

TRANSLATION

Ichigon Hōdan

Part I

TRANSLATED BY DENNIS HIROTA

Introduction

Ichigon Hōdan 一言芳談—"Plain words redolent [with the Dharma]"—is a late Kamakura collection of statements illuminating the way of nembutsu. It includes more than 150 entries, recording the names of 34 Heian and Kamakura period masters; of the editor, however, almost nothing definite is known. He probably compiled his work sometime between 1297, when the last of the masters included died, and 1330–31, the generally accepted date of composition for Yoshida Kenkō's *Tsurezuregusa*, in which it is briefly described and quoted.¹ The latest possible date is set at 1350, which marks Kenkō's death. Further, he was almost certainly a monk, like nearly all of the men he

¹ Kenkō devotes Section 98 of *Tsurezuregusa* to *Ichigon Hōdan*: "In reading a book entitled *Ichigon Hōdan*, which records the words of venerable *bijiri*, I was impressed with the aptness of the following passages: 1) 'That which you wonder whether you should do or not is generally best not done.' 2) 'The man who aspires for birth into the Buddha Land should not possess so much as a crock for bean-paste. Even with a copy of a sutra or a sacred image for worship, it is senseless to own fine things.' 3) 'The man who has abandoned the world passes his life in such a way that he has no want of what he lacks; this is the best way to live.' 4) 'The senior monk must become a novice, the wise man a fool, the prosperous man poor, and the man of accomplishments unschooled.' 5) 'Aspiring to the Buddha-way is nothing special. Allow yourself the time and set your mind to no worldly matter: this is the primary step.' I do not recall the many other statements." Kenkō's quotations are paraphrases: (1) corresponds to section 22 of *Ichigon Hōdan*; (2) is derived from sections 67 and 95; (3) corresponds to section 41, (4) to section 60, and (5) to section 50. In addition, Kenkō may well have drawn on *Ichigon Hōdan* 53 and 127 for his comment on Shinkai in *Tsurezuregusa* 49 and his quotation of Hōnen in 39.

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quotes; it is unclear, however, with which school of nembutsu he was most closely associated. Various streams are represented in *Ichigon Hōdan*, and although the editor opens his book with an anecdote employing the notion that the Shinto gods are manifestations of Buddhas (*bonji suijaku*), a method of preface not uncommon in the popular Buddhist literature of the time, the remainder of the collection reveals little discernible order or arrangement. Rather than with a particular sect or doctrinal position, then, he seems to have been concerned with words which, arising directly from the life of religious practice and experience, could sustain and guide him in his own endeavor.

Early in *Ichigon Hōdan* Hōnen is asked what a man must do to free himself from birth-and-death, and he answers: "Just say the nembutsu." This is a statement of his doctrine of *senju nembutsu*—solely pronouncing the Name—and it is tempting to see it here as the "redolent word" *par excellence*, setting the tone of immediacy and practicality and identifying the doctrinal underpinnings of the entire collection. Almost all of the masters included were influenced by Hōnen's teaching and many received it directly. Viewing *Ichigon Hōdan* in historical context, however, one notices that a number of Hōnen's more important disciples are missing; Shōkū, Ryūkan, Kōsai and Shinran, all of whom developed Hōnen's teaching into diverging branches, receive no mention. If the editor was a man of Hōnen's Jōdo school, he probably belonged to the Chinzei branch—historically the mainstream of the school—represented in the collection by the founder, Shōkō, his chief disciple, Ryōchū, and a number of others. The last man by date of death to be quoted in *Ichigon Hōdan* is the Chinzei priest Jishin, and it has been suggested that the editor was a disciple either of Jishin or of his master Ryōchū.

Hōnen's statement, "Just say the nembutsu," is not, however, the easy answer it sometimes seems to be. Moreover, Kamakura nembutsu practice was by no means a monopoly of Hōnen's newly founded Jōdo school and its branches. After accepting Hōnen's reply in the exchange mentioned above, Myōhen, the questioner, probably returned to the Shingon center on Mt. Kōya, where he came to hold high rank. Jōdo school writings portray Myōhen as a disciple of Hōnen who developed Shingon nembutsu practice along the lines of the Master's teaching. In the writings left by the *Kōya bijiri*—hermit-monks based on Mt. Kōya—he is their near legendary founder. State-

ments by *Kōya bijiri* concerning the life of the recluse and the renunciation of all worldly and religious attachments—aspects of a sole practice of nembutsu far more concretely defined than Hōnen's—are among the most striking in *Icbigon Hōdan*. Indeed, Myōhen appears nearly as often as Hōnen in the collection and his disciple, Kyōbutsu, has the greatest representation with twice as many entries. The spirit of the *Kōya bijiri* looms large in *Icbigon Hōdan*, and the case has been made that the editor was a *bijiri* disciple of Kyōbutsu.

