

# The Perfect and Sudden Precepts in the Jōdoshū

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THE AIM of this essay is to provide a brief introduction to the perfect and sudden precepts (*endonkai* 円頓戒), the bodhisattva precepts employed in the Japanese Jōdoshū 浄土宗, or Pure Land school. I will discuss their history and philosophical background, consider their relationship to the *nenbutsu* 念仏, reflect on their purpose and significance, and finally describe the ordination ceremony as practiced in present-day Japan.<sup>1</sup>

Many people consider the Jōdoshū to be a religious denomination that teaches us to recite the *nenbutsu* with faith in Amida 阿弥陀 Buddha's vow to save us, thereby attaining birth in the Pure Land of Supreme Bliss after we die. In a nutshell, it is a religious denomination that teaches the way to go to a pleasant world in the next life (*gose zensho* 後世善処) through the *nenbutsu*. Such an understanding is not wrong, but the Jōdoshū also advocates keeping the perfect and sudden precepts for our welfare in the present world. In other words, it is also a religious denomination that teaches the way to attain peace of mind in the present life (*genze an'on* 現世安穩).<sup>2</sup> Followers of the Jōdoshū, monastics as well as lay people, are nurtured by both the *nenbutsu* and the perfect and sudden precepts.

## I. THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PERFECT AND SUDDEN PRECEPTS IN THE JŌDOSHŪ

The bodhisattva precepts transmitted in the Jōdoshū today are called the perfect and sudden precepts. In this section, I will consider the history of

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see Saitō 2018.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase “attaining peace in the present life and going to a pleasant world in the next life” derives from the “Parable of the Medicinal Herbs” chapter (“Yakusōyubon” 藥草喻品) of the *Lotus Sutra* (ch. 5). See T no. 262, 19b.

the transmission of the perfect and sudden precepts and their philosophical background.

### *History*

The perfect and sudden precepts (also called perfect precepts [*enkai* 円戒]) originally derive from Zhiyi 智顛 (538–598), also known by his title Great Tiantai Master (Ch. Tiantai Dashi 天台大師). Zhiyi is the de facto founder of the Chinese Tiantai 天台 (Jp. Tendai) school, and he also lectured on the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (hereafter, *Brahmā's Net Sutra*), which provides a detailed explanation of the bodhisattva precepts. Zhiyi's lectures were taken down and edited by his disciple Guanding 灌頂 (561–632) and are now extant as the *Pusajie yishu* 菩薩戒義疏 (Jp. *Bosatsukai gisho*; Commentary on the Bodhisattva Precepts).<sup>3</sup> The perfect and sudden precepts were transmitted within the Tiantai school and brought to Japan by Jianzhen 鑑真 (688–763) along with the *Sifen lü* 四分律 (Four-Part Vinaya), the standard set of precepts used in the East Asian Buddhist tradition.<sup>4</sup> It is recorded that the bodhisattva precepts were granted to over four hundred and forty lay people, including Emperor Shōmu 聖武 (701–756), Empress Kōmyō 光明皇后 (701–760), and Emperor Kōken 孝謙 (713–770), at Tōdaiji 東大寺 in Nara 奈良 in 754. When Saichō 最澄 (767–822) travelled to Tang 唐 China in search of the Buddhist Dharma, he received the perfect and sudden precepts from Daosui 道邃 (d.u.), the seventh patriarch of the Chinese Tiantai school. After returning to Japan, Saichō established the Japanese Tendai school on Mount Hiei 比叡 and used the sudden precepts to train his disciples. Ever since that time, the Tendai school and the various Buddhist schools that developed from it have used this set of precepts to regulate the lives of their monks.<sup>5</sup>

Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), who founded the Jōdoshū, studied Tendai philosophy on Mount Hiei between the ages of thirteen and forty-three. At the age of fifteen, he received the perfect and sudden precepts from Eikū 叡空 (d.u.–1179) who lived as a recluse in the Kurodani 黒谷 section of

<sup>3</sup> *Pusajie yishu*, T no. 1811; *Fanwang jing*, T no. 1484.

<sup>4</sup> T no. 1428.

<sup>5</sup> Many of the Buddhist schools of Japan developed out of the Tendai school. Among them, the schools that also transmit the perfect and sudden precepts include the Jōdoshū, Seizan Jōdoshū 西山浄土宗, Jishū 時宗, Tendai Shinzeishū 天台真盛宗, and the Yūzū Nenbutsushū 融通念仏宗.

Mount Hiei. Even after he broke from the Tendai school and founded the Jōdoshū at the age of forty-three, Hōnen bestowed the perfect and sudden precepts to many clerics and lay people alike, personally serving as the precept master (*kaishi* 戒師), or the monk who grants the precepts during an ordination ceremony. The people he bestowed the precepts on included his disciples, emperors, members of the nobility, and warriors. The importance that Hōnen placed on the perfect and sudden precepts can be seen from his declaration that “there is no one who has studied the Mahayana bodhisattva precepts as much as me.”<sup>6</sup>

After Hōnen’s death, the teachings concerning the perfect and sudden precepts were transmitted by the successive patriarchs of the Jōdoshū. Although the school gradually increased its influence, it was frequently subject to criticism. One such criticism came from Kokan Shiren 虎関師鍊 (1278–1346), a Rinzai Zen monk of Tōfukuji 東福寺, who refused to recognize it as an independent religious denomination, stating that “Jōdoshū is an irregular religious denomination having no proper lineage.”<sup>7</sup> Faced with such opprobrium, the Jōdoshū embarked upon an epochal training program for its monks during the tenure of its seventh patriarch Shōgei 聖岡 (1341–1420). As a part of this program, the school created an officially recognized line of precepts transmission deriving from Hōnen and introduced a formal system of granting the precepts. In this and other ways, the Jōdoshū sought to establish itself as an independent and orthodox religious denomination worthy of respect from the monks of other schools. Shōgei also wrote the *Ken jōdo denkai ron* 顯淨土傳戒論 (Treatise Revealing the Precept Transmission of the Pure Land School)<sup>8</sup> to clarify the reason why the precepts are transmitted in the Jōdoshū. It is through this work that the perfect and sudden precepts came to hold a central place in the Jōdoshū.

