Plain Words on the Pure Land Way
Sayings of the Wandering Monks of Medieval Japan
Translated by Dennis Hirota
"Those who seek the world beyond abide in the thought that they are out on a journey.

Though you travel to the limits of cloud or sea, as long as you have physical existence, you cannot do without the bare essentials of food, clothing, and shelter. Nevertheless, whether you are attached to them or not makes all the difference. When you are constantly aware that you have but one night's lodging, not a permanent dwelling, nothing can obstruct your saying of the nembutsu."

*Plain Words on the Pure Land Way* is a collection of sayings that guided the lives of wandering monks in medieval Japan. Long appreciated for their incisiveness and immediacy, these sayings provide a vivid glimpse into the thought and experience of people who dedicated themselves to the *nembutsu*—the utterance of the Name of Amida Buddha—during the tumultuous period when it first emerged as a way to enlightenment available to all.

This collection is highly regarded not only as a document revealing the spirit of the nascent Pure Land path before the rigid division into doctrinal schools, but also as an important example of the literature of the recluse's thatched hut (*sōan bungaku*) and of Buddhist writings in the vernacular (*kana hōgo*). Japanese text included.
A nembutsu hijiri or wandering monk spreading the teaching of Amida Buddha. Such men abandoned worldly pursuits, shaved their heads, and donned monk's robes, but often were not affiliated with any particular temple and not recognized by the state as authorized, ordained monks. They carried on their study and practice in small, isolated groups and spread the Dharma among the common people.

In the illustration, plain robes and bare feet indicate a commitment to a life of poverty; the staff, a mendicant existence without settled dwelling. The staff is tipped with deer antlers, perhaps a survival from earlier traditions when hijiri were "holy men" who gained magical powers through austerities in the mountains. Deer were regarded as sacred messengers of the gods and their antlers and skins were thought to possess supernatural properties (Shibusawa Keizō, ed., Nihon jōmin seikatsu ebiki, Tokyo, 1968, vol. 5, pp. 39, 87).

At his chest is a gong-like bell, which was rhymically struck to accompany the chanting of Amida's Name. Following in the tradition of Kūya, the "hijiri of the marketplace," he may also have led dancing recitation (odori nembutsu) with this bell in villages and city streets. At his shoulder is an oversize rosary, perhaps jointly used in group nembutsu chant.

The articles at his waist are uncertain. One may be a bamboo tube for stick incense. The other may be a booklet in which to keep a register of people who promised to recite the nembutsu a certain number of times daily; this was a feature of yōzu-nembutsu practice. Or, it may simply be a handkerchief, which Ippen in his Record, for example, lists among the twelve "tools" or possessions allowed a follower.

This figure, from a biographical handscroll of Hōnen (Hōnen Shōnin eden, XVII, 4), may depict the lad Kyōrenja (section 51) at the age of twelve, on his way to a memorial service in Kyoto on the anniversary of Hōnen's death. In a sermon on that occasion, Hōnen's disciple Seikaku announced that any who doubted his explanation of the teaching should verify it with Shōkō, another prominent disciple dwelling in distant Kyushu. Kyōrenja, without even returning to his hut, immediately set off to see Shōkō, demonstrating the total dedication to the Way that was the ideal of the hijiri.
Chill autumn air:
Not even a crock for salted bran.

*aki no iro
nuka-miso tsubo mo
nakarikeri.*

BASHÖ

Plain Words on the Pure Land Way

SAYINGS OF THE WANDERING MONKS OF MEDIEVAL JAPAN

*A Translation of Ichigón Hōdan*  
*by Dennis Hirota*

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epiGRAPH

Haiku inscribed by Bashō on a portrait of Kenkō, author of Essays in Idleness, to be hung in the dwelling of a disciple. It includes an allusion to Plain Words, section 67, which Kenkō quotes in his Essays.

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Introduction

I

COLLECTED HERE are the words of recluses and wanderers—men in search of paths to Buddhahood amid ashes of war and great turbulence in their society. Abandoning worldly ambitions, they joined a tradition of fugitives and outsiders. Often unsanctioned by established temples and unrecognized by the state, they depended for guidance not on scriptural texts and the old scholasticism, but on predecessors who, like themselves, were impelled above all by the fervor of their quest. Legends of forerunners and words of companions lit their way; to such plain counsel as gathered here—on aspiration and practice, provisions and shelter, sickness and death—they turned for advice in their day-to-day hardships, for the tuning of nerve, and for all they needed to know of the compassionate power of the Dharma.

The path these men tread opened forth from the Pure Land teaching, which is often regarded as “popular Buddhism,” devotional activity accommodated to the common people. For four centuries after its introduction into Japan, however, it remained the province of monks performing rites in official temples and the court nobility seeking peace for the dead. When it finally developed its potential as an effective form of Māhāyana Buddhism in the Kamakura period (1185–1333), it did so in intimate relation with these wandering monks, who rejected any use of Buddhism for temporal ends and insisted on genuine aspiration for enlightenment.
Pure Land thought gave direction to a long though amorphous and eclectic tradition of “holy men” (hijiri) in Japan, and conversely, the hermits and wanderers who emerged in numbers from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries—with their strength of purpose and a poverty shared with the common people—provided the vehicle by which Pure Land Buddhism developed and spread as an indigenous path to awakening.

**Plain Words on the Pure Land Way**

*Plain Words on the Pure Land Way* (ichigon hōdan, literally “one word talks fragrant [with Dharma]”) includes over 150 brief statements in the form of personal instruction, anecdote, and dialogue. Many of the sections are anonymous, but the names of more than forty monks are also recorded. It was compiled at the close of the remarkable period in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when various new forms of Buddhism emerged, including the traditions formalized as Pure Land (Jōdo, Shin, and Ji), Nichiren, and Zen (Rinzai, Sōtō). Most of the sayings stem precisely from this era of unparalleled vigor and creativity. Hōnen was the first of the new founders, and at the heart of the path in *Plain Words* is his teaching that those who “just say the Name” of Amida Buddha—Namu-amida-butsu—will attain birth in the realm of Amida’s enlightenment, the Pure Land.

The depiction of Buddhist practice in *Plain Words* is striking for several reasons. First, the work exhibits a broad sense of tradition, rooting the Pure Land movement in the legacy of the wandering monks by embracing within its past such figures as Gyōgi of the eighth century and Saichō and Kūkai, the founders of the Heian-period Buddhism. In fact, it places native sources rather than the texts and schools from the Asian continent at its foundations, invoking in its opening section a revelation delivered at the Great Shrine at Ise, since early times the most sacred place of worship in the country. Further, out of this historical awareness, it goes on to lament the degeneration of reclusive practice and foreshadows the course the tradition was later to take.

Above all, however, *Plain Words* conveys with immediacy the vital spirit of the wandering monks during the Kamakura period, their resolution and tough-minded practicality. It is said that two streams of Pure Land practice are brought together in *Plain Words*, that of Hōnen’s sole practice of saying of Name of Amida (senju nembutsu) and that of a Shingon-influenced nembutsu practice spread by the Kōya hijiri—reclusive or itinerant monks based on Mount Kōya. From the perspective of the work itself, however, it may be more accurate to say that these two streams are grasped together as a single tradition of wholehearted aspiration for enlightenment, and that this breadth of vision reflects the diversity and raw energy of the times, before the fine doctrinal distinctions of the various Pure Land schools solidified.

The compiler of *Plain Words* has not been identified. No preface or editorial note is attached, and nothing in the work can be attributed to the compiler’s hand with certainty. He was no doubt a practitioner of the Pure Land path, and probably a monk like almost all of the figures he quotes. Further, he clearly possessed considerable literary talent. Today, most readers first encounter the work in the classic *Essays in Idleness* (c. 1333) by the monk Kenkō, who responded to the trenchant thought and expression of *Plain Words* by quoting several sections from memory. The concreteness of its language evokes the ambiance of practice, with talk of backpacks, paper robes, and meals of gruel or of bean paste heated on leaves. Images drawn from archery suggest the warrior background of many of the monks, and homely details of earthenware, broken walls, and the resilience of bamboo indicate a closeness to daily life.

Further, numerous scenes vividly convey the extremity of spirit that the aspirants of the times experienced. We find Shunjō in nocturnal vigil before the chapel where Kūkai is enshrined,
when a voicing of the nembutsu suddenly emerges from it and pierces him to the quick (section 2). Or a young court lady disguised as a priestess beats a drum before a deserted shrine, crying out in the night for salvation (section 78).

*Plain Words* is an example of *kana hōgo*—writings on the Dharma in the vernacular rather than Chinese, the language of learning and of Buddhism. Such writings were an innovation closely associated with the penetration of the teaching into the lives of the common people. The collection 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 does not represent a mere evasion of the dangers of attachment; at work is a demand for directness and integrity in facing the problem of transcending birth-and-death, and at its core is the insight that true resolve is not a matter of ordinary learning.

At the heart of the nembutsu teaching in *Plain Words* lies a paradox in which our ordinary judgments and perspectives are brusquely uprooted and overturned. People of the nembutsu are "neither monk nor yet worldly" (section 98); they know that "to speak deeply about the meaning of the nembutsu is, on the contrary, a sign of shallowness" (99) and that they are "impeded by their own virtue" (25). In Hōnen's phrase, which echoes in the works of his disciples, "The way to say the nembutsu lies in having no 'way'" (100). The masters in *Plain Words* sought a language as they sought the life of the nembutsu, and their terse phrases represent, more than simplicity of doctrine, a refusal to be satisfied with an easy and insular knowledge. Thus, they confront us still with a probing test of religious life.

II The Traditions in *Plain Words*

As noted before, various strands of Buddhist practice and tradition are drawn together in *Plain Words*. It may be helpful, therefore, to sketch some of the chief elements that find their way into the work. Here we will consider the development of official and unofficial Buddhism in the Nara period (seventh and eighth centuries); the institutionalization of mountain Buddhism in the ninth century; the spread of nembutsu chant as a standard practice on Mount Hiei and among lay people in the tenth century, when the court culture was reaching its zenith but already giving rise to disaffection among the lower aristocracy; and the emergence of large numbers of wandering monks engaging in Pure Land practices in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the country passed through a violent transition toward a feudal society. These developments set the stage for the appearance of Hōnen and other figures in *Plain Words* from the end of the twelfth century.

**Official and Unofficial Buddhism**

The date for the introduction of Buddhism into Japan is often set at 538, when King Seong Myong of Paikche on the Korean peninsula sent an envoy with a gilt statue of Sakyamuni and copies of sutras. It is clear, however, that Buddhist beliefs and practices were already known through immigrants from the Asian mainland, and that these beliefs had fused with Taoist and native shamanistic practices. From the very beginning, then, Buddhism tended to flow in two distinct streams—that of an official religion functioning to enhance and protect the state, and that of an underground tradition associated with "holy men" who undertook disciplines and austerities in the mountains.

**State Buddhism**

The envoy from the Korean peninsula was followed by others during the sixth century, and after political struggle among the leading clans over whether to admit the foreign religion, Buddhism was formally accepted by the court, though not adopted exclusively. Prince Shōtoku (574–621), in his "Seventeen Article
Constitution" of 604, declares that the people should "revere the Three Treasures." A program of temple construction and training of clergy was instituted, and by 624 a census showed that there were forty-six temples populated by over eight hundred monks and five hundred nuns. Many of these temples were built by powerful clans and had as their chief activity the worship of ancestors and offering of prayers for the dead. The sponsorship of the court was also directed toward temporal benefits, and monks were charged with making prayers for rain and warding off sickness. Thus, in their study and performance of rites and ceremonies, the clergy functioned as government officers, and their duty to the safekeeping and prosperity of the country superceded any personal aspirations for enlightenment.

With the strengthening of the central government through the adoption of the Chinese administrative system (Taika Reform of 645), a bureau was organized to manage religious affairs, and state control of temples became fixed. Clan temples were encompassed within this system, and court-appointed clerical offices were established to administer temple lands and possessions and oversee the activities of monks and nuns. Ordination required government authorization, and clergy were supported not by donations from devotees, but directly by the court or the aristocratic clans.

The conduct of monks and nuns was carefully regulated both by minute precepts governing daily life and by strict public statutes. In 702, extensive new codes of law (Taihō律) prohibited not only such non-Buddhist practices as fortunetelling and healing through sorcery, divination, or Taoist spells, but even the establishment of gathering places outside of temples and propagation in society. Despite exhortation in the sutras to spread the Dharma, priestly activities were confined to temples and monasteries, and contact with the common people was regarded as unnecessary and potentially threatening to the bureaucratic system. Court appointment of clerics and restriction of propagational activity remained hallmarks of official policy even in the Kamakura period, when the Pure Land and Nichiren schools underwent repeated state persecution.

In 710, the capital was moved to Nara. Powerful temples quickly relocated within the city precincts, and during the seven decades that the capital remained there, temple activity flourished, backed by the government and economically supported by large land holdings throughout the country. A program to construct temples in every province was instituted, and Nara's Tōdaiji became their headquarters. Eminent monks capable of study abroad appeared and, together with monks from China and even India, established the six officially recognized schools—essentially scholastic traditions—of the Nara period.

The Counter-Tradition

The 702 codes also forbid monks and nuns from undertaking unauthorized practice in secluded mountains and forests, but a repetition of such regulations in 718 indicates that violation was common. The government feared the use of isolated areas to build private followings and develop staging areas for insurrection. Practice in the mountains, however, had been widely accepted since ancient times as an initial activity for religious aspirants. Mountains were considered sacred, the abode of gods, and both Buddhists and Taoists retired to them to attain spiritual perfection and cultivate supernatural powers. The authorities, while wary of such activity, hoped to utilize the powers gained, so while prohibiting monks from Taoist practices, allowed them to employ Buddhist incantation for healing and exorcism. Mountain training centers were therefore established, and novices with special permission could undertake practices under a watchful government eye.

Thus, while most of the regular, fully ordained monks lived in the great urban temples, there were in addition two other categories of Buddhist aspirant. People belonging to these
categories were sometimes officially recognized, but many others were private, unauthorized practicers. One category was the *ubasoku* (Sk. *upāsaka*, "lay practicer") who, though not shaving his head or wearing robes like a monk, performed practices of varying levels in the mountains. Some were affiliated with temples, received material aid from the state, and would be ordained in the future, but others were not recognized, and carried on activities among the common people, from whom they obtained support.