One other theory of authorship should be mentioned: the priest and poet Ton'a 頓阿 (1289–1373). As a man of the Ji sect founded by the wandering monk Ippen, Ton'a was in a position to respond to the stories of both the Jōdo and *Kōya bijiri* streams of nembutsu. Moreover, there are examples among his poems showing that he turned his literary gifts to religious themes. It is the kindred spirit apparent in *Tsurezuregusa*, however, that most strongly suggests Ton'a as the editor of *Icbigon Hōdan*, for he and Kenkō were closely associated both as priests and as poets sharing the reputation of being among “the Four Heavenly Kings” of poetry.² The evidence is circumstantial, but it takes into consideration the literary qualities of *Icbigon Hōdan*—the freshness and incisiveness of expression—which were early perceived by Kenkō and which account for much of the work's continuing popularity.

Although the editor tells us little about himself personally, he nevertheless presents us with a forceful image of the nembutsu practice of the period. His very anonymity is one shared with the authors of some of the most important Nembutsu Buddhist writings in Japanese, and his freedom from sectarian debate serves to emphasize the utter commitment of his search for religious awakening. It is this integrity that informs the work and makes it expressive of the driving energy at the wellspring of the religious developments of the Kamakura period. *Icbigon Hōdan* is generally considered under two genre classifications. One is that of *kana bōgo*—writings on the Dharma in the vernacular—an innovation associated in particular with Nembutsu Buddhism and the penetration of Buddhism into the lives of the common people. *Icbigon Hōdan* not only typifies the genre, but gives direct expression to its moving spirit in the repeated admonitions against scholarship for its own sake. This attitude

² The wide-ranging case for Ton'a as editor may be found in *Icbigon Hōdan no bensha wa Ton'a ka* by Sanda Zenshin 三田全信, included in his book *Jōdo-shū shi no sbokenkyū* (1959).

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does not represent a mere evasion of the dangers of attachment; at work is a demand for directness and honesty in confronting the question of birth-and-death, and at its core is the insight that true religious aspiration is not a matter of learning.

The second genre to which *Ichigon Hōdan* belongs is the literature of renunciation, of the recluse and the thatched hut. Here again the work shows us the pivotal point of this literature, where the unrelenting rejection of desire for prestige and wealth is understood to propose a poverty not merely of the secular world. The Kamakura period was a time when monks, impelled by the collapse of the old order and infused with the energy and freedom it granted, renounced the world anew; abandoning their temples, they sought the Way in the back hills and meadows, in a nakedness uncloaked by priestly robes and ceremony.

At the heart of the way of nembutsu lies paradox. People of nembutsu are “neither monks nor yet worldly” (98); they know that “to speak deeply of the doctrinal significance of nembutsu is, on the contrary, a sign of shallowness” (99) and that they are “harmed by their own virtuousness” (25). In Hōnen’s phrase, which echoes in the works of his disciples: “The way in saying the nembutsu is to have no ‘way’ ” (100). The masters of *Ichigon Hōdan* sought a language as they sought the life of nembutsu and their terse phrases represent not a simplicity of doctrine, but the refusal to be satisfied with an easy and insular knowledge. Thus, they confront us with a test of religious life still keen with the urgency of their own aspiration.

Text

The translation follows a text based on a manuscript dated 1463 and first published in 1648. Except for the division into two fascicles, it is assumed to represent the original form of *Ichigon Hōdan*. It is included in *Kana bōgo shū* 假名法語集, volume 83 of the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, edited by Miyasaka Yūshō. Section divisions have been made in the translation wherever separate quotations have been clearly indicated in the text and the sections have been numbered. This method of division is somewhat arbitrary, for some sections contain more than one entry, and in several instances adjoining sections may have been considered as one.

