at the same time instilled a new fear with its implications of an age when the Dharma would be lost. As the central government began to totter, the focus of Buddhism shifted from protection of the state to personal salvation.¹² Nobles devoted themselves increasingly to the building of family temples and the worship of Amida Buddha, seeking rebirth in his Pure Land as an escape from a world grown strange and terrifying. Others retreated to the formal world of court poetry, where falling cherry blossoms and maple leaves gave way to more bizarre and violent images of change, as impermanence—the central truth of Buddhism—made itself evident in new and ever more appalling ways.¹³ Court diaries blamed the collapse of the social structure on the advent of *mappō*, and voiced their authors' despair at having been born in this evil era.

Eventually, however, men appeared who confronted their fears, strove to discern the true nature of the *mappō* age, and came directly to grips with the problem of how one should seek enlightenment in a time when "the Pure Dharma will be obscured and lost." Among them were the founders of Kamakura Buddhism.

The Pure Land Buddhists: Hōnen and Shinran

The first of the Buddhist leaders of the Kamakura period to formulate a doctrine specifically in terms of *mappō* thought was Hōnen Genkū-bō (1133-1212), founder of the Japanese Jōdo or Pure Land sect. As a young man, Hōnen had studied at the prestigious Tendai institution on Mount Hiei, outwardly still prosperous but inwardly divid-

¹² "Salvation" here was often conceived of in a worldly rather than a religious sense. Many nobles in the late Heian period seem to have looked upon rebirth in the Pure Land as an extension of their elegant lifestyle into the next world, without any fundamental questioning of the values that lifestyle presupposed.

¹³ William R. LaFleur, trans., Introduction to *Mirror for the Moon: A Selection of Poems by Saigyō* (New York: New Directions, 1977), pp. xviii-xix.

ed by ugly power struggles. The corruption he saw around him and his acute reflection on his own spiritual shortcomings confirmed in him the belief that "already the age is that of *mappō*, and its people all are evil."¹⁴ While attaining liberation by the traditional path of high resolve and personal endeavor might be possible in theory, his own sense of frustration and failure in the monastic disciplines caused him to despair of its realization in practice. "People like ourselves are no longer vessels for the three disciplines of precepts, meditation and wisdom," he lamented. "Apart from these, is there no doctrine that befits our minds, no practice suited to our bodies?"¹⁵ In quest of an answer he is said to have read through the entire Tripitaka five times. Finally, influenced by the writings of various Pure Land masters, including Shan-tao's commentary on the Meditation Sutra (*Kanmuryō-jukyō*) and Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū*, and a vision of Shan-tao who appeared to him in a dream, he resolved to abandon all other practices and rely solely upon chanting the name of Amida Buddha.

Amida worship existed in Japan from an early period, perhaps as early as the time of Prince Shōtoku. "Amida" is a transliteration of the Sanskrit Amitāyus (Infinite Life) and Amitābha (Infinite Light), a Buddha said to dwell in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss (Skt. Sukhāvātī, Jap. Jōdo), billions of world-spheres away in the western sector of the universe. According to the Larger Sukhāvātyūha Sūtra (*Daimuryō-jukyō*, or *Muryōjukyō*), one of the three basic Pure Land scriptures,¹⁶ Amida was once a bodhisattva who, in his desire to benefit all living beings, made forty-eight vows concerning the Buddha land he would establish for them after he attained enlightenment. In Pure Land thought, the most important of these is the eighteenth or original vow, in which the bodhisattva pledged that all who relied upon him would attain certain rebirth in his Pure Land:

If, when I attain Buddhahood, among the living beings in the ten directions—who, aspiring in sincerity and faith to be born in my land, call me to mind ten times—should there be any

¹⁴ *Nembutsu ōjō yōgi shō*, cited in Hazama Jikō, "Mappō shisō to Kamakura shosei no taido oyobi dōkō," *Bukkyō Kenkyū* 7, 3-4 (October 1943), p. 3.

¹⁵ *Hōnen Shōnin gyōjō ezu*, number 6, cited in Hazama, p. 3.

¹⁶ The other two are the Smaller Sukhāvātyūha sūtra (*Amida-kyō*) and the so-called Meditation Sutra.

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who fail to be born there, then let me not attain supreme enlightenment.

“Call me to mind” here is interpreted as nembutsu 念佛, literally, “to meditate on the Buddha.” Hōnen, following Shan-tao, took this to mean reciting Amida’s name, in the formula *Namu-Amida-Butsu* (*Namu* is a transliteration of the Sanskrit *namas*, indicating devotion or reverence).

Hōnen was not the first person to regard Amida worship as specifically suited to the Final Dharma age. In China, as mentioned above, this association had been made by Tao-ch’o and his disciple Shan-tao, and in Japan, Genshin had urged people to worship Amida as a practice especially befitting the time of *mappō*. What Hōnen did was to redefine the invocation of Amida’s name, not simply as one practice among many, but as the only practice leading to salvation in the age of the Final Dharma. This exclusive choice of a single way of practice which thereby acquires absolute status would appear again in other new sects of the Kamakura period, and as we shall see, may have stemmed in part from the phenomenon of *mappō* consciousness.

Like other Buddhists before him, Hōnen had pondered the factors of time (*ji*) and the people’s capacity (*ki*), long regarded as two major criteria in evaluating the fitness of a particular doctrine at any given juncture. The time, he believed, was *mappō*, when the five defilements prevailed, and the people were weak and deluded common mortals, burdened by limited faculties and karmic hindrances. This conviction informs his major work, the *Senchaku hongan nembutsu shū* (Treatise on the Exclusive Selection of the Original Vow of the Nembutsu), or simply *Senchakushū*, which outlines his reasons for choosing the nembutsu as the only practice valid in the Final Dharma age.

In the opening chapter of this work, quoting from the works of the Chinese Pure Land masters Tao-ch’o and T’an-luan (476-542), Hōnen divides all Buddhist teachings into two categories: the Sacred Way teachings (*shōdō-mon*) and the Pure Land teachings (*jōdo-mon*).¹⁷

¹⁷ Tao-ch’o proposed the division into Sacred Way teachings and Pure Land teachings, which T’an-luan had equated, respectively, with the “difficult way” and “easy way” mentioned in Nāgārjuna’s *Dasabhāṃikavibhāṣā* (Jap. *Jūjūbibasharon*). Tao-ch’o also elucidated the division of *jiriki* and *tariki*, originally proposed by Vasubandhu.

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The Sacred Way refers to the path of attaining enlightenment in the mundane world through strenuous efforts in self-perfection, following traditional Buddhist disciplines. Often thought to require many lifetimes of exertion, this is the “difficult way” of *jiriki* (self-power) or reliance on one's own endeavors. The Pure Land way, on the other hand, is that of attaining enlightenment in the Pure Land, where one may be reborn after death through faith in Amida Buddha. This is the “easy way” of reliance on *tariki* (other power), that is, on Amida's grace. In the age of *mappō*, Hōnen asserted, people could no longer attain enlightenment through the Sacred Way of personal endeavor; the world was too far removed from the age of Shakyamuni, and the Sacred Way doctrines too far surpassed the people's meagre understanding. He concluded that those bent on attaining enlightenment should at once set aside the doctrines and practices of the Sacred Way and enter the Pure Land way instead, relying solely on the practice of nembutsu.

The fifth chapter of the *Senchakushū* gives two reasons for Hōnen's exclusive choice of the nembutsu. They deserve note because they foreshadow major developments in the Buddhism of this time. First, Hōnen argued that the nembutsu is superior while other practices are inferior; by this he meant that the merit of the nembutsu is all-encompassing. Amida's three bodies, ten powers, four fearlessnesses—indeed, all the Buddha's countless virtues and attributes—are inherent in the sacred name, as opposed to all other practices, which are each limited to some single aspect. In short, Hōnen claimed that this one practice contained the benefit of all other practices within itself.

His second reason for choosing the nembutsu alone is equally striking: the nembutsu is easy while all other practices are difficult; therefore, the nembutsu can be practiced by everyone. Hōnen was by no means the first individual to see in the “easy practice of nembutsu” a discipline especially suited to the great mass of common people,¹⁸

¹⁸ The *Nihon ryōiki* mentions popular nembutsu practices in connection with Gyōgi Bosatsu (668-749). Also Kuya (903-972), the “saint of the market place,” popularized the nembutsu by dancing and singing hymns to Amida in the streets of Kyoto. Ryōnin (1072-1132), founder of the *yūzu* nembutsu movement, travelled throughout Japan to spread the practice of calling upon Amida's name. Genshin also helped to bring this practice within reach of the common people.

whose religious needs had been largely overlooked by the elitist monasteries of the Nara and Heian periods. But he was the first to argue that its very ease and accessibility to all classes of people endowed it with an authenticity no other practice possessed. Behind this assertion lay Hōnen's conviction that if Amida Buddha had truly intended to save all beings by leading them to rebirth in his Pure Land, he would never have made that rebirth contingent upon actions which only a few could carry out:

If the original vow required making images and building stupas, then the poor and destitute could not hope to attain rebirth in the Pure Land, but the wealthy and noble are few, while the poor and lowly are numerous. If the original vow required wisdom and great talents, there would be no hope of rebirth for the foolish and ignorant, but the wise are few while the foolish are very many. . . . If the original vow required upholding the precepts and rules of conduct there would be no hope of rebirth for those who break the precepts or for those who have not received them, but those who keep the precepts are rare, while those who break them are altogether common. And the same reasoning applies to all other practices.

Truly you should know this: Were the original vow to depend on these many forms of discipline, those obtaining rebirth in the Pure Land would be few, while those unable to do would be many. It follows, therefore, that the Tathagata Amida, when he was a monk by the name of Dharmakara in ages past, moved by his impartial compassion and his desire for the salvation of all, did not make his original vow contingent upon making images, building stupas or other sundry practices, but upon the single act of calling on his sacred name.¹⁹

In this way, Hōnen defined the practice appropriate to the time of *mappō* as one that 1) possesses the merit of all other practices within itself, and 2) can be practiced universally. Both would become impor-

¹⁹ *Senchakushū*, in Ōhashi Shunno, ed., *Hōnen, Ippen*, Nihon Shisō Taikēi, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Iwanamai Shoten, 1971), p. 106.

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tant themes in the new schools of Kamakura Buddhism.

All the "sundry practices" Hōnen defined in the above passage as unnecessary for obtaining rebirth in the Pure Land involve reliance on one's own exertions and were therefore unsuited, in his estimation, to the depraved beings of the *mappō* era. They were also the very disciplines that, until that time, had kept Buddhism the province of the wealthy, the educated, and especially, the clergy. In this connection we should particularly note Hōnen's denial of the need for "upholding the precepts and rules of conduct," as it was fated to become one of the most hotly debated issues involved in *mappō* thought. Precepts constitute the first of the "three disciplines" (*sangaku*)—precepts (*kai*), meditation (*jō*) and wisdom (*e*)—traditionally said to encompass the whole of Buddhism. They form the very foundation and rationale of monastic life. To question the importance of the precepts was to cast doubt on the validity of the entire monastic institution—a major reason why Hōnen incurred the enmity of the older Buddhist sects.

Hōnen's views on the subject apparently derived in part from a peculiar work called the *Mappō tōmyō ki* (A Lamp for the Age of the Final Dharma), generally attributed—in error, it is now thought—to Saichō (Dengyō Daishi, 766-822), founder of the Japanese Tendai sect. The treatise suggests that as the world moves farther and farther away from the time of the historical Buddha, human capacity to observe the monastic precepts inevitably declines, until, by the time of *mappō*, no one will be capable of keeping the precepts at all. In that age, it says, the "monk without precepts" or the "monk in name only" who merely shaves his head and dons a robe, presenting the appearance of a monk, is the treasure of the world and a true merit-field for the people; he is a lamp for the age of the Final Dharma. By the end of the Heian period, the monastic precepts were often honored more in the breach than the observance, and the *Mappō tōmyō ki* was widely interpreted to justify the laxity of the Buddhist clergy as no fault of its own, but an unavoidable consequence of the degenerate age.

Hōnen cites this work in his *Jūni mondō* (Twelve Questions and Answers), where he poses the question: Will there be any difference in rank, after rebirth in the Pure Land, between those who observe the precepts but chant only few nembutsu and those who break the precepts but chant many nembutsu? He replies:

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It is because the mats [we are now sitting upon] exist that we can say of them that they are either worn out or not. If there were no mats, how could they be worn out or otherwise? In like manner in these wicked days we may say that the precepts are neither kept nor broken, for the priests themselves are such in name only, as Dengyō Daishi [Saichō] very clearly states in his *Mappō tōmyō ki*. So there is nothing to be gained by discussing the question of breaking or keeping the precepts. It is just for such common mortals as ourselves that the original vow was made in the first place, and so we cannot be too eager or diligent in our calling upon the sacred name.²⁰

With this analogy of the mats, Hōnen seems to suggest that in the time of *mappō* there are no precepts, in the sense of moral imperatives upon whose observance one's enlightenment depends. He himself continued to keep his monastic vows, as did other Jōdo priests, as a matter of personal choice. However, in teaching that they had no bearing on one's salvation in the Final Dharma age, Hōnen's doctrine helped to blur the hitherto rigid hierarchical distinction between clergy and laity, and gave rise to the new phenomenon of Buddhist fraternities independent of temples, in which monks and lay believers participated together.