There were also *shami* (Sk. *śrāmānera*, "novice"), who underwent initial ordination, shaved their heads, and wore robes and surplices. They were exempted from conscripted labor like regular monks. After some years of practice in the mountains they might, upon passing further government review, receive the complete 250 precepts and be ordained as full-fledged monks (*biku*, Sk. *bhikṣu*). They would then take a position in one of the main temples of the Nara area or a state temple in the countryside. Toward the close of the Nara period, there also appeared increasing numbers of self-proclaimed *shami* who shaved their heads without government authorization.

There are several outstanding examples of religious practicers outside of the bureaucratic system during this period. One is the *ubasoku* En no Ozunu (6347-701), who is regarded in the traditions of Shugendo—the way of attaining supernatural powers through austerities in the mountains—as their founder. Originally of a family of Shinto priests, he performed practices for over thirty years on the sacred mountain Katsuragi. His disciplines stemmed chiefly from Buddhist and Taoist traditions, fused with native beliefs and Shintō elements; later, Shugendō developed from such practices with strong influence from esoteric Buddhism. It is said that he gained power over natural forces and could control gods through Buddhist incantations. In 699, he was banished by the authorities for seeking to manipulate people through his magical powers.

Another influential figure was Gyōgi (670-749; section 102), a novice (*shami*) of the Nara temple Yakushiji. He also carried on practices in the mountains, then instead of assuming a post in a temple, began to travel throughout the country, spreading the teaching and undertaking many public works projects to relieve the suffering of the ordinary people. He is said to have built irrigation canals and bridges, and also public shelters for people journeying to fulfill their labor obligations. He attracted many followers and established a number of *dōjō* or seminaries, but as an outsider he was watched by the authorities, who attempted to suppress his activities. Finally, however, when the government had difficulties completing the huge temple Tōdaiji, he was commissioned to collect contributions for it and elevated to high clerical rank.

En no Ozunu and Gyōgi together well represent the two major faces of the tradition of the outsider taking shape in the Nara period—mountain practice to gain spiritual powers and works among the people to manifest the Buddhist ideal of compassion.

Mountain Buddhism in the Heian Period

As the Nara temples prospered, monks emerged who sought to influence temporal affairs. The most conspicuous was Dēkyō, who gained the attentions of the empress and had himself appointed to a succession of lofty posts, finally conspiring to become emperor. His ambitions were thwarted, and after the death of the empress he was quickly banished. Nevertheless, his example underscored the potential threat of powerful temples to the imperial family, and the next emperor resolved to relocate the capital. In 784 it was moved to Nagaoka, and then in 793 to the basin area of present Kyoto, where a new capital named Heian-kyō was built.

Early in the Heian period (794-1185), two additional schools of Buddhism, freshly introduced by monks who had studied in China, were officially recognized. These schools, Tendai and
Shingon, quickly became the dominant forms of Buddhism in the new capital, patronized by the imperial court and the aristocratic clans. Like the Nara schools, they remained distant from the common people; nevertheless, their founders had emerged from the earlier tradition of outsiders, and in Heian Buddhism, the aspect of mountain practice in this tradition became institutionalized as official Buddhism: the central temples, which previously had occupied the urban plains, themselves moved to the mountains. The Tendai school was established on Mount Hiei overlooking Kyoto from the northeast, and Shingon on Mount Kōya, several days' journey south in Wakayama.

Two basic motives underlay this change in locale. First, Heian Buddhism was pervaded by esoteric thought, which, as we have seen, was strongly associated with practice on sacred mountains. This was true not only of Shingon, a form of orally-transmitted Tantric Buddhism, but also of Tendai, which included programs both of Tendai meditation and of esoteric practices belonging to the same tradition as Shingon. These practices were characterized by the use of manual postures or gestures (mudrā), repetitive incantation of sacred syllables or verbal formulas (mantra), and meditative exercises focusing on Buddhas and bodhisattvas depicted in intricate patterns (mandala), all aimed to bring the practicer into unity with Buddha or true reality. The sense of mystery and magical power imparted by these practices and the aesthetic qualities of the rituals and the graphic representations of the numerous Buddhas quickly enchanted the aristocracy, and esoteric Buddhism came to be favored at court. The second reason for the move to the mountains was to escape the worldly entanglements into which the temple institutions in the urban areas had fallen; in this, both the court and the new founders were in accord.

**Kūkai**

With regard to esoteric practice, we see a strong continuity with the earlier traditions of mountain training in Kūkai (774–835), who established the Shingon school. While still a student in the national college, he began entering the mountains to perform Taoist and Buddhist meditative practices, including the chanting of mantras. He probably associated with practicers in mountain temples, and around the age of twenty-four he became an ubasoku. Thereafter, until the age of thirty-one, he was an unauthorized wandering ascetic traveling widely and training on various mountains. Wishing to pursue his studies of esoteric Buddhism, he applied to the government and was sent to China in 804, where he received the transmission of the eminent master Hui-kuo (746–805). He returned to Japan in 806 and, in recognition of the importance of the teachings he had received, was summoned to the capital in 809. He quickly won imperial sponsorship, and the following year, was appointed the administrative head (bettō) of Tōdaiji. In 816, he was granted Mount Kōya, where he began a monastery that in succeeding centuries grew into an immense complex of temple halls and buildings.

**Saichō**

The element of withdrawal in the Heian-period mountain Buddhism is seen in Saichō (766–822, section 96), who established the Tendai school. He was fully ordained at Tōdaiji, but soon left to build a rough hermitage on Mount Hiei, shortly before the capital was moved to Kyoto. After several years, he made his hermitage into a temple, which came to be regarded as the protector of the new capital, for it stood in the direction from which evil influences were thought to arise. The young monk came to the notice of the emperor Kammu, who sent him to China to study. In 804, Saichō went to Mount T'ien-t'ai and
brought back texts and traditions of this school as well as of esoteric Buddhism and Zen.

Saicho stressed the necessity of true aspiration for enlightenment (doshin) and firmly rejected impulses to use priestly activities or temple offices to procure material comforts and recognition. *Rules for the Meditation Hut*, a handbook on mountain practice attributed to him, states:

> It is not our lot to possess vast tracts of valuable land or large supplies of food, neither are grand temples managed by monastic officials to be our dwelling. 4

The practitioner with genuine aspiration will live in simplicity in a thatched hut, far from the centers of wealth and power, devoting himself wholly to the Dharma. Saicho's emphasis on an austere life informed by resolution to attain enlightenment became a major element of the hijiri ideal in the following centuries.

This aspiration holds, in its negative face, stringent self-reflection and sensitivity to any lingering worldly attachment at the roots of one's thoughts and perceptions. In vows that he wrote shortly after embarking on his reclusive life of practice on Mount Hiei, Saicho speaks of himself as "the most foolish among the foolish, the most deluded among the deluded, a being defiled and shaven [like a hypocritical monk], the lowest Saicho." This same element of self-reflection coupled with the courage of religious resolve is expressed in his conception of the "last age of the Dharma" (mappō), in which humankind is seen to exist at an unbridgeable distance from the influence and example of Sakyamuni, and yet precisely because of this to be ripe for the teaching that can lead all swiftly to Buddhahood. A pessimistic view of the conditions of the world may seem to provide an excuse for laxity in religious practice. On the contrary, however, to the latter-day practitioners, the formal monastic rules were no longer valid, but one was to follow the spirit of precepts based on wisdom, in full realization that one's own condition did not allow for the fulfillment of the code of conduct of the Buddha's day. This awareness differs utterly from a sense that precepts themselves had grown slack because the age had declined. The insistence on self-awareness grew even stronger as the Pure Land teaching developed.

**The Pure Land Buddhism of Mount Hiei**

Both Saicho and Kūkai recognized the importance of imperial support and, as the state bureaucracy weakened, the patronage of the aristocracy, and they both acknowledged Buddhism's role as the protector of the nation. As the temples they founded grew in size and wealth in the succeeding centuries, so did a close involvement with secular society, and ecclesiastical institutions became a haven for aristocratic offspring who lacked sufficient backing for advancement at court. Thus, beyond the temple precincts, Buddhism functioned chiefly as landlord or in ritual and ceremonial roles, offering prayers for supernatural aid in alleviating sickness, bringing rain, or counteracting natural calamities.

Mount Hiei, with its close proximity to the capital, came to possess political influence not only though its clerical officers and court activities, but also because of its military potential. The temples required administrative priests to manage their manors in the various provinces, and there grew up a class of monks whose function was identical to the military branches of the nobility. Moreover, numbers of men were attracted to the monasteries as a sanctuary from taxes and conscription labor. Mount Hiei became the home of numerous "soldier monks" under the rule of temple administrators, and shows of force in the capital as well as armed clashes with other temples began to occur from the end of the tenth century.

It is in this setting that the original impulse behind Saicho's mountain hermitage began to reassert itself, this time in close
connection with Pure Land Buddhism. Monks had renounced mundane life, but they found that the mountain monasteries in which they sought refuge had themselves been permeated by the hierarchical structures of the aristocratic society. Repulsed by the ambitions and temporal entanglements that pervaded the temples, they withdrew, renouncing the world anew. Their paths led to secluded valleys apart from the main temples, where they could dedicate themselves to study and practice undisturbed. At the same time, this became a movement back toward the world of society.

Pure Land Practice

Pure Land Buddhism was an integral part of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai meditation teachings that Saicho introduced from China. In basic T'ien-t'ai writings, four types of meditative practices were defined: constant sitting samādhi, constant walking samādhi, half-sitting, half-walking samādhi, and samādhi in which physical posture is not determined ("neither walking nor sitting" only). All of these were extremely demanding forms of practice. Of them, the second and third were particularly important in Japan.

Constant walking samādhi (jogyō zammai) involves the concentration of physical, mental, and verbal activity on Amida Buddha by circumambulating a statue of him for ninety days, day and night without interruption, contemplating his features and his land and reciting his Name. The aim of this practice is not birth into Amida’s land in the future, but entrance into the samādhi in which the Buddhas of the universe appear before one, signifying attainment of the realm of enlightenment. Half-walking, half-sitting samādhi (hangyō hanzan zammai) consists of circumambulation of a statue of a Buddha for seven days constantly repeating incantations (dhārani), followed by three weeks devoted to seated meditation, chanting of the Lotus Sutra, and repentance for delusional thoughts and acts.

A hall for meditative practice centering on the Lotus Sutra (Hokkezammai dō) was built during Saicho’s lifetime, and after his death, his disciple Ennin (794-864) built a hall for constant walking samādhi with a large golden image of Amida in the center and depictions of the Pure Land on the four walls. Ennin also studied in China, and on Mount Wu-t'ai, he learned a method of melodic chanting of the nembutsu and of the Smaller Sutra (goe nembutsu or inzei nembutsu). He established the performance of this chant as a form of constant or “uninterrupted” (fudan) nembutsu, commonly carried on for periods of seven days and nights, in the halls for constant walking samādhi on Mount Hiei. The Smaller Sutra itself states:

Śāriputra, if good men and good women, hearing of Amida Buddha, hold steadfast to the Name for one day, or two days, or three days, or four days, or five days, or six days, or seven days, with wholeness of mind undistracted, then at the time of death. Amida Buddha will appear before them together with a host of sages. Thus, when their lives end, their minds will be free of all invertedness, and they will immediately attain birth in Amida Buddha’s land of bliss.

In the tenth century, constant nembutsu employing melodic chant gradually became a standard form of practice in the meditation halls of Mount Hiei and was adopted at other temples, such as Shitennoji in present Osaka. About this time also, utterance of the nembutsu began to spread beyond temple precincts. The nobility, attracted by the aesthetic qualities of Amida worship, built chapels on their estates, and at the opening of the eleventh century, the lady Sei Shonagon included in a list of “enviable people” those “who can afford to build their own Chapel of Meditation and pray there in the evening and at dawn.”

Behind these developments lay the activities of such figures of
the outsider tradition as Kūya (or Köya, 903-972), who taught the chanting of the nembutsu among the populace, and Yoshishige Yasutane (931-1002), a Chinese scholar in the court bureaucracy who eventually took orders on Mount Hiei. Although their names are not mentioned in Plain Words, they pioneered modes of nembutsu practice—rhythmic chanting in city streets, and concentrated recitation in small fellowships—that left their marks on the later tradition.

Early Diffusion: Kūya

Kūya, in the first part of his life, displayed the typical traits of the older type of shamanistic practitioner who, after performing an amalgam of practices, including austerities in the mountains, emerged among the people as a wandering holy man working to alleviate their suffering by teaching the Dharma, curing sickness, and undertaking public works projects such as clearing roads and digging wells. Further, though he later received full ordination on Mount Hiei, he preferred to maintain his title of shami. In part, this reflects a critical stance toward the official constraints on temple activity, but it also expresses a genuine humility characteristic of the later hijiri. Although Gyōgi was regarded as a bodhisattva and indeed given this title by the emperor, the men of Plain Words refer to themselves as "outcast (hi-nin, 'nonhuman') monks," recognizing themselves as the least capable of religious aspirants.

A brief biography by Yoshishige concisely states Kūya's importance: he made the nembutsu popular among the common people. In 938, he appeared on the streets of the capital teaching the chanting of Amida's Name. An early statue depicts him with a small gong at his chest, which he beat to the rhythm of the nembutsu chant, and it is also said that he performed a dancing nembutsu (odori nembutsu). Before him, the nembutsu was considered an incantation to pacify the dead and bring them merit; according to Yoshishige, it was rarely performed by lay Buddhist devotees, and ordinary people shunned (imu) it because of its associations with death. Kūya, with his ecstatic chanting in the marketplace, his joy in the nembutsu emerging even into dance, spread the Pure Land teaching as a way to salvation among ordinary people for the first time, and he found adherents from the nobility as well as the lowest strata of society. His practice was not an exclusive devotion to the nembutsu; Yoshishige describes meditative practices and such austerities as burning incense on his arm. He is also credited with stopping an epidemic. Nevertheless, as the "hijiri of the marketplace" (ichi no hijiri), he brought nembutsu chant out from the temple confines.