Another important and widely read edition is that of the Jōdo school priest Tanchō 湛澄, published in the second year of Genroku, 1689, under the title *Hyōchū zōbo ichigon bōdan sbō* 標註增補一言芳談鈔. Tanchō's notes still provide the foundation for modern annotated editions. However, he lent the work something of his own Jōdo school outlook by completely reorganizing it under ten section headings of his own devising: Food, Clothing and Shelter; Purity and Simplicity; Teacher and Companions; Impermanence; Aspiration for Death; Facing the Moment of Death; Nembutsu; Attainment of Faith; Learning; and Admonishments. Modern editions include: *Kōchū ichigon bōdan* 校註一言芳談 (1938) by Taya Raishun 多屋頼俊, which collates Tanchō's notes with those of another Edo period edition, *Ichigon bōdan kukai* 一言芳談句解 (1688) by Sōkan 祖観; and a text annotated and translated into modern Japanese by Konishi Jin'ichi, included in *Hōjōki, Tsuresuregusa, Ichigon Hōdan sbū* edited by Usui Yoshimi.

Ichigon Hōdan

(First fascicle)

1. It was said: "Eshin Sōzu¹ made a pilgrimage to the Great Shrine at Ise to spend seven days in secluded prayer. During the final night, in dream, the doors of the holy shrine suddenly opened and a noblewoman of lofty bearing stepped forth. She declared, 'The deity of the Great Shrine has returned to the capital of original enlightenment. I am caretaker in the absence. Instructions were left saying: if a sentient being of the last age should inquire of the fundamental path of freedom, advise him to utter the Name of Amida Buddha.' "

2. It was said: "Shunjō Shōnin² was in the closing night of a vowed week-long seclusion in the inner temple of Mt. Kōya. When it had drawn into the deep of night and all had grown still, from within the vault of the Founder's Samadhi³ there sounded forth a single, clearly audible voicing of the nembutsu.

¹ 恵心僧都 (942-1017). Also known as Genshin 源信. Tendai master and the first Japanese 'patriarch' of Jōdo Buddhism; author of the *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 'Essentials for Birth.' *Sōzu* is the second of three high offices in the temple hierarchy.

² 俊乗上人 (1121?-1195). Also known as Chōgen 實源. Born into the ancient Ki family. Entered Daigo-ji in 1133 and studied esoteric Buddhism; later met Hōnen and practiced the nembutsu. Made a trip to China in 1167, visiting Mt. T'ien-t'ai with the future Zen master Eisai 榮西. Famous as the founder of a nembutsu society for perpetual utterance of the nembutsu on Mt. Kōya and as an active *kanjin bijiri*, a monk wandering through the country collecting contributions, largely for construction projects. When Nara's Tōdai-ji burned in 1180, he was charged with its reconstruction and in 1195 he lectured on the Jōdo sutras in the completion ceremony for the Hall of the Great Buddha.

³ It is said that Kūkai 空海, the founder of the Shingon complex on Mt. Kōya, did not die, but entered the deep samadhi in which he lives to this day, working for the enlightenment of sentient beings.

Those who heard it were overcome both with sorrow and with joy, and their sleeves were wet with the tears.”

3. It was said: “Ren-amidabutsu⁴ had a dream in which the deity of the Hachiman Shrine declared, ‘Birth into the Buddha Land of Purity does not depend on saying the nembutsu once; it does not depend on saying it many times. It depends upon the heart.’”

4. On his way back from a pilgrimage to Zenkō-ji, Myōhen Sōzu⁵ had an interview with Hōnen Shōnin.⁶

Myōhen asked, “How can I attain emancipation from birth-and-death with this lifetime?”

Hōnen replied, “Just say the nembutsu.”

“Surely that is the answer. But what should I do about the illusions and distractions that fill my mind?”

“Through the power of the Primal Vow you will attain birth into the Buddha Land even though your mind is distracted.”

Myōhen accepted this answer and departed.

Afterwards Hōnen, half to himself, said, “When people seek to attain birth by suppressing their distracting thoughts, it is as though they would cast away the eyes and nose they were born with in order to say the nembutsu.”

5. Myōzen Hōin⁷ said: “You should simply devote yourself to saying the nembutsu. It may seem but a pouring of water to stone, but pronounce, and there will be benefit.”

⁴ 蓮阿彌陀佛. One of Shōkō's (see section 33) more important disciples.