In the seventeenth century, as part of their religious policies, the Tokugawa 徳川 shogunate introduced the *danka* 檀家 system which required all families to become affiliated with a Buddhist temple. Although this system brought financial security to the temples, it also had an unfortunate result in that the practices and daily lives of the monks of the various Buddhist schools began to decline. In the Jōdoshū, the number

<sup>6</sup> *Hōnen shōnin gyōjō ezu* 法然上人行狀絵図, roll 5. See Jodoshū Seiten Kankō Iinkai 1994–2000, vol. 6, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書, roll 27, in Takakusu and Mochizuki 1932, vol. 101, p. 470a.

<sup>8</sup> Jōdoshūten Kankōkai 1907–36, vol. 15, pp. 894–99.

of monks neglecting their pastoral work and breaking the precepts also began to increase. As a result, the Jōdoshū lay followers came to lose confidence in the monks, resulting in decreasing revenues and increasing difficulties in the management of the temples. In the eighteenth century, the sense of crisis that this situation provoked led many monks to reexamine the goals and significance of the perfect and sudden precepts and to work for their revival in order to reverse the growing moral laxity of the monkhood. But the Tokugawa shogunate was overthrown in 1868 and Japan entered the Meiji 明治 period (1868–1912). The new Meiji government passed laws allowing monks to marry, eat meat, and keep their hair long, removing the requirement to shave their heads. As a result, many monks once again ceased keeping the precepts and their lifestyle again became disorderly.

In the present twenty-first century, Japanese Buddhism is criticized as being nothing more than a “funeral Buddhism” (*sōshiki bukkyō* 葬式仏教) concerned solely with the conduct of funerals (and reaping financial benefit from them), and many people are turning away from it, feeling that it no longer has any meaning for them—a phenomenon popularly known as *otera banare* お寺離れ, which can be loosely translated as “exodus from the temples.” But just like the situation in the mid-eighteenth century, a number of monks of the Jōdoshū are working for the revival of the precepts with a sense of urgency.

### *Philosophical Background*

In East Asia, which is sometimes described as a cultural sphere based on Chinese characters (*kanji bunkaken* 漢字文化圏), the Buddhist teachings are understood through texts which use these characters. The image that many people associate with the Chinese character for precepts, *kai* 戒, is that of a prohibition (*kinshi* 禁止), that “one should not do such and such a thing.” However, the Sanskrit term for precepts is *śīla*, which means action (*kōi* 行為), habits (*shūkan* 習慣), or nature (*seishitsu* 性質), all of which are associated with “doing something.” Ever since *śīla* was first translated as *kai* in the mid-second century by the pioneering Buddhist translator An Shigao 安世高 (fl. ca. 148–180 CE),<sup>9</sup> it became the standard translation for precepts in East Asia. But I fear that this has led many people to misunderstand the original meaning of the precepts.

<sup>9</sup> An Shigao came to China in 147 and translated many Buddhist texts for the next twenty years.

The bodhisattva precepts found in the *Brahmā's Net Sutra* mentioned above and the threefold pure precepts (*sanju jōkai* 三聚淨戒), both of which are central to the Jōdoshū, also must be understood in the sense of “action,” “habits,” and “nature.” That is to say, it is necessary to put the Brahmā's Net precepts and the threefold pure precepts into practice, to continue cultivating them as part of one's daily habitual actions, and ultimately make them a part of one's nature. Moreover, the precepts are not prohibitions or duties that are imposed on oneself from above, so to speak. Neither are they rules or contracts. If anything, the precepts should be described as contracts with oneself. They are Buddhist norms that should be accepted in order to improve one's daily life.

What, then, is the significance of the perfect and sudden precepts? “Perfect” means complete with nothing lacking, while “sudden” means “quick” or “speedy.” Thus, the perfect and sudden precepts refer to Buddhist virtues that, through their practice, allow one to improve one's character and quickly attain enlightenment.

The bodhisattva precepts transmitted in the Jōdoshū (that is to say, the perfect and sudden precepts) originally belonged to the Tendai school. Hence, the fundamental teachings concerning these precepts are basically the same in both schools. In both cases, they are based on the so-called three sutras of the perfect and sudden precepts, which are as follows.

The first is the *Myōhō rengēkyō* 妙法蓮華經 (Sutra of the Lotus Blossom of the Sublime Dharma), popularly known as the *Lotus Sutra*, the central text of the Tendai school. The virtuous spirit of the bodhisattva described in this text is taken to be the fundamental basis of the perfect and sudden precepts.<sup>10</sup> However, the explanation of this spirit found in the sutra is somewhat abstract and does not provide us with concrete guidelines for conducting our lives. Hence the importance of the second text, the *Pusa yingluo benye jing* 菩薩瓔珞本業經 (Jp. *Bosatsu yōraku hongō kyō*; Sutra of