Nembutsu Fellowships

The second major development in the diffusion of the nembutsu during the tenth century—one which shows beginnings of acceptance among the intellectuals of the lower aristocracy—was the emergence of fellowships of Pure Land practitioners. Their formation was probably directly influenced by Kūya, who gathered both monks and laity at a temple he founded in Kyoto. The central figures in the early fellowships were Yoshishige and the Tendai monk Genshin (942-1017, section 1). At his residence in Kyoto, Yoshishige built a small chapel on the western bank of a garden pond—the side nearer the Pure Land—and enshrined a statue of Amida. There he performed devotions morning and evening, calming his mind by thinking on Amida and reading the Lotus Sutra. In 964, he formed an association of twenty scholars and twenty Tendai monks that met twice a year, first at the foot of Mount Hiei and later at various temples. The participants heard a sermon on the Lotus Sutra in the morning, then composed poetry based on passages from it. From evening, they devoted themselves to recollection of Amida Buddha and recitation of the nembutsu, in which they passed the night.

The use of the Lotus Sutra together with the nembutsu
resulted from belief in the power of the sutra to eradicate the effects of wrongdoing in the past. As we have seen, self-reflection and repentance were crucial features of Tendai contemplative practice based on the Lotus Sutra. Through coming to perceive clearly, on the basis of true reality, the blind passions and false thoughts motivating one’s actions, one could neutralize the harmful effects of one’s past karma and avoid evil acts in the future. Even chanting the sutra was taught to hold this power to save one from plunging into hell. By further reciting the nembutsu after extirpating one’s past evil, it was thought that one could attain birth in Amida’s Pure Land.6

Yoshishige’s fellowship for mutual support in religious practice gradually came to take on a greater social function, with increasing weight given to poetry composition and banqueting, and after twenty years it disbanded. Two years later, Yoshishige became a monk and joined another, newly-formed fellowship at Yokawa, a secluded area on Mount Hiei. This was the “nembutsu-samādhi fellowship of twenty five” (nijūgo-zammai e), started in 986. Genshin drafted the rules for the fellowship, which was clearly intended as a more tightly-knit and religiously-oriented group. Meetings took place at the full moon of every month, and though the same pattern of Lotus Sutra study and nembutsu devotion was kept, the poetry composition was done away with. Moreover, the members vowed to care for one another in times of illness, and to give support at death, when it was necessary for the practitioner to focus his thoughts on Amida Buddha in order to attain birth in the Pure Land. Members were buried together and their deaths recorded in a register for memorial services. Further, an element of Tantric practice is seen in the sprinkling of sand invested with the power of the light-mantra over the remains of dead members. This mantra was said to hold the power of eradicating the effects of the deceased’s wrongdoing.7

Membership grew to more than one hundred, and Genshin founded other similar groups also, in which men and women, monk and lay came together to engage in Pure Land practices. On the one hand, lay people went to temples once a month to join together in devotions with monks; this may be seen as an emblematic retreat to the mountains. Yoshishige, for example, even while serving at court, states that on returning home in the evening to his own chapel, he felt as though he were dwelling in the mountains. That is, he imagined himself a recluse in the secluded hut of a hijiri. On the other hand, for monks too the fellowship meetings represented a kind of retreat, a withdrawal from entanglements and duties in the main temple to pursue study and training in solitude. The fellowships, then, represented a world of religious aspiration and practice in which the distinction between lay and monk, secular society and temple, began to lose its fixity.

Early Nembutsu Writings

Two major literary works emerged from the nembutsu fellowships, both expressive of the practical bent of the nembutsu movement in the tenth century. The first is Yoshishige’s Japanese Records of Attaining Birth in the Land of Bliss (Nihon ojō gokuraku ki), a collection of accounts of people who had attained birth in Amida’s Pure Land, including both monks and laity, men and women. Yoshishige notes in his preface that though people might hear of the Pure Land path, unless they knew of instances in which practicers actually attained birth, they would find it impossible to believe in the teaching. Thus, taking Chinese works as his model, he created the first example of an important genre in the literature of the period. It includes, for example, the biography of Kūya mentioned before, describing Kūya’s composure at death, which was attended by miraculous fragrances and music from the skies, indicating that Amida had come to receive him.

The second work to arise from the impetus of the fellowships
is Genshin’s Essentials for Birth (Ōjōyōshū). It was completed early in 985, between the disbanding of the first fellowship and the formation of the “nembutsu-samādhi fellowship,” and appears to be a handbook for the members of the latter. It gives detailed instruction for practice based on Tendai meditation, including the constant walking samādhi and uninterrupted nembutsu chant. At its core it teaches contemplative training leading to perception of Buddhas and the features of the Pure Land, but Genshin also notes that those incapable of achieving such states should nevertheless chant the Name focusing their thoughts on Amida. He sets forth as the aim of such recitation not entrance into deep samādhi, but birth into the Pure Land after death in this world. With Essentials for Birth, Genshin articulated the doctrinal underpinnings for the later focus on vocal, rather than contemplative, nembutsu practice. As the references in Plain Words indicate, it remained the handbook of the nembutsu hijiri movement in the Kamakura period.

Emergence of the Nembutsu Hijiri

During the eleventh century, Buddhist teachings and practices began to spread widely among all levels of society and to all parts of the country, borne by monks who departed from the major temples in numbers. Many of them were originally of prominent aristocratic families. Some withdrew to isolated huts in the mountains and forests where they pursued their practices of meditation, sutra chanting, and austerities. Others, however, followed the models of Kūya and Genshin, either going down into the cities and wandering in the countryside, or withdrawing to secluded valleys near temples and, while devoting themselves to study and practice, associating with lay people and unordained practitioners by giving sermons and leading worship and chant.

Those who followed a mendicant life among the people lived by begging food and alms, stopping before houses to recite passages from sutras or incantations for warding off misfortune. Some collected contributions for temples they formed affiliations with, to be used for building construction or for an image or bell; at times they performed rites for the dead or to cure illness.

The life of wandering might be broken by periods in places where hijiri gathered apart from the main temples. These were known as bessho (“special places”) in contrast to the monks’ “original temple” (honji). Such sites began to appear in the first half of the eleventh century and quickly grew to number more than sixty, chiefly in western Japan, but also in the rural eastern regions where hijiri traveled. Some of the bessho had small temple halls as their center. As hijiri gathered, perhaps attracted by stories of some venerable practitioner in residence, they would build their grass huts nearby. Monks sharing the same teachings and practices joined together to hold sessions for sermons, repentance, uninterrupted nembutsu, and enactment of Amida’s coming with bodhisattvas to welcome one at death (mukae- kodō), a rite originated by Genshin. Smaller bessho had only a few residing hijiri, but larger ones are said to have had populations of a hundred or even a thousand.

Most bessho were relatively secluded, but places of popular worship also became gathering places for wandering monks and took on the coloration of their practices. Shitennoji, for example, was closely associated with Pure Land practice in the popular mind, and the sunset viewed from its western gate was said to provide a glimpse of the Pure Land in the west. Hijiri gathered there to perform constant nembutsu chant and contemplative exercises focused on the Pure Land, and to undertake retreats, hoping for a revelation from Prince Shōtoku, the temple founder, assuring them of future attainment of birth. One common practice that developed here was a pilgrimage to perform one million utterances of the nembutsu (hyakumanben no nembutsu), which might require seven to ten days. Such prac-
tice was executed to gain merit for dead relatives or for one's own birth in the Pure Land, or to avoid sickness and adversity.

About this time there also appeared a number of shamis of a distinctive type. While from the tenth century we find mention of many men of the lower classes shaving their heads and wearing robes to avoid taxes and conscription labor, in the eleventh century there emerged shami who had been officially ordained and who kept a monk's exterior, yet maintained families and homes. Such men lived in violation of their precepts, but they also served as living examples of the possibility of salvation, through the power of the Dharma, even for those who were given to wrongdoing. In the tale literature of this period there are many examples of monks and laity who commit transgressions throughout their lives, yet because of some meritorious deed such as hearing a single sermon on the Lotus Sutra or reciting the nembutsu at death, do not suffer the consequences that their misdeeds might have brought on them. Such tales manifest an acute sense that the shadow of the "last age of the Dharma" had fallen, but they also suggest the saving power of self-awareness and the need for self-reflection and exertion.

Interpenetrating Nembutsu

The most important development in Pure Land practice during this period was the evolution of yūzū-nembutsu—"interpenetrating nembutsu" in which the merit of one's own recitation was made to fuse with the merit of other practicers, so that the collective body of good would pervade each person, becoming the cause of their birth in the Pure Land. Thus, the attainment of one person signified the attainment of all. This form of nembutsu had its intellectual roots in the Lotus and Garland Sutras, but was articulated by the Tendai monk Ryōnin (1073–1132) on the basis of a revelation that he received from Amida Buddha: "One person is all people; all people are one person. One practice is all practices; all practices are one practice."

Ryōnin originally trained in constant walking samādhi and esoterism, then went to Ōhara, a bessho associated with Mount Hiei. There he performed typical hijiri practices, reciting the nembutsu sixty thousand times a day and chanting the Lotus Sutra. From later descriptions of practice at Ōhara, he seems also to have gathered practicers for three-day periods of circumambulation, performed to the accompaniment of nembutsu in beautiful chant melodies that he developed, with a marked musical talent, from traditional Tendai chant. His methods of chant eventually gained great popularity and were spread by wandering hijiri. While Genshin had emphasized personal effort and cautioned practicers in the fellowships he founded against depending on others, Ryōnin evolved a form of communal chant that evoked a harmonious atmosphere of mutual benefit and joint attainment.

Moreover, in 1117 Ryōnin received his revelation and began traveling widely to propagate his teaching. Developing his thought further, he employed a register in which he recorded the names of people who promised to say the nembutsu—perhaps ten times each morning facing the west, or a hundred or a thousand times daily. In this way he created a community of practicers in the society at large, making the practice of the hijiri at their bessho available to ordinary people in their homes. Thus, his yūzū-nembutsu represents a further descent of the nembutsu from the mountain into the lives of the common people.

The element of joint-creation and sharing of merit in nembutsu practice developed into a widespread custom of group sessions of constant chanting—commonly for a day, three days, or seven days—open to both monks and laity. Examples may be seen in the nembutsu groups created by Myōhen and Shinjō, the seven-day nembutsu meeting organized by Seikaku on the third anniversary of Hōnen's death, and the sessions held by Ippen during his travels.
Nembutsu of Nara and Mount Kōya

Pure Land practices were also undertaken by reclusive and itinerant monks of the Nara schools and Mount Kōya. An example of the former is Yōkan (or Eikan, 1033–1111), who propagated Pure Land teachings among the general populace late in life and wrote several works that influenced Hōnen and his movement. He was ordained at Tōdaiji and became a noted scholar of the Sanron (Madhyamika) school. When in his thirties, he withdrew to Mount Kōmyō temple, a Tōdaiji bessho, and took up nembutsu practice. About the age of forty he fell ill and thereafter dedicated himself to attainment of birth in Amida's Pure Land.

Yōkan emphasized wholeheartedness in practice of the nembutsu and is said to have recited the Name tens of thousands of times daily. This “wholeheartedness” (isshin) was a kind of total concentration on Amida, and he speaks of sitting in solitude in his hermitage, facing the west with his eyes closed and his hands in a gesture of homage, attaining singleness of mind through utterance of the Name. His practice was not restricted to the nembutsu, however, but included Tantric elements, reflecting the growing influence of esoteric thought in the Nara schools. Yōkan himself was an important figure in the development of ronmitsu, a blending of Sanron and esoteric traditions. In addition to the nembutsu, he chanted dhārani and performed contemplative exercises focused on the Sanskrit letter A, which he identified both with the Dharma-body or reality that a practicer attains oneness with through Amida, and with the logic of negation taught in the Sanron school.

Pure Land thought also came to adopted by Shingon practitioners from the tenth century on, and Kakuban (1094-1143), in attempting to bring about the revival of Mount Kōya three centuries after Kūkai, absorbed Pure Land practice on the basis of Shingon doctrine. He accomplished this by identifying Amida as an aspect of Vairocana, the Sun Buddha who is Dharma-body itself in Shingon teachings. The Pure Land also is another name for the reality that pervades all things. Thus, by reciting the mantra of Amida, forming the hand posture representing him, and contemplating him, one can achieve a oneness with Amida that signifies attainment of the Shingon goal of Buddhahood with this very body.

III The World of Plain Words

The two broad streams of Pure Land practice seen in Plain Words—that of Hōnen and that of the Kōya hijiri—both trace their roots to the traditions delineated above. Hōnen studied under a student of Ryōnin on Mount Hiei and was also familiar with the Pure Land teachings of the Nara schools, and the leaders of the Kōya hijiri—Myōhen (section 4) and Shunjō (section 2)—emerge from the streams of Nara school and Shingon esoterism.

A sharp wind, however, blows through the world of Plain Words, sweeping away all that is unessential from practice. In part, it is a reassertion of the critical impulse of the outsider tradition, an insistence on purity of motive. The elaborate, formalized practices of the established schools, including the ritual esoterism indulged in by the court, came to be abandoned. Even the chants and incantations commonly performed by wandering monks became suspect, for they often functioned more as means of support than practices for emancipation. In the twelfth century, a bleak pessimism pervaded the air as the court aristocracy declined and warrior clans struggled openly for power. At the same time, the collapse of the old order released fresh energies. Thus, the emphasis on genuine aspiration was also an affirmation of a path compatible with the thoroughgoing honesty and severity of the wandering monks.
Honen

The doctrinal basis of the teachings in Plain Words is the "sole practice of saying the nembutsu" developed by Honen. In his career, we see another development in the hijiri tradition. Like Genshin, Honen renounced secular life to enter the monastery, then left the main temple seeking seclusion for study and practice. But after twenty-five years of Tendai Pure Land training in a bessho at Kurodani, a valley of Mount Hiei, he further decided to abandon his previous practice and descended from the mountain, settling in the foothills of Kyoto. There he taught that Amida Buddha, in order that every person might attain enlightenment, selected as the act resulting in birth in the Pure Land one that could easily be performed by all people—the simple saying of the Name. Other practices—contemplative exercises, sutra chanting, monastic precepts—were to be put aside. Only saying the nembutsu entrusting oneself to Amida's compassion was necessary.