The easy practice of nembutsu, Hōnen felt, not only made salvation readily accessible in "spatial" terms (i.e., to all people), but also in terms of time. That is, he believed that sole reliance on chanting Amida's name would enable one to attain enlightenment much more quickly than he could by traditional means. The "Sacred Way" of pursuing enlightenment through one's own efforts was generally thought to require aeons of exertion, during which the practitioner gradually rid himself of illusion and evil karma, and accumulated merit over the course of successive lifetimes. From this perspective, the present lifetime was viewed as an opportunity to further one's progress toward the goal by amassing as many virtuous deeds as possible. Hōnen, however, insisted that common mortals of the *mappō* era, being weak and depraved, could not possibly achieve any spiritual advance

²⁰ Harper Havelock Coates and Ryūgaku Ishizuka, *Hōnen the Buddhist Saint: His Life and Teaching* (Kyoto: Chion-in, 1925), pp. 736-737; adapted.

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through their own efforts, but could succeed only in miring themselves still deeper in illusion. One was better advised to use this life chanting the nembutsu to assure his rebirth in the Pure Land, where, under Amida's compassionate instruction, he would be capable of practicing the requisite disciplines and eventually attain enlightenment. According to Pure Land doctrine, all who are born in Amida's land are certain to attain Buddhahood. Hōnen therefore equated rebirth in that land with the stage of non-regression (*futai no kurai*). He thus regarded the nembutsu, a way of practice accessible to all, as a path by which the common person could attain enlightenment "quickly," without aeons of austere practices.

The traditional view of enlightenment as something attained only after repeated lifetimes of effort not only failed to inspire the average person, but had, by the late Heian period, become a source of real despair to those who perceived themselves as unable to make the causes thought necessary for improving one's karma.²¹ It was also inherently discriminatory, with its implication that monks, able to devote their full energies to Buddhist disciplines, could make more rapid progress, and were therefore almost by definition nearer the goal. Hōnen's insistence on the universal possibility of rebirth in the Pure Land via the nembutsu no doubt provided solace for many by bringing the promise of salvation within a conceivable reach of time.

Another important aspect of Hōnen's *mappō* thought lies in his emphasis on the eternal validity of the nembutsu. That is, though he regarded the nembutsu as a practice established especially for the people of *mappō* and uniquely suited to their capacity, he also believed that its efficacy transcended that age. He argues this point in the sixth chapter of the *Senchakushū*, with a highly personal interpretation of the following passage from the Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra:

For the age to come, when the teaching and the Way have been extinguished, out of compassion and pity, I [Shakyamuni] in particular leave this sutra, which shall endure a hundred years, and, of the beings of that time, those who encounter this sutra will in accordance with their desire

²¹ William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1983), pp. 48-49.

all obtain the Way.²²

Hōnen interprets “this sutra” as the nembutsu itself, because the nembutsu of the original vow forms the sutra’s essence and ultimate intent. In this he follows the interpretations of Shan-tao, Huai-kan (c. seventh century), Genshin and other Pure Land teachers. The phrase “endure a hundred years” had traditionally been interpreted as referring to the first hundred years of *mappō*, meaning that the nembutsu would prove efficacious during the first century of the degenerate age when all other Buddhist teachings are said to lose their power. Hōnen, however, takes it to mean the first hundred years after the ten thousand years of *mappō* have passed, a time indicated only vaguely in some sutras and commentaries as the period when the Dharma perishes altogether. By interpreting the sutra passage to mean that the nembutsu will benefit people even after the Final Dharma age has passed, Hōnen in effect “endowed the nembutsu with eternal life.”²³ He continues:

QUESTION: It is now clear that the nembutsu will endure for a hundred years [after the age of the Final Dharma has passed]. But does this practice of the nembutsu suit the time and the people’s capacity only during that period? Or does it apply to the ages of the True Dharma, the Counterfeit Dharma and the Final Dharma as well?

ANSWER: Broadly speaking, it applies to all three ages.²⁴

Had the nembutsu applied only to a particular age, its efficacy would have been relative. But in asserting its relevance not only to the three periods—indicating historical time—but also to the first hundred years after *mappō* ends—a time transcending any sort of historical conception—Hōnen in effect defined the nembutsu as absolute. The practice specifically recommended for the age of *mappō*, he claimed, was in fact timeless. Or, one could say that in Hōnen’s doctrine, *mappō* thought forms the starting point for the revelation of an eternally valid teaching.

²² T. 12.279a.

²³ Kazue Kyōichi, *Nihon no mappō shisō* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1961), p. 236.

²⁴ *Senchakushū*, Ōhashi ed., p. 119.

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The *mappō* doctrine also profoundly influenced Hōnen's disciple Shinran (1173-1262), founder of the Jōdo-shin or True Pure Land sect that would later become one of the mainstreams of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. Shinran's concern with the problem of *mappō* can most clearly be seen in his *Ken jōdo shinjitsu kyōgyōshō monrui* (Collection of Passages Elucidating the True Pure Land Teaching, Practice, and Proof), or simply *Kyōgyōshinshō*, the mature statement of his faith. In the final chapter, "On the Transformed Buddha Land," where he reaffirms Hōnen's conclusion that only the nembutsu of the original vow can lead ignorant and deluded people to salvation, it is *mappō* thought that he uses to buttress his argument. Addressing the *mappō* concept here in far more detail and at greater length than did Hōnen, he reviews the five 500-year periods set forth in the *Ta-chi-ching*, and cites the "True Dharma 500 years, Counterfeit Dharma 1,000 years, Final Dharma 10,000 years" version of the three-period thought found in the Bhadrakalpa (*Kengō*), Benevolent King (*Ninnō*) and Nirvana sutras. He concludes that 1224, the year when he was writing, was the 683rd year of the Final Dharma age.²⁵ Freely quoting the *Ta-chi-ching*, Tao-ch'o's *An-lo-chi* (Collection of Essays on the Western Paradise), and almost the entire *Mappō tōmyō ki*, he asserts that the Sacred Way teachings are provisional, while the Pure Land teachings are true; only the nembutsu of the original vow suits the capacity of deluded people in the age of *mappō*. He admonishes, "Monks and lay believers of the present age should both recognize their own [limited] capacity."²⁶

For Shinran, this recognition was inseparable from the whole problem of *mappō*. Far more even than Hōnen, he tended to identify the degeneracy of the age with his own sense of inadequacy and sinfulness. The intensity of self-reflection in Shinran's *mappō* consciousness finds expression in his *Shōzōmatsu wasan* (Hymns of the Three Ages), a cycle of 116 poems in the popular *imayō* style:

Though I might imagine this to be the age of the True
Dharma,
And myself a person capable of practicing it,
Being the lowest of ignorant common men,

²⁵ Shinran miscalculates: 1224 should be the 673rd year of the Final Dharma age.

²⁶ *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Hoshino Genpō et al., eds., *Shinran*, Nihon Shisō Taikō, vol. 11 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1971), p. 217.

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Utterly without a mind of truth or purity,
How could I arouse the aspiration for the enlightenment?²⁷

With a mind as deceitful as a snake or scorpion,
I could not possibly practice good through my own powers.
Without relying on the Tathāgata's transfer of merit,
I would surely end without shame or repentance.²⁸

Shinran's conclusions about *mappō* per se do not differ substantially from those of Hōnen. However, it seems altogether possible, as Kazue Kyoichi perceptively suggests,²⁹ that many of the unique elements in Shinran's Pure Land thought spring from his acute and thoroughly internalized *mappō* consciousness—a suggestion we will briefly explore.

Shinran's uniqueness lies in his absolute emphasis on *tariki* or other power, that is, on the power of Amida's grace. In addition to the eighteenth or original vow, traditional Pure Land thought also recognizes the nineteenth and twentieth vows, which promise rebirth in the Pure Land, respectively, to those who arouse the aspiration for enlightenment and accumulate all forms of virtue, and those who plant roots of merit with a desire for the Pure Land in mind. Shinran, however, having looked deeply into his own heart, concluded that people in the degenerate age of *mappō* could not perform even the slightest good deed, for one's virtuous acts are invariably tainted by the calculation (*hakarai*) that they will rebound to one's credit and thus remain essentially egotistical. Moreover, he felt that relying on virtuous acts for one's rebirth implied some lingering degree of reliance on one's own abilities and thus fell short of perfect trust in Amida's compassion. He therefore emphasized only the eighteenth vow, which stresses faith and reliance on Amida. While Shinran never formally repudiated the nineteenth and twentieth vows,³⁰ he felt that those who depended on good deeds for their salvation would be reborn in the "borderland" or the

²⁷ T. 83.665a.

²⁸ T. 83.667c.

²⁹ Kazue, pp. 267-274.

³⁰ Shinran formulated a theory of religious development called "turning through three vows" (*sangan tennyū*). In this process, as one experiences the failure of the self-power demanded by the nineteenth and twentieth vows, he is led gradually to full reliance on other-power, as expressed in the eighteenth vow. See Alfred Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1965), pp. 33-34.

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“realm of neglect”—a kind of purgatory where one would be purified of his doubts in Amida’s perfect grace.

Hōnen, as we have mentioned, continued to observe his monastic vows from choice, though he denied that one’s rebirth depended upon them. Shinran, however, with his absolute stress on *tariki*, saw in the precepts a potentially dangerous tendency to rely on one’s own efforts. If salvation comes about purely through Amida’s mercy and cannot be furthered by one’s own efforts, he reasoned, then surely it was arrogance to engage in some special form of conduct that set one apart from other people. Banished by the government to Echigo in 1207 for his association with Hōnen, Shinran allowed his hair to grow and married a woman known as Eshinni by whom he had five or six children, and styled himself “neither monk nor layman.”³¹ Even the distinction of master and disciple he rejected as presumptuous, believing that his followers invoked the nembutsu solely because of Amida’s workings and not through any virtue of his own. His followers formed congregations called *monto*, democratically organized religious fraternities open to men and women³² of all classes, and independent of the established temples.

Shinran’s emphasis on *tariki* even extended to the nembutsu itself. Hōnen had stressed repeated recitation of the nembutsu to purify oneself of evil karma and to assure one’s rebirth. He himself appears to have chanted sixty thousand, and later seventy thousand, nembutsu a day. Shinran, on the other hand, felt that excessive preoccupation with the number of recitations placed too much emphasis on one’s own endeavors. A single nembutsu uttered with faith would ensure one’s rebirth; subsequent callings-on-the-name were meaningful as expressions of gratitude.

In carrying the doctrine of absolute reliance on *tariki* to its logical ex-

³¹ *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Hoshino ed., p. 258.

³² One remarkable feature of Kamakura Buddhism lies in a movement toward recognition of the religious equality of the sexes. Traditional Buddhism had discriminated against women as inherently more sinful and karma-ridden than men, and women were banned from the precincts of major temples such as those at Mount Hiei and Mount Kōya. Hōnen, in contrast, asserted that men and women could equally attain rebirth in the Pure Land (though he said that women would be reborn there as men). Dōgen and Nichiren moved still further in the direction of religious equality by asserting that women could attain Buddhahood in their present form.

treme, Shinran did not see himself as establishing a new sect, but rather as carrying out the full implications of Hōnen's teaching. What he evolved, however, differed not only from Hōnen's doctrine but virtually from the whole of Buddhism: a teaching in which the principles of karmic causality and merit accumulation, as well as aspiration and endeavor for enlightenment, were in effect set aside and superseded by faith in the original vow. And even the fact that one had faith, Shinran held, was not due to one's own will to believe, but to one's being grasped (*sesshu*) by Amida's compassion.

The awakening of faith holds primary importance in Shinran's doctrine. Hōnen had emphasized continual chanting of the nembutsu throughout life to ensure that one's mind would be correctly focused on Amida at the moment of death; only then could one be certain of rebirth in the Pure Land. For Shinran, however, one attained the stage of non-regression and was assured of rebirth from the very moment faith first arose in one's heart.³³ This doctrine, called *sokutoku ōjō* or the instantaneous achievement of rebirth, forms one of the unique elements in Shinran's doctrine.

However, before faith can arise in one's heart, he must be fully convinced of his own depravity. As long as he thinks he has even the slightest virtue, he will try to rely on his own efforts. A famous passage from the *Tannishō* cites Shinran's views on the subject:

“Even a virtuous man can attain Rebirth in the Pure Land, how much more easily a wicked man!” But ordinary people usually say: “Even a wicked man can attain Rebirth in the Pure Land, how much more so a virtuous man.” At first sight, this view may appear reasonable, but it really goes quite contrary to the intention of the Other Power of the Original Vow. The reason is that since a man who does deeds of merit by his own efforts lacks total reliance on the Other Power, he is self-excluded from Amida's Original Vow. . . .

It was solely to enable the wicked to attain Buddhahood

³³ According to Hōnen's doctrine, years of dedication to chanting the nembutsu could theoretically come to naught, if for some reason one failed to achieve the proper focus of mind at the moment of death. This uncertainty gave rise to considerable anxiety among believers, which Shinran's doctrine of “instantaneous rebirth” did much to relieve.

