

# TRANSLATION

## Sermons on the Precepts and Monastic Life by the Shingon Vinaya Master Jiun

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY PAUL B. WATT

### Introduction

Jiun Sonja was born in Osaka in 1718, the son of a *rōnin* and a devoutly Buddhist mother. As a boy, Jiun received a Confucian education and, for a time, exhibited a disdain for Buddhist and its clergy that reflected his early Confucian sympathies. However, after his father's death in Jiun's thirteenth year, his upbringing was entrusted to a monk affiliated with the *Shingon risshū*, or Shingon vinaya sect, and within two years Jiun had been won over to Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> In his late teens, he was sent by his teacher to Kyoto for further study of Confucianism at the Kogidō, or School of Ancient Meanings, established by Itō Jinsai (1627–1705). Immediately thereafter Jiun resumed his Buddhist training in Shingon ritsu temples in the Osaka area. Though by his early twenties, he had succeeded his teacher as abbot of Hōrakuji in Osaka, he soon gave up that post to embark upon a period of uninterrupted meditation under the direction of a Sōtō Zen monk. It was during this time that he apparently had his first enlightenment experience.

In his late twenties, troubled by what he judged to be a lack of commitment to practice among his contemporaries, as well as by the sectarian character of Tokugawa Buddhism, Jiun commenced a movement to revive what he sometimes called "Buddhism as it was when the Buddha was alive," or, more frequently, the "True Dharma." At the heart of his movement—known as the

<sup>1</sup> The Shingon ritsu sect was originally founded by Eison (1201–90) and Ninshō (1217–1303) and, after a period of decline, was revived in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by Shunshō Myōnin (1576–1610).

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*Shōbōritsu*, or “Vinaya of the True Dharma”—was an emphasis upon the fundamentals of Buddhist practice and a de-emphasis of sectarian concerns. After a long career as a Buddhist scholar, reformer and apologist, Jiun died in Kyoto in 1804.<sup>2</sup>

The following three *hōgo*, or sermons, date from the middle period of Jiun’s life which he passed in retreat in a hut on Mt. Ikoma, east of Osaka. For nearly fourteen years prior to his move to Two Dragon Hut, as his dwelling was called, Jiun had worked in a variety of ways for the spread of the “True Dharma”; then, in 1758, he withdrew to the mountain. He spent much of his time there meditating, but he also concentrated on the study of Sanskrit during those years, completing, with the help of a handful of disciples, the bulk of his one-thousand fascicle *Bongaku shinryō* or “Guide to Sanskrit Studies.” Further, during the first half of the Two Dragon Hut years—that is, from 1758 to 1766—Jiun addressed his followers from time to time or, at their request, wrote short sermons for them. Many of his talks were recorded by his disciples and, along with those pieces that Jiun penned himself, have been included in his *Collected Works*.<sup>3</sup>

The sermons translated in the following pages have been selected to illustrate the importance Jiun attached to the precepts and the monastic life. Students of Dōgen (1200–53) will notice a strong similarity between the Zen master’s thought and Jiun’s on these subjects; for both, the celibate, meditative way of life initiated by the Buddha and established as the norm for all later generations of monks and nuns is viewed as simultaneously a means to and a consequence of the enlightenment experience. As Jiun states in one of the sermons translated below, the way of life of one who “leaves home” is “natural to people who follow the great path to liberation from birth and death.”

<sup>2</sup> For a study of Jiun’s critique of Confucianism, see the author’s “Jiun Sonja (1718–1804): A Response to Confucianism within the Context of Buddhist Reform,” in Peter Nosco, ed., *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 188–214.

<sup>3</sup> Hase Hōshū, ed., *Jiun Sonja zenshū* (hereafter cited as JSZ) (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 1974), *Shukan* (Introductory volume), 17 volumes, and *Hoi* (Supplement). Most of the sermons from the Two Dragon Hut years are included in volume XIV: 285–779.