With this teaching, Honen stripped away all self-attachment from religious endeavor. Previously, practice had been understood as accumulation of merit, discipline of the heart and mind, and the eradication of delusional thought, but bringing the self-scrutiny of the hijiri—the discernment of latent grasping for esteem and profit even in religious activity—deeply to bear on his own life, Honen declared himself incapable of fulfilling such practice. The only Buddhist act he was capable of was saying the Name and attaining birth through the working of Amida's Vow.

Honen won followers from among the nobility as well as the lowest levels of society and attracted many hijiri. While he wore monk's robes, maintained his basic precepts, and even bestowed lay precepts on others, he firmly denied the necessity of renouncing secular life. Thus, in pursuing his search for a path to enlightenment, he came nearly full circle, back to ordinary society, and precisely by doing so, advanced the tradition of the outsider. Late in life, as his teaching gained popularity, he was deprived by the authorities of his monkhood and the Jōdo (Pure Land) school he founded was outlawed.

Myōhen

A version of the sole practice of nembutsu that remains rooted in the earlier hijiri tradition is seen in Myōhen. He was ordained at Tōdaiji, where he studied the Sanron school. Though gaining renown as a scholar-monk, he rejected worldly prestige and retired to the Tōdaiji bessho at Mount Kōmyō, where he took up Pure Land practices. In this, he followed in the footsteps of Yōkan, who also repeatedly refused lectureships and temple posts in order to pursue his Pure Land practices.

About the age of thirty, Myōhen went to Mount Koya, settling in a secluded valley, Rengedani, which he rarely left during the remainder of his life. Like Yōkan, he received transmissions of esoteric practices. After encountering Honen (section 4), however, he is said to have abandoned his Sanron study and esoteric training and devoted himself to saying the Name together with his followers:

Whenever asked, he used to discourse on the doctrines of the exoteric and esoteric sects, but as for himself he did nothing but the one thing of repeating the sacred name. 10

From Plain Words, we see that Myōhen initiated followers in such esoteric traditions as the "eighteen elements" of basic practice, which would qualify one to receive the abhiṣeka ("sprinkling water" on the forehead) ritual and further transmissions (section 85).

His daily routine included other widespread practices of the times. Every morning he declared vows to observe the precepts and worshiped relics of Śākyamuni Buddha. These activities reflect a determination to return to Śākyamuni's authentic
teaching and way of life. This resolve arose in reaction against the corruption of the temple establishment and was shared by reclusive figures associated with the Nara schools such as Gedatsu (section 12) and Myōe, both fierce critics of Hönen's teaching.

In addition, Myōhen and his group performed practices common among the earlier nembutsu fellowships. Every evening they enacted Amida's coming at death (mukae-kō), and at the six hours of the day (at four-hour intervals), they chanted the nembutsu and hymns. Thus, “sole practice of the nembutsu” meant for such monks the eradication of all residue of attachment from study and practice, leading one eventually to abandon complex esoteric rites and training and to concentrate on strict observance of precepts and recitation of the nembutsu.

Shunjō

The career of Shunjō also reflects the older hijiri traditions. After receiving initial training in esoteric Buddhism, he undertook austerities at a number of sacred mountain sites. He then became a wandering monk, performing both recitation of the Lotus Sutra and week-long sessions of uninterrupted nembutsu. Later, he made Mount Kōya his base and built a following of close disciples.

He is best known as a leader of kanjin hijiri, monks traveling the countryside collecting contributions for temple construction and public works projects. He offered his services to the shogunate for the restoration of Tōdaiji, consciously following Gyōgi's example, and employed a knowledge of temple architecture that he gained in China in directing the huge project involving many craftsmen, itinerant monks and workers. He also built seven other temple halls, known as new bessho, which served as places for nembutsu practice and also as centers for public welfare activities.

Shunjō's practice on Mount Kōya is reflected in a bell that he contributed to a temple that probably stood in Rengedani. It is inscribed with Sanskrit "seed-letters" (Sk. bija) or characters representing Amida and his attendant bodhisattvas, together with a spell for Amida Buddha and with the words of the light-mantra. We see, then, that although in later Jōdo school accounts Shunjō is portrayed as a follower of Hönen's teaching, his nembutsu practice was rooted in his earlier Shingon training. Nevertheless, he seems to have focused his practice chiefly on Amida rather than other Buddhas in the Shingon pantheon, and he established groups of nembutsu practicers in various areas of the country. On Mount Kōya, for example, he founded a bessho slightly deeper in seclusion than Myōhen's Rengedani, and there a small number of his most ardent followers practiced constant nembutsu.

IV After Hönen

Seeking the world beyond is no different from carrying out your life on the paths of this world. (Section 69)

In Hönen's thought, the concept of "selection and rejection" (senjaku)—Amida's determination of simple utterance of the Name as the act for birth and his setting aside of all traditional forms of religious cultivation—had the same effect as the hijiri's stern passion for poverty and candor: it sheared away all that was extraneous—all appetite for the inconsequential—from authentic practice of the way. Hönen's nembutsu, however, harbored an inherent tension, which we glimpse in the practice of the Kōya hijiri. It was natural, given the total dedication advocated by the hijiri, that adoption of his thought would lead to wholehearted endeavor in recitation of the Name and an effort to eliminate mundane obstructions that might express itself even as a wish for death. Hönen himself uttered the nembutsu
incessantly, tens of thousands of times daily, much like Ryōnin, Yōkan, and other earlier practicers. The nembutsu he taught, however, was effective not because of any effort by the aspirant, but rather because it was decided on by Amida and made to hold the Buddha’s virtues. Hence, sole practice for Hōnen assumed the entrusting of oneself to the Buddha’s wisdom and the power of his Vow to save all beings. Solely saying the Name became a very different kind of act from other practices, including nembutsu recitation to accumulate merit, and sole practice was integral to its nature. Other kinds of practice—for merit or self-purification—were unnecessary; faith in the sufficiency of simple utterance, however, was. Thus, there appeared among Hōnen’s following some who emphasized constant effort to recite the Name, and others who felt that faith in Amida’s compassion was the key to attainment. The master sought to reconcile the two elements of practice and faith (sections 26, 114), but was not altogether successful.

*Plain Words* includes chiefly the sayings of followers who stressed lifelong endeavor in reciting the Name; it is here that their accord with the Kōya hijiri monks lies. Viewing the collection in historical context, one notices that a number of Hōnen’s other prominent disciples are missing; Kōsai (1163-1247), Shinran (1173-1263, founder of the Shin school), and Shōkū (1177-1247, founder of the Jōdo school Seizan branch), all of whom developed the concept of faith or trust, receive no mention. If the compiler of *Plain Words* was a man of the Jōdo school, he probably belonged to the Chinzei branch, which became the mainstream of the school, represented in the work by the founder Shōkō, his chief disciple, Ryōchū (Nen’a), and a number of others.

It is in the delineation of the dimension of faith, however, that we see the completion of the trends we have been describing. In Hōnen, practice became possible while carrying on mundane life because its genuineness ceased to depend on the training or mental state of the aspirant. Nembutsu practice was no longer spiritual discipline or the eradication of the effects of inner turmoil, past and present. Rather, the concept of practice itself underwent a change. Hōnen was able to disclose the true practice of the Pure Land way—the act selected precisely because it could be easily incorporated into everyday life—by eliminating all impulses to appropriate it as one’s own, all pride in human effort. By doing so, he brought practice down from Mount Hiei and out of the bessho and made it fully available to ordinary people.

Through the entrusting of oneself to the Vow, then, the nembutsu enters one’s life; trust is the link between the practice infused with the Buddha’s virtues and the practicer. Faith in Amida’s Vow means precisely abandoning the vanity in learning and the self-consciousness in good acts. Thus, Hōnen speaks of entrusting oneself to the nembutsu by becoming a foolish person and “simply saying the nembutsu with wholeness of heart, free of any pretensions to wisdom” (page 71). In this way, nembutsu becomes the central activity of life:

Even when engaged in other activities, do them while saying the nembutsu. Don’t say the nembutsu while doing something else. (Section 32)

Here, ordinary life in the world is superimposed on the hijiri’s life of undefiled practice; they coincide without impedement. Because practice is solely saying the Name, a life in dedication to it can be carried on in a mundane context uncompromised.

Those among Hōnen’s disciples who explored the dimension of faith, however, sought to articulate further the incorporation of the Buddha’s practice by revealing how the nembutsu is not merely added to one’s everyday life, but utterly pervades and transforms it. Kōsai, Shinran, and Shōkū all taught that attainment of the awakening termed faith—which is freedom from the constrictions of the imagined self—represented a union of a
person with Amida’s wisdom-compassion. Having relinquished all clinging to egocentric perceptions by entrusting oneself to the Buddha, one is transfused with authentic awareness of the nature of human life, and having discarded attachments to one’s accomplishment of good, every act is made to hold the virtue of transcending the self. One joins, then, not merely a fellowship of aspirants along the path who pool their merit, but a community of those who have come through—one that embraces all who rejoice in the Name, including Buddhas and enlightened beings. This is mundane life as itself the austere life of one free of the domination of self-will. Such life is wholly mundane, filled with acts arising from ignorance and passions, and at the same time it is an ongoing transformation of it, the effortless resolution of our gravest concern (section 74). As Plain Words states: “When you have genuinely let go of your attachments, you show no sign of having done so” (section 60).

The Hijiri as Ideal

Coming at the close of an era of great creativity, Plain Words displays, amid the stark immediacy of the life of practice, a developed sense of a “hijiri ideal,” and with it, strands of nostalgia. Thus, true to its probing, self-reflective spirit, it also portends the deterioration of the tradition. Three general sources of secularization demand comment in the work, being intertwined with the hijiri’s life: self-indulgent interpretation of the hijiri ideal; professionalism; and the appropriation of the hijiri’s life for ends other than religious.

Concealing Virtue

One of the central themes of Plain Words is the idea that hijiri should hide any trace of goodness, lest they succumb to pride in their practice and, under the scrutiny of their fellows, a concern for reputation. The hijiri of the Kamakura period struck out into the wilderness not for knowledge and power, like the holy men of old, but to leave behind the self. The reverse side of their reluctance to reveal their accomplishments was a genuine humility, a biting awareness that, whatever the appearances, their life hardly merited the respect of others. In Plain Words, these feelings are vividly expressed by Myōhēn:

I have become known as a “man of the Way” and live in splendid circumstances: this is altogether at odds with my original intention. And unaware of my inmost feelings, people see my secluded life here and think it worthy of admiration. (Section 47)

“Splendid circumstances” refers to his hermitage, a small temple hidden away in Rengedani scarcely lavish by ordinary standards; elsewhere he speaks of its poor construction (section 76). Nevertheless, his high aristocratic birth as well as his accomplishments in learning and practice no doubt brought him deferential treatment, especially among the low-ranking hijiri. Wandering monks gained a canny sense both of underlying complacency and of authentic practice and traded tales of exemplary monks; Myōhēn’s diligence in seeking to avoid fame merely enhanced his stature in the eyes of his followers.

It was in such situations, however, that the strategy of hiding one’s virtue could be employed to effect. It was derived from the basic T’ien-t’ai text, Great Tranquility and Insight (Ja. Makashikan), which states that one should “contract one’s virtues and expose one’s flaws; make a show of delusions and conceal one’s reality.” Concealing one’s rectitude, then, is not merely a matter of seclusion; when necessary, it means to make use even of a camouflage of despicable conduct in order to preserve one’s integrity. From the beginning of the thirteenth century, there begin to appear numerous tales of monks who put an end to the lingering gratification of esteem by, for example, pretending to such lapses as living with women.

The notion of hiding one’s practice or good acts is open to
abuse, however, as a positive interpretation of wrongdoing. 

Plain Words cautions:

Although the Buddhist teaching states that virtues are best hidden, purposely making a show of foolishness is also a fault, one that will turn into indolence. (Section 136)

Nevertheless, concealing one's activity as a monk, with its superficial blurring of the religious and the mundane that renders external judgments meaningless, may be seen to hint at the deeper revision of the idea of virtue seen before, in which authentic practice has crossed beyond the limits of self-purification and self-will. Here, the key to the hijiri's abandonment of reputation lies finally in hiding one's virtues above all from oneself, or rather, seeing right through them, to the error in imposing ordinary standards, moral or religious, on the life of the nembutsu. As Hōnen states, "Wakening aspiration for enlightenment is best accomplished by stealth" (section 84).

Professional Hijiri

The venerable masters of old, with total commitment, discarded the trappings of their renunciation, including sutra texts and images for worship. They repudiated their esoteric knowledge of the significance of Sanskrit letters and abandoned the secret rituals that had been transmitted to them. But now, it is said in Plain Words, monks utilize their skills in chant and in preaching—which might include storytelling, musical intonation and instrumental accompaniment, and even dance and mime—to attract a following and collect donations and alms.

Plain Words makes repeated reference to chant in worship, which was closely related to the hijiri tradition. Under the influence of Kūya, Senkan (918–983) of Miidera wrote hymns in Japanese to be sung to Tendai chant melodies, and Genshin followed him, composing hymns for use in worship among the nembutsu fellowships. Ryōnin further developed the aesthetic elements of chant, which spread with his yūzū-nembutsu. By the time of Plain Words, liturgical chant had become extremely popular, and had even been adopted to secular songs.

Plain Words even speaks of the deterioration of chant into "monkey-music" (sarugaku, section 107), pointing perhaps, beneath the irony, to actual shifts in occupation. Sarugaku refers to entertainments such as farce and mime performed during festivals at temples and shrines. The performers were itinerants loosely affiliated with the temples and shared a background not unlike that of many wandering monks. Gradually the entertainments absorbed elements of religious music and Buddhist themes; nō drama and kyōgen comedy, which are still performed as offerings at temples and shrines, have their roots here.