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that Amida took his vows, out of Compassion for those like us who, defiled to the core, have no hope of liberating ourselves from the cycle of births and deaths through any other discipline. And so an evil man who dedicates himself to the Other Power is above all endowed with the right cause for Rebirth.³⁴

Since the "easy way" is by definition for those of lesser faculties, a conviction of personal inadequacy characterizes the writings of many Pure Land teachers. With Shinran, however, it becomes an integral part of doctrine. Only when one thoroughly recognizes his own impotence and evil will faith and the certainty of rebirth be brought about from Amida's side.³⁵ And that recognition, for Shinran, is inseparable from *mappō* consciousness. The degeneracy of the times and the limitations of the individual were in his view ultimately one and the same.

In summation, the *mappō* thought of Hōnen and Shinran focused on human depravity and powerlessness to effect salvation through personal effort, and instead held out the hope of immediate rebirth after death in Amida's paradise by relinquishing all self-reliance and placing total faith in that Buddha's compassion. Their rejection of the traditional practices for attaining enlightenment, especially the observance of monastic precepts, helped to break down the long-standing barrier between clergy and laity; this, added to the fact that chanting the nembutsu requires no special education or ability, helped to open the way for a popular Buddhism to emerge. It also earned them the hostility of the older sects, who saw in their sole reliance on the nembutsu both a threat to the monastic establishment and an invitation to license.³⁶

In any event, Hōnen's teaching set in motion a powerful new force in the realm of Japanese religion. Moreover, being first among the Bud-

³⁴ Bandō Shōjun and Harold Stewart, trans., "Tannishō," *The Eastern Buddhist* XIII, 1 (Spring 1980), p. 61.

³⁵ Kazue, p. 271.

³⁶ Although both Hōnen and Shinran made it quite clear that they had no such intent, Pure Land doctrine does leave itself open to this misinterpretation. Since faith in the nembutsu supposedly enables one to "transcend karma," and since observance of the precepts is not required for salvation, inevitably some followers decided that they were therefore justified in behaving immorally.

dhist leaders of the Kamakura period to propose a religion specifically for the age of the Final Dharma, Hōnen in large measure defined the vocabulary of contemporary *mappō* thought. Anyone else who took up the theme would be virtually compelled to address the issues he had raised: the nature of the time and the people's capacity, whether people could attain enlightenment through their own efforts, whether monastic precepts remained valid in the Final Dharma age, difficulty versus ease of practice, and so forth. There were, as we shall see, quite as many points of difference as of agreement.

The Vinaya Restoration Movement: Myōe and Jōkei

While Hōnen and his disciples argued that no one in the degenerate age of *mappō* was capable of following the Sacred Way, others retorted that the degenerate age had come about precisely because men no longer followed it scrupulously enough. Among these were the leaders of a restoration movement based chiefly at the old capital in Nara and arising among the so-called "six Nara sects,"³⁷ the oldest formal Buddhist traditions in Japan. Appalled by the corruption of the Tendai and Shingon establishments, and disturbed by the threat they perceived to the entire monastic institution in Hōnen's Pure Land teaching, they cried for a return to the days of the founder Shakyamuni Buddha, and to the "pure" way of practice carried out by his immediate disciples. In particular, they sought to restore strict observance of the precepts and vinaya, or monastic rules of discipline. Among the several leaders of this movement we will briefly consider two: Myōe-bō Kōben (1173-1232) affiliated to both the Kegon and Shingon sects, and Gedatsu-bō Jōkei (1155-1213) of the Hossō sect, men whose *mappō* thought serves to represent that of the movement as a whole.

Myōe, first restorer of the Kegon sect in the medieval period, was born to a prominent family in Kii (present-day Wakayama Prefecture). Orphaned young, he studied the esoteric teachings at the Jingo-ji on Mount Takao and later studied Kegon at the Tōdai-ji in Nara. Throughout life, he fiercely embraced a high standard of monastic conduct. "I have for many years studied the sacred teachings of the Buddha's lifetime," he wrote, "and in inquiring into what they teach, I

³⁷ The Kusha, Jōjitsu, Sanron, Ritsu, Hossō and Kegon sects.

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have found them to be encompassed by the six words: 'The way that one should be' (*arubekiyō*). The way that one should be as a lay believer, the way that one should be as a monk, the way that one should be as someone who has retired from the world"³⁸ And, "I cannot say that I shall be saved in the next life, only that in this life I shall strive to be as I should, for to practice as one ought to practice and to behave as one ought to behave are what the sacred teachings expound."³⁹

For Myōe, as a monk, "the way that one should be" meant to strive in imitation of the Buddha's disciples Shariputra and Maudgalyāyana. Two or three years after his ordination, he came into conflict with his colleagues at the Tōdai-ji and at Takao for their failure to conform, in his eyes, to "the way that one should be." Disappointed at their worldliness, he secluded himself for a while at Shirakami-no-mine in Kii before establishing a center for Kegon studies at Mount Toganoo. This disillusionment at monastic corruption later became bound up with Myōe's *mappō* thought. "In the last age, 'the way that one should be' is neglected,"⁴⁰ he complained. Though he never denied the three-period concept, he saw the decline of Buddhism as stemming, not from historic inevitability, but from the laxity of monks:

They cut off their hair but do not sever their desires; they don black-dyed robes but do not imbue their hearts [with the aspiration for enlightenment]. Some have wives and children, some put on armor and helmets. They do nothing but indulge in the three poisons and five desires as they please and never uphold the five precepts or ten good acts. Gradually, monks such as these are filling the land.⁴¹

For Myōe, the advent of *mappō* did not entail any mysterious decline in the human religious capacity that rendered traditional disciplines futile. Rather, he believed, it was irresponsible fatalists, preaching that orthodox disciplines no longer led to enlightenment,

³⁸ *Shasekishū*, vol. 3, cited in Uehara Nobuo, "Myōe Shōnin Kōben no mappō kan," in *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 11, 1 (January 1963), p. 156.

³⁹ *Takao Myōe Shōnin denki*, cited in Hazama, p. 4.

⁴⁰ *Shasekishū*, vol. 3, cited in Uehara, p. 156.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

who were the cause of the world's confusion and were actually inviting the destruction of the Dharma. It particularly distressed him that, of the three disciplines, precepts and meditation were universally neglected even in the Nara temples, and only wisdom—evidently interpreted as doctrinal study—was pursued. Hōnen's position that "people like ourselves are no longer vessels for the three disciplines" he of course rejected completely. On the necessity of precepts, Myōe states:

No sutra teaches that one can do as he pleases in this life and expect to be saved in the next. Even the Buddha said, "If one breaks the precepts, how will it benefit him to see me?"⁴²

And on the benefit of meditative practices:

QUESTION: Now is the last age, and to practice meditation would no longer befit the times. Even if one were to practice, it would be impossible to gain the proof of enlightenment. What benefit is there then in such practices?

ANSWER: Your question is self-indulgent in the extreme. How can those who do not practice possibly attain the goal? Those who do not practice make negligence their business; those who practice make diligence their occupation. Thinking people may judge which way is to their advantage.⁴³

Myōe also took exception to the Pure Land view of the aspiration for enlightenment (*bodaishin*), which, according to Hōnen, depraved beings in the Final Dharma age were incapable of arousing. *Saijarin* (A Wheel to Smash Heresy), Myōe's rebuttal to Hōnen's *Senchakushū*, devotes an entire chapter to this issue. Myōe regarded the aspiration for enlightenment as a function of one's inherent Buddha nature, and anyone, he felt, was therefore capable of arousing it. "Even if one is ignorant and foolish and has no understanding of Buddhist doctrines, it is not difficult to arouse this aspiration,"⁴⁴ he wrote. Aspiration and diligence, rather than time or capacity, were for him the determining

⁴² *Takao Myōe Shōnin denki*, cited in Hazama, p. 6.

⁴³ *Kegon bukkō zammai kammyō kanden*, cited in Uehara, p. 156.

⁴⁴ *Saijarin sōgon-ki*, cited in Kikufuji Akemichi, "Kamakura kyūbukkyō to mappō shisō," *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 23, 1 (December 1974), p. 237.

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factors in attaining Buddhahood.

One should above all make efforts and be diligent. For even if one does not reach the goal, if he practices throughout this lifetime, he can surely surpass those who do not, and in his next life, he is certain to attain victory. Although this is the last age when there is no Dharma teacher, still one can obtain the fruit of the four meditations.⁴⁵

Though Myōe remained optimistic about the possibility of attaining enlightenment through traditional practices, the fact of living in the Final Dharma age and the institutional corruption he associated with it filled him with disgust. In more than one passage he bewails his fate at having been born in the degenerate age. "Though I was born in the human world, it is a long time since the days of the Tathāgata, and though I have encountered Buddhism, I was born in a remote and peripheral country in the last age."⁴⁶ His loathing gave rise to an intense longing for the days of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. While a desire to return to Shakyamuni's day pervades the *mappō* consciousness of the entire vinaya restoration movement, in Myōe it assumed a particularly acute and literal form. "At times I would face a Buddha image and yearn for the days when the Buddha was still in the world, and at other times, reading the holy scriptures, I would be consumed with envy that I had not heard his teaching in the past."⁴⁷ Twice he actually attempted to go to India, only to be thwarted by ill health and other difficulties. The Kōzan-ji retains a copy of his travel plans, including an estimate of the time needed to walk to India from Ch'angan and of the food and clothing he would require.

The only thing more repugnant to Myōe than birth "in a remote and peripheral country in the last age" was the prevailing attitude of hopelessness and despair on that account. The deeper his consciousness of *mappō* grew, the more he affirmed his resolve to uphold the monastic rules and precepts, convinced that such was his duty as the Buddha's disciple in order to protect the Dharma. The Kegon doc-

⁴⁵ *Kegon bukkō zammai kammyō kanden*, cited in Uehara, p. 157.

⁴⁶ *Kegon ichijō jūshin'i chūkaikaku shinkyō butsu butsudō dobukkōkan hōmon*, cited in Hazama, p. 3.

⁴⁷ *Takao Myōe Shōnin denki*, cited in Hazama, p. 6.

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trinal system which he established, incorporating nembutsu, meditation and esoteric elements, strongly emphasizes practice and faithful adherence to the way that the Buddha taught.

A similar, almost hysterical revulsion against the realities of the Final Dharma age and a passionate longing for the time of Shakyamuni run through the writings of the distinguished Hossō scholar Jōkei:

Greater than all griefs is the grief of not having been born in the Buddha's lifetime. More bitter than all resentments is the resentment of being submerged in the sea of suffering. What is more, from long aeons past until the present, I have already been spurned from the Buddha lands in the ten directions, equal in number to the sands of the Ganges River, and, accumulating still heavier karmic hindrances, I have at last come to this peripheral country where the five defilements prevail.⁴⁸

A grandson of Fujiwara no Michinori (1106-1159), Jōkei was ordained at the Kōfuku-ji in Nara where he practiced for thirty years. In 1192, he attended a service at the imperial palace and was shocked by the worldliness of the monks there who mocked his simplicity. Shortly afterward he retired to Mount Kasagi, east of Nara, viewed by many as the Pure Land of the future Buddha, Maitreya.

Although horrified at the corruption of the priesthood upon which, like Myōe, he blamed the decline of Buddhism, Jōkei firmly believed that the way taught by Shakyamuni transcended the three periods, and aroused the determination to attain enlightenment by exerting himself in the three disciplines as befitted a disciple of the Buddha. "Even if the monks are impure and their regulations do not accord with the Dharma," he wrote, "should there be even one or two among them who know the Dharma, this is a tremendous condition [leading to the enlightenment of all]. How could their efforts be in vain?"⁴⁹

Like Myōe, he attempted to integrate the esoteric teachings, medita-

⁴⁸ *Gumei hosshin shū*, in Kamata Shigeo and Tanaka Hisao, eds., *Kamakura Kyūbukkyō*, Nihon Shisō Taikō, vol. 15, p. 15.

⁴⁹ *Gedatsu Shōnin kairitsu kōgyō gansho*, Kamata and Tanaka eds., p. 11.

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tion and nembutsu within a single doctrinal framework (Hossō in this case), with a strong emphasis on practice, especially meditation and the observance of precepts. Precisely because it was the age of *mappō*, he believed, it was all the more important to revere the precepts and keep the vinaya, and he wrote a vow to restore them both. Its opening passage begins, "After the Buddha's entry into nirvana, one should make the precepts his teacher. Monk or lay believer, of the seven classes of disciples, who could fail to revere them?"⁵⁰ indicating the central role he believed the precepts should play. Jōkei and his followers exerted a profound influence on the development of Kamakura-period vinaya practice, a cause he struggled for throughout his life.