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Arouse the Thought of Enlightenment and Observe the Precepts  
*Bodaishin o hosshite, kai o jiseyo*<sup>1</sup>

The Buddha's Dharma is difficult to believe. One can not explain it by comparisons, nor can it be fathomed by petty learning or subjective thinking. Rather, only a person rich in blessings from previous lives can enter into it through the power of faith.

It is not that the arguments of such people as the Confucians and Taoists are not profound, but since they deal only with things extant before one's eyes and with the meaning of forms, they are easy to believe. The Buddha's Dharma spans the three periods of the phenomenal order and exhausts the realm of Principle.<sup>2</sup> Since it is a teaching concerning the formless ground of the mind, it is difficult to believe.

By "ground of the mind" we mean one's own [true] mind. One's [true] mind is originally distinct from concepts and distinct from language, is ultimately pure and can not be commented upon. However, all sentient beings distinguish a mind from their own [true] mind and make further distinctions both gross and subtle; in the end, they generate karma and themselves establish the cycle of transmigration. Though a drop of dew may vanish in an instant, [seemingly] without a trace, still it leaves behind moisture that attracts later dew drops; gradually the drops accumulate, gathering here and there, becoming a flow of water. Likewise, when thoughts arise, attributes appear, and when attributes appear, attachments arise. Thereupon, the three worlds<sup>3</sup> emerge, you rise and fall in the sea of birth and death,

<sup>1</sup> JSZ XIV: 378-389. Presented at Two Dragon Hut on the 4th day of the 10th month, Hōreki 11 (1761); on this occasion, Jiun bestowed the bodhisattva precepts on a woman referred to only as "the worthy daughter of Yoshinobu."

<sup>2</sup> *Rihokkai*; the realm of emptiness, i.e., the realm of form which in all respects is without autonomous, unchanging essences.

and through innumerable *kalpas* you are born here and there, moving from darkness to darkness, piling up suffering with no end in sight.

A wise person should earnestly arouse the thought of enlightenment. The thought of enlightenment is the thought pure in its self-nature. It naturally has no relationship to fame and profit, the desires of the five senses, to self-pride and conceit, and to much talk and many concerns. Rather, it is naturally related to gentleness and harmony, to compassion and forbearance, to loyalty, filial piety, sincerity, and good faith, to humility and respect, to meditation and wisdom. From the Buddhas above to flying and creeping insects below, all are seen as the same in their self-nature, yet their distinctive attributes are not destroyed.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, one seeks enlightenment above and transforms sentient beings below; one reveres those above and loves those below.

The place where the thought of enlightenment takes form is in the practice of the precepts. That which accompanies the practice of the precepts is the mind of great compassion. Practice of the precepts without the thought of enlightenment leads to the attainment of a pleasant retribution in the conditioned world; this is the lesser karma attained by human beings and devas. A time will come when this retribution is exhausted and, as before, you will fall back into the cycle of birth and death.

Practice of the precepts with the thought of enlightenment extends infinitely into the future and in the end leads to the realization of the retribution of Buddhahood. In the sutras, it is written, "The Buddhas of the three periods of time gained the thought of enlightenment through these precepts." All of you should believe this and receive and observe the precepts in conformity with the Dharma.

### Leave Home for the Protection of the True Dharma

*Shōbō goji no tame ni shukke seyo*<sup>5</sup>

I have heard that you want to receive the precepts for novices. [Among matters that I must mention to you,] there is first the concept

<sup>3</sup> *Sangai*; the realms in which sentient beings transmigrate: the world of desire, the world of form, and the formless world.

<sup>4</sup> The words "the same in their self-nature" render the Japanese *byōdō byōdō ni shite*.

<sup>5</sup> JSZ XIV: 613–617. Presented on the 25th day of the 11th month, Hōreki 12 (1762).