Another example of the mundane development of the hijiri's training is "their tales of war" (section 93), originally the stuff of sermons interwoven with the theme of impermanence. Narratives of battle—the best known is the Tales of the Heike—came to be intoned to melodies derived from Tendai chant and developed into a popular entertainment. Specialists, often blind, wore monk's garb and sang the tales to the accompaniment of the biwa, a continental lute that gained popularity in Japan in the Heian period. These itinerant "biwa monks" numbered in the hundreds in Kyoto alone during the Kamakura period.

The biwa monks and temple entertainers were the forerunners of specialists in the arts who stemmed from the hijiri tradition, including linked verse poets, nō performers, and the tonseisha ("recluses") of the Muromachi period who advised the Ashikaga shoguns and feudal lords in such matters of taste and connoisseurship as flower arrangement, gardens, and incense appreciation.

Life of the Thatched Hut

The movement of wandering monks into the realm of the arts
was paralleled by the adoption of the recluse's life by men of letters. A tendency to idealize the hijirji's life and to perceive in it a freedom denied in the rigid, hierarchic court society dominated by a single clan may be traced back to the latter part of the tenth century, the time of Yoshishige and his garden chapel. The outstanding example, however, is Saigyō (1118–1190), who abandoned his post as a court guard to pursue the life of wandering monk and poet. As monk, his career shares elements in common with Kyōbutsu—a disciple of Myōhen and the best-represented hijiri in Plain Words. Both trained at Ohara and Mount Kōya, and both were familiar (despite Kyōbutsu's disclaimer, section 40) with Tendai chant and yūzū-nembutsu practices.

Further, the purity of aspiration emphasized by the wandering monks came to be seen as capable of transforming artistic discipline into a way of spiritual cultivation. This perception is clearly expressed in Kamo no Chōmei's Tales of Aspiration for Enlightenment (Hosshinshū, 1216), written about the time of Hönen's death. In one tale, Chōmei states:

Vice-governor of Dazaifu Sukemichi, a skilled biwa player, ... did not perform any of the usual practices for attaining the world beyond. Going into his private chapel each day, he simply played pieces on the biwa while having someone keep count and directed the merit accruing from this toward his birth in the Land of Bliss. (VI, 9)

Here, dedication to the single art of the biwa is substituted for recitation of the nembutsu. Chōmei carefully explains why such training works to bring about religious fulfillment:

Religious practices are [essentially] acts accomplished through effort and aspiration; hence, one should not necessarily think of such [performance on the biwa] as ineffective. We find here the spirit of artistic dedication (suki), in which a person ceases to delight in joining socially with others, or to sorrow at declining fortune. He is moved to deep compassion by the opening and scattering of blossoms, and his mind is made lucid wherever he thinks of the moon's rising and setting, so that he seeks above all to remain unstained by worldly defilements. Thus, the reality of arising-and-perishing naturally manifests itself to him, and attachments to fame and profit completely die away. This is indeed the gateway to freedom and emancipation.

The cultivation of an undistorted sensitivity to the things of the world through artistic discipline, seclusion, and closeness to nature is seen here to resemble the hijirji's practice in his hermitage and to lead to the same end. This spiritualization of secular arts and daily activities through commitment, training, and aesthetic preferences modeled on the hijirji's life characterizes such arts as the tea ceremony, which developed under the influence of monks and artistic performers who sought to create the atmosphere of a mountain retreat in their practice.

Plain Words criticizes the transmutation of the hermit's life of practice into literary pursuit as an error:

Many who dwell in solitude cling to their way of life, believing that their minds are pure because they pass their time wholly in intoning verses in their still and tasteful retreats: they are deceiving themselves (section 44).

Nevertheless, we sense here a recognition of the shifting center of cultural creativity from religion to arts. It is in the realm of the arts and the aesthetic ideals termed "chill," "lean," "withered," "sabi" (solitariness) and "wabi" (poverty) that the spirit of the hijirji tradition was next to find new expression.

Plain Words captures a moment in the history of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan. Since its time, developments at the dōjō and
bessho founded by wandering monks have grown into major
temple institutions, and most clergy of all schools have become
shami, wearing monk’s robes while maintaining homelife and
families in their temples. The temples themselves, interwoven in
to secular life, are bequeathed to offspring, and may be litigated
like an inheritance. The teachings have been codified, in accord
with government policy in the Edo period, and are refined and
debated by professional scholar-clerics. Hijiri of old now bear
honorific names posthumously bestowed by emperors. Plain
Words gives a glimpse of the great revolution that preceded.
The moment it evokes also occurs in the life of the Pure Land
practicer; herein lies the work’s abiding value. It points in two
directions at once, and through its individual entries we see that
traveling the road of the death of the self becomes an engage-
ment in life in secular society, and return to ordinary life is
founded on the departure it depicts. It teaches that unless one
makes an effort to free oneself from the attachments and desires
that bind one to samsaric life, it is impossible to awaken to the
working of Amida’s compassion, which comes to pervade one’s
existence just as one is.

A Note on the Text

There is little to be said about the compilation of Plain Words
that cannot be deduced from the text itself. Similar anthologies
exist, but they seem to be derivative. While Hōnen’s sayings
may have been drawn from earlier biographies or collected say-
ings, other material, most notably the sayings of Kyōbutsu, cannot
be found elsewhere.

As noted before, the doctrinal content and the image con-
voyed of Myōhen and other monks of the older Hijiri type sug-
gest the perspective of the Chinzei branch of Hōnen’s Jōdo
school. Myōhen, however, appears nearly as often as Hōnen in

the collection, and Kyōbutsu has the greatest representation
with twice as many entries. In addition, the editorial comments
occasionally appended to the text occur chiefly in material
associated with Kyōbutsu. Either a record of Kyōbutsu’s sayings
was incorporated into Plain Words, inclusive of these comments,
or perhaps more likely, Plain Words may itself have been com-
plied by a disciple of Kyōbutsu.

One other theory of authorship should be mentioned: the
poet-monk Ton’ a (1289–1373). As a man of the Jū school
founded by the wandering monk Ippen, Ton’ a was in a position
to respond to stories of both the Jōdo and Kōya hijiri
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 expressed in Essays in Idleness, however, that
most strongly suggests Ton’ a as compiler of Plain Words, for he
and Kenkō were closely associated both as monks and as poets
sharing the reputation of being among “the four heavenly
kings” of poetry. The evidence is circumstantial, but it takes
into consideration the literary qualities of Plain Words.

The work is assumed to have been compiled after the death of
the masters named (either 1287, when Nen’a died, or 1297, when
Jishin died), and before 1333, the generally accepted date for the
composition of Essays in Idleness. The latest possible date is
1350, when Kenkō died.

The translation follows the earliest extant text, published in
1648 with a note stating that it is based on a manuscript dated
1463. It is also included in Miyasaka Yūshō, ed., Kana hōgo shū,
Nihon bungaku taikei, volume 83, Iwanami Shoten, 1964. The
text may have passed through several stages of editing by the
time it assumed this form. Section breaks are not clearly shown
in the original; these have been added in this volume where-
ever separate quotations are specifically indicated, and section
numbers have been added. The text, however, is not consistent
in format; some sections include more than one entry, and in
several instances, adjoining sections may originally have been considered one.

A more widely read edition in premodern Japan is that of the Jōdo school priest Tancho 深長, published in Genroku 2 (1689) under the title Hyōchū zōho ichigon hōdan shō 横川増補一言方談動. Tancho’s notes still provide the foundation for modern annotated editions. However, explanatory comments also seem to have been incorporated into the text at some points. In addition, Tancho lent the work a Jōdo school outlook by reorganizing it under ten headings of his own devising. Since the original displays little organization apart from the opening entries, I include here a list of the sections in their order in Tancho’s edition, according to the present section numbers:

Food, Clothing and Shelter: 6, 42 (part 6), 18, 76, 53, 44 (part 3), 82, 96, 19, 88, 43, 52, 80, 44 (part 3), 82, 96, 19, 88, 43, 52, 80, 44 (part 3), 82, 96, 19, 88, 43, 52, 80, 44 (part 3).

Purity and Simplicity: 42 (part 3), 81, 41, 67, 103, 106.

Teachers and Companions: 102, 11, 140.

Impermanence: 29, 42 (part 1), 70, 66, 78, 42 (part 5), 34.

Mindfulness of Death: 44 (part 1), 39 (part 2), 97, 61, 72, 94, 59.

Facing the Moment of Death: 9, 62, 107.

Nembutsu: 1, 3, 2, 10, 28, 99, 133, 134, 74, 135, 73, 77, 54, 91, 123, 124, 125, 5, 100, 114, 98, 35.


Learning: 64, 85, 115, 101, 68, 118, 12, 51, 46, 47, 42 (part 8), 42 (part 9), 63, 104, 65, 60 (part 1), 23, 17, 139, 42 (part 7), 105, 39 (part 1), 79, 42 (part 2).


The monks of Plain Words express little interest in the scholastic side of their tradition—the works of Genshin and Hōnen, or Hōnen’s inspiration Shan-tao, that formed the foundation of the nembutsu teaching; their effort is rather to forge the living, native expression of those teachings. Thus Kyōbutsu speaks repeatedly of incisive statements of Dharma that do not exceed a single sheet of paper. I have appended several examples of this genre. With Yokawa hōgo attributed to Genshin, I have followed a text transmitted in the Shin school Shinshū hōgo shūi, which is more concise than the common version. Hōnen’s Ichimai kishōmon is based on the autograph manuscript. The circumstances of its composition, two days before Hōnen’s death at the age of seventy-nine, are recorded in a biography:

As the master [Hōnen] lay with the end approaching, [his disciple] Seikan-bō requested him to set down the essentials of the nembutsu-faith briefly in his own hand, even though he had listened to Hōnen’s teaching for some years; he said that he would treasure it thereafter as a keepsake.

Myōhen’s statement is taken from Myōhen sōzu isshì hōgo genchi, published in Genbun 5 (1740) and available in the Ryukoku University library.
NOTES

1. The term *hijiri* 聖 originally meant “sage” and appears to have its roots as an honorific title for a “holy man” or shaman of the indigenous religious traditions. Its literal meaning is understood as one who knows (shīri) the movements of the sun (hi) and other heavenly bodies [Hori Ichirō, “On the Concept of Hijiri (Holy-Man),” part 1, p. 129] or one who controls or kindles (shiru) the sacred fire (hi) [Gorai Shigeru, *Kōya hijiri*, p. 29]. By the time of *Plain Words*, however, it was used chiefly to indicate a wide variety of reclusive or itinerant monks, who were often without official clerical status. It sometimes retained its honorific sense, but it was also employed simply as a common noun for low-ranking wandering monks only loosely affiliated with temples. The synonymous term *shōnin* 聖人 or 上人 likewise had both these meanings, honorific and common.

2. A comparison of the dialogue between Myōhen and Hōnen (section 4) with versions in other records reveals a sense of the dramatic qualities of spare expression in *Plain Words* lacking in the more explanatory renderings. *Hōnen shōnin eden*, for example, comments on Myōhen’s omissions of ordinary civilities in his eagerness to hear Hōnen’s comment (Coates and Ishizuka, *Hōnen the Buddhist Saint*, p. 318).

3. Kenkō (1283–1350) devotes section 98 of *Essays in Idleness* (Tsurezuregusa) to *Plain Words*:

   In reading a book titled *Ichigon hōdan*, which records the words of venerable *hijiri*, I was impressed with the aptness of the following passages:

   (1) Acts you must ponder whether to do or not are, as a rule, better left undone.

   (2) Those mindful of the world beyond should own nothing, not so much as a crock for salted bran. Even with copies of scripture for daily use and sacred images for the altar, it is senseless to own fine things.

   (3) A recluse passes his life managing to feel no want of what he lacks; this is the best way to live.

   (4) The senior monk should become a novice, the sage a fool, the prosperous man poor, and the person of accomplishments unschooled.

   (5) Aspiring to the Buddha Way is not an involved task. Allow yourself time and set your mind to no worldly business: this is the primary step.

   There were a number of other statements that I do not recall.

Kenkō’s quotations are paraphrases: (1) corresponds to section 22 of *Plain Words*; (2) is derived from sections 67 and 95; (3) corresponds to section 41, (4) to section 60, and (5) to section 50. In addition, he may have drawn on *Plain Words* sections 53 and 127 for his comment on Shinkai (*Tsurezuregusa*, 49) and his quotation of Hōnen (39).


6. The chanting of the *Lotus Sutra*, like the nembutsu, came to be disseminated among the common people by wandering monks. Such monks, termed “bearers of the sutra” (jikkyōja), often led a mendicant life, chanting portions of the sutra before houses and receiving alms. They tended, however, to be reclusive, dedicating themselves to repeated recitations of the *Lotus Sutra* and the writing of copies in isolation. The Nichiren school may be seen as developing out of this tradition.


7. The mantra of light (*kōmyō shingon*): om amogha vairocana māhā-mudrā mani padma jvala pravarttaya hūm. Mantras are sacred embodiments of reality as sound and often have no apparent literal meaning as phrases; they are said to hold the power, when repeated numbers of times, to protect the practicer and ward off evil and danger.

8. This identification of Amida with Vairocana may be expressed obliquely in Genshin’s revelation at Ise (section 1), for the tendency to
associate the "Great Sun Buddha" (*Dainichi nyorai*) with the sun goddess Amaterasu, enshrined at Ise, goes back to the Nara period. It is said that Gyōki was sent to Ise by the emperor to gain approval for the construction of the statue of Vairocana at Tōdaiji.

9. The Amida spell (*Amida shōju*) or shorter mantra: om amṛta teje hara hūṃ.


12. Perhaps the true inheritors of the spirit of the nembutsu hijiri are the "wondrous, excellent people" (*myōkōnin*) of the Shin path, whose stories begin to be collected and published in the Edo period. While the hijiri abandoned their learning and the pursuit of security, the myōkōnin were often from the outset illiterate people of the countryside living in harsh uncertainty. Nevertheless, after long struggle with the teaching carried on in their daily lives, they came to manifest in word and deed a joy and self-knowledge arising from the wisdom of the nembutsu.