Jōkei's reverence for the precepts and the vinaya inevitably brought him into conflict with the new Pure Land sect. Jōkei is generally believed to have been the author of the Kōfuku-ji petition of 1205, a memorial to the throne which resulted in a temporary banning of Hōnen's teaching. Its eighth article, "Offenses against Shakyamuni Buddha," charges that radical followers of Hōnen "made breaking the precepts their guiding principle, and accommodated themselves to the secular mind. Of all conditions leading to the extinction of Buddhism, none is more fearful than this."⁵¹

Jōkei too called for a "return to the age of Shakyamuni" in order to counteract the degeneracy of the *mappō* era. In addition to his emphasis on strict observance of the precepts in accordance with the Buddha's will, he also established a practice known as Shaka-nembutsu. He did so, partly, no doubt, in reaction to Hōnen's exclusive Amida-nembutsu, but also as a genuine expression of devotion to the historical founder of Buddhism who had first opened the way to emancipation. His reverence for Shakyamuni extended to include the *śarīra*, or Buddha's relics, as well as the Chinese monk Ganjin (Chin. Chien-chen, 688-763), who was said to have brought them to Japan in 753. Jōkei insisted repeatedly on the need to acknowledge one's obligations to the historical Buddha, and saw in Hōnen's exclusive Amida worship an expression of the blackest ingratitude. Neglect of Shakyamuni, Jōkei warned, formed a major contributing factor in the

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵¹ *Kōfuku-ji sōjō*, ibid., p. 41.

decline of Buddhism:

We have never yet heard the preaching of Yakushi or received the precepts of Amida. We have never obtained the *shartra* of Kashyapa or had Lochana confer upon us a prophecy of Buddhahood. Why should one set aside what is near and seek the distant, abandon the roots and seize at the branches?⁵²

Yet Jōkei himself worshipped Maitreya, the Buddha-to-be, who, it is said, will make his advent in the world 5,670 million years after Shakyamuni's passing. Among other expressions of devotion, in 1198, Jōkei erected on Mount Kasagi a thousand images of Maitreya and thirteen stupas dedicated to Shakyamuni. "Shakyamuni and Maitreya are one entity,"⁵³ he declared. It may be that while Myōe expressed his longing for Shakyamuni's day in an attempt to "go back" via an actual journey to India, Jōkei projected his longing forward by worshipping Shakyamuni's successor.⁵⁴

As we have seen above through the examples of Myōe and Jōkei, the vinaya restoration leaders sought to stem the decline of Buddhism in the Final Dharma age by reviving the orthodox monastic practices of Shakyamuni's day. In so doing, they maintained the old distinction between clergy and laity and made no extraordinary efforts to provide for the religious needs of the common people unable to undertake monastic disciplines. One might argue that their purist and somewhat reactionary demands for orthodoxy blinded them to human limitations, or that they simply lacked the Pure Land teachers' concern for the salvation of the masses. On the other hand, one could as easily maintain that they held a much higher opinion of human nature on the whole than did the Pure Land Buddhists, in that they claimed that even the most ignorant common mortal could arouse the aspiration for enlightenment and eventually attain the goal through his own endeavors. In any event, though they most definitely believed that they were living in the Final Dharma age, their consciousness of *mappō* did not lead them to question either their own religious capacity or the validity of traditional disciplines. Herein we find a major difference be-

⁵² *Tōshōdai-ji Shaka-nembutsu ganmon*, cited in Hazama, p. 23.

⁵³ *Shunnichi gongen kenki*, cited in Hazama, p. 26.

⁵⁴ See Hazama, pp. 26-27.

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tween the *mappō* thought of the vinaya restorationists and that of the Pure Land Buddhists.

For Hōnen and Shinran, the reality of *mappō* was an external projection of their own sense of sinfulness and inadequacy stemming from their deep self-reflection; for Myōe and Jōkei, *mappō* involved a problem, not of inherent human evil or sinfulness, but of institutional corruption. In this they probably came closer than any of the Kamakura Buddhists to the original intent of the *mappō* concept as first used in the Buddhist scriptures: that is, as a warning against laxity in observing the monastic discipline, and not, as Hōnen had interpreted it, as a reason why that discipline was now futile and unnecessary.⁵⁵ Yet, though “textually accurate,” their interpretation of the Final Dharma age evidently failed to resonate with popular *mappō* consciousness. Despite their earnest efforts, as well as considerable backing in high places,⁵⁶ the movement they initiated did not long outlive them, let alone become a major force in shaping the future direction of Japanese Buddhism.

Some have charged that the Nara restoration movement led by Myōe, Jōkei and others like them failed to take hold because of their elitist mentality. Yet this alone seems inadequate to explain their failure in establishing a lasting tradition. (The Zen teachers of this time, as we shall see, gave little practical consideration to the religious needs of the masses, yet Zen survived and flourished.) An additional piece of the explanation may be that, in their doctrines, the goal of religious striving remains remote and inaccessible. The satisfactions of living up to “the way that one should be” or of knowing that “even if one does not reach the goal, if he practices throughout this lifetime he can surely surpass those who do not” may have held little attraction for people newly and brutally awakened to the truth of impermanence by the calamities and upheavals identified in the public mind with the Final Dharma age. *Mappō* consciousness and the fear that it engendered may well have demanded a more immediate religious cer-

⁵⁵ Bloom mentions this reversal of the meaning of degeneracy in his *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace*, p. 28.

⁵⁶ Myōe was revered by ex-Emperor Go-toba and Hōjō Yasutoki, while Jōkei, rather ironically, enjoyed the admiration of Hōnen's great patron, Kujō Kanazane.

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tainty than that provided by the traditional belief, upheld by the vinaya restoration leaders, that one achieves enlightenment only after successive lifetimes of austere practices.

(To be continued)

Seeking Enlightenment in the Last Age

Mappō Thought in Kamakura Buddhism

PART II

JACKIE STONE

Zen: Eisai and Dōgen

We turn now to the Zen sect. Introduced to Japan in the Nara period and incorporated by Saichō into the Tendai system, Zen emerged in the Kamakura period as an independent teaching. As one might expect in a tradition tending to minimize scriptural authority in favor of direct intuitive experience, Zen teachers on the whole placed less emphasis on the *mappō* doctrine as it appears in the sutras and commentaries than did other Kamakura Buddhist leaders. However, Zen came to prominence at a time when *mappō* consciousness prevailed, and did not wholly escape its impact.

In inquiring into the possible influence of *mappō* consciousness on Zen thought, we will focus on the views of Eisai (1141–1215), founder of the Rinzai sect of Japanese Zen, and Dogen (1200–1253), founder of the Sōtō sect. Both drew their inspiration from the Ch'an (Zen) teachings of China where they had gone for study, and both incurred opposition from the older sects on their return. Eisai found it impossible to teach pure Zen in Kyoto under the hostile eyes of the Tendai center on Mount Hiei, and the Kennin-ji temple which he established ultimately included halls for Tendai and Shingon worship. Yet by tactful compromise he won increasing recognition for the Zen discipline. Dōgen, on the other hand, refused to yield in the slightest, and

* This is the second and final part of an article which began in *The Eastern Buddhist* xviii, 1 (Spring 1985), pp. 28–56.

withdrew under pressure from the Tendai establishment to Echizen, where he founded a monastery. This difference between Eisai and Dōgen in their response to attacks from the religious establishment can also be seen in their respective treatment of the *mappō* doctrine: Eisai skillfully adopted it in a manner tending to enhance the legitimacy of Zen, while Dōgen—perhaps alone among the Kamakura-period Buddhist teachers—rejected it altogether.

Eisai readily acknowledged the historicity of *mappō*. His best-known work, the *Kōzen gokokuron* (Promoting Zen for the Protection of the Nation), states, “Since the Tathāgata’s final nirvana in the fifty-third year, cyclical sign *mizunoe-saru*, in the reign of King Mu of the Chou dynasty, until the present ninth year, cyclical sign *tsuchinoe-uma*, of the Kenkyū era in Japan, 2,147 years have passed. Accordingly, we are now in the second century of the fifth 500-year period.”⁵⁷ However, in striving to promote Zen meditation, he found himself in the position of first having to repudiate certain aspects of Hōnen’s *mappō* thought. A discipline relying wholly on self-endeavor, Zen unquestionably belonged to the Sacred Way condemned in the *Senchakushū* as beyond the capacity of common mortals in the Final Dharma age. Hōnen had in particular singled out practices such as meditation to perceive that “one’s own mind is the Buddha” as too profound for the benighted beings of *mappō*.⁵⁸ Eisai repeatedly countered that Zen was not, as the world believed, difficult to practice and difficult to attain enlightenment by, but easy and suited to people of all capacities:

Now I desire to recommend Zen for the ignorant people of this last age, and enable them to form a bond with the direct path to Buddhahood. Even if one is to be reckoned among those who “listen to few teachings and have meagre understanding,” or among those “of dull faculties who lack wisdom,” if he devotes himself single-mindedly to *zazen* [seated meditation], he will at once attain the Way.⁵⁹

Since *zazen* ensures the enlightenment of all, Eisai argued, it is the cor-

⁵⁷ *Kōzen gokokuron*, T. 80.4a.

⁵⁸ *Ōjō dai-yōshō*, cited in Hazama, p. 32.

⁵⁹ *Kōzen gokokuron*, T. 80.12b-c.

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rect practice for the Final Dharma age:

The Prajñā, Lotus, and Nirvana sutras all teach the meditative practice of *zazen* for the last age. If it did not suit the people's capacity in these latter days, the Buddha would not have taught this. For this reason, the people of the great Sung nation avidly practice Zen. They err, who, in ignorance of *zazen*, hold that Buddhism has fallen into decline.⁶⁰

Nor did Eisai regard the advent of *mappō* as a valid reason to discard the monastic precepts, which he saw as integral to Buddhist practice and endeavored to help restore. "The Zen sect regards the precepts as being of first priority,"⁶¹ he wrote. And, "By means of the precepts, meditation and wisdom are brought forth."⁶² Here Eisai may have had in mind the traditional order of the three disciplines, whereby observing the precepts facilitates meditation, meditation leads to wisdom, and wisdom enables one to attain enlightenment. Eisai was especially critical of the Pure Land sect for, as he saw it, using the *mappō* doctrine to justify laxity in monastic observances. The *Kōzen gokokuron* also warns against too literal an interpretation of the *Mappō tōmyō ki*'s assertion that in *mappō* there will be no precepts, and suggests that it refers to Hinayana, rather than Mahayana, precepts.⁶³

In the final analysis, however, Eisai's approach to the *mappō* doctrine did not go much beyond a rebuttal of those points of the Pure Land teaching inimical to Zen, while at the same time borrowing Pure Land rhetoric to assert that Zen is an "easy practice" and "suited to all people's capacities." *Mappō* was not the subject on which he expended his most creative thought. Of far greater interest here are the views of Dōgen, who dismissed the entire three-period concept as a provisional teachings.

In the *Bendōwa* (A Story of the Way) chapter of Dōgen's major work *Shōbōgenzō* (The Eye and Treasury of the True Dharma), we find the following exchange:

⁶⁰ Ibid., T. 80.4a.

⁶¹ Ibid., T. 80.8b.

⁶² Ibid., T. 80.7a.

⁶³ Robert F. Rhodes, trans., Introduction to "Saichō's *Mappō tōmyō ki*," *The Eastern Buddhist* XIII, 1 (Spring 1980), pp. 84–85.

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QUESTION: Is it possible to obtain the proof of enlightenment by this practice [of *zazen*] even during this evil latter age?

ANSWER: The doctrinal schools emphasizing names and appearances distinguish between the True, Counterfeit, and Final Dharma ages, but in True Mahayana [Zen] we find no such distinction. It teaches that all who practice will attain the Way.⁶⁴

How was Dōgen, perhaps alone among the Kamakura teachers, able to dismiss the *mappō* doctrine that so obsessed his contemporaries? To answer this, we must look into his views of time, existence, and the Buddha nature.

Early in his monastic career as a novice on Mount Hiei, Dōgen became troubled by the apparent contradiction between the Tendai doctrine of original or inherent enlightenment (*hongaku*), and the idea of acquired enlightenment (*shikaku*) implicit in the concept of Buddhist practice. If one is originally enlightened, then what is the significance of practice, and when does one “become” a Buddha if he is Buddha already? In resolving these questions he would arrive at a view of time essentially incompatible with three-period thought.⁶⁵ Here we will briefly touch on a few relevant aspects of Dōgen’s view of time as reflected in the *Shōbōgenzō*.⁶⁶

Conventional views of time generally imply a duality of time and event, holding, for example, that events are enacted in succession against the backdrop of time, or that time flows against the background of events. In the *Uji* (Existence-Time) chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen rejects this duality, asserting that “‘Time is existence, existence is time’ . . . one blade of grass, every single object, each living thing is inseparable from time. Time includes every being and all worlds.”⁶⁷ Existence-time, in other words, involves the totality

⁶⁴ *Shōbōgenzō, Bendōwa*, in Terada Tōru and Mizuno Yaoko, eds. *Dōgen*, Nihon Shisō Taikō, vol. 12, p. 26.

⁶⁵ Kazue, pp. 379–380.

⁶⁶ I have relied heavily on Kazue, pp. 284–380, and Hee-Jin Kim, *Dōgen Kigen: Mystical Realist* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975), pp. 160–213, in preparing the following explanation.

⁶⁷ Kōsen Nishiyama and John Stevens, trans., *Dogen Zenji's Shōbōgenzō*, vol. 1, pp. 68–69.

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of both spatial and temporal dimensions.

Moreover, existence-time does not extend beyond the moment, which Dogen terms the “absolute now” (*nikon*). This “now” contains both past and future within itself.