⁵ 明通僧都 (1139?-1224). Also known as Kū'a 空阿. Entered Tōdai-ji after his father, the influential counsellor of state Fujiwara Michinori, was killed in the Heiji Rising in 1160. Later went to Mt. Kōya and is said to have been appointed *sōzu* but to have declined. He is also said to have been deeply influenced by Hōnen. He is best known as the founder of Mt. Kōya's Rengedani—a gathering place for nembutsu practitioners established apart from the original temple—and of the Kōya *bijiri* generally.

⁶ 法然上人 (1133-1212).

⁷ 明禪法印 (1167-1242). Born into the Fujiwara family. Studied on Mt. Hiei. At first opposed the Jōdo school teaching but after Hōnen's death was converted through an encounter with Hōren (see section 35) and through reading Hōnen's *Senjaku-shū*. Hōin is a title corresponding to the office of *sōjō* 僧正, the highest in the temple hierarchy.

6. Myōhen Sōzu said: "There is no reason to think that you can live as you would like anywhere in this defiled world. You must simply endure the minor hardships in your heart. Otherwise it is like being in a boat in rough weather and wanting to shift back to the stern and then up to the prow."

7. It was said: "Aspire for birth with the steadiness of mind of one fixing upon a target."

8. It was said: "It may well be that you know no true compassion whatever; but harbor no hatreds."

9. It was said: "When I lie dying, do not say, 'Oh, already the time has come . . .!' It is my life, which I have clung to steadily from the beginningless past, so is it not likely I'll be forlorn? You must only encourage me to utter the nembutsu."

10. After his demise, Jien Sōjō⁸ appeared in a dream and declared: "The study of exoteric and esoteric is of no use whatever. Only the contemplation on nothingness and the pronouncing of the nembutsu, which I occasionally performed, stand me in good stead for future Buddhahood."

11. It was said: "The *Commentary on the Awakening of Faith*⁹ states that two people should not live in a single room, for they will disturb each other and obstruct the Way."

12. Zen-amidabutsu¹⁰ of Kurodani told this story: "A *bijiri*¹¹ went to Gedatsu Shōnin¹² and asked to be permitted to live and study with him. Gedatsu re-

⁸ 慈円僧正 (1155-1225). A ranking priest of Mt. Hiei and one of the foremost poets and men of letters of his age (see section 36).

⁹ *Shakumakacronron* 釋教訓所論. Extensively quoted by Kūkai and highly regarded in the Shingon school; it does not, however, contain the present passage.

¹⁰ 善阿彌陀佛. Biography unknown.

¹¹ 聖. 'Sage,' 'hermit-saint,' often used of wandering monks without recognized clerical status.

¹² 解脱上人 (1155-1213). Also known as Jōkei 貞慶. Born into the Fujiwara family. Studied Hossō and Ritsu teachings at Kōfuku-ji in Nara; then after nearly 20 years there, abandoned his position and secluded himself at Mt. Kasagi in Yamashiro for study and practice, attracting many students.

plied, 'Honored monk, I can see that the thought of enlightenment is awake within you. It is completely useless to engage in studies; quickly return whence you came. Those who are here lack the aspiration for birth and I put them to pursuing studies simply because that is better than aimlessly doing nothing at all.' Thus he drove him away."

13. Myōhen said: "In the end, if you have a heart of true aspiration for the Buddha Land and renunciation of the defiled world, it is certain that you will attain birth by pronouncing the Name in your ordinary state of mind. If your aspiration is not true and sincere, you may cast light upon a hundred thousand obscurities and awaken to the deepest of truths, yet attainment of birth will surely be impossible. In the practice of the Buddha Way, accumulation of merit is important. It is preposterous for a man who has once discerned his own nature and resolved upon the single practice of nembutsu to change because of something other people say."

14. Myōzen Hōin said: "When I think of having encountered the dominant condition for birth, Other Power, I see that emancipation from birth-and-death must be accomplished in this present lifetime. Even though we encounter Other Power, if we vainly pass it by to no purpose, we are certain to fall into sub-human life once again. Failure to part from birth-and-death, then, is wholly decided in the present."

15. Further he said: "If you would attain birth into the Buddha Land, take care not to be conspicuous in the eyes of men. People are harmed by others. For a *bijiri*, cultivating virtues in this life means, on the whole, so much jetsam with regard to future Buddhahood."