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of the thought of enlightenment, about which you already know. Concerning it, in Bodhisattva Asvaghosa's *P'u-t'i hsin-lun*,<sup>6</sup> the various conditions that may lead to the arousing of the thought of enlightenment are explained. Some arouse the thought of enlightenment as a result of illness. Some arouse the thought of enlightenment as a result of encountering hardships. Others arouse the thought of enlightenment as a result of receiving instruction from a Buddha, bodhisattva, or good spiritual friend, or as a result of seeing the collection of the sacred teaching and commentaries or the marks of a Buddha or bodhisattva. [Still] others arouse the thought of enlightenment as a result of seeing the signs of the Dharma's decline. Among these examples, the thought of enlightenment aroused by those who, in the latter age, see the signs of the Dharma's decline is particularly firm.

The Dharma is fundamentally not something that arises and becomes extinct. Even if all sentient beings, at the same time, were to arouse the thought of enlightenment, fulfill the practice of the bodhisattva and realize unsurpassed enlightenment, as regards the Dharma, there would not be the slightest increase. Even if all sentient beings, at the same time, were to arouse false views and slander the Three Treasures,<sup>7</sup> as regards the Dharma, there would not be the slightest decrease. Corruption in the conduct of monks, however, may accurately be referred to as a sign of the Dharma's decline. In such sutras as the *Fa-mieh-chin ching* and the *Mahamaya Sutra*,<sup>8</sup> the signs of the Dharma's decline in the latter age are explained; all [such texts mention] laxity in the conduct of monks. From this perspective, seeing the corruption today in the appearance and conduct of the five groups [within the Buddhist clergy],<sup>9</sup> one must arouse a [high] aspiration.

The sutras say that when Sakyamuni was a prince and went forth from the north gate [of his palace], he saw an ascetic, and for the first time, he aroused the thought of enlightenment.<sup>10</sup> Thereafter, he

<sup>6</sup> J., *Bodaishinron* (T 32.572). Jiun errs in attributing this work to Asvaghosa; Nagarjuna is traditionally regarded as its author.

<sup>7</sup> The Buddha, the Dharma or his teachings, and the Sangha or Buddhist community, here signifying the community of monks and nuns.

<sup>8</sup> Respectively, J., *Hömetsujinkyō* (T 12.1118) and J., *Makamayakyō* (T 12.1005).

<sup>9</sup> Monks, nuns, male and female novices, and *siksamana*, a special category of female novice between the ages of 18 and 20.

<sup>10</sup> Jiun seems to have drawn much of the following biographical information from

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followed a hunter and exchanged his garments for a robe, and cutting off his hair with a knife, for the first time [himself] took on the appearance of an ascetic. Then, in the guise of one who had left home, he begged for food in the country of Magadha, using a lotus leaf [as a receptacle]. (In general, it is said that a *pratyekabuddha*<sup>11</sup> who appears in a buddhaless world wears a robe and receives food on a lotus leaf. There are different views [of this matter] in the sutras and commentaries; [for example,] it is also said that a *pratyekabuddha* may use a bowl for begging, but at this time the Buddha used a lotus leaf.)

Thereafter, when Sakyamuni realized unsurpassed enlightenment and received sugar from Tapussa, he combined into one the four bowls offered him by the four heavenly kings and used it. It is said that, later, when he converted his various disciples by addressing them [with the words], "Well come monks," their hair fell off spontaneously and they were endowed with robes and bowls. Furthermore, the Buddha said that if, at the time a request is made for permission to receive the precepts, [the candidate] does not possess robes and bowl, he may not receive the precepts. From this [you should know that] the appearance, robes, bowl and conduct of one who has left home is of great importance.

The Buddha, the World-Honored One, was not a person who left home because the position of a Cakravartin king<sup>12</sup> or the governance of the empire had become a burden. He was not a person who could not have ruled [simply] by gathering together such sages and worthies as Ch'i, Hsieh, and Kao-yao<sup>13</sup> and turning the government over to them, himself do nothing.