All existences and all worlds are contained within a temporal particularity. Just meditate on this for a moment: Are there any existences or any worlds excluded from this present moment? . . . I think of the past, present, and future, and no matter how many periods, even tens of thousands of them, I may think of, they are the present moment, the absolute now. A person’s destiny necessarily lies within the present.⁶⁸

Because this present is absolute, “there is no coming and going in time. . . . Yesterday’s time is experienced in our present experience.”⁶⁹ Our dynamic experience in this moment of remembering the past and anticipating the future creates a sense of continuity, but the succession of “absolute nows” that constitute our experience of time does not, in Dōgen’s view, flow one into the next. To believe that would be to presuppose some entity or substratum that “changes” from future into present, or from present into past—a position Dōgen rejected as essentially non-Buddhist. “Time does not pass,”⁷⁰ he wrote. And, “There is absolutely no time that has not arrived.”⁷¹ Thus Dōgen denied the linear flow of time; each “absolute now” is discrete and discontinuous.

Moreover, the interpenetration of space and time which forms the “absolute now” of existence-time transpires within the individual. Dōgen writes:

The central meaning of being-time is: every being in the entire world is related to each other and can never be separated from time. Existence is time and therefore it is my own true time.⁷²

And, “everything exists in the present within yourself.”⁷³ This totality of time and space inherent in the absolute now of the individual,

⁶⁸ *Shōbōgenzō, Daigō*, cited in Kim, p. 198.

⁶⁹ Nishiyama and Stevens, p. 69.

⁷⁰ *Shōbōgenzō, Uji*, cited in Kim, p. 196.

⁷¹ *Shōbōgenzō, Busshō*, cited in Kim, p. 207.

⁷² Nishiyama and Stevens, p. 69.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Dōgen further equated with the Buddha nature.

The Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra states, “All existences⁷⁴ without exception possess the Buddha nature” (*issai shujō kotogotoku busshō o yūsu*). However, in the *Busshō* (Buddha Nature) chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen reinterprets the Chinese in an ingenious manner⁷⁵ to read, “All existences are the Buddha nature” (*issai shujō shitsu u busshō*). In this way he rejected the view, held, for example, by the Consciousness-Only school, that the Buddha nature is a “seed” or psychic potential that evolves in a linear fashion from latency to realization, and instead identifies it with the unchanging, ultimate truth, designated as Suchness (Skt. *tathatā*, Jap. *shinnyo*), Emptiness (*sūnyatā*, *kū*), or the Dharma nature (*dharmatā*, *hosshō*).⁷⁶ This Buddha nature, being identified with “all existences,” exists nowhere apart from the destruction and coming-into-being of the phenomenal world in the present moment, or absolute now.

Because this “now” is absolute, and because “there is no time that has not arrived,” Buddhahood is not a potential that will unfold in the future, but can be realized only in the present moment. In other words, attaining Buddhahood is not, in Dōgen’s view, a gradual evolving from potential to realization associated with a linear view of time. In this way, he was able to resolve the contradiction that had originally puzzled him. “The Buddha nature and becoming a Buddha always occur simultaneously,”⁷⁷ he concluded. This view wipes out at a single stroke any metaphysical gap between practice and enlightenment: Whenever

⁷⁴ The sutra actually says “all living beings” (*issai shujō*), but since Dōgen himself interprets this expression as including both sentient and non-sentient beings, I have translated it as “all existences”; see Kim, pp. 163–166.

⁷⁵ In “breaking down” the characters of a Chinese text into Japanese syntactical form, it is possible to alter deliberately the grammatical structure of the original, thereby deriving new meanings. This practice seems to have been quite common in interpreting Buddhist texts during this period. Shinran uses it, for example, to reinterpret the eighteenth vow in light of his absolute emphasis on *tariki*; see Bloom, pp. 48–49.

⁷⁶ Kim, pp. 161–164, gives this as his interpretation of Dōgen’s reasons for restructuring the Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra passage. There are others. For example, Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga claim the Dōgen interpreted the passage in this way to avoid any possible misunderstanding of the Buddha nature as *anātman* or permanent ego; see *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles and Tokyo: Buddhist Books International, 1976), p. 249.

⁷⁷ *Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, cited in Kim, pp. 179–180.

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one sits in meditation, he simultaneously enters the realm of Buddha. Dōgen called this the “kōan realized in reality,” or *genjō kōan*.

Viewing time and enlightenment in this way, Dōgen found himself unable to accept the historical view of three-period thought, according to which the Dharma becomes obscured with the passage of time. “Time does not pass,” he believed, and the Dharma does not decline; wherever one sits in meditation, he is contemporaneous with Buddha.

We have seen that Eisai and Dōgen cared little for the *mappō* doctrine as such, yet they may quite possibly have been influenced by the phenomenon of *mappō* consciousness. This proposition rests on a few striking resemblances between the teachings of these two men, Dōgen’s in particular, and those of Honen and Shinran, who made *mappō* thought their foundation and starting point.

At first glance, of course, the Pure Land teachings and Zen appear not only to lack major points of resemblance but to form mirror opposites. In contrast to the Pure Land emphasis on absolute reliance on the “other power” of Amida’s vow, Zen teaches complete self-reliance, requiring only one’s own body and the proper intention. And, unlike Hōnen and Shinran, both Eisai and Dōgen emphasized monastic life with its strict adherence to the rules and precepts. A second look, however, reveals some marked similarities. The most noteworthy of these is the absolutizing of a single form of practice. Eisai, as mentioned above, eventually compromised his attempts to teach pure Zen and incorporated other disciplines into his system. However, this was probably not his original intention. As Furuta Shōkin points out, Eisai must have placed far greater emphasis on pure Zen than others had ever done, or he would not have incurred such virulent opposition from the older sects in the first place.⁷⁸ The emphasis on Zen meditation as an exclusive practice undergoes further development in the thought of Dōgen, who rejected even the kōan as practiced by Rinzai Zen and upheld the sole practice of sitting in meditation (*shikan taza*). “Indeed, unless one concentrates on one thing,” he wrote, “he cannot attain the one wisdom [of Buddha].”⁷⁹ Moreover, both Eisai and Dōgen asserted, as the Pure Land teachers

⁷⁸ Furuta Shōkin, *Nihon Bukkyō shisō-shi* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1971), p. 105.

⁷⁹ *Shōbōgenzō, Bendōwa*, cited in Kim, p. 74.

had of the nembutsu, that the practice of *zazen* suits people of all capacities without exception. Dōgen's remarks on the subject sound astonishingly like Hōnen's praise of the universality of the nembutsu:

The true learning of the Way is not dependent on one's native intelligence or acquired learning, nor on cleverness or quickness. . . . Truth does not employ high erudition and high intelligence, so do not despair at being endowed with slowness or inferior intelligence. For the true learning of the Way should be easy.⁸⁰

Parenthetically, we should note that the universal feasibility of *zazen* as taught by Eisai and Dōgen obtained more in theory than in practice; the very nature of meditation and the emphasis these Buddhists placed on monastic life prevented it from spreading immediately among people of all classes as did the nembutsu. However, they did help set in motion the eventual adoption of Zen meditation by laymen, especially of the warrior class, in decades to come.⁸¹

Sitting in meditation was for Dōgen the "proven method," so to speak, of attaining enlightenment—the method employed by Shakyamuni under the bodhi tree. As such, he felt, its efficacy transcended the distinctions of the three periods. In this, too, his views resembled Hōnen's concerning the eternal validity of the nembutsu. The difference between them on this point lay chiefly in their approach: In Hōnen's thought, *mappō* becomes the starting point for presenting the nembutsu as an eternally valid way of practice; in Dōgen's thought, because *zazen* is eternally valid, the entire concept of *mappō* becomes irrelevant.

As yet another point of similarity, Dōgen claimed, as the Pure Land teachers had of the nembutsu of the original vow, that *zazen* offers

⁸⁰ *Zuimonki*, III: 20, cited in Kim, pp. 51–52.

⁸¹ Both Eisai and Dōgen had spent some time in Kamakura, where they seem to have greatly impressed some members of the warrior elite. Eisai won the patronage of Hōjō Masako, the widow of Minamoto no Yoritomo who had founded the Kamakura shogunate. He also enjoyed the support of the second and third shoguns, Yoriie and Sanetomo. Dōgen for his part made a great impression on the fifth Hōjō regent, Tokiyori. As a result, Tokiyori and subsequent regents invited Zen masters from China such as Dōryū (Tao-lung) and Sogen (Tsu-yuan) who, unaware of the Japanese eclectic tradition, taught pure Zen as they had practiced it in China and thus furthered its acceptance as an independent teaching.

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direct access to the goal of practice. Dōgen carried this concept far beyond Hōnen and even beyond Shinran by arguing, as we have seen, that Buddhahood is attained in the very act of *zazen*. In Dōgen's thought there is no goal as distinct from the practice to attain it:

The view that practice and enlightenment are not one is heretical. In the Buddha-Dharma they are one. Inasmuch as practice is based on enlightenment, the practice of a beginner is all of original enlightenment. Therefore, in giving instruction for practice, a Zen master advises his disciples not to seek enlightenment beyond practice, for practice itself is original enlightenment.⁸²

Thus Dogen's teaching, even more than that of the Pure Land teachers, brings the goal of practice within certain reach.

Although Hōnen condemned meditation as beyond the capacity of people born in the age of *mappō*, and Dōgen for his part likened the practitioners of nembutsu to frogs "croaking day and night in the rice paddies,"⁸³ both nevertheless argued for the absolute validity of a single practice suited to the capacities of all people, eternally relevant, and offering direct access to enlightenment. These are hardly negligible points of resemblance, especially when we consider that no other form of Buddhist teaching claiming precisely these attributes had arisen in Japan before. Now, suddenly, these two appeared within a few decades of each other. It seems probable that some common factors moved and inspired their teachings, and one such factor may well have been the phenomenon of *mappō* consciousness. We will consider this possibility in more detail after examining the *mappō* thought held by the last of the great Kamakura Buddhist leaders, Nichiren.

Nichiren

Nichiren (1222–1282), like Hōnen and Dōgen, taught a single, exclusive practice for the age of *mappō*. However, rather than assigning absolute significance to some existing discipline, as these teachers had, Nichiren initiated a new form of Buddhist practice. In this last age, he

⁸² *Shōbōgenzō, Bendōwa*, cited in Kim, p. 79.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

asserted, men and women of whatever capacity could attain Buddhahood in their present form by chanting the *daimoku* 題目 or title of the Lotus Sutra with the invocation *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*. Nichiren's *mappō* thought stands out for its striking affirmation—in contrast to conventional pessimistic sentiments—that the present, degenerate Final Dharma age is actually the most ideal time for attaining Buddhahood.

Where Hōnen and Shinran had based their religious quest on their own sense of sin and personal shortcomings, Nichiren's search for a teaching valid in the *mappō* era stemmed from a desire for objective truth. Contention among rival Buddhist sects—exemplifying the *Ta-chi-ching's* prediction of an age when “quarrels and disputes will arise among the adherents to my teachings”—along with the glaring failure of the established religious institutions to alleviate the nation's suffering, awoke in him a resolve to discover which, among the so-called “eighty-thousand teachings,” represented the Buddha's true intention and could benefit people in the last age. Setting aside for the moment the claims of rival teachers and turning to the texts themselves, he devoted sixteen years to exhaustive study of the sutras and commentaries. Eventually he concluded that the Lotus Sutra, and none other, represented the pinnacle of Shakyamuni's teachings.

In this he concurred with Chih-i (538–597), founder of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai school, and with Saichō (767–822), who had established the T'ien-t'ai (Jap. Tendai) teachings in Japan. Nichiren in fact used the T'ien-t'ai *kyōhan*,⁸⁴ or comparative classification of the sutras, to help clarify his own teaching. This system places the Lotus in a position central to all other sutras for its revelation of the One Buddha Vehicle leading to universal enlightenment, as well as its emphasis on the essential non-duality of the Buddha and the common mortal. Chih-i, in establishing this classification, had designated all other sutras as provisional, expedient means taught by the Buddha to elevate his disciples'

⁸⁴ The practice of “comparative classification” originated in China as an attempt to systematize the bewildering array of sutras that had been introduced at random from India. Chih-i's system, called the “five periods and eight teachings” postulates the Lotus Sutra as the final teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha's preaching career. Chih-i's classification system is perhaps better regarded as a clarification of why he held this sutra to be supreme, rather than an actual assessment of the chronological sequence of the Buddha's teachings.

understanding to a point where they could grasp the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren, summarizing his own view of the essential difference between the Lotus Sutra and all others, states, "The provisional sutras expound the Dharma in fragments. They do not teach it in its entirety as the Lotus Sutra does."⁸⁵ He held, along with Tendai tradition, that the Lotus Sutra not only surpasses all other Buddhist teachings but encompasses their partial truths within itself. Or conversely stated, the other teachings accurately reflect the truth only when based on the premise of the One Buddha Vehicle revealed in the Lotus Sutra.

In the age of *mappō*, Nichiren believed, people no longer had the capacity, as men had in previous ages, to attain full realization of the truth through its partial manifestations as represented by the provisional teachings. Only in the perfect mirror of truth contained in the Lotus Sutra could people perceive their innate Buddha nature.