16. Further he said: "There is no special gain in idly sleeping, but neither is anything lost."

17. Further he said: "For the *bijiri*, it is good being no-good."

18. Further he said: "It is well for one's dwelling to be disagreeable. If it pleased the heart, then, unenlightened men such as we are, we would certainly become attached to it."

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19. Someone asked, "Where should a hermit-outcast¹³ live?" He replied, "Any place at all is fine, if only the nembutsu can be pronounced there. Those places that hinder the practice of nembutsu should be avoided. But in any case, you must be detached from your surroundings."

20. Further he said: "A baby's nembutsu is wonderful."

Overhearing some people in a display of learning, he commented, "Be-nighted men, ignorant even of their own nature."

21. Further he said: "Whatever the problem, we in our foolishness can manage only so long as we do not face it squarely. Our sense of purpose may appear imposing, but if something happens, it is easily shaken."

22. Further he said: "When you must so much as ponder whether to do a thing or not, it is, as a rule, better left undone."

23. Further he said: "For one who is earnest in his aspiration to attain birth in the Buddha Land, withdrawal from ordinary life is, from the outset, utterly without meaning."

24. Further he said: "Although you do not go to great lengths to benefit other sentient beings, if you truly aspire to part from birth-and-death, there is certain to be appropriate benefit for every other person."

25. Further he said: "A *bijiri* is harmed by his own virtuousness. Rather than trying to do virtuous acts, you should put a stop to doing evil."

26. Hōnen Shōnin said: "If, because it is said that birth is attained with but one or ten utterances,¹⁴ you pronounce the nembutsu heedlessly, then faith is hindering practice. If, because it is taught that one should pronounce 'moment by moment without negligence,'¹⁵ you believe one or ten utterances

¹³ *binin* 非人 lit. 'non-human'. Used of monks in the sense of one beyond the pale of normal life.

¹⁴ In the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life*, Amida's 18th Vow states that anyone who does the nembutsu even ten times will attain birth, and the passage on the fulfillment of the Vow states that the person who rejoices in nembutsu even once will reach attainment.

¹⁵ Quoted from the *Sanzengi* 散善哉 of Shan-tao 善導.

to be indecisive, then practice is hindering faith. As faith, you should accept that birth is attained with but one utterance, and as practice, endeavor in nembutsu throughout your life."

27. Further he said: "It is taught that if you believe one utterance of the nembutsu to be indecisive, then every utterance becomes nembutsu of no faith. For Amida Buddha's Vow was established so that birth would be attained with each single utterance, and therefore every moment of nembutsu is the karma that results in birth."

28. Further he said: "When I look upon the commentaries of Shan-tao, to my mind it appears that—whether it be the threefold mind or the fourfold practice¹⁶—it is all *namu-amida-butsu*."

29. He instructed a person with the words: "Human life is such that occasionally a man taking delicious food in mouthfuls will choke on it and die. So you should chew *namu-amida-butsu*, and drink *namu-amida-butsu* down."

30. Further he said: "Without fretting over whether your passions are superficial or deep-seated, without pondering the weight of your sins, simply say *namu-amida-butsu* with your lips and through your voice bring about the settling of birth."

31. Hōnen often said in encouragement: "The man who has seriously embraced the aspiration for birth into the Buddha Land always has about him an air of slight distrust of the world."

¹⁶ In his *Commentary on the Meditation Sutra* 觀經疏, Shan-tao gives the 'three minds' prescribed in the *Meditation Sutra* as necessary for attainment of birth as: 1) true and sincere mind—sincerely worshipping and being mindful of Amida and pronouncing the Name; 2) profound mind—deep awareness both of one's own evil and of the certainty of attaining birth through nembutsu; and 3) aspiration for birth, directing any merit towards its attainment. In his *Ōjōraimon* 往生禮讚 the fourfold practice is set forth as: 1) worship of Amida and the bodhisattva host; 2) exclusive practice of pronouncing the Name; 3) uninterrupted practice; 4) sustaining practice throughout one's lifetime.

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32. Zenshō-bō¹⁷ said: "It was the late Master Hōnen's teaching that, even when busy with other things, you should think of yourself as doing them while saying the nembutsu. Do not think that you are saying the nembutsu while doing something else."