<sup>10</sup> The virtuous spirit of the bodhisattva described in the *Lotus Sutra* is epitomized by the three dharmas (*sanbō* 三法: to enter the Tathāgata's room [i.e., to arouse the mind of compassion], to wear the Tathāgata's robes [i.e., to practice forbearance], and to sit on the Tathāgata's seat [i.e., to recognize the emptiness of all things]) found in the “Dharma Master” chapter (“Hosshibon” 法師品, ch. 10), the four comfortable conducts (*shi anraku gyō* 四安樂行: to commit no evil acts physically, vocally, and mentally, and to arouse the aspiration to lead all beings to enlightenment) described in the “Comfortable Practice” chapter (“Anrakugyōbon” 安樂行品, ch. 14), and the four essentials (*shiyō* 四要: to be protected by the buddhas, to plant good roots of merit, to enter the stage of non-retrogression, and to arouse the aspiration to save other beings) found in the “Exhortation of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva” chapter (“Fugen bosatsu kanhotsu bon” 普賢菩薩勸發品, ch. 28).

the Necklace of the Bodhisattva's Original Acts), that clarifies and systematizes the practice of the perfect and sudden precepts through its teaching of the threefold pure precepts.<sup>11</sup>

The threefold pure precepts are (1) precepts encompassing pure conduct (*shōritsugikai* 撰律儀戒), (2) precepts encompassing good dharmas (*shōzenpōkai* 撰善法戒), and (3) precepts encompassing sentient beings (*shōshujōkai* 撰衆生戒).<sup>12</sup>

The precepts encompassing pure conduct are the precepts concerned with putting an end to evil conduct. To be more specific, they refer to the moral norms set forth in the ten major and forty-eight minor precepts described in the *Brahmā's Net Sutra*.<sup>13</sup> (It may be mentioned here that these ten major and forty-eight minor precepts are known as the "Brahmā's Net precepts.")

The precepts encompassing good dharmas are those concerned with undertaking various good actions. Although a wide variety of good actions are found in Mahayana Buddhism, here they refer specifically to the six perfections.

The precepts encompassing sentient beings are those concerned with actions for helping sentient beings, and refer to the four immeasurable minds (*shimuryōshin* 四無量心, consisting of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity), which represent the Mahayana Buddhist spirit of compassion, and the four ways of embracing sentient beings (*shishōhō* 四摂法, consisting of charity, loving words, other-benefitting actions, and sympathetic understanding), which are the guidelines for engaging in compassionate activities.

As this shows, the perfect and sudden precepts are a balanced and systematic set of precepts, consisting of both the moral principles of Mahayana Buddhism and concrete guidelines for putting them into practice. Moreover, they can be kept by monks and nuns as well as lay men and women.

## II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE *NENBUTSU* AND THE PERFECT AND SUDDEN PRECEPTS

As noted above, the teaching of the Jōdoshū relies on the *nenbutsu* for going to a pleasant world in the next life and the perfect and sudden precepts for attaining peace of mind in the present life. The *nenbutsu* is the

<sup>11</sup> T no. 1485.

<sup>12</sup> T no. 1485, roll 2, 24: 1020b–c.

<sup>13</sup> T no. 1484, 24: 1004b–1009b.

practice set forth by Amida Buddha that allows us to attain birth in this Buddha's Pure Land of Utmost Bliss after we die. In contrast, the perfect and sudden precepts are the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha and refer to the guidelines on how to live in the present life until one dies.

As stated in the previous section, the understanding of the perfect and sudden precepts in both the Jōdoshū and the Tendai school are fundamentally identical. However, in the Jōdoshū, which teaches birth in the Pure Land through the *nenbutsu*, there is a further point that needs to be clarified. This is the relationship between the *nenbutsu* and the precepts, to which we will now turn.

*There is No Contradiction between the Nenbutsu and the Precepts*

Almost two thousand years ago, Pure Land Buddhism arose as a spiritual movement focused especially on the issue of salvation in the afterlife. For this reason, Pure Land Buddhism does not concern itself too much with the matter of salvation in the present life.

In principle, Pure Land Buddhism (or the teachings found in the three Pure Land sutras)<sup>14</sup> is a spiritual movement that seeks to escape from this defiled realm (*onri edo* 厭離穢土) and is oriented towards the next life. Its central concern is “how to be born in a blissful postmortem world” (*ano yo* あの世). Hence it neither engages in theoretical reflection nor in practices related to the issue of how to live in this world. It is an undeniable fact that the three Pure Land sutras do not provide any practical guidance concerning how we should live in the present life.

However, as long as we are alive, it is impossible for us to escape from the various problems that daily confront us. The *nenbutsu* cannot help us to deal with these individual problems directly. This is because the *nenbutsu* is a practice that Amida Buddha set forth in his original vow to lead us to the Pure Land. The *nenbutsu*, in other words, is not a panacea. On the other hand, the precepts deal specifically and concretely with the way in which to live in this life. Thus they can provide Buddhists with reliable guidelines for living in this world. In other words, this means that the *nenbutsu* and the perfect and sudden precepts have different jurisdictions.

In this way, in Pure Land Buddhism, the *nenbutsu* and precepts are unrelated to each other doctrinally. However, as an institutionalized religious

<sup>14</sup> The three Pure Land sutras refer to the three central sutras of the Jōdoshū: the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life* in two rolls, the *Sutra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* in one roll, and the *Amida Sutra* in one roll. All of these sutras teach birth in the Pure Land through the *nenbutsu*.

organization, the Jōdoshū attaches great importance to both the *nenbutsu* as a means for going to a pleasant world in the next life and the precepts as a means for attaining peace of mind in the present life. This also shows that the teachings of Amida Buddha and Śākyamuni Buddha are complimentary. The Jōdoshū teaching about the precepts places equal emphasis on the *nenbutsu* and the perfect and sudden precepts, resulting in a commendable balance between the two.