18. The wide-ranging case for Ton'a as compiler may be found in Sanda Zenshin, "Ichigon hōdan no hensha wa Ton'a kā," included in his book, *Jōdoshū shi no shokenkyū,* 1959.
It is told:

Bishop Eshin made a pilgrimage to the Great Shrine at Ise to spend seven days in secluded prayer. During the final night, in dream, the portals of the holy shrine suddenly opened and a gentlewoman stepped forth in an aura of sanctity. She declared:

The Goddess of the Great Shrine has returned to the capital, the primal enlightenment. I am caretaker in the absence. Instructions were left, saying: *If sentient beings of the last age should seek the essential path of liberation, advise them to say the Name of Amida Buddha.*

*Great Shrine at Ise.* The most important Shintō shrine, dedicated to the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. In medieval times, Shintō deities had come to be widely regarded as manifestations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

*The capital.* The center, the truth or reality that is the source of Buddhas’ activity in this world.

*Primal enlightenment (hongaku).* The original Mind or Buddhahood inherent in all beings, though they may not yet have gained awareness of it. Wisdom or true reality transcends the dichotomies between this world and the world beyond, or ignorance and enlightenment; thus, enlightenment pervades the world of beings and forms its foundation. This concept played an important role in medieval Tendai thought and lent support to the emanational view of the various deities.

*Last age.* The final period in the history of the Buddhist path in the world, when the teachings of Dharma survive but, because of the condition of the world and of beings, practices can no longer be fulfilled and realizing enlightenment through one’s own efforts is impossible. In one theory, it began in 1052 and will run ten thousand years.
The venerable Shunjō was in the closing night of a vowed week-long seclusion at the inner sanctuary of Mount Köya. When it had drawn into the deep of night and all had grown still, from within the chapel of the Founder's Samādhi there emerged a single, distinct voicing of the nembutsu. Hearing it, he was overcome with both sorrow and joy, and his sleeves were wet with tears.

inner sanctuary (oku no in). A chapel built in the most sanctified part of temple precincts, behind and above the main halls, and dedicated to the temple founder or other special figure.

Founder's Samādhi. It is said that Kūkai (774–835), the founder of the Shingon complex on Mount Köya, did not die, but entered the deep samādhi in which he dwells to this day, working for the enlightenment of sentient beings.

Ren-amidabutsu had a dream in which the Deity of the Hachiman Shrine declared:

Birth into the Pure Land does not depend on saying the nembutsu once; it does not depend on saying it many times. It depends on the heart.

Hachiman. Originally the fifteenth emperor Ojin (r. 270–310), who was deified, with his main shrine at Usa in northern Kyushu; eventually regarded as the god of archery, and thus of war. Given the title “Great Bodhisattva” and considered a manifestation of Amida Buddha.

On his way back from a pilgrimage to Zenkōji temple, Bishop Myōhen of Mount Köya had an interview with Hōnen.

Myōhen asked, “How can I break the bonds of samsaric existence with this life?”

Hōnen replied, “Just say the nembutsu.”

“That’s surely the answer. But what should I do about the delusional thoughts and feelings that fill my mind?”

“Even though deluded thoughts arise, you will attain birth though the power of the Primal Vow.”

Satisfied with this answer, Myōhen left.

Afterwards Hōnen murmured to himself, “Trying to attain the Pure Land by suppressing delusional thoughts is like casting away the eyes and nose you’re born with in order to say the Name.”

Zenkōji. Temple enshrining a famous image of Amida with his two attendant bodhisattvas, said to have been transmitted from India and to be the living embodiment of the Buddha himself. This temple was a popular pilgrimage site and center for hijiri.

Simply dedicate yourself to saying the nembutsu. This may seem but a pouring of water to stone, but utter it, and there will be benefit.

DHARMA-SEAL MYŌZEN
There's certainly no reason that anything in this defiled world should gladden the heart. Simply endure the minor hardships with equanimity. It's like being in a boat in rough weather and wanting to shift back to the stern, then up to the bow.

BISHOP MYÔHEN

Aspire for birth with the deep-rooted mind of one fixed on a target.

ANONYMOUS

Most likely you never awaken any genuine compassion; but you must harbor hatred of no one.

ANONYMOUS

When I lie dying, don't exclaim, "Oh, it seems the time has come!" It is my life, which I've habitually clung to since the beginningless past, so I may feel dejected. Just encourage me to say the nembutsu.

ANONYMOUS

After his demise, Archbishop Jien appeared in someone's dream and declared:

Studying exoteric and esoteric teachings has served no purpose. Only contemplation of emptiness and saying the nembutsu—practices I took up from time to time—have stood me in good stead for the world beyond.

The Commentary on the Awakening of Faith states, "Two people should not share a single room; they will disturb each other and obstruct the Way."

Commentary on the Awakening of Faith. Doubtfully attributed to Nāgārjuna. Extensively quoted by Kūkai and highly regarded in the Shingon school; modern commentators therefore suggest that this saying originated with a follower of Kakuban (1095–1143), who incorporated nembutsu into Shingon practice and opened the way for the associations between Mount Kōya and nembutsu hijiri monks. The work does not, however, contain the present statement (T32, no. 1668).
Zen-amidabutsu of Kurodani told this story:

A hijiri went to Gedatsu and asked permission to live and study with him.

Gedatsu replied, “Good monk, I perceive that aspiration for enlightenment is awake within you. Engaging in study is altogether useless; swiftly return whence you came. Those here lack desire for the world beyond, and I put them to study only because it’s better than aimlessly doing nothing at all.”

Thus he drove him away.

Zen-amidabutsu. Unidentified; the monk in the story may well be the narrator. The name is found in Collection of Sand and Pebbles (I, 3), which depicts a close relation with Myōhen, suggesting that he was a Köya hijiri.

Kurodani. An area of Mount Hiei that provided refuge to monks devoted to reclusive practice, becoming a center for nembutsu hijiri. Separated from the major halls, it nevertheless maintained a long tradition of Tendai Pure Land study and contemplation, and was the home of Honen for twenty-five years, until he left Mount Hiei to found and spread the independent Pure Land school.

Put plainly, if in your heart you genuinely aspire for the Pure Land and reject this defiled world, you will unfailingly attain birth by just saying the Name without any special concentration. If your aspiration is not authentic, you may clear away a hundred thousand obscurities and grasp the deepest of doctrinal truths, yet attainment of birth will elude you.

In practicing the Buddha Way, continuous effort is crucial. It’s preposterous for people who have once discerned their own capacities and resolved upon the single practice of the nembutsu to change because someone has spoken against it.

When I reflect on having met with the effective cause of birth, Other Power, I realize that it is with this life that I must gain liberation from birth-and-death. Though we encounter Other Power, we will certainly fall to lower realms again if we idly pass by to no purpose. Whether or not we part from samsaric existence, then, depends on the present.

If your concern is birth in the Pure Land, take care not to stand conspicuous in the eyes of men. Human beings are injured by human beings. For a hijiri monk, gaining a measure of prosperity in this life means, on the whole, so much jetsam with regard to the world beyond.
16
There’s no profit in idly sleeping, but neither is anything lost.

17
A hijiri knows it’s good being good for nothing.

18
It is best that one’s dwelling be disagreeable. If it pleased the heart, then unenlightened as we are, we would certainly become attached to it.

19
Asked where an outcast monk should live, Myōzen replied, “So long as you can say the nembutsu, anywhere at all is fine. Avoid places where your utterance is hampered. But wherever you dwell, be detached from your surroundings.”

20
Further, Myōzen said: “The 'baby’s nembutsu' is best.” Hearing of monks engaged in a display of learning, he commented, “Ignorant men, blind to their own nature.”

Cf. Shinran (1173–1263): “I recall hearing the late Master Hōnen say, ‘Those of the Pure Land tradition attain birth by becoming their foolish selves.’ Moreover, I remember him smile and say, as he watched humble people of no intellectual pretensions coming to visit him, ‘Without doubt their birth is settled.’ And I heard him say after a visit by a man brilliant in letters and debating, ‘I really wonder about his birth’” (Letters of Shinran, 6).

21
Whatever occurs, we in our foolishness can keep our composure only so long as we avoid facing it squarely. Our aspiration may appear imposing, but if something happens, it is easily shaken.

22
Acts you must ponder whether to do or not are, as a rule, better left undone.
23
For the person who actually wants to attain the world beyond, nothing is more pointless than withdrawal from ordinary life.

MYÖZEN

24
You may not go to great lengths to aid others, but if you truly aspire to part from samsaric existence, there is certain to be appropriate benefit for every other being.

MYÖZEN

25
Hijiri monks are impeded by their own virtue. Rather than trying to perform good acts, just stop doing evil.

MYÖZEN

26
If, because it is taught that birth is attained with but one or ten utterances, you say the nembutsu heedlessly, then faith is hindering practice.

HÖNEN

one or ten utterances. Amida’s Eighteenth Vow in the Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life states that those who say the Name perhaps ten times with sincere trust will attain birth. Śākyamuni’s words at the close of the sutra state that the person who rejoices in the nembutsu even once will be born.

moment to moment. From the Chinese master Shan-tao (613–681): “Single-heartedly practicing the saying of Amida’s Name alone—whether walking, standing, sitting, or reclining—without concern for the length of time, and without abandoning it from moment to moment: this is called the act of true settlement [of birth], for it is in accord with the Buddha’s Vow” (Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra, T37, 272b). This passage is said to have awakened Hōnen to the nembutsu teaching.

27
It’s taught that if you believe saying the nembutsu once to be indecisive, every utterance becomes nembutsu of no faith. Amida Buddha’s Vow was established so that birth would be attained with each utterance; therefore, every single saying of the nembutsu is a karmic act that results in birth.

HÖNEN
When I read Shan-tao’s Commentary, to my eye it appears that the three essential attitudes and the four rules of practice are all Namu-amida-butsu.

HÖHEN

three essential attitudes. Literally, “three minds.” The Eighteenth Vows speaks of beings “(1) sincerely (2) entrusting themselves and (3) aspiring for birth” in the Pure Land. These attitudes were identified with those enumerated in the Contemplation Sutra, which states that beings should awaken three minds: genuine mind, deep mind, and aspiration. Shan-tao analyzes these at length in his commentary, explaining the first as complete sincerity, the second as self-reflection and trust, and the third as desire to be born in the Pure Land through directing merit towards one’s own and others’ attainment.

four rules of practice. Prescriptions for proper nembutsu practice: worship of Amida and the beings of the Pure Land; exclusive practice of saying the Name and thinking on Amida; wholehearted, uninterrupted practice; and practice sustained throughout life (Shan-tao, in Hymns of Birth in the Pure Land).

HÖHEN

Honen instructed someone:

Human life is such that occasionally a person bolting down mouthfuls of good food will choke on it and die. So chew with Namu-amida-butsu, do Namu-amida-butsu as you swallow.

30

Without fretting about whether your passions are superficial or deep-seated, without weighing the magnitude of your karmic evil, just say Namu-amida-butsu with your lips and through your voicing bring about the settlement of birth.

HÖHEN

31

Honen often said in guiding others:

People who have seriously embraced the aspiration for birth always have about them a slightly cynical distrust of the world.

32

The venerable late Master Honen taught, “Even when engaged in other activities, do them while saying the nembutsu. Don’t say the nembutsu while doing something else.”

ZENSHŌ

33

In straightening an arrow shaft, you shut one eye to train
it closely. When, in like manner, in the single, whole­hearted practice you cast no sideward glance, swiftly it finds its mark.

SHOKO

34

If people who have been steadily and deeply mindful of birth into the Pure Land find that their practice is regressing, they should consider well: the time of death is approaching.

SHOKO

35

Hōren of Jōdodani not only let his provisions dwindle; his morning meal was scarcely more than a formality, and even it was completely forgotten in his worship for birth into the Land of Bliss. It was far beyond the ordinary. If the nembutsu entered his heart as he prepared his meal, the result resembled neither steamed rice nor gruel. After some years, his face began growing more haggard day by day and his bodily strength waned. To close friends who inquired after him, he replied:

*nishi e yuku*
*suji hitotsu dani*
*tagawazuba*
*hone to kawa to ni*
*mi wa naraba nare*

If only the single way leading to the West is certain, then let my body be skin and bone.

Jōdodani. The place of Hōren's residence, also known as the “new” Kurodani. His grandfather, Hamuro Akitoki, of a prominent branch of the Fujiwara clan, donated an estate in the northeastern hills of Kyoto (Shirakawa) for a hermitage for Eikū. This hermitage was passed on to Hōnen and then to Hōren, who lived there until his death.

36

Kyōbutsu-bō said:

I told Myōhen that a poem had enabled me to grasp the Dharma-gate of the nembutsu. “I can appreciate that,” he replied.

The poem:

*tada tanome*
*tatoeba hito no*
*itsuwari o*
*kasane koso wa*
*mata no uramime*

You must simply trust. If deceptions should accumulate, then be reproachful.

poem. By Jien, included in the imperial collection *Shinkokinshū*, XIII, 1223, with the headnote, “the spirit in pledging love.” It is commonly interpreted as a man’s words to dispel a woman’s misgivings, but may also be taken, perhaps more fittingly here, as words to oneself.

37

It is not to be learned that the three essential attitudes are had for the learning.

KYŌBUTSU
You may become conversant with all eighty-thousand Buddhist teachings, but as one in the condition of human foolishness you will still be given to error. All that is critically important is the thought, "Buddha, save me!"

KYŌBUTSU

It is inconceivable that either Myōhen or Myōzen simply happened on the awakening of aspiration. They had to struggle constantly to subdue their delusional thoughts with the truth of the way things are. Never losing sight of truth, then, may itself be called the mind aspiring to the Way. Practice for birth is possible only when this mind is stalwart. Since all matters serve as but hindrances, how could anyone with an irresolute mind endure? People unable to maintain the truth as it demands all surrender to their hearts and in the end come to give scarcely a thought to the world beyond. Taking the truth in vain—failing to carry it through to the end—is the greatest obstruction to birth.

Whether you live a mundane life or for transcendence of this world, in the end the one great matter is death alone. Just resolve, "When the time comes, so be it," and every pressing concern will vanish. It is from cherishing your existence and clinging to life that all obstacles arise. If you simply come to realize that death by some mishap is actually a cause for joy, you will be able to face all difficulties with tranquility. Thus, if you sincerely aspire for the world beyond, by all means firmly establish the truth for yourself and do not capitulate to the heart; do not give your mind to things of this samsaric world.

