Seeking Enlightenment in the Last Age

Mappō Thought in Kamakura Buddhism

PART I

JACKIE STONE

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

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

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

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

Textual and Historical Background

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

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

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

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

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

---

[1] For the arguments presented in this section I am deeply indebted to Yamada Ryujō, "Mappō shisō ni tsuite: Daijikkyō no seiritsu mondai," in *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 4, 2 (March 1956), pp. 54-63.

[2] Āgamas, T. 2.226b-c and 2.419b-c.

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

[4] Yamada, pp. 56-57.

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

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

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

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

---

[5] *Ta-chi-ching*, T. 13.363b.

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

[10] Ozawa, p. 18.

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

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

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

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

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

mappō.

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

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

The Pure Land Buddhists: Hōnen and Shinran

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> If the original vow required making images and building stupas, then the poor and destitute could not hope to attain rebirth in the Pure Land, but the wealthy and noble are few, while the poor and lowly are numerous. If the original vow required wisdom and great talents, there would be no hope of rebirth for the foolish and ignorant, but the wise are few while the foolish are very many. . . . If the original vow required upholding the precepts and rules of conduct there would be no hope of rebirth for those who break the precepts or for those who have not received them, but those who keep the precepts are rare, while those who break them are altogether common. And the same reasoning applies to all other practices.
>
> Truly you should know this: Were the original vow to depend on these many forms of discipline, those obtaining rebirth in the Pure Land would be few, while those unable to do would be many. It follows, therefore, that the Tathāgata Amida, when he was a monk by the name of Dharmākara in ages past, moved by his impartial compassion and his desire for the salvation of all, did not make his original vow contingent upon making images, building stupas or other sundry practices, but upon the single act of calling on his sacred name.[19]

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

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

tant themes in the new schools of Kamakura Buddhism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

all obtain the Way.[22]

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

> QUESTION: It is now clear that the nembutsu will endure for a hundred years [after the age of the Final Dharma has passed]. But does this practice of the nembutsu suit the time and the people's capacity only during that period? Or does it apply to the ages of the True Dharma, the Counterfeit Dharma and the Final Dharma as well?
>
> ANSWER: Broadly speaking, it applies to all three ages.[24]

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

---

[22] T. 12.279a.

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

[24] *Senchakushū*, Ōhashi ed., p. 119.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[27] T. 83.665a.

[28] T. 83.667c.

[29] Kazue, pp. 267-274.

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

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

Hōnen, as we have mentioned, continued to observe his monastic vows from choice, though he denied that one's rebirth depended upon them. Shinran, however, with his absolute stress on *tariki*, saw in the precepts a potentially dangerous tendency to rely on one's own efforts. If salvation comes about purely through Amida's mercy and cannot be furthered by one's own efforts, he reasoned, then surely it was arrogance to engage in some special form of conduct that set one apart from other people. Banished by the government to Echigo in 1207 for his association with Hōnen, Shinran allowed his hair to grow and married a woman known as Eshinni by whom he had five or six children, and styled himself "neither monk nor layman."[31] Even the distinction of master and disciple he rejected as presumptuous, believing that his followers invoked the nembutsu solely because of Amida's workings and not through any virtue of his own. His followers formed congregations called *monto*, democratically organized religious fraternities open to men and women[32] of all classes, and independent of the established temples.

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

[35] Kazue, p. 271.

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

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

The Vinaya Restoration Movement: Myōe and Jōkei

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

[41] Ibid.

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

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

And on the benefit of meditative practices:

> QUESTION: Now is the last age, and to practice meditation would no longer befit the times. Even if one were to practice, it would be impossible to gain the proof of enlightenment. What benefit is there then in such practices?
>
> ANSWER: Your question is self-indulgent in the extreme. How can those who do not practice possibly attain the goal? Those who do not practice make negligence their business; those who practice make diligence their occupation. Thinking people may judge which way is to their advantage.[43]

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

---

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

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

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

factors in attaining Buddhahood.

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

[50] Ibid., p. 10.
[51] *Kōfuku-ji sōjō*, ibid., p. 41.

decline of Buddhism:

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

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

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

---

[52] *Tōshōdai-ji Shaka-nembutsu ganmon*, cited in Hazama, p. 23.
[53] *Shunnichi gongen kenki*, cited in Hazama, p. 26.
[54] See Hazama, pp. 26-27.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(To be continued)