### *Hōnen's Understanding of the Precepts*

Let us consider how Hōnen understood the relationship between the *nenbutsu* and the precepts. This is the question of how the *nenbutsu* for attaining birth in the Pure Land and the precepts for providing guidelines for the present life are related to each other. Hōnen develops his understanding of the perfect and sudden precepts from the following three perspectives: (1) From one perspective, Hōnen claims that they are to be rejected because they are of no use in attaining birth in the Pure Land of Utmost Bliss; (2) From another perspective, he claims that they can be adopted as practices useful for supporting the *nenbutsu* practitioner; and (3) From yet another perspective, he claims that they are universal practices, common to all Buddhists.

Concerning the first point, Hōnen thought that the *nenbutsu* is the only practice that leads to birth in the Pure Land. This is because he believed that it was the practice that Amida Buddha specifically chose in his original vow for bringing all beings to his Pure Land. For this reason, Hōnen rejected all other practices as not being conducive to birth in the Pure Land. Since the perfect and sudden precepts are included among such non-*nenbutsu* practices, it is appropriate to understand the relationship between the *nenbutsu* and perfect and sudden precepts as being identical to that between the *nenbutsu* and non-*nenbutsu* practices. In other words, the precepts must be rejected as not being necessary for attaining birth in the Pure Land.

No matter how much importance Buddhists of past ages may have placed on the precepts, such traditional common-sense notions of what is important for Buddhist practice did not mean much to Hōnen. The same was true for such basic Mahayana Buddhist practices as arousing the aspiration for enlightenment and the six perfections. When contrasted with the *nenbutsu* of the original vow, it is only natural that all other practices, be it the aspiration for enlightenment, the six perfections, or the perfect and sudden precepts, should be rejected as not being in accord with the original vow to save all beings by means of the *nenbutsu*.



Turning next to the second point, Hōnen enumerates five practices as practices for attaining birth in the Pure Land: reading the sutras, contemplation, veneration, *nenbutsu* recitation, and giving praise and offerings. He called them the “five kinds of right practices” (*goshu shōgyō* 五種正行). However, among the five practices, he considered the first three practices and the final practice to be auxiliary practices (*jogō* 助業) for undertaking the fourth practice of *nenbutsu* recitation, which he called the “rightly assured practice” (*shōjōgō* 正定業). Auxiliary practices refer to those practices that help the practitioner continue reciting the *nenbutsu*, which is the rightly assured practice for gaining birth in the Pure Land. Hōnen called the four auxiliary practices the “auxiliary practices of a similar type” (*dōrui no jogō* 同類の助業),<sup>15</sup> since they are all associated with the practice of gaining birth in the Pure Land.<sup>16</sup>

Since the perfect and sudden precepts are not included in Amida Buddha’s original vow as a practice necessary for gaining birth in the Pure Land, they should, at least initially, be rejected. However, as long as they assist the practitioner in reciting the *nenbutsu*, the precepts may be useful as an auxiliary practice. In this sense, they can be called an “auxiliary practice of a different type.”

Finally, the third point. Inasmuch as the precepts are one of the three learnings (*sangaku* 三学), or the three fundamental Buddhist practices (the other two are meditation and wisdom), their importance should not be

<sup>15</sup> In the fourth chapter of the *Senchaku hongan nenbutsu shū* 選擇本願念佛集, Hōnen discusses the practices that are helpful in undertaking the *nenbutsu* and divides them into two: the auxiliary practices of a similar type and the auxiliary practices of a different type. The former refer to the four auxiliary practices: reading the sutras, contemplation, veneration, and giving praises and offerings. The latter refer to other practices that are helpful in undertaking the *nenbutsu* but are not included among the five kinds of right practices. See *Senchakushū* English Translation Project 1998, p. 85.

<sup>16</sup> The fourth chapter of Hōnen’s *Senchaku hongan nenbutsu shū* states, “Concerning the auxiliary practices of a similar type, the *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* [*Guan-ding shu* 觀經疏] of Master Shandao [善導; 618–681] says, ‘These refer to the five types of auxiliary practices that help one to undertake the single practice of the *nenbutsu*. This was explained in detail in the section on the right and mixed practices above.’” See Jōdoshū Seiten Kankō Inkai 1994–2000, vol. 3, p. 126. For an alternative English translation, see *Senchakushū* English Translation Project 1998, p. 85. The term “good roots of a similar type” is also found in Hōnen’s *Muryōjūkyō shaku* 無量壽經釋 (Commentary on the Sutra of Immeasurable Life). See Ishii 1955, p. 89, for the source of this passage. In other words, among the five right practices, the four auxiliary practices are all practices that help one attain birth in the Pure Land just like the *nenbutsu* recitation. It is for this reason that they are called auxiliary practices of a similar type.

denied by Buddhists. Precepts help to mitigate the anxieties and delusive thoughts that arise in daily life, gradually bring our character to perfection, and ultimately lead to the attainment of enlightenment. Hence, Buddhists should be rather diligent in practicing them.<sup>17</sup>

This does not mean that one should keep the precepts perfectly but rather that one should keep them to the best of one's abilities insofar as one's circumstances allow. Hōnen emphasized that it is important for a person who recites the *nenbutsu* to strive not to commit even the slightest evil. The perfect and sudden precepts are not a practice for attaining birth in the Pure Land but are of great value in removing suffering and living a good life. For this reason, they should be practiced in conjunction with the *nenbutsu*.<sup>18</sup>

### *Shōgei's Understanding of the Precepts*

After Hōnen's death, the perfect and sudden precepts were transmitted from disciple to disciple. However, during the time of the seventh patriarch, Shōgei, the *nenbutsu* was recognized as being the *shūmyaku* 宗脈, or the school's official practice to be transmitted from master to disciple, while the perfect and sudden precepts were made the *kaimyaku* 戒脈, or the school's official precepts to be transmitted from master to disciple. In this way, the system for training the school's monks, emphasizing both the *nenbutsu* and the precepts, came into being.