KYŌBUTSU

Recluses these days, once they have cut off the topknots they wore in mundane life, become superb scholars and preachers. Going up Mount Kōya, they turn into illustrious Shingon masters and eminent explicators of the commentaries. Or, although originally they may have been unable to form even the syllable shi properly curved, they acquire a serviceable hand at the standard Sanskrit and Chinese characters. But it's extremely rare to see one whose abhorrence of samsaric existence runs deep, or who is wholly immersed in practice for attaining the world beyond. When they first cut their topknots, they seemed resolved never to be thus possessed of ambition, but they have aroused thoughts driven by fierce self-attachment and concern for reputation.

Up to the time that I abandoned the world, all of us were taught that since renunciation meant giving up all we possessed, seeking more was inexcusable. We therefore embraced a determination never to engage in any activity, secular or religious, that—though it might mean mastering the arts and skills of this life—would turn into a lingering
attachment to samsara and in the end become a hindrance to birth. This included any attainment, whether it lay easily in reach or at a distance, regardless of its form. Hence, though I was long at Óhara and Mount Kóya, I learned not even one chant melody nor a single Sanskrit letter.

Thus he spoke. With all things, it is best for our attainment of the world beyond simply to pass steadily through this life.

commentaries. May refer specifically to the Commentary on the Awakening of Faith (see section 11).

Sanskrit. In the Shingon school, Sanskrit characters play an important role in contemplative practices; see section 85.

Óhara. Area northeast of Kyoto, known as a hijiri center with close ties to Mount Hiei. As Pure Land teachings spread in society, religious chant (shómyó) came to be widely used as a vehicle of propagation and popular worship. Tendai chant, imported from China during the ninth century, was adapted for verses in Japanese by Senkan (918–983) and later by Genshin, who composed many such hymns. In 1109, Ryóin (1073–1132), the founder of Yûzi-nembutsu, established Raigo-in ("Temple of Amida's Welcoming") in Óhara as a training center for Tendai chant. The melodic chanting of hymns and nembutsu came into vogue, and also influenced popular music and drama (sections 93, 107).

Kyôbutsu-bô said:

To feel attached to your implement box or wicker pack is to lose sight of why you use it in the first place. Earnestly resolve in your heart: this life is one night's lodging, this world but dream and illusion, so let it be as it may.

As a means to taking your existence lightly and aspiring for the world beyond, you should become keenly aware that being alive is a matter of this day only, of the present moment alone. Realize this, and what is now scarcely endurable will be easily borne; your endeavor for the world beyond will be dauntless. If you imagine even casually that your life will be long, things of this world will swell in importance and all those concerns unrelated to the aspiration for enlightenment will arise.

For more than thirty years I have taken this truth of impermanence as my support, and to this day I make no error. I have looked as far to the future as the possibility of death by the year's end, but never contemplated life extending into the next year. I am now in old age. In all matters I think only of today. Ultimately, the key to liberation lies in setting your mind on impermanence.

implement box. A container of woven bamboo covered with leather. Kamo no Chômei, in his Ten-foot Square Hut (Hôjôki), uses a similar term, stating that he keeps three "black leather containers" for the writings he possesses: poetry, musical works, and Genshin's Essentials for Birth. They were apparently lidded and small enough to be kept on a suspended shelf, and were used to protect fragile items from the weather in travel and in temporary shelter.

wicker pack. A kind of backpack. Packs were one of the few items
deemed necessary to the hijiri's life, and are a conspicuous feature in pictorial representations. Judging from references in *Plain Words*, they were liable to become objects of envy and attachment. Various kinds were in use, and a hijiri's affiliations could be discerned from his pack. For example, followers of Ippen (1239–1289), the "hijiri who discarded," used ornamented black wooden boxes with symbolic coloration (see *No Abode: The Record of Ippen*, p. 27).

Even for the person untroubled about daily necessities, it is extremely difficult to strive for the world beyond with peace of mind. Effective practice, then, turns not on the supply or lack of provisions, but simply on aspiration. Hence my own desire for such provisions died away long ago. Attaining the world beyond alone is crucial.

It is possible to get along by living life naturally as it comes. "Apart from liberation from samsaric existence, let all things be as they may!" Such is the detachment in which the person aspiring for birth abides. Awakening the aspiration for emancipation, however feebly, is the genuine and sincere homage to the Buddha made in true accord with the Buddha's mind. 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 these things as if they were significant and to rank them alongside my practice for the world beyond would be the ultimate folly.

*garments of paper.* The cheapest form of clothing, made of heavy paper treated with persimmon tannin, weathered, and softened by hand. First adopted by monks observing strict precepts, for paper robes could be produced without depending on women at any stage.

People of ancient times, on casting off worldly life, lived with purity and simplicity of heart. Nowadays reclusion is but poorly understood, and through it people are instead corrupted in spirit.

Although the person aspiring for the world beyond chops wood and draws water, it should be the chopping wood and drawing water of one who is thinking of birth.

Wherever I look, I find only the world's uncertainty and the evanescence of my existence within it. Hence, although it may be but an everyday incident, I always sense my life in great peril. But you, monks, even when confronted with real danger, show not the slightest sign that you are aware. How little concerned you appear, then, when I see you at your daily tasks. The vital issue concerning the reality of impermanence is not just how it should be expressed. That can be done only after you have taken it even slightly to heart.

Those who seek the world beyond abide in the thought that they are out on a journey. Though you travel to the limits of cloud or sea, as long as you have physical existence, you cannot do without the bare essentials of food, clothing, and shelter. Nevertheless, whether you are attached to them or not makes all the difference. When you are constantly aware that you have but one night's lodging, not a permanent dwelling, nothing can obstruct your saying of the nembutsu.

"This existence would have ended pointlessly as a body cast aside in a field, but to have let go of it for the sake of
emancipation, enduring the cold and heat and the sickness: this will be the reminiscence of a greatly blessed lifetime!

How rare are people who rejoice thus.

That learning is worthless to the outcast monk is a matter of degree. The person with the capacity should occasionally skim Genshin's *Essentials for Birth* in an elementary way, taking a look at the concrete descriptions of the transience of samsaric existence, the bliss in the Pure Land attained through the nembutsu, and so on. Hence the venerable Myōhen commented, "It is ridiculous for the person of nembutsu not to know what the ten joys of the Pure Land are."

But you should never labor after a thorough mastery or lucid understanding of every word and phrase just because study is recommended. In reading the text, it is enough to be able to grasp the gist without too much effort and to survey generally the most important passages. Once you have mastered this proven method, you will never deviate from the teaching, the fundamental intent of which lies in encouraging us to attain the world beyond. This is its living core.

Although you study only to this degree, if you sense your self-attachment or concern for reputation growing, you should resolutely desist. To turn medicine into poison is complete folly. On the other hand, if through your grasp of even a single sentence or phrase you find yourself more earnest in saying the nembutsu or your aspiration for birth strengthened, or you experience a fresh sense of urgency welling up within, you should indeed read the sacred words from time to time.

The person whose natural abilities are meager, however, should wholeheartedly say the Name without even this level of learning. If you endeavor in practice with genuineness of heart and mind, you will never stray from the basic intent of the teaching. The mind of faith—the mind aspiring for enlightenment—will arise of itself if you practice.

*ten joys.* The bliss resulting from ten benefits experienced with birth in the Pure Land. Discussed in *Essentials for Birth:* 1) being welcomed by Amida and a host of bodhisattvas; 2) the opening of the lotus on which one is born in the Pure Land; 3) taking on excellent bodily characteristics and transcendent powers; 4) experiencing the splendor of the Pure Land; 5) joy without end; 6) being able to save those one has known in this world; 7) joining the company of bodhisattvas; 8) seeing Amida and hearing the teaching from him; 9) paying homage to all the Buddhas; 10) advancing to Buddhahood (T84, 41-45).

Study the teaching that leads to the world beyond under a person who aspires to it. Learning devoid of aspiration is apt to be detrimental to others. There is a saying, "Only a serpent knows a serpent's mind." Likewise, the world beyond is apprehended only by the person with aspiration. Even though it may not actually harm your spirit, carefully avoid possessing anything that will foster greed in others.

Those who adopt the life of a recluse, however indifferent in manner, seeking to say the nembutsu in the peace of
their hearts, must relinquish even the implements of the supramundane Dharma. With provisions for subsistence in this world, then, their wariness must be all the greater, and they must learn to live in a poverty of things. Even in simply hiding their nakedness and eking out their day-to-day living, they should manage in a way that, befitting a hermit, leaves unstained their aspiration to be free.

KYÔBUTSU

44

Kyobutsu-bo once said:

I have long embraced the truth that death is not to be feared. Strengthened by this, I find that when my condition in this present sickness takes a slight turn for the better, I'm taken aback by the thought that I'm not yet to die. So monks, put an end even to hopes of having a better pack. Now it may seem but a trifle, but in the end it will grow into a lingering attachment to samsaric life. Abide with vigilance in an aversion of this self and embrace the aspiration for death.

The attainment of the world beyond lies simply in contemplating quietly.

The old warriors of the eastern provinces used to say that if they stayed long in the capital, they'd lose their nerve. This reveals, likewise, the wisdom of those who aspire to the world beyond. Bodily repose and lucidity of mind come only after you have eradicated even the slightest concern for fame and profit. Many of those who dwell in solitude cling to their way of life, believing that their minds are pure because they pass their time wholly in intoning verses in their still and tasteful retreats: they are deceiving themselves.

warriors. Samurai from the eastern provinces (Bandô) were known for their ferocity. It is said that the Taira warriors, after gaining ascendancy in Kyoto, took up the ways of courtiers and lost their fighting spirit. Thus, the Minamoto clan established their “bivouac government” in the east at Kamakura, far from the old capital, after seizing power.

still and tasteful (yûgen). Literally, “dark,” “subtle,” or “difficult to grasp or express.” This term, which originally characterized the apprehension of profound truth in Taoist and Buddhist writings, was used to describe an aesthetic ideal, a sense of mystery and refinement harboring great depth of feeling. In medieval times, it came to include a cultivated appreciation of the spiritual loneliness and poverty of the hermit’s thatched hut, which was regarded as a source of artistic and religious sensibility.

45

Hopeless is the hijiri who, clad in a robe of paper, takes pains to straighten the creases.

MYÔHEN

46

Someone asked Myôhen, “Is study beneficial when its sole aim is attainment of the world beyond?”
He answered, “At first, your thoughts may be on the world beyond, but later it will come to be entirely for esteem and possessions.”

Myōhen often said:

Personally, I regret the day 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 twigs and brushwood for my meals, but quite the opposite, I have become known as a “man of the Way” and live in splendid circumstances: this is altogether at odds with my original intention. And unaware of my inmost feelings, people see my secluded life here and think it worthy of admiration.

This he would say with a wry expression.

Although I should repent my bodily and mental acts of evil with the karma of speech—the nembutsu—I waste my time with vanities.

Heaven and earth answer no practical purpose, yet embrace all things. Thus is the person of the Way. In becoming one of no consequence whatsoever lies the supreme consequence.

Wholly aspiring to the Buddha Way is not an involved task. Allow yourself time, putting the Way before all else and setting your mind to no other business: this is the primary step.

People who take up scholarly study—though they may have long yearned for the world beyond—usually lose their aspiration.

Gedatsu, vexed by the susceptibility of his palate, deliberately watered any carefully prepared food.
Shinkai crouched but never sat. Asked about this, he replied: “Where in the three realms and the six paths can I settle back with an easy mind?”

three realms. The spheres of samsaric existence where ignorant beings transmigrate, including the world of desires (living things dominated by lust and greed), the world of form (ethereal matter, where beings are free of desire), and the world on non-form (realm of lofty meditative states).

six paths. The various modes of existence in the world of desires: hell, famished ghosts, beasts, asuras (warring demigods), human beings, and gods.

When you come to a landing just as the ferry is pulling away, there is only one thing to be done: just grab hold and get aboard.

If the crossing you seek traverses the river of passions surging through this life, then once you have encountered Amida’s Name there is nothing else to be done: just say the nembutsu, reverently entrusting yourself to it. None of us really realize how much we suffer because of our own calculating wisdom.

None of us genuinely perceive that it’s saying Namu-amida-butsu that is crucial, without deliberating whether we are wholehearted in it or not.

There are none who have awakened an authentic entrusting of themselves to the Buddha. Who regrets the time taken up with other tasks because it keeps them from practice for the world beyond?

No one really realizes that the mind of highest good is that possessing the thought, “Buddha, save me!”

Extraordinarily rare are those who, casting aside the desires and ambitions that torment the spirit, seek to devote themselves wholly to saying the Name with their hearts and minds unadorned, just as they are. No one has truly wakened the aspiration just to say the nembutsu
single-heartedly, becoming one who does not even distinguish between black and white.

Do we realize what power is embodied in the mystery of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow? We are all busy fashioning our places in the world, neither reflecting on the evil of our existence nor turning a thought to the power of the Buddha and the Dharma. Thus our evil karma runs on unchecked. This is a miserable attitude.

KENSHŌ

59

The desire to hasten toward death is the greatest aid to attaining the world beyond.

KENSHŌ

60

It used to be that, in their aspiration for the world beyond, the senior monk became a novice, the sage a fool, the prosperous man poor, and the person of accomplishments unschooled. But now, people are completely different.

I was long on Mount Kōya, spending my youth and adulthood there, but I learned not a single Sanskrit letter. An inured renunciation of all desire for wealth and esteem requires that you turn your back even on the skills you have. Going about acquiring others, then, is preposterous. For more than thirty years I have made a habit of abstaining from such knowledge.

When you have genuinely let go of your attachments, you show no sign of having done so. Thus, casting off concern for reputation and possessions does not mean you must feel constrained about keeping the company of other practicers or obtaining a single robe of paper to wear. This level of involvement and material comfort is an aid to the world beyond.

An infant turns to its mother without any idea why. There is simply an utter reliance. Entrusting yourself to the Name is like this.