33. Shōkō Shōnin¹⁸ said: "Fitting the arrow's shaft, you shut one eye to aim it closely. When, in like manner, in the single, wholehearted practice you cast no sideward glance, swiftly it finds its mark."

34. Further he said: "If one who has been steadily and deeply mindful of birth into the Buddha Land finds that his practice is regressing, he should consider: the time of death is approaching."

35. Hōren Shōnin¹⁹ of Jōdodani not only reduced his daily provisions to the bare necessities; his breakfast was scarcely more than a formality, and in his morning service for birth into Perfect Bliss all concerns slipped from his mind. It was extraordinary. His endeavor was all for birth alone. When the nembutsu was in his heart, his thoughts would turn to neither rice nor gruel. With the passage of time, his face began to grow thinner day by day and his body weakened. When close friends came to inquire after him, he replied:

If only I tread
the way to the West
without error
then let my body
be skin and bone.

¹⁷ 禪勝房 (1177-1258). Studied in the Tendai school. At 29, directed by a disciple of Hōnen, he made his way to Yoshimizu and there received the nembutsu teaching from the master. Later he became a carpenter and taught among the populace.

¹⁸ 聖光上人 (1162-1238). Also known as Benchō 辨長 and Ben'a 辨阿. Studied Tendai on Mt. Hiei. At 36 met Hōnen and eventually became one of his chief disciples. After Hōnen's death returned to his native Kyushu where he actively spread the teaching. Founder of the Chinzei branch of the Jōdo school.

¹⁹ 法蓮上人 (1145-1228). Also called Shinkū 信空. One of Hōnen's chief disciples.

36. Kyōbutsu-bō²⁰ said: "I mentioned to Myōhen that I had heard a single poem brought him to a realization of the nembutsu way to enlightenment. 'That's so,' he replied:

You must simply trust.
And if deceptions
should accumulate
then be reproachful."²¹

37. Further he said: "It is not to be learned that the threefold mind is had for the learning."

38. Further he said: "You may become conversant with all of the 80,000 Buddhist teachings, but as one in the condition of human foolishness you will still be given to error. All that is truly important is the thought, 'Buddha, save me!'"

39. Further he said: "It is hardly conceivable that either Myōhen or Myōzen simply happened upon their awakening of the aspiration for enlightenment. They devoted themselves constantly to subduing their distractions with the truth of the Way. We should understand, then, that never losing sight of the truth of the Way is itself the aspiration for attainment. Practice for birth in the Buddha Land is based on the strength of this aspiration. How could anyone with an irresolute mind endure the nembutsu practice, which is fraught with a myriad impediments? Thus, people unable to maintain the truth of the Way as the truth demands all give in to their hearts and finally become like those completely lacking aspiration for the future Buddhahood. Taking the truth of the Way in vain—failing to carry it through to the end—is the greatest obstruction to birth.

"Whether you live an ordinary life or in abandonment of the world, in the end the one great matter is death alone. If you simply realize that 'When I die, I die,' then all great concerns vanish. It is from cherishing your self and

²⁰ 敬佛房. It is known only that he was a disciple of both Hōnen and Myōhen.

²¹ A *waka* by Jien; included in the *Shin kokinshū* (13 / 1223) under the headnote, 'the state of feeling in pledging love.'

being attached to your life that all obstacles arise. If you only know that to fall ill and die is a cause for joy, then all things will seem easy. Thus, in sincerely aspiring to attain the future Buddhahood, we should by all means firmly establish the truth of the Way for ourselves and not give in to our hearts; do not give your mind to things of this world of samsara."

40. Further he said: "Recluses these days, once they have cut off their top-knots, become superb scholars and preachers; going up to Mt. Kōya, they turn into splendid Shingon masters and extraordinary explicators of the commentaries. Or, although originally they may be unable to draw the figure for the syllable *sbi* (L) properly curved, they study how to write the standard Sanskrit and Chinese characters. Thus it is extremely rare that their feelings of renouncing the world of samsara go deep, or that they give themselves completely to the practice for attaining birth. When they first cut off their topknots it seemed that they would never be thus possessed of ambition, but they have aroused this passion so given to self-attachment and concern for reputation. Up to the time that I abandoned the world, all were taught that in renunciation we must cast aside all that we have, so obviously to seek for what one does not possess is inexcusable. Thus I embraced a determination not to engage in any activity, secular or religious, for the sake of mastering the arts and skills of this life, or to do anything which might turn into a lingering attachment to samsara or in the end become a hindrance to birth, whether it lay close at hand or at a distance, whether in one form or another. Hence I was long at Ōhara and Mt. Kōya, but I left without learning even one gatha chant, nor even a single Sanskrit letter. With all things, it is good for the attainment of birth simply to pass steadily through this life."