Nichiren was not the first person to advocate the Lotus Sutra for the Final Dharma age. The sutra itself speaks of the blessings to be gained by the one who upholds it "in an evil age, at the time of the Final Dharma."⁸⁶ Moreover, some four hundred years earlier Saichō had written: "The ages of the True and Counterfeit Dharmas have nearly passed, and the age of the Final Dharma is near at hand. Now is indeed the time when people can attain enlightenment through the One Vehicle of the Lotus Sutra."⁸⁷ Nichiren's uniqueness lay rather in the practice that he established. Rejecting the traditional practices of the Lotus Sutra such as copying it and reciting its twenty-eight chapters, as well as the twofold Tendai system of doctrinal study (*kyōsō*) and meditation (*kanjin*), he instead established the universally feasible practice of chanting the sutra's title. His reasons for doing so, as we shall see in a moment, were deeply bound up with his view of *mappō*. First, however, we will briefly consider a few pertinent aspects of the practice that he taught for the Final Dharma age.

Tendai Buddhism not only held that all truth is contained in the Lotus Sutra but had a long tradition of title exegesis and belief that the meaning of the entire sutra is contained in its title. The sect takes as its

⁸⁵ "Mōkoshi gosho," Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūsho, *Teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun*, vol. 2, p. 1112.

⁸⁶ Leon Hurvitz, trans., *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 255.

⁸⁷ *Shugo kokkai shō*, T. 74.177b.

basis the Chinese translation of the Saddharma Pundarīka Sūtra made by Kumārajīva in 406, the *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching*, or *Myōhō-renge-kyō* in Japanese. Thus we find both historical and doctrinal reasons why Nichiren should choose invocation of the sutra's title as a universal practice for attaining Buddhahood. For Nichiren, however, the "five characters of Myōhō-renge-kyō" were not merely the title of a sutra but the direct manifestation of ultimate reality itself. In various writings he equates Myōhō-renge-kyō with the universal Dharma nature, the Buddha nature inherent in all sentient and insentient beings, the wisdom of all Buddhas and the original cause (*hon'in*) for attaining Buddhahood. "All Buddhas throughout time and space invariably attain their enlightenment with the seed of the five characters of Myōhō-renge-kyō,"⁸⁸ he wrote. In the way of recitation that he taught, Myōhō-renge-kyō is preceded by *Namu*, an expression of devotion. In the act of chanting *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*, he asserted, the fusion of subjective individual wisdom and the absolute takes place, and the common mortal, just as he is, becomes Buddha.

Like Dōgen, Nichiren taught that Buddhahood is attained in the moment of practice: In the act of chanting *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*, one "simultaneously makes the cause and receives the effect of Buddhahood."⁸⁹ However, since one tends to revert to his ordinary deluded state when not actually engaged in practice, Nichiren also stressed the importance of strengthening the experience of enlightenment by continuing to chant *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō* throughout one's life. "If you have faith in this truth [that your own mind is the Dharma] and chant Myōhō-renge-kyō, you are certain to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime,"⁹⁰ he wrote. In his doctrine, Buddhahood thus has the elements of both instantaneous enlightenment and enlightenment-as-process. The aspect of process, however, he viewed not as linear progress toward an external goal, but as the uncovering, so to speak, of one's already inherent Buddha nature, analogous to the way in which one brings out a mirror's luster by repeated polishing.

Chanting the *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren taught, equally suits the capacities of all people, whether they are men or women,

⁸⁸ "Akimoto gosho," *Nichiren Shonin ibun*, vol. 2, p. 1731.

⁸⁹ "Oko kikigaki," *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 2546.

⁹⁰ "On Attaining Buddhahood" (Isshō jōbutsu shō), Nichiren Shōshū International Center, *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: 1979), p. 5.

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priests or lay believers; whether they are ignorant or wise, or of high or low status; whether or not they have accumulated merit in past lifetimes; and whether they keep, break or have never received the precepts. Moreover, he held the *daimoku* to be not only universally efficacious but all encompassing, containing the merits of all good practices within itself. As he wrote:

Shakyamuni's practices and the virtues he consequently attained are all contained within the single phrase Myōhō-*renge-kyō*. If we believe in that phrase, we shall naturally be granted the same benefits as he was.⁹¹

Nichiren's conviction in the all-encompassing nature of the *daimoku* led him to deny the necessity of upholding the precepts. Like Hōnen, he himself continued to observe the monastic vows of celibacy and refrained from meat-eating and so forth even after establishing his own sect, but he did not consider the precepts essential to attaining Buddhahood.⁹² His reason was not that people in the *mappō* era are incapable of upholding precepts, but that the observance of precepts was superceded by, and in fact included in, the chanting of the *daimoku*:

The five characters of Myōhō-*renge-kyō*, the heart of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, contain all the benefit amassed by the good practices and meritorious deeds of all Buddhas throughout past, present and future. Therefore how could they not contain the benefit amassed by observing the Buddha's precepts?⁹³

For Nichiren, there was only one precept in the Final Dharma age—to embrace the *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra, thereby attaining Buddhahood in one's present form. Firmly convinced of the essential oneness of mundane truth and the ultimate reality, he also believed

⁹¹ "The True Object of Worship" (Kanjin honzon shō), *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 64.

⁹² In rejecting the precepts, Nichiren, unlike Hōnen, did not leave himself open to the charge of short-circuiting the law of karmic causality and thereby inviting immoral behavior. Chanting *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō* enables one to "transcend karma" in these sense that it affords direct access to the absolute; however, according to Nichiren's doctrine, because one remains in the world even after attaining Buddhahood, he is still liable for the effects of all his good and evil deeds.

⁹³ "Kyōgyōshō goshō," *Nichiren Shōnin ibun*, vol. 2, p. 1488.

that chanting the *daimoku* would, in and of itself, enable one to correctly understand all worldly affairs.⁹⁴

Nichiren, too, claimed for his teaching a validity extending beyond the duration of the *mappō* era. His statement, "If Nichiren's mercy is truly vast and all-encompassing, *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō* will spread for ten thousand years, and more, for all eternity,"⁹⁵ calls to mind Hōnen's assertion that the nembutsu would endure a hundred years after the Final Dharma age had passed. Yet Nichiren went far beyond the Pure Land teacher in developing the concept of eternal validity. Where Hōnen had simply claimed that the nembutsu would bring about rebirth in the Pure Land even after the *mappō* era had passed, Nichiren asserted not only that Myōhō-renge-kyō would lead people to enlightenment throughout the everlasting future, but that in the final analysis, since the infinite past as well, no one ever has attained enlightenment except through this teaching. This extraordinary conclusion rests on Nichiren's truly cosmic view of life as it transmigrates through successive existences and is born into different worlds. In arriving at it, he was to define in a unique fashion exactly how the religious capacity of people in the Final Dharma age differs from that of people in previous ages.⁹⁶

Chih-i, in *chūan* one of his *Fa-hua-wen-chū* (Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra), likens the process by which the Buddha leads the people to enlightenment to that of "sowing, maturing and harvesting."⁹⁷ First the Buddha plants the seed of Buddhahood in the minds of living beings by causing them to hear the Dharma and thus form a bond with it. Then he gradually nurtures their understanding by expounding various provisional teachings suited to their individual capacities, and at last brings them the last step of the way to emancipation with a final teaching. This analogy rests on the traditional view of the attainment of Buddhahood as a linear endeavor spanning many lifetimes. Based

⁹⁴ "Kanjin honzon shō," *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 720.

⁹⁵ "Hōon shō," *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 1248.

⁹⁶ In preparing this explanation, I have relied chiefly on Nichiren's "Kanjin honzon shō," "Kyōgyōshō gosho" and "Kembutsu mirai ki."

⁹⁷ *Shu* 種, *juku* 熟, and *datsu* 脱, literally, "sowing, maturing and emancipation." I have adopted the translation "sowing, maturing, and harvesting" used by the Nichiren Shōshū International Center translation committee, Tokyo, because it serves well to illustrate the process.

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on it, Buddhist teachings may be classified according to which stage they occupy in the process—teachings of sowing, or teachings of maturing and harvesting.

Chih-i developed the doctrine of “sowing, maturing and harvesting” based on the seventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra, wherein Shakyamuni reveals to his śrāvaka disciples that they first formed a bond with the Dharma when he preached the Lotus Sutra to them in the remote past, as the sixteenth son of a Buddha called “Victorious Through Great Penetrating Wisdom” (Skt. Mahābhijñānābhibhū). Since then, he tells them, they have been born together with him in lifetime after lifetime and world after world, and each time he has fostered their growing wisdom by expounding provisional teachings in accordance with their capacity. Now, having been born with him again in India, they will at last be able to attain perfect enlightenment through the One Buddha Vehicle of the Lotus Sutra.

In light of the “sowing, maturing and harvesting” doctrine, Nichiren concluded that people who had attained enlightenment during the True and Counterfeit Dharma ages had been able to do so only because they had received the seed of Buddhahood (i.e., heard the Lotus Sutra) from Shakyamuni in previous lifetimes. For example, his *Kyōgyōshō gosho* (On Teaching, Practice and Proof) states:

During the two thousand years of the True and Counterfeit Dharma ages, those who embraced Hinayana or provisional Mahayana as the basis of their faith and practiced these teachings in earnest could generally gain the benefit of enlightenment. However, though they believed this benefit had come directly from the sutras they had chosen to rely on, in light of the Lotus Sutra, no benefit ever originated from any such provisional teachings. The reason [they were able to attain enlightenment] is that all these people had established a connection with the Lotus Sutra during the Buddha’s lifetime, though the results they gained varied according to whether or not their receptivity had fully matured. Those whose capacity was inferior and immature [were still incapable of attaining enlightenment at that time, but] were reborn during the age of the True Dharma, and, by embracing provisional Mahayana teachings such as the Vimalakīrti,

Shiyaku, *Kanmuryōju*, *Ninnō*, and *Hannya* sutras, they were able to gain the same proof of enlightenment achieved by those of higher capacity during the Buddha's lifetime.⁹⁸

In short, the provisional teachings may have served as a proximate cause or catalyst for the enlightenment of people in the True and Counterfeit Dharma ages, but fundamentally, those people's enlightenment derived from an earlier bond formed with the Lotus Sutra.

All this raises the question: What people in the age of *mappō*? Here we come to Nichiren's unique understanding of the problem of human religious capacity in the last age. According to his account, people born in the Final Dharma age, by definition, have never received the seed of Buddhahood—i.e., heard the Lotus Sutra—from Shakyamuni in prior existences. Thus no matter how assiduously they might practice, they cannot attain enlightenment through Shakyamuni's teachings, any more than one can reap a harvest from a field that has never been sown.

Now in the age of *mappō*, only the teaching remains; there is neither practice nor proof. There is no longer a single person who has formed a relationship with Shakyamuni Buddha. Those who possessed the capacity to gain enlightenment through either the provisional or true Mahayana sutras have long since disappeared. In this age of impurity and evil, *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō* . . . should be planted as the seed of Buddhahood for the first time in the minds of those who commit the five cardinal offenses and slander the true Dharma.⁹⁹

Here we can see one reason why Nichiren established a new way of practice. He firmly believed that, as the Lotus Sutra teaches, "Within the Buddha-lands of the ten directions/There is the Dharma of only One Vehicle"¹⁰⁰—that is, only one great truth by which all beings can attain enlightenment. Nichiren often referred to this truth as "the Lotus Sutra," abstracting this name from its historical association with the *Saddharma Pundarīka*. Yet this one truth must inevitably assume different forms according to the time and the people's capacity. In

⁹⁸ "Kyōgyōshō gosho," *Nichiren Shōnin ibun*, vol. 2, pp. 1479–1480.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1480.

¹⁰⁰ Hurvitz, p. 34.

Shakyamuni's lifetime, Nichiren held, it took form as the Saddharma Pundarīka Sutra, which served as the Buddhism of the harvest for people who had already received the seed of enlightenment and nurtured it through their Buddhist practice in prior lifetimes. Now in the time of *mappō*, however, people have never received the seed of enlightenment, let alone cultivated their capacity through practice; they are defined as people "without prior good causes" (*honmi uzen*). Therefore the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra must for their sake take form as the Buddhism of sowing, which Nichiren defined as the five characters of Myōhō-*renge-kyō*. As he wrote:

The essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra and that intended for the beginning of the Final Dharma age are both pure and perfect teachings that lead directly to Buddhahood. But Shakyamuni's is the Buddhism of the harvest, while this is the Buddhism of sowing.¹⁰¹

Nichiren never denied outright the prevailing opinion that people in the time of *mappō* are more evil and deluded than those in previous ages and less capable of discerning true from false, or profound from shallow, in religious doctrines. In his thinking, however, the major hindrance to their enlightenment lay, not in their innate evil, but in their lack of those prior causes (i.e., practice in past lifetimes under the guidance of Shakyamuni), that would have enabled them to attain enlightenment through traditional disciplines.

Here we encounter an interesting two-level perspective in Nichiren's *mappō* thought. On the surface, acknowledging popular opinion, he describes the beings of *mappō* as "lacking virtue," which he interpreted as not having formed the sort of karmic bond with the historical Shakyamuni that would have allowed them to attain liberation through that Buddha's teachings. Yet in terms of his own unique *mappō* thought, Nichiren regarded people born into the Final Dharma age as the most fortunate of living beings. His reason was that, while the historical Buddha generally taught the attainment of Buddhahood through practices spanning many aeons (*ryakkō shugyō*), the *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra to be propagated in the time of *mappō* is a practice of attaining Buddhahood in one's present form (*sokushin jōbutsu*). In

¹⁰¹ "Kanjin honzon shō," *Nichiren Shōnin ibun*, vol. 1, p. 715.