KENSHŌ

61

The eighty thousand teachings of the Dharma all expound one word: death. Keep death in mind, and you will naturally acquire a grasp of all eighty thousand.

SHŌKŌ

62

When the late Jakugan-bō was confined to his sickbed, Kyōsen-bō gave this advice:
People who practice horseback archery learn a full-dress etiquette and ceremony that accompanies shooting. When it comes down to the actual day of contest, however, they are so filled with eagerness to shoot that once they have sprung forth on their horses, they forget everything but the desire to get their arrows to the target.

Likewise, you have been engrossed with one thing and another concerning the world beyond and have studied ceaselessly, but already you lie sick. Now you must embrace the aspiration to attain birth, saying the nembutsu with no other thought.

Once you have taken refuge in the Primal Vow and entrusted yourself to the Name, it is merely the work of the fawning demon within you to spend time sitting before a text, thinking you should read it because its teaching conforms with the nembutsu.

I once told Shimbutsu-bō:

When people in secular life like blacksmiths and carpenters train apprentices in the ways of their trade, they do not necessarily teach in complete detail. Nevertheless, if the novice becomes competent at the essentials, they say that the way has been transmitted.

Similarly, even if you have nothing to show for these two or three years you’ve spent with me except that, as one who has broken away from the world, you do not lose sight of impermanence, then my original purpose will have been fulfilled.
67

Those mindful of the world beyond recognize that they should own nothing, not so much as a crock for salted bran.

SHUNJÔ

*salted bran* (jinta). Fermented pastes made with beans, rice and salt have long been a common part of the Japanese diet (see section 47). A paste made with rice bran is the coarsest such food, and although at times apparently eaten, is now used chiefly for pickling vegetables.

The setting for this comment is given in *Collection of Sand and Pebbles* (IV, 9): The Tendai prelate Kenshin held a forty-eight day meeting to discuss Genshin's *Essentials for Birth* with many eminent monks (this appears to be a variant report of the celebrated "Ohara discussion" [*Ôhara dangi*]; see note on Kenshin). After it was over and the others had left, Honen asked Shunjô to state the crux of the discussion. Shunjô replied: "Know that anything on which your attachments abide—though it be but a crock for salted bran—should be cast away." Kenshin, calling it the finest comment to come out of the entire session, was moved to tears of joy.

68

As might be expected, one mark of aging is a growing awareness that the Pure Land is drawing near and that attainment of birth is definitely settled. Put simply, when you genuinely aspire for birth, it makes no difference whether you are walking, standing, sitting, or reclining while you utter the nembutsu. In just wholeheartedly saying "Namu-amida-butsu, Namu-amida-butsu" whether waking or sleeping, standing or sitting, rising or retiring, you have all your travel provisions for the unfailing attainment of birth.

Learning may also seem important, but it is not really necessary. In fact, although you may clarify one doubtful issue through study, in the process you will stumble on other questions and so spend a lifetime resolving doubts, without a chance to utter the nembutsu in the peace of your heart. Learning, rather than being an aid to nembutsu, is a formidable obstruction.

JÔGAN

69

Seeking the world beyond is no different from carrying out your life on the paths of this world. This day is already at dusk. How easy it is to be slack in your labor. The year too drifts to a close; a lifetime is elapsing without any sense of urgency. At night, lie down and lament this meaningless procession of hours, and at dawn awaken and resolve to endeavor in your practice to the day’s end.

When slovenly and negligent, set your mind on the transience of samsaric existence. When wayward thoughts take hold in your heart, raise your voice and utter the nembutsu. When confronted by demons and imps, arouse your compassion and try to help them; do not feel you must overcome them.

Poverty is the seed of awakening that day by day advances us along the Buddha-path. Possessions are the chains of birth-and-death, and night after night they move us to further evil.

ANONYMOUS
70
Of three-hundred sixty days a year, not one gives respite from the law of impermanence. Think of each hour, day and night, as none other than the time of death.
GEDATSU

71
My wish is to be wisdomless.
MYÖHEN

72
All through life, live in reproach of your life.
KYÖSEN

73
The meaning of the nembutsu path lies in clinging to no meaning.
SHÖSHIN

74
Attaining birth in the Pure Land is our gravest concern, effortlessly resolved.
MYÖZEN

75
Someone asked Kyōjitsu-bō, "I say the Name knowing utterance to be the key to attaining birth, but my thoughts wander off to the moors and mountains of this world and I say it merely from my lips. What should I do?"
He answered, "When you set out with the idea of coming here, surely you did not think 'I'm going there,' 'I'm going there' with every step. You made your way here with your mind full of unrelated thoughts. Nevertheless, you did not cease walking and you have arrived.
"In this way, once you have wakened the aspiration for birth into the Land of Bliss, if you continue saying the Name of Amida to the end of your life, then even though your mind strays while doing so you will unfailingly attain birth."

76
Since his hermitage was inconvenient in floor plan and construction, Kū-amidabutsu of Mount Kōya remodeled it in his mind, commenting that it would be good if
slightly re-done. When someone offered to have the alterations made, however, he replied, "No, don't touch it. This way it is an aid to renunciation. If I found it pleasant and became attached to it, it would serve no purpose whatever."

**77**

Nothing is of greater moment than realizing that birth in the Land of Bliss is simple. Here, in essence, lies the central point of the Pure Land way. When you become aware of the ease of attaining birth, then it is indeed so. Nevertheless, modern scholars have produced a hodge-podge of conflicting doctrines, and because of the profundity of the sacred teaching, it is now all but impossible to distinguish true from erroneous. Hōnen's words, however, were free of this difficulty.

—— ZENSHŌ

**78**

At a shrine of Mount Hiei, a young court lady disguised herself as a priestess. In the middle of the night, after everyone had retired, she beat out clear raps on a drum before the shrine of Jūzenji, singing with perfect lucidity of heart: "Let it be as it may. Please, please . . . ."

After persistent questioning, she explained, "When the transience of samsaric existence fills my mind, I say: Let the things of this world be as they may. Please bring me to the world beyond!"

—— SHINCHŌ

**79**

To chant the Liturgy of Praise or other hymns and gather people for sermons, even at a temple secluded in the woods, is likely to be detrimental.

—— ZENSHŌ

Liturgy of Praise (J. Rokuji raisan). Also known as Hymns of Birth in the Pure Land (J. Ojōraisan). Hymns by Shan-tao arranged to be chanted at six times during the day: dawn, midday, sunset, evening, midnight and early morning.

**80**

Anxiously facing winter without adequate clothing, I decided to descend Mount Kōya. But near the Great Gate I came on a deer, its fur new-grown into a winter coat, and turned back to dwell on the mountain.

—— HARIMA

Deer were regarded as possessing magical powers (see note on the cover illustration) and hijiri often used their pelts for clothing.
I have seen a hijiri heartened to learn that provisions had run out. For that leanness when the smoke of the cooking hearth dies away holds what it truly means to be a hermit.

ANONYMOUS

There is a three-point oral tradition regarding reclusion. First, do not continue to live in the same place. Second, do not dwell where other aspirants have built their huts. Third, do not ostentatiously reform your accustomed way of life with the idea that you have now abandoned the world.

KYÖJITSU

Do not stand conspicuous in people’s eyes, like crimson leaves dotting the far hillside or a single tree in a field: the best hijiri are bamboo in a brake.

JI-AMIDABUTSU OF SHIMOTSUMURA

Wakening aspiration for enlightenment is best accomplished by stealth.

HÔHEN

Long ago I met Myöhen and, upon being initiated in the eighteen elements of practice, requested instruction in the samâdhi of the Sanskrit characters in a lunar ring. Whereupon the master admonished me: “Do not cherish the thought of becoming learned or wise. Even Śâkyamuni, when performing practices for Buddhahood, was neither scholar nor sage. He was an aspirant for enlightenment who sacrificed himself to learn the second half of a gatha and cast away his life to feed his body to a tigress. Of what use, then, are abstruse teachings? It is the aspiration for enlightenment that is paramount.”

Although permission to receive instruction in the ring-samadhi was then granted, I felt drawn to abstain from learning it.

GANSHÔ

eighteen elements (jûhachî dô). Elementary forms of Shingon practice—including self-purification, preparation of the hall, adornment of the altar, offerings, etc.—performed using eighteen kinds of mudrâ (manual signs).

samâdhi of Sanskrit characters (ji-rin kan). Meditative practice in which one forms, on the mental image of a lunar ring, various patterns
of Sanskrit characters representing the five elements (earth, water, fire, wind, air) or the Buddhas and bodhisattvas one is worshiping.

gatha. Refers to a hymn taught in the Nirvana Sutra: "All things are impermanent;/They arise and then perish./When arising and perishing comes to an end,/That tranquility is bliss." When Sakyamuni, in a previous life, was performing bodhisattva practices in the Himalayas, the god Indra took on the form of a man-eating demon, appeared near him, and uttered the first half of the verse. In order to be taught the second half, Sakyamuni agreed to offer his body to the demon after hearing it.
tigress. In a previous life, Sakyamuni offered his body to a tigress to keep it from eating its cubs.

To live as a hermit is to be untrammeled by things of the world; it is like drawing a length of bamboo out from a dense thicket.

KYÔBUTSU

When they were with Kyôbutsu-bô in Kyoto, Kakumei-bô said to Shôren-bô, "The conduct of practicers in former times differs from what we see today. Before, what hijiri monks discussed among themselves was whether or not they personally aspired for the world beyond. Now they speak of capacity for scholarship as the crux of what it means to be an aspirant."

"Yes," said Kyôbutsu-bô, "the lives of practicers have changed utterly."

As you pursue your vagrant life of alms-begging and practice, carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of various places as sites for your final moments. Decide on one beforehand where you will be able to exert your efforts for the world beyond with a tranquil heart, leaving behind all self-attachment and concern for reputation. People lacking aspiration are devoid of such foresight.

ANONYMOUS

final moments. Many nembutsu practicers believed that one's condition in one's final moments determined one's future, and in particular, whether one could attain birth in the Pure Land. It was taught that Amida would come for those who were mindful of him and said the nembutsu at the very end. Such practicers therefore performed the nembutsu to prepare themselves for the time of death and to eradicate the effects of any wrongdoing, and they sought to arrange their surroundings so that they would remain undistracted at the time of death.

KYÔBUTSU

In subduing sexual craving, contemplation of bodily corruption or impermanence is secondary. Poverty is supreme. Hence the late Master Hônen said, "I am not excessively troubled, for I put poverty and lowliness foremost. It is because practicers these days are well off that they find restraint difficult."

The master never spoke of relations between men and women, even in passing.

KYÔBUTSU
Honen, though teaching that only saying the nembutsu was necessary to attain birth and that whether or not one observed precepts was irrelevant, himself maintained basic precepts, including celibacy, throughout his life.

90

Kyōbutsu-bō said, to teach a fellow practicer the ideal stance of one seeking the world beyond:

May my daily existence be mean, my heart exalted.

91

A glimpse of the venerable Myōzen the other day overturned my previous assumptions. For I had been pondering sententiously the plainest of matters. Indeed, nothing surpasses giving yourself up joyfully to saying the nembutsu.

KYŌBUTSU

92

When scholar-monks of various schools are summoned to the imperial court for a service, they spend the time before it starts conferring with each other about matters of mutual concern. Up to the time of Emperor Ichijō the way of attaining the world beyond was all their discussion, for it seems their study of esoteric and exoteric writings was solely for liberation from samsaric existence. From the reign of Emperor Shirakawa they began speaking of scriptural texts. By the time of Emperor Toba worldly affairs had become their sole interest. That was when I served at court. Up to that time the discussions were at least recorded. Now not even that is done.

ANONYMOUS

Emperor Ichijō. 980–1011; reigned 986–1011.
Emperor Shirakawa. 1053–1129; reigned 1072–1086.
Emperor Toba. 1103–1156; reigned 1107–1123.
The last two emperors were powerful figures after abdication, during the period of the "cloister government" (insei) when political struggle intensified and the power of the aristocratic court declined.

93

For the venerable monks of old, the great issue throughout their lives was whether or not they had the aspiration for enlightenment. Those of later times fell to discussing texts. Now they speak of nothing but their tales of war.

HONGAN OF HÔDÔ-IN

tales of war. Hijiri monks employed a variety of stories in their sermons, and the struggle between the Taira and Minamoto warrior clans provided graphic material for teaching the impermanence of life and the vanity of worldly fortune. As itinerant storytellers, they played an important role in teaching the recent history of their turbulent era to people of the countryside, and the present passage is often cited in discussions of the origins and religious coloration of war narratives such as the Tales of the Heike. These tales were often chanted to the accompaniment of the lute by bard-like "lute monks" (biwa hōshi), to melodies reminiscent of Tendai chant (shômyô, see sections 40 and 107).
Hongan of Hōdō-in. Hōdō-in was a temple at Rengedani on Mount Kōya. Hongan ("Primal Vow") was used as a generic name for nembutsu hijiri on Mount Kōya; the person referred to here is unidentified.

Having renounced worldly life or become a recluse means that you have resolved, at bottom, to meet death at the road’s edge or in a field. Bear this in mind, and you will never for a moment envy others, however disheartening your experience. But even in this, you must rely on the Buddha’s power.

MYŌHEN

There are three hindrances to emancipation. First, cherished possessions—including sacred images for the altar and copies of scripture for daily use. Second, holding your life dear. Third, ignoring the instructions of a true teacher.

GEDATSU

The dwelling of the person seeking the world beyond should not exceed three ken in area: one for the altar room, one for living space, and one for mundane tasks.

A RECORD OF SAICHŌ

ken. The area of a square about six feet on a side. A hut of three ken would correspond with that of Kamo no Chōmei, which had outside porches for household tasks.

From the time I first abandoned the world, I have made desire for an early death my study. Having continued now for more than thirty years, I never forget it even for a moment.

Since I hope for death soon, when I sense that my life will last even slightly longer, I am desolate and seized by misgivings. In this way, I put to an end all impulses to have even a better pack. Is not the important thing to reject samsaric existence?

KENSHŌ

Kyōshin, who settled in Kako, built no fence to the west: toward the Land of Bliss the gate lay open. Nor, befittingly, did he enshrine