Concurrently, Shōgei composed the *Ken jōdo denkai ron* and instituted a formal system of transmitting the precepts from master to disciple based on Hōnen's understanding of the precepts that were described in the section above. As its title indicates, Shōgei's aim in writing the *Ken jōdo denkai*

<sup>17</sup> The *Tozanki* 登山記 says, "The injunction 'do no evil and practice good' (*shoaku makusa shuzen bugyō* 諸惡莫作衆善奉行) is the precept common to all the buddhas of the three periods of time. . . . However, refrain from committing evil actions to the best of your abilities" (Jōdoshū Seiten Kankō Iinkai 1994–2000, vol. 4, p. 504). Moreover, in Hōnen's letter to Kumagai Naozane 熊谷直実 (1141–1207/8) entitled "Kumagai nyūdō e tsukawasu gohenji" 熊谷入道へ遣わすご返事, it says, "Thus, since the keeping of the precepts is not a practice required by the original vow, you should keep it to the extent that it is possible for you to keep it." Jōdoshū Seiten Kankō Iinkai 1994–2000, vol. 4, pp. 544–45.

<sup>18</sup> The *Tozanki* says, "Uphold the ten major precepts and recite the *nenbutsu* ten times. Keep the forty-eight minor precepts and rely on the forty-eight vows. Do not transgress them deep in your mind." See Jōdoshū Seiten Kankō Iinkai 1994–2000, vol. 4, p. 504. The *Muryōjukyō shaku* also states, "Even though you do not exclusively keep the precepts, if you reflect single-mindedly on Amida Buddha, how can you not attain birth in the Pure Land? How much more so if you keep one precept or two precepts to the best of your abilities." Jōdoshūten Kankōkai 1907–36, vol. 9, p. 334.

*ron* was to emphasize the legitimacy of transmitting and practicing the perfect and sudden precepts within the Jōdoshū. That is to say, in this work, he sought to demonstrate that the precepts derive their authority from the fact that they have been transmitted from the patriarch Hōnen and to provide the doctrinal justification for undertaking non-*nenbutsu* practices such as the precepts along with the *nenbutsu*. Shōgei was the first person to begin the task of systematizing the school institutionally and his accomplishments were far-reaching. Ever since Shōgei's time, the monks of the Jōdoshū have been trained according to the system started by him of transmitting both the *nenbutsu* and the precepts.

The *Ken jōdo denkai ron* consists of six sets of questions and answers treating the following topics.<sup>19</sup>

1. Although the perfect and sudden precepts originally belonged to the Tendai school, they comprise an excellent set of precepts for benefitting other sentient beings (*ritagyō* 利他行). Therefore, they should be taken into the Jōdoshū.
2. The Kurodani lineage of the Tendai perfect and sudden precepts was transmitted to Hōnen from Eikū. Hence from now on, it is the responsibility of the Jōdoshū to transmit it to posterity.
3. The teaching to avoid evil actions and undertake good actions is one that all the buddhas have preached in common. Since it is a universal Buddhist teaching that transcends sectarian boundaries, it is appropriate to accept it as a part of the Jōdoshū's teachings.
4. Hōnen was widely praised as being "the foremost precept master of Japan" (*tenka no kaishi* 天下の戒師) and the perfect and sudden precepts have been transmitted by his disciples from one generation to the next. One should not make light of the historical fact that the precepts have been continuously transmitted by Hōnen's disciples in this way.
5. The perfect and sudden precepts are not among the practices that Amida Buddha chose in his original vow to effect the birth of sentient beings into the Pure Land and are therefore not actually a practice for attaining birth in the Pure Land. However, if the act of keeping the precepts serves as a foundation for the *nenbutsu* practitioner's daily life, it will become an auxiliary practice. For this reason, the practice of keeping the precepts can be tolerated.
6. Even if one breaks the precepts, one will not lose the substance of the precepts (*kaitai* 戒體; on the "substance of the precepts," see below).

<sup>19</sup> Jōdoshūten Kankōkai 1907–36, vol. 15, pp. 894–98.

Those who receive the precepts but break them are far superior to those who do not receive the precepts at all.

### III. THE PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PERFECT AND SUDDEN PRECEPTS IN THE JŌDOSHŪ

In this section, I will discuss the purpose and significance of the perfect and sudden precepts. No matter what they are, we continue certain actions because there is an important purpose and significance to them. In the same way, there is a purpose for, and significance in, our taking the perfect and sudden precepts into our lives.

#### *The Purpose of Keeping the Precepts*

Śākyamuni Buddha left home and became a monk because he was beset by the sufferings of life. Similarly, Hōnen became a monk as a result of his father's assassination.<sup>20</sup> They both became monks when they found it difficult to accept the common-sense views and values of the secular world. In other words, they could no longer find any meaning in secular values and tried to find a new way of life based upon a different set of values.

Inasmuch as the precepts are a part of the basic threefold set of fundamental Buddhist practices consisting of precepts, meditation, and wisdom (the three learnings mentioned above), the reason why people practice them must be for their attainment of enlightenment. However, the Jōdoshū does not teach the way to attain enlightenment in this life. The purpose of the precepts in the Jōdoshū must lie elsewhere.