It was not that his officials and subjects had become a burden. For the Buddha, the World-Honored One, even when he was among great numbers of people, it was no different than when he was alone in a quiet place with no one around.

the *Fo-pen-hsing-tsan ching* (J., *Butsuhongyōjukkyō*; T 3.655).

<sup>11</sup> A solitary Buddha; an individual who has attained insight into the conditioned nature of existence without benefit of instruction from a Buddha.

<sup>12</sup> A universal monarch; an ideal Buddhist ruler who governs through righteousness rather than force.

<sup>13</sup> All three were famous ministers who served Shun, a legendary ruler of ancient China.

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It was not that the palaces and towers had become a burden. Even when the Buddha, the World-Honored One, was amidst golden palaces and jeweled towers, it was no different than when he was [sitting] beneath a tree or on a rock.

Nor was it that he left home because his three wives, Yasodhara and the others, and his sixty-thousand ladies in waiting had become a burden. Even when he was amidst men and women who were immersed in the five desires, it was no different that when he encountered trees and stone.

Nor was it that he left home because his relatives had become a burden. For the Buddha, the World-Honored One, all sentient beings in the three realms were his children, and he viewed all sentient beings as the same in their self-nature.

Why, then, did he leave home? It is simply that the guise of an ascetic and of one who leaves home is natural to people who follow the great path to liberation from birth and death. Because all of the Buddhas of the three periods of time left home and realized enlightenment, Sakyamuni also, following their [example], left home and realized unsurpassed enlightenment. The great bodhisattvas Manjusri, Maitreya<sup>14</sup> and others also later left home and, through the dignified conduct of monks, saved sentient beings. Mahakasyapa, Ananda,<sup>15</sup> and the following generations of patriarchs, without exception, left home and transmitted the true Dharma.

Therefore, when illustrious masters of ancient times discoursed on the three Treasures and spoke of the element most important for the transformation of people, [they held that] the merit of the Buddha comes first. For the attainment of liberation, [however,] the merit of the Dharma comes first. Even the Buddha realized enlightenment by taking the Dharma as his teacher, and people today also practice relying upon the Dharma. [Yet] for the maintenance of the Three Treasures, the merit of the sangha comes first. If the conduct of the

<sup>14</sup> The bodhisattva of wisdom and the so-called "future Buddha"; the latter now resides in the Tusita heaven, but will come to earth as a Buddha at the end of the present cycle of time.

<sup>15</sup> Major disciples of the historical Buddha; Mahakasyapa was known as a great ascetic, while Ananda was the Buddha's personal attendant during the last twenty years of his life.

Sangha is correct, then the Buddha and the Dharma will survive, and, as a consequence of that, the true Dharma will long abide.

Today, some say that one need not worry about appearances, but I do not agree. The conduct of the five groups [within the Buddhist clergy] begins with the novice, and his appearance is the same as that of the saints of the three vehicles.<sup>16</sup> It is a manifestation of a field of blessing for human beings and devas. Today, a person who sees the signs of the Dharma's decline and who [still] has a [high] aspiration, can not pass the days at ease. If, arousing a [high] aspiration, a person wants to protect the Dharma, there is nothing better than leaving home in accord with the Dharma. If one's appearance is correct, one's aspiration will naturally be correct, and if one's aspiration is correct, the Buddha's Dharma will survive. If a person leaves home to take pleasure in his own tranquility and purity, though that is not a bad thing, it may [accurately] be called the practice of a *śrāvaka*.<sup>17</sup> If a person arouses the true and correct aspiration and leaves home in accord with the Dharma, for the sake of protecting the true Dharma, whether it be only one person or only two or three, because of these people, the true Dharma will long abide.

Since this is explained in detail in the sutras and commentaries, understanding it in this way, you should receive the precepts for novices.

