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

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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-

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[57] *Kōzen gokokuron*, T. 80.4a.
[58] *Ōjō dai-yōshō*, cited in Hazama, p. 32.
[59] *Kōzen gokokuron*, T. 80.12b-c.

rect practice for the Final Dharma age:

> The Prajñā, Lotus, and Nirvana sutras all teach the meditational 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:

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[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.

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

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[64] *Shōbōgenzō, Bendōwa*, in Terada Tōru and Mizuno Yaoko, eds. *Dōgen*, Nihon Shisō Taikei, 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.

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,

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[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 existences[74] 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 manner[75] 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 (*śūnyatā, 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

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[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 Sutra 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] *Shōbōgenzo, Busshō*, cited in Kim, pp. 179–180.

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.

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 Dōgen'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

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[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

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[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.

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 Myoho-renge-kyo, 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

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[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 gosho," *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 Myōho-renge-kyo 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 *chüan* one of his *Fa-hua-wen-chü* (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

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[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* 脫, 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.

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. Mahābhijñājñānābhibhū). 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

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[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

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[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

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[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.

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 Pundarīka, which describes itself as the teaching that is "the hardest to believe, the hardest to understand."[108] Nichiren analyzed this difficulty

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[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

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[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.

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.

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 *Sukhāvatīvyūha 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.

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 Taikei, vol. 12, p. 19.

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.

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 ne 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

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[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 world[120]—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.

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-

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.

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[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.