People receive the precepts in the Jōdoshū in order to awaken to the fact that there is a set of transcendental values that is different from the constantly changing and ultimately untrustworthy values prized in the secular world. These transcendental values refer to the guidelines based on Buddhist thought that show us how to think and act. It is the precepts that clearly teach us these values. People who cannot accept the common-sense views and values of the secular world can only withdraw from society and shut themselves up in their homes (*hikikomori* 引きこもり), contemplate suicide, bear with their situation the best they can, or seek a confronta-

<sup>20</sup> Hōnen's father, a warrior named Uruma no Tokikuni 漆間時国 (1098?–1141), was killed when his house was attacked by a rival warrior named Akashi no Sadaaki 明石定明 (d.u.).

tion with society. None of these choices will result in happiness. If this is the case, it is wiser to accept the unchanging transcendental values, just as Śākyamuni Buddha and Hōnen did.

For about two thousand, four hundred years, Buddhism has continued to offer such unchanging world-transcending values (that is, values embodied in the precepts) to the world. And, as long as there are people who will accept these values in the present and in the future, these values will provide spiritual peace of mind and serve as a trustworthy basis for their lives. The purpose of receiving the precepts is not to gain enlightenment in this life but to recognize the existence of transcendental values, put them into practice in our daily lives, and remove or lessen suffering, worries, anxieties, and delusive thoughts, thereby improving our character and lives as good Buddhists. The precepts are not something for other people or for society; they are something intimately related to our own way of life.

### *The Significance of the Precepts*

The Jōdoshū considers the perfect and sudden precepts to be significant for the following four reasons: (1) They enable us to attain peace of mind in the present life; (2) When we receive the precepts, the substance of the precepts arises in us; (3) They help facilitate the practice of the *nenbutsu*; and (4) They contribute to the well-being of society.

As noted above, the precepts are practiced in order to mitigate and eradicate the sufferings we encounter in the present life. If we are only seeking salvation in the next life, the *nenbutsu* is enough. But if we rely solely on the *nenbutsu*, the problems that arise in our lives remain unsolved. We need concrete guidelines in order to see how we should live today and tomorrow and how to mitigate and extinguish the troubles that daily assail us. There is a big difference as to whether we are aware of such guidelines or not. These guidelines are, of course, the perfect and sudden precepts. Concerning the teachings of the Jōdoshū, Hōnen stated:

While we are alive, the merits of the *nenbutsu* accumulate, and when we die, we go to the Pure Land. In any case, when we accept that we need not worry about our present life, we find that we need not worry either about life or death.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Hōnen shōnin gyōjō ezū*, roll 21, Jōdoshū Seiten Kankō Inkai 1994–2000, vol. 6, p. 283.

As this shows, Hōnen was concerned not only with the problem of going to a pleasant world in the next life but also with the problem of attaining peace of mind in the present life. To be able to rid oneself of the anxieties concerning both this world and the next is the ideal that *nenbutsu* practitioners should strive for. Hōnen's words above, that "we need not worry either about life or death," indicate that the Jōdoshū teaching shows us both how to attain birth in the Pure Land in the next life, and how to live without worries and anxieties in the present life. To repeat, it is possible to go to a pleasant world in the next life through the *nenbutsu* and attain peace of mind in the present life through the perfect and sudden precepts. Herein lies the strength of the Jōdoshū teaching.

The substance of the precepts refers to the driving force, or the potential, behind the desire to uphold the precepts. Upon receiving the precepts, one gains the substance of the precepts and will not lose it until one dies. On this point, Hōnen says:

This precept Dharma is taken into the body of the person receiving the precepts in one instant (*kṣana*), the moment following the three acts (*san katsuma* 三羯磨).<sup>22</sup> This is called the substance of the precepts. . . . Once you have gained these sublime perfect and sudden precepts, you will never lose them, even if you break the precepts or commit evil actions. For this reason, these are called the precepts that, once gained, will never be lost.<sup>23</sup>

The substance of the precepts may be likened to the brake and accelerator of an automobile. Those who have gained the substance of the precepts will put a brake on evil actions and will press the accelerator in conducting good actions. However, if one has neither a brake nor accelerator in the first place, one can neither stop nor go. But as long as one has a brake and an accelerator, even if there should be an accident, it is possible to fix them and start up again. Therefore, in order to gain the substance of the precepts that work like brakes and accelerators, it is necessary to become a bodhisattva by receiving the bodhisattva precepts and to take into one's life the standards for judging good and evil. In summary, it may be said once again that those who receive the precepts but break them later are superior to those who do not receive the precepts at all.

<sup>22</sup> This refers to the seventh of the twelve stages in the ordination ceremony, in which the person being ordained undergoes the act of receiving the precepts three times.

<sup>23</sup> Jōdoshū Seiten Kankō Iinkai 1994–2000, vol. 5, p. 480.

It is meaningful to break the precepts. This idea, startling at first sight, is already found in Hōnen. In the *Ōjōki* 往生記 (Records on Birth in the Pure Land), he says:

Even if you think in your hearts, “I must not break the precepts; I must not commit any evil deeds,” you cannot refrain from doing so, with the result that you break the precepts and commit evil deeds with fear and trembling. We only feel sorrow over this fact and can do nothing else. It is for this very reason that we cannot but trust in the (practice of) reciting the *nenbutsu* and attain birth in the Pure Land through the power of Amida Buddha’s original vow.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, it is necessary to receive the precepts in order to become a Buddhist. It is only then that a life based on keeping the precepts can begin. But no matter how hard we may try to keep the precepts, it is impossible to do so. At this point, we realize that we are foolish beings filled with passions (*bonnō gusoku no bonbu* 煩惱具足の凡夫) who invariably end up breaking the precepts. It is because we realize that we are such foolish beings that we are led to take refuge in Amida Buddha, enabling us to recite the *nenbutsu* and attain birth in the Pure Land. To conclude, this is the significance of receiving the precepts: by breaking the precepts, we realize we are capable of nothing but reciting the *nenbutsu*. (This process can be schematized as follows: receiving the precepts ⇒ keeping the precepts ⇒ breaking the precepts ⇒ realization of oneself as a foolish being ⇒ accepting and reciting the *nenbutsu* ⇒ birth in the Pure Land.)