### The Merit of Leaving Home *Shukke kudoku*<sup>18</sup>

The merits of a person who leaves home are innumerable and without limit. Since this is explained in detail in the sutras and commentaries, however, there is no need to take it up here. Rather, I will only indicate what can easily be known about that state.

<sup>16</sup> *Sanjō no kenjō* refers to three types of Buddhist practitioners: the *śrāvaka* or auditor, one who receives instruction from a Buddha; the *pratyekabuddha* or solitary Buddha, who as noted above is regarded as having attained some degree of insight without the aid of a Buddha; and the *bodhisattva* or enlightened being, who has attained insight but who postpones his final nirvana so that he may lead others to liberation.

<sup>17</sup> See the immediately preceding footnote; from the viewpoint of Mahayana Buddhism, the *śrāvaka* is too much concerned about his own enlightenment and insufficiently concerned about the enlightenment of others.

<sup>18</sup> JSZ XIV: 25-27. The postscript dates this *hōgo* the 8th day of the 12th month of Meiwa 1 (1764).



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On the one hand, one who leaves home inherits the seeds of Buddhahood and causes them to flourish. His leaving home is like the birth of a prince to a Cakravartin king; though the prince is an infant, later surely he will be fully endowed with the seven [royal] treasures<sup>19</sup> and rule the four continents. A bodhisattva who has left home is also like this. Though he may not yet have every kind of good quality and virtue and his powers may be limited and weak, later surely he will fully possess all virtues and be called a teacher of human beings and devas.

On the other hand, one who leaves home becomes a field of blessing for all sentient beings. This is because one who has left home is the manifest form of compassion. For those human beings and devas who see him, he becomes a cause of virtue. Those who reverence and honor him will surely gain the retribution of being held in high esteem, and those who make offerings to him and sing his praises will surely give rise to all virtue and wisdom. For all those who come into contact with the shadow of his robe, even birds and animals and flying and creeping insects, that contact becomes a distant cause for their attainment of Buddhahood.

When a monk walks under the moon in meditation, his mind is emptied of all conditioning. When he sits in meditation beneath a tree, all gates to the Dharma manifest themselves within his mind, and he roams far beyond the three worlds. He is unaware that he is still on earth; yet, at ease, he moves about in one room. He is unaware that he is a person who has left home, or again, that he is a human being. Gain and loss, right and wrong—of what concern are they to him? A ruler can not make him his subject; his father can not again make him his child. He has no ties to wife or children; he does not compete for fame or profit. Rather, becoming the overseer of the three worlds, he causes the woodcutter to collect kindling, and he does this without concern for his own affairs. He causes the weaving maid to spin her thread, and here too for him there is no gain or loss. He causes the sun and moon to shine down on the land below. He causes human beings to be ranked as high or low, noble or humble. He causes fish to frolic in the waters and animals to run in the mountains. In this state, there is great wealth and honor that has nothing to do with status, and there is great ease that is

<sup>19</sup> A golden wheel (a symbol of a Cakravartin's authority), elephants, swift horses, pearls, able ministers of the treasury, beautiful women, and loyal generals.

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unrelated to the five *skandhas* of form and mind.<sup>20</sup> He is like the ruler of a country who becomes the overseer of the four classes of people,<sup>21</sup> causes each to work at this task, and yet himself simply sits with folded arms, having nothing to do.

[For the monk], all sentient beings are his children. There is only compassion; there are no relative degrees of intimacy. To shave off one's hair is to discard all ornamentation. To dye one's clothes is to transcend all distinctions of noble and humble. To take the begging bowl in hand is to become a field of blessing for all sentient beings.

Above I have omitted much and recorded only the main points. As for the rest, you should peruse the sutras and commentaries or make inquiries of your seniors.

<sup>20</sup> The five *skandhas*, or aggregates, represent an early Buddhist analysis of the constituent elements of experience; specifically the five *skandhas* are form, sensation, perception, psychic construction and consciousness.

<sup>21</sup> Administrators, cultivators, artisans, and merchants.