Nichiren's teaching, the entire process of sowing, maturing and harvesting concludes in the moment of chanting the *daimoku*, the act by which one "simultaneously makes the cause and receives the effect of Buddhahood." Or, if enlightenment is viewed as a process, one reaps the harvest of emancipation within this single lifetime. Those born in the True and Counterfeit Dharma ages, Nichiren taught, could attain Buddhahood through traditional disciplines, but these in general demanded practice spanning many cycles of birth and death. On the other hand, those born in the time of *mappō* cannot attain Buddhahood through such disciplines, but by chanting *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*, they can become Buddhas in this very lifetime.

Thus for Nichiren, birth in the Final Dharma age is ultimately a matter for rejoicing. "What joy to have been born in *mappō*, and to have shared in the propagation [of the *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra]!"¹⁰² he exclaims. "To be a common mortal seeking the Way in this Final Dharma age is better than being a mighty ruler during the two thousand years of the True and Counterfeit Dharma ages. . . . Rather than be abbot of the Tendai sect, it is better to be a leper who chants *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*."¹⁰³ And, "I rejoice at whatever good fortune enabled me to be born in the fifth five-hundred years. . . . When one compares the rewards of living in the three different periods, it is clear that mine surpass not only those of Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu but those of T'ien-t'ai [Chih-i] and Dengyō."¹⁰⁴ Similar expressions of joy and gratitude abound in his writings, contrasting sharply with the gloom of conventional *mappō* thought. For Nichiren, *mappō* was defined not in terms of its depravity, but in terms of the relationship between the people and the Dharma. From one perspective, he taught that the *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra is the correct practice for people in the Final Dharma age, but more fundamentally, he held the Final Dharma age to be significant because that is the time when the *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra—the seed for the direct attainment of Buddhahood—shall spread.

What did, in Nichiren's estimation, make *mappō* a dark and evil era was stubborn adherence to provisional teachings no longer suited to

¹⁰² "Niike gosho," *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 2118.

¹⁰³ "Senji shō," *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 1009.

¹⁰⁴ "On the Buddha's Prophecy" (Kembutsu mirai ki), *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, vol. 1, p. 110.

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the time or the people's capacity. These fragmentary revelations of truth had been able to trigger full awakening in the people of the True and Counterfeit Dharma ages, who had cultivated the requisite capacity through their past practice. However, like medicine standing too long upon the shelf which loses its potency and turns poisonous, by the Final Dharma age, far from leading to enlightenment, these incomplete doctrines served only to compound people's illusions and evil karma. Convinced of the essential non-duality of the individual and his objective world, Nichiren saw the disasters and upheavals of his age as an outward expression of widespread delusion arising from faith in these inferior teachings. He asserted that if people would instead embrace the *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra, awakening to their own Buddha nature, then the present world, just as it is, would become the Buddha land.¹⁰⁵

Nichiren consistently opposed any suggestion that enlightenment or ultimate truth or the Buddha land lies anywhere apart from oneself in the present moment. "There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves," he remarked. "The difference lies solely in the good or evil in our minds."¹⁰⁶ In this way, he saw the individual as fully responsible for his own enlightenment, a view that heavily influenced his position on another of the standard *mappō* issues—the question of ease versus difficulty of practice.

The *daimoku*, like the nembutsu, requires neither profound doctrinal understanding nor the institution of monastic life nor even the ability to read. Nichiren himself acknowledged the virtue of its extreme simplicity, which rendered it accessible to all people. However, unlike Hōnen, he rarely argued the authenticity of the *daimoku* on the basis of its ease of practice. Rather, looking beyond mere mechanical simplicity, he defined the practice of the *daimoku* as "difficult."¹⁰⁷

Here Nichiren applied to the *daimoku* the words of the Saddharma Pundarika, which describes itself as the teaching that is "the hardest to believe, the hardest to understand."¹⁰⁸ Nichiren analyzed this difficulty

¹⁰⁵ This forms the central argument of the *Risshō ankoku ron*, Nichiren's famous memorial submitted to the ex-regent Hōjō Tokiyori in 1260.

¹⁰⁶ "On Attaining Buddhahood," *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, vol. 1, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Asai Endō, "Nichiren Shōnin ni okeru ningenkan," *Nihon Bukkyō gakkai nenpyō* 33 (1967), p. 316

in several ways. First, he said, there is doctrinal difficulty; because the *daimoku* encompasses all truth within itself, it is infinitely profound and therefore “difficult to understand.” Second, he stressed the difficulty of propagation, which in the Final Dharma age invariably entails hardships and misunderstandings. The Lotus Sutra itself enumerates the persecutions that will befall its votaries in the “evil age”—prophecies borne out with almost uncanny accuracy in the lives of Nichiren and his disciples. Third, he warned against the difficulty of sustaining faith, for one’s deluded mind will attempt to thwart him in various ways as he advances in practice. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, Nichiren emphasized the extreme difficulty of believing in one’s own Buddha nature. He wrote, “To believe that Buddhahood exists within Humanity [*ninkai*] is the most difficult thing of all.”¹⁰⁹

Herein lies a crucial difference between Nichiren and the Pure Land teachers. The fact that both Nichiren and Hōnen emphasized the efficacy of a single phrase uttered with faith has led many to deduce a false similarity between their teachings. In actuality, they require an altogether different posture on the part of the believer. Faith in Amida as taught by Hōnen and Shinran rests on a thorough conviction of one’s own helplessness and depravity. The absolute emphasis on *tariki* or “other power” demands this; to the extent that one remains unconvinced of his own moral inadequacy, he cannot fully entrust himself to the power of Amida’s grace. For Nichiren, however, once one embraces the *daimoku*, the single, inadmissible doubt that will hinder his enlightenment is doubt about his own Buddha nature. Faith in the *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra rests on the premise that one possesses the absolute within himself, and to believe this—in the face of one’s obvious shortcomings—Nichiren acknowledged to be difficult.¹¹⁰

Nichiren’s *mappō* thought unites two important but hitherto distinct elements of Kamakura Buddhism: a universally feasible way of practice and belief in the possibility of becoming a Buddha in this world. Hōnen’s nembutsu could be practiced by anyone regardless of education, ability, and so forth, but his doctrine deferred the attainment of

¹⁰⁸ Hurvitz, p. 178.

¹⁰⁹ “The True Object of Worship,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, vol. 1, p. 54.

¹¹⁰ Shinran also sometimes stressed the difficulty of faith, but for the opposite reason: It is difficult to relinquish fully all self-reliance and trust only in Amida.

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Buddhahood until after rebirth in the Pure Land, and emphasized human limitations rather than their inherent Buddha nature. Dōgen stressed the inherent Buddha nature and held that one attains enlightenment directly in the act of seated meditation, but the practice of *zazen* as he taught it was not universally accessible, requiring the environment of monastic life, observance of the precepts, and, one assumes, some degree of education. Nichiren's teaching combined both a universally practicable discipline—the *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra—and the doctrine of attaining Buddhahood as a common mortal.

Conclusion

Thus far we have responded to the first two questions raised at the beginning of this paper, having outlined what the Kamakura Buddhist leaders taught about the age of the Final Dharma and what they regarded as the major doctrinal issues involved in *mappō* thought. We have also seen, in connection with the third question, that some of their teachings did indeed prove better suited to the times than others. The vinaya restoration movement, despite the sincerity and dedication of its leaders, soon faded, while Pure Land (especially Shinran's True Pure Land thought), Zen and Nichiren Buddhism not only survived but flourished, and continue to exert their influence in the present century. It would appear that these forms had greater relevance to the religious needs of the times—represented by the overwhelming phenomenon of *mappō* consciousness—as well as a more lasting and universal appeal, than did the Nara Buddhist movement. This no doubt accounts for why these three forms are so often referred to, collectively, as “Kamakura Buddhism.”¹¹¹ In addressing our fourth and fifth questions, what common elements may be found in the *mappō* thought of the Kamakura Buddhist leaders and what connection may

¹¹¹ James H. Foard, in his essay, “In Search of a Lost Reformation: A Reconsideration of Kamakura Buddhism,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 7, 4 (December 1980), pp. 261-291, rightly argues that defining “Kamakura Buddhism” solely as the five sects founded by Hōnen, Shinran, Eisai, Dōgen and Nichiren is simplistic, as this definition admits only doctrinal considerations and takes no account of other factors such as methods of propagation, institutional organization, types of religious groups, etc. However, since this paper deals chiefly with doctrinal issues, I have continued to use the expression “Kamakura Buddhism” in this limited sense.

exist between *mappō* thought and the emphasis on universality that characterizes Kamakura Buddhism, we will set aside the vinaya restoration movement and focus chiefly on the other three, as those teachings which the Japanese on a broad scale found to offer viable answers to the problem of *mappō*.

We have seen that the Pure Land, Zen and Nichiren schools of Buddhism differed greatly among each other on such issues as whether or not people can attain enlightenment through their own efforts, the necessity of upholding precepts, and even the historical validity of the *mappō* doctrine. Nevertheless, we also find points of similarity. The most obvious of these lies in the emphasis on an exclusive form of practice: the nembutsu, advocated by Hōnen and Shinran; *zazen*, especially the exclusive, *zazen*-only form taught by Dōgen; and Nichiren's *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra. The emergence of a single, exclusive form of practice, a relatively new element in Buddhist history, would seem to be closely connected with the problem of *mappō* consciousness, and its implications may help to explain why these three traditions flourished and the vinaya restoration movement, which lacks it, did not. We will therefore consider it in some detail, focusing on similarities among the three schools.

First, the nembutsu, *zazen*, and the *daimoku* are each said to suit the capacities of all people. That is, of all who practice them, all will attain the goal, whether they are men or women, good or evil, wise or foolish, and so forth. The idea that a single form of practice could equally benefit all people was a rather new one. Belief that all people can attain enlightenment dates back to the days of Shakyamuni himself, but the traditional outlook tended to focus on individual differences in wisdom, virtue, and ability, and maintained that, while the ultimate goal might be the same, not all would reach it by the same route. Yet in little more than half a century, from the time Hōnen wrote his *Senchakushū* in 1198,¹¹² to Nichiren's first public declaration of his teachings in 1253, no less than three distinct forms of single practice emerged, each claiming universal applicability. Of these three, the nembutsu and the *daimoku* could be practiced without education, doctrinal understanding, or monastic vows, a fact that contributed greatly to the

¹¹² We find several opinions on the dating of the *Senchakushū*, although 1198 seems quite probable; see Kazue, p. 229.

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popularization of Buddhism in the Kamakura period and helped narrow the hierarchical gap between clergy and laity. *Zazen*, while mechanically not that much more difficult to practice than the nembutsu or the *daimoku*, probably lacked the appeal of the spoken mantras and was at this time taught exclusively within the context of monastic life; its universality therefore tended to be more theoretical than practicable. Nevertheless, both Eisai and Dōgen, as we have seen, taught that in principle, all people are capable of attaining enlightenment by sitting in meditation. This attribute of universality, especially when linked with the emergence of Buddhism as a popular movement, is often cited as the dominant characteristic of Kamakura Buddhism.

Second, these three exclusive practices are each said to transcend in some way the historical time-frame of *mappō*. Hōnen, it will be recalled, reinterpreted the *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* as stating that the nembutsu will retain its efficacy for a hundred years after the time of *mappō* has passed. Moreover, he claimed that although the nembutsu was specifically suited to the Final Dharma age, broadly speaking, it applied to the ages of the True and Counterfeit Dharmas as well. Dōgen so firmly believed that all Buddhas and patriarchs throughout time and space attain their enlightenment by sitting in meditation that he dismissed the entire concept of the three periods as an expedient teaching, and did not regard the *mappō* doctrine as particularly worth troubling about. Nichiren accepted the historical reality of *mappō*, but he, too, held that *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō* is “the master of all Buddhas throughout past, present and future,”¹¹³ and that in the final analysis, no one has ever attained enlightenment except through this teaching. In other words, all three teachers claimed for their respective disciplines an eternal validity. Though their perspectives differed, we may say that each of them argued that the teaching valid now (i.e., in *mappō*) is the one that always has been valid, and always will be. This attribute of eternal validity might be thought of as universality projected into the dimension of time.

Third, of the three single practices, the nembutsu and the *daimoku* are said to contain the benefits of all other, lesser practices within themselves. We have noted how Honen argued the superiority of the

¹¹³ “Earthly Desires Are Enlightenment” (Bonnō-soku-bodai gosho), *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, vol. 2 (Tokyo, 1981), p. 228.

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nembutsu on the basis that it alone, out of all other disciplines, contains all of Amida Buddha's virtues. Nichiren further developed this idea of all-inclusiveness and taught that the *daimoku* of the Lotus Sutra is "perfectly endowed" (*enman gusoku*), encompassing the benefits of all Buddhas throughout space and time. In this way, these two teachers underscored the universal nature of their respective disciplines by claiming that they included the merits of all other practices. Dōgen did not stress the universality of *zazen* in precisely this fashion. However, he rejected the expression "Zen sect," with its implication that *zazen* was only one way among many, and insisted that *zazen was Buddhism*¹¹⁴—a position which serves in its own way to absolutize the practice in question.