Moreover, the realization of having broken the precepts makes us understand that the choice of action we made was the wrong one, enabling us not to make the same wrong choice again. We often use the proverb “failure teaches success” (*shippai wa seikō no moto* 失敗は成功のもと), but in the same way, we can say that “breaking the precepts teaches the way to improve our character.” Understood in this way, it is not necessarily a bad thing to break the precepts.

In contemporary Japan, Buddhism is expected to contribute to the well-being of society. In particular, many people expect Buddhist organizations and individual Buddhist monks to assume responsibility for social welfare activities that the government and commercial organizations are incapable of doing.

<sup>24</sup> Jōdoshū Seiten Kankō Inkaï 1994–2000, vol. 5, p. 5.

Faced with such expectations, the Jōdoshū is now engaged in various activities to promote the well-being of society. As part of its program, the Jōdoshū issued the “Twenty-First Century Jōdoshū Proclamation,” setting forth the following four goals:

1. Let us reflect on ourselves and realize that we are foolish beings.
2. Let us create a loving home.
3. Let us create a compassionate society.
4. Let us create a peaceful world where we can coexist with one another.<sup>25</sup>

Among these four points, the third and fourth points in particular reflect the school’s determination to work for the well-being of society. Since the school has issued this proclamation, there must be a basis for it in the school’s teachings. Its basis is to be found more in its teachings on perfect and sudden enlightenment than in the *nenbutsu* teachings. In this regard, among the threefold pure precepts noted above, the precepts encompassing sentient beings are especially important.

Putting the “Twenty-First Century Jōdoshū Proclamation” into practice is none other than putting the perfect and sudden precepts into practice. Conversely, it may be said that, unless they receive the perfect and sudden precepts, it is impossible for the monks of the Jōdoshū to make any distinctive contribution to society. Here we find another reason why the Jōdoshū promotes the perfect and sudden precepts.

#### IV. ORDINATION CEREMONY FOR RECEIVING THE PERFECT AND SUDDEN PRECEPTS

At present, the Jōdoshū conducts two ordinations for conferring the precepts: those for monks and those for lay people. First, the ordination ceremony for monks, which lasts three weeks, takes place in December every year at Chion’in 知恩院 in Kyoto and Zōjōji 増上寺 in Tokyo. Those for lay people take place in various Jōdoshū temples throughout Japan. During these ceremonies, *kaimyō* 戒名 (clerical names) are also granted. It must be noted that, before these ceremonies, one is required to attend lectures on the history, philosophical background, and contemporary significance of the precepts.

##### *The Ordination Manuals*

In principle, the ordination manual employed in the perfect and sudden precepts ordination ceremony is the *Shou pusajie yi* 授菩薩戒儀 (On Granting

<sup>25</sup> See the Jōdoshū homepage: <https://jodo.or.jp/>.



the Bodhisattva Precepts)<sup>26</sup> by Zhanran 湛然 (711–782), the sixth patriarch of the Chinese Tiantai school. However, the various Buddhist schools that developed from the Japanese Tendai school all use their own revised ordination manuals. In the ordination ceremony of the Jōdoshū, two types of ordination manuals that were revised by Hōnen are used. They are called the old text (*kohon* 古本) and the new text (*shinpon* 新本), respectively.<sup>27</sup>

The old text refers to the manual that was transmitted by the seventh patriarch Shōgei, and is used mainly in the ordination ceremonies carried out in the Kanto region, including Zōjōji in Tokyo. The new text was revised by Hōnen at Nison'in 二尊院 in Kyoto and was transmitted by Hōnen to his disciple Tankū 湛空 (1176–1253). It is used mainly in the ordination ceremonies conducted in the Kinki region, including at Chion'in. Since there is no great difference between these two texts, both texts have been allowed to be used in the ordination ceremonies.

### *Ordination Ceremony*

In this section, I will summarize the procedure to be followed in the ordination ceremony for lay people. The ordination ceremony for lay people is called *jukai'e* 受戒会 (literally “ceremony for receiving the precepts”). It takes place in a temple and usually lasts three days (plate 1). During all three days, the participants receive lectures from a teacher in a lecture hall, and on the final day they attend the ordination ceremony at the main hall of the temple. Topics taken up during the lectures include the life and teachings of the Buddha, basic information about Buddhism including the precepts and Vinaya (*ritsu* 律, or rules of behavior laid down by the Buddha for the Buddhist community), the history and philosophical background of the perfect and sudden precepts, the purpose and significance of the perfect and sudden precepts, the meaning of the *kaimyō*, and the ritual procedures of the ordination ceremony (plate 2).

The ceremony for taking the tonsure takes place on the second day (plate 3). This is the ritual in which lay people become the Buddha's disciples. First, there is the *kanjō shasui* 灌頂洒水, in which water is sprinkled on the head of the person receiving the tonsure. This is followed by the act of touching a razor on the top of the head (symbolizing the taking of the tonsure). Finally, the *kesa* 袈裟 (which derives from the Sanskrit term *kaśāya*)

<sup>26</sup> Jōdoshūten Kankōkai 1907–36, vol. 15, pp. 872–78.

<sup>27</sup> Both texts are found in *Jōdoshū seiten*, vol. 5. See Jōdoshū Seiten Kankō Iinkai 1994–2000, vol. 5, pp. 423–37, for the old text and pp. 439–54, for the new one.