41. Further he said: "A recluse ought to be accustomed to making do whatever the circumstances, feeling no want of anything he may lack."

42. Further he said: "To be attached to a pack, for example, is to be ignorant of the fundamental purpose in using it. Take care that your outlook be in all sincerity: this life is but a night's lodging, a world of dream and illusion, so let it pass as it may. Taking your life lightly and aspiring for birth in the Buddha Land, you should come to a complete realization that being truly

alive here is a matter of today only, of this present moment alone. When you understand this, that which is impossible to bear becomes easily borne, and your practice for birth into the Buddha Land becomes inspired. If you imagine even casually that your life will be long, things of this world will take on importance and all those concerns unrelated to the aspiration for enlightenment will arise. For more than thirty years I have endeavored with this truth and to this very day I make no error. I sometimes wondered if death would come by the end of the year, but I never worried about what might happen the following year. I am now in my old age. In all matters I think only of this very day. In the end the key to emancipation lies in setting your mind upon impermanence.

“Even for the man with no worries about his daily necessities, it is extremely difficult to carry on the practice for birth in tranquility. Considering this, it seems to me that practice does not turn upon the supply or lack of provisions, but simply on the existence or absence of aspiration. Hence my own desire for such provisions died away long ago. The future Buddhahood alone is important. Moreover, one can get along by living life as it comes. ‘Let all else apart from emancipation from samsara be as it may’: it is in this attitude of detachment that the man who aspires for birth abides. Awakened the thought of emancipation, however feebly, is the genuine and sincere offering to the Buddha made in true accord with the Buddha’s heart. For this human body beset with wants there can be no freedom from the necessities of life, so with garments of paper and such things as come to hand I manage my life; but to treat such things as if they were important and to rank them alongside my practice for birth in the Buddha Land would be unspeakably foolish.

“Men of ancient times, upon casting off worldly life, lived in a purity and simplicity of heart. Nowadays renunciation of the world is but poorly understood, and through it men become, on the contrary, corrupted in spirit.

“Although the man aspiring for the Buddha Land chops wood and draws water, his chopping of wood, his drawing of water, should be that of one thinking of birth.

“In whatever I look upon I see only the world’s uncertainty and the evanescence of my self within it, so on occasion, although it may be but an every-

day incident, I sense my life in great peril. But you, monks, even when truly confronted with danger, show not the slightest sign that you are aware. And when I see you at your daily tasks, you seem even less concerned. The crucial thing, then, is not how I put the truth of impermanence. The question is whether you take it even slightly to heart.

“The man who seeks birth abides in the thought that he is out on a journey. Though he travel to the limits of cloud or of sea, as long as he has a body, he cannot do without the bare essentials of food, clothing and shelter; nevertheless, whether he feels attachment or not makes all the difference. When he knows he is always in one-night’s lodging and that life is not a stay that will linger on indefinitely, there is nothing that can obstruct his pronouncing of the nembutsu.

“ ‘Though in any case I’ll lie cast aside in some field, to have abandoned myself for the sake of emancipation from birth-and-death, undergoing all cold and heat and all sickness—this will be the reminiscence of a greatly blessed lifetime!’ How rare are people who rejoice thus.