Fourth, all three of the single practices are said to offer direct access to the goal: That is, they enable one to attain enlightenment "quickly." Here we have an extremely important aspect of the new Buddhism of the Kamakura period. To understand the dramatic conceptual shift that it implies, we must remember that traditional Buddhism views the attaining of enlightenment as an effort spanning a great many lifetimes. Numerous Mahayana texts inform us, for example, that the six paramitas or bodhisattva practices of almsgiving, upholding precepts, forbearance, assiduity, meditation and wisdom are to be perfected one by one, mastery of each requiring a hundred kalpas (one kalpa being generally reckoned as 15,998,000 years). Or, according to another popular explanation, one advances toward full enlightenment through fifty-two successive stages of bodhisattva practice, systematically extirpating illusions and evil karma and acquiring enlightened virtues along the way. Such views regard the attaining of Buddhahood as a linear process with a beginning and an end, commencing with one's bodhisattva vows and concluding with the achievement of perfect liberation. The concept of attaining Buddhahood in one's present form, though already present in Indian Mahayana Buddhism, had until this point never gained the same widespread acceptance as the notion of practice spanning countless lifetimes.

In the doctrines of the three new Kamakura schools, this vast length of time is progressively shortened until, in the teachings of Dōgen and Nichiren, it vanishes altogether, and practice and enlightenment

¹¹⁴ *Shōbōgenzō, Bendōwa*, in *Dōgen, Nihon Shisō Taikēi*, vol. 12, p. 19.

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become simultaneous. First, Hōnen taught that anyone who chants the nembutsu with faith is assured of attaining rebirth in the Pure Land. Strictly speaking, rebirth in the Pure Land is not a final goal, for one must continue his practice there under the guidance of Amida Buddha and may eventually return to the mundane world as a bodhisattva.¹¹⁵ For Hōnen, rebirth in the Pure Land corresponded to what was called “the stage of non-regression,” the point, literally, of no return, where one has advanced so far in his spiritual development that he cannot backslide and is certain to attain the goal. Thus Hōnen taught that by chanting the nembutsu, one can attain the stage of non-regression in his very next existence, a drastic shortening of the time traditionally thought to have been required.

Shinran shortened it still further. As we have seen, his doctrine of *sokutoku ōjō* or “instantaneous rebirth” holds that one attains the stage of non-regression, not with his death and rebirth in the Pure Land, but in the very moment that faith first arises in his heart. We can see in these Pure Land teachers’ views a gradual movement away from the linear concept of attaining Buddhahood toward that of the simultaneity of practice and enlightenment as taught by Dōgen and Nichiren.

Both Dōgen and Nichiren held that, in the very act of practice, one simultaneously attains, not the stage of non-regression, but Buddhahood itself. Nichiren wrote, “‘To attain’ [in the phrase ‘attain Buddhahood’] means ‘to open,’ ”¹¹⁶ reflecting his belief that Buddhahood is not something one “attains” at all, but is inherent in all sentient and non-sentient beings. At the same time, both he and Dōgen vigorously denied the view of Buddhahood as a final accomplishment rendering further practice unnecessary. Dōgen therefore urged continued exertion in *zazen*, and Nichiren, in chanting the *daimoku*, until the last moment of one’s life. In this sense, it can be argued that neither one wholly abandoned the view of enlightenment-as-process; however, both saw this process not as linear progress toward a final goal, but as “practice based on enlightenment.”¹¹⁷ For these two men, “common

¹¹⁵ While Hōnen and Shinran distinguished clearly between rebirth in the Pure Land and subsequent attainment of Buddhahood, one wonders how many of their followers made the same distinction. It would seem that rebirth in the Pure Land in and of itself constituted a final goal in the minds of many.

¹¹⁶ “Ongi kuden,” *Nichiren Shōnin ibun*, vol. 3, p. 2663.

mortal" and "Buddha" were not the beginning and end, respectively, of a long journey. Both states, they believed, could coexist in a single individual. Their teachings thus represent a closure of the gulf that in earlier doctrines had gaped so forbiddingly between the ordinary person and ultimate truth.

Thus the supreme state of Buddhahood, previously thought to require aeons of effort to attain, comes in the Kamakura period to be viewed as obtainable "in one's present form." All three single practices represent attempts to allow common mortals direct access to the ultimate without the intervening process of systematically eradicating bad karma. This concept of direct attainment may be seen as illuminating yet another aspect of universality: Wherever one undertakes the Buddhist practice, the goal of his striving is immediately at hand.

In this way, the Pure Land, Zen and Nichiren schools each taught a single, exclusive form of practice said to be universally valid, eternally valid, and all-encompassing (in the case of the nembutsu and the *daimoku*), and to constitute the direct path to enlightenment. Not only were these attributes common to all three forms of the new Buddhism people turned to as their hope for salvation in the Final Dharma age, but no other practice said to encompass this particular cluster of attributes had ever before emerged in the history of Buddhism.

This is not to suggest that the exclusive practices of the Kamakura period sprang fully formed out of nowhere. A conceptual basis for a single, universal practice endowed with the above-mentioned attributes may be said to have already existed in the Buddhism of the Heian period, and to have its roots in the earliest Mahayana teachings. This single practice itself may be an expression in concrete form of the very ancient belief that ultimate reality is one and only one—"only One Buddha Vehicle," as the Lotus Sutra states. The attribute of suiting all people's capacities similarly finds a doctrinal counterpart in the teaching that all beings are equally endowed with the Buddha nature, which can be traced back to the origins of Mahayana Buddhism and was well established in Heian Buddhism as the doctrine of original enlightenment (*hongaku shisō*). The attribute of eternal validity echoes the belief, equally old, that the absolute is changeless and im-

¹¹⁷ *Shōbōgenzō, Bendōwa*, cited in Kim, p. 68.

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perishable. The idea of one practice including the merits of all practices may have its theoretical foundation in the doctrine that one truth encompasses all truths, a major theme of the Lotus Sutra and a teaching central to the Kegon, Shingon and Tendai doctrinal systems. The concept of attaining Buddhahood "quickly" probably also has connections to belief in the universality of the Buddha nature. The principle of "attaining Buddhahood in one's present form" is integral to both Tendai and Shingon doctrine, though not until the Kamakura period was it welded to a universally feasible way of practice.¹¹⁸

Even without extensive investigation, we find in the Mahayana tradition a long-standing belief that the Dharma nature or absolute truth is universal, eternal, all-encompassing, and inherent. The individual concepts discussed above in connection with the single practices of Kamakura Buddhism were in no way new. What was new was a shift in focus from the realm of doctrine to that of concrete phenomena, wherein the characteristics of ultimate truth were redefined as the virtues of specific practices. This new focus was part of a general shift in emphasis from principle (*ri*) toward actuality (*ji*), as people began to pursue the oneness of the common mortal and the Buddha, not through doctrine alone, but through their direct experience.¹¹⁹

We have noted that we find no previous form of Buddhism espousing a single, exclusive practice and claiming the precise constellation of attributes mentioned above. Now, in little more than half a century, three of them emerge. What motivated their appearance? In part, at least, we may imagine it to have been the existential terror and desire for certainty of salvation inherent in the phenomenon of *mappō* consciousness.

Western writers sometimes compare *mappō* thought to eschatology, perhaps the only analogous doctrine in the Christian tradition. Nevertheless, we find important differences between the two, and, from a soteriological perspective, it is *mappō* that inspires the greater dread. Eschatology entails the destruction of the world, but the believer can rest secure in the knowledge that his faith will nevertheless ensure his

¹¹⁸ The Tendai meditation to "perceive the threefold truth in a single mind" (*isshin sankan*) as well as certain esoteric Shingon rituals directed toward Dainichi Buddha aimed at achieving the goal of enlightenment in this present body; however, being chiefly limited to monks, these could not be called universally feasible ways of practice.

¹¹⁹ Ozawa, p. 149.

salvation. The idea of *mappō*, however, involves not only the decline of the world¹²⁰—as suggested by the “five defilements”—but the failure of the means of salvation itself. At a time when the bodies of plague victims periodically littered the streets, when fires and earthquakes leveled temples and government offices alike, when warrior clans rose to challenge a tottering nobility in a series of bloody altercations that radically altered the political structure, Japanese on the whole must have come to realize the uncertainty of this world with an immediacy that people but rarely experience under more tranquil conditions. The prediction that in this hour, Buddhism too would decline must have filled them with a horror beyond imagining.

The realization of impermanence—of one’s own mortality, and of the evanescence of all things—may be said to form the starting point, not only of Buddhism but of all the so-called “universal religions.” It would also seem to be a precondition to the desire for salvation or emancipation which these religions hold as their goal. That is to say, one might reasonably argue that only when one perceives the transience of all mundane affairs will he be motivated to seek a universal, changeless truth transcending the mutability of phenomena. Without that perception, he is likely to remain at the more primitive level of spiritual mentality that seeks, by invoking supernatural aid, to suspend the laws of change in one’s own case alone.

While Japan, like any society, had no doubt always had her individuals of deep religious awareness, up until this time the religious mentality of the majority could be said to have remained relatively immature, as evidenced by the expectation, mentioned earlier, that Buddhism had its primary function in protecting the state and conferring worldly benefits. Toward the end of the Heian period, however, the precarious stability which allowed such expectations to persist was shattered. The simultaneous decay of virtually every major social institution—not least of all the Buddhist clergy—coupled with violent upheavals in the natural realm, may well have jarred great numbers of

¹²⁰ Buddhist texts do mention the destruction of the world, but not generally in connection with *mappō* thought. Less geocentric than the Western world view, Indian cosmology postulated an infinite number of worlds in the universe, all involved in a never-ending cycle of emergence, growth, decline, destruction and reemergence. The “end of the world” was thus seen as one phase of a natural process and lacked the implications of finality in Western eschatology.

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people into an unusually acute perception of the uncertainty of all things. At the same time, sutras and commentaries informed them that such events betokened not only the mere “impermanence of all phenomena” but the decline of the Dharma itself, adding another, more serious dimension to their unease. Buddhism, that should by rights have helped them cope with the instability of a world gone mad, was itself collapsing. Predictions that the Dharma would be “obscured and lost” seemed altogether credible in light of the corruption in the Buddhist establishment and its inability to adjust to contemporary religious needs. The frame of mind known as “*mappō* consciousness” would thus have included both an unusually sharp recognition of impermanence and the anxiety invariably attendant upon that recognition, as well as a deeper, religious fear, born of realizing that prior sources of spiritual aid would no longer suffice. It seems reasonable to imagine that, under these pressures, numbers of people awakened to a new level of religious maturity capable of actively seeking salvation through pursuit of the absolute. Certainly it seems feasible to view Kamakura Buddhism, at least in part, as an expression of such a shift in religious consciousness. From this perspective, one might say that Buddhism in Japan at this time came closer than ever before—in spirit if not always in form—to the intent of Buddhism’s historical founder: not protection of the state, or worldly benefits, or superior magic, but personal liberty from the sufferings of birth and death and entry into the realm of the absolute.

This new religious motivation would account for the renewed emphasis on practice found in all the new Buddhist movements. Even the vinaya restoration movement rejected the lopsided stress on doctrinal study found in Heian Buddhism and focused on the importance of practice. However, it was the three single practices of the new schools which proved to best answer the spiritual crisis of the times.

The single practice, by its very universality, promises certain salvation. It applies to all people and to all time; it contains the whole of Buddhism within itself; it affords direct access to the goal. All that it requires is one’s exclusive commitment.¹²¹ Among those so committed, there can be no exceptions, no one who “slips through,” failing to attain the Way, and no uncertainty arising because too much time must elapse between practice and attainment. Each of the attributes of the single practice discussed above—universal validity, eternal validity, all-

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inclusiveness and immediate efficacy—emphasizes from a slightly different perspective the absolute nature of the practice in question, and so works as a guarantee of certain enlightenment. It may have been a lack of such certainty, not merely its elitist leanings, that prevented the vinaya movement from flourishing.

Hōnen, Shinran, Eisai, Dōgen and Nichiren—the founders of the single-practice schools—deeply felt that religious truth transcends in both theory *and practice* the distinctions of the phenomenal world. Precisely because that truth was genuine, they believed, it must be accessible to all people, not merely from a doctrinal standpoint, but in terms of direct experience. We have seen that a conceptual basis for the universal single practice already existed in the Buddhism of Heian times, in such doctrines as original enlightenment, the encompassing of all truths in one truth, the attainment of Buddhahood in one's present form, and so on. These five men, having trained at the major center of Heian Buddhism on Mount Hiei, had all received a thorough grounding in these concepts. Responding perhaps, whether consciously or not, to the contemporary religious crisis of "*mappō* consciousness," they gave this doctrinal matrix concrete expression in the single practices they established.

¹²¹ It is here, in the matter of exclusive commitment, that the "easy practices" prove to be not all that easy. While their founders and a number of followers earnestly bent on attaining enlightenment were able to make such a commitment, others tended to "hedge their bets," so to speak. For example, the war chronicles tell us of Zen warriors who died with the nembutsu on their lips, and Nichiren's extant letters to disciples suggest that some of them found it hard to devote themselves single-mindedly to the *daimoku*, remaining attached to their earlier practices.