Plate 1. Gathering for ordination at 10:00 a.m. on the first day.



Plate 2. Pre-ordination lecture on Buddhist history and the precepts.



Plate 3. Implements for the ordination. From left to right: vase containing water for the *kanjō shasui*, *kessa*, and razor.



Plate 4. A scene from the ordination, which comprises twelve steps in all.



Plate 5. Ordination certificate granted at the end of the ritual.

are presented to the participants. (*Kesa* means monastic robes, but the *kesa* that are granted in the ordination are *wagesa* 輪袈裟, or simplified *kesa* consisting of a circular sash hung around the neck.) Also, during all three days, the participants attend services at the main hall and help clean the temple precincts between the lectures. Previously, it was necessary to stay at the temple all three days, but recently, due to the changing circumstances of both the temples and the participants, the requirement to lodge at the temple was relaxed and it is now becoming common to go to the temple in the morning and return home at night.

During the ordination ceremony on the third day, the participants first line up in a waiting room. When a drum is sounded, they walk one by one to the main hall when their names are called. After they have all entered the main hall, the precept master enters the hall and walks around a statue of Śākyamuni Buddha counterclockwise three times. Then, after everyone sits down, several Buddhist verses are chanted in unison and the *karma* master (*konmashi* 羯磨師)<sup>28</sup> recites the introductory section of the *Brahmā's Net Sutra*. Subsequently, the ceremony proceeds in accordance with the instructions given in the *Shou pusajie yi*, the ordination manual mentioned above, which stipulates that the ordination be carried out in the following twelve steps (plate 4):

1. Providing instructions (*kaidō* 開導): the gist of the perfect and sudden precepts is explained in order to awaken in the participants the awareness that they are about to embark on the bodhisattva path.
2. Three refuges (*sanki* 三歸): the participants promise to take refuge in the three treasures (Buddha, Dharma, and sangha).
3. Invitation of the master (*shōshi* 請師): Śākyamuni Buddha, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, Maitreya Buddha, and the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions all of whose presence is necessary for the ordination ceremony are invited into the hall.
4. Repentance (*sange* 懺悔): the participants repent all the evil actions they have conducted in the past and purify themselves physically, vocally, and mentally.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> The *karma* master is one of the “three masters” (*sanshi* 三師) who officiate at an ordination ceremony. For a valid ordination ceremony to take place, it must be attended by ten correctly ordained monks, the three masters, and seven monks who serve as witnesses (*shichishō* 七証). The three masters are the precept master who grants the precepts, the *karma* master who conducts the ceremony, and the instruction master (*kyōjushi* 教授師) who instructs the novices concerning the ceremony.

<sup>29</sup> Buddhist texts divide all actions into three: physical, vocal, and mental actions. These three actions are collectively called the triple actions (*sangō* 三業).

5. Arousing the aspiration for enlightenment (*hosshin* 発心): the participants pledge to practice as bodhisattvas for one's own benefit (*jiri* 自利) and for the benefit of others (*rita* 利他).
6. Inquiries concerning exclusion (*monsha* 問遮): the fact that all the participants have the necessary qualifications for ordination is confirmed.
7. Granting the precepts (*jukai* 授戒): the threefold pure precepts are granted and the participants gain the substance of the precepts.
8. Attestation (*shōmei* 証明): the buddhas of the ten directions are requested to attest to the fact that they have genuinely granted the precepts to the participants.
9. Appearance of marks (*gensō* 現相): the buddhas of the ten directions attest to the fact they have granted the precepts to the participants.
10. Explanation of the marks (*sessō* 説相): the participants pledge that they will not break the ten major precepts of the *Brahmā's Net Sutra*.
11. Vow to spread the merits (*kōgan* 広願): the merits acquired from taking the precepts are turned over to others.
12. Exhortation to uphold the precepts (*kanji* 勸持): the participants pledge to strive to uphold the precepts from now on and to recommend others to keep the precepts as well.

Among the twelve steps above, the seventh step of granting the precepts is central. Along with the threefold pure precepts, the substance of the precepts are gained at this stage as well. Once these twelve steps are completed, an ordination certificate (*kaichō* 戒牒) is handed out to the participants as proof that they have received the precepts (plate 5). The precept master then leaves the main hall and the other participants follow suit. With this, the entire ceremony comes to an end. The amount of time it takes to conduct the ordination ceremony varies depending on the number of participants, but it generally takes between sixty to ninety minutes.

## CONCLUSION

Above, I have provided a brief summary of the perfect and sudden precepts in the Jōdoshū. In closing, let me recapitulate the points that I have made in this paper. The perfect and sudden precepts derive from Zhiyi. They hold an important place in the Japanese Tendai school and were also adopted by the Jōdoshū. The main texts setting forth this set of precepts are the so-called “three sutras of the perfect and sudden precepts,” which include the *Lotus Sutra*, *Pusa yingluo benye jing*, and the *Brahmā's Net Sutra*. To be more

specific, the perfect and sudden precepts are based on the moral spirit of the *Lotus Sutra*, the ten major and forty-eight minor precepts of the *Brahmā's Net Sutra*, and the threefold pure precepts of the *Pusa yingluo benye jing*.

The basic reason why Buddhist practitioners uphold the perfect and sudden precepts is in order to gain enlightenment. But the precepts are also important for mitigating suffering and anxiety and ensuring peace of mind and tranquility in the world. These precepts provide us with the standards for distinguishing between good and evil. Moreover, in breaking the precepts, we are paradoxically brought to the teaching of the *nenbutsu*. Finally, they serve as the basis of social action in the world, which the Jōdoshū promotes.

#### ABBREVIATION

- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭. 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–35.

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