“That learning is of no use to the hermit-outcast is a matter of degree. The person with the capacity would do well to look through Genshin’s *Essentials for Birth* occasionally, going through the motions of simply reading the text aloud and thus skimming the passages covering the details of impermanence in samsara, the certitude of birth through nembutsu and so on. Hence the venerable Myōhen said, ‘It is inexcusable for the man of nembutsu not to know what the ten joys²² of attainment are.’ Nevertheless, you should never labor after a thorough mastery or a lucid understanding of every word and phrase under the impression that such learning is a necessity. In reading the text, it is enough to be able to understand without too much effort and to survey generally the most significant passages. When one has mastered this

²² Discussed in the second chapter of *Essentials for Birth*: 1) being received at death by Amida and a host of bodhisattvas; 2) being born from a lotus in the Buddha Land; 3) taking on excellent marks and powers; 4) experiencing the wonder of the Buddha Land; 5) rejoicing without end; 6) saving those one has known; 7) entering the company of the bodhisattvas; 8) seeing Amida Buddha and hearing the teaching; 9) making offerings to the Buddhas; 10) advancing to Buddhahood.

ancient method, one will not deviate from the true intent of the teaching, the substance of which is to encourage us to future Buddhahood. Although you study only to this degree, if you feel an increase in self-attachment or concern for reputation in doing it, you should resolutely desist. To turn medicine into poison is the ultimate folly. On the other hand, if through your grasp of even but a single sentence or phrase you feel that you are more earnest in nembutsu, or that your aspiration for birth is strengthened, or that a sense of urgency is awakened, you should read the sacred words from time to time. The person whose natural abilities are meagre, however, should wholeheartedly pronounce the Name without even this level of learning. If one endeavors in practice with a true heart and mind, one will not stray from the fundamental meaning of the teaching. The true mind of faith, the mind of enlightenment, will naturally arise of itself if you practice.

“The study of the teaching of birth in the Buddha Land should be done under a man who aspires for birth. There is a danger that the study of one who lacks such aspiration will be detrimental to others. It is said that only a snake can understand a snake’s mind; likewise, it is the man aspiring for birth who understands matters of birth. Even though it may not actually harm your spirit, you must carefully avoid possessing anything that will foster greed in others.”

43. Further he said: “The man who has decided to live the life of a hermit-outcast, aspiring to do the nembutsu in the peace of his heart, must put aside even the trappings and tools of his renunciation of the world. His vigilance with worldly provisions then should be all the greater, and he should learn to live in a poverty of things. Even in simply hiding his nakedness and eking out his day-to-day living, he should manage in a way which, befitting a hermit, does no harm to his aspiration for emancipation.”

44. Once he said: “When my condition takes a slight turn for the better, I’m taken aback by the thought that I may not die: this comes of the strength of having long embraced the truth that death is not to be feared. And so you, monks, should put an end to the desire to have even a decent pack. Right now it may seem but a trifle, but in the end it will turn into a lingering attach-

ment to birth-and-death. With vigilance, then, abide in an aversion of your self and embrace the aspiration for death.

“The settlement of the matter of birth lies simply in contemplating quietly.

“It is said that when men of the eastern frontier long dwell in the capital, they lose their nerve. This is a telling example for the man who aspires for birth. Pacifying the body and clarifying the mind may seem but petty tasks, but they come only after one has put off all thoughts of gaining esteem and riches. There are many who dwell in solitude merely out of love of the manner and the trappings they associate with the purifying of the mind—the tranquility of an elegant retreat: they are living a lie.”

45. Myōhen Sōzu said: “The *bijiri* who fusses over the orderliness of his rags is hopeless.”

46. Further he said: “I asked someone, ‘How would it be to study solely for the sake of attaining birth?’ He answered, ‘Although at first one may study with birth in mind, it will later come to be entirely for the sake of fame and profit.’”

47. He often said: “Personally, I regret the day that I began to dwell in this mountain monastery. I imagined that, after withdrawing from worldly life, I would be heating bean-paste over a fire of leaves and brush for my meals, but quite the opposite, I have become a ‘man of the Way’ and live in splendid circumstances: this is altogether at odds with my original intention. And not knowing my true feelings, people see my secluded life here and think it worthy of admiration.” Thus he would speak with a wry expression.

48. Gyōsen-bō²³ said: “Although I should repent the evil acts of body and mind with the karma of speech—the *nembutsu*—I waste my time with vanities.”

²³ 行仙房 A disciple of Shōkō and Zenshō, he converted from the Shingon school to Hōnen’s *nembutsu*.

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49. Further he said: "Heaven and earth answer no practical purpose, and yet they embrace all things. So is it with the man of the Way. To become one of no consequence whatever is the matter of great consequence."

50. Further he said: "Wholly aspiring to the Buddha-way is no especially exacting matter. Allow yourself the time and, putting the Way before all else, set your mind to no other business: this is the primary step."

(end of the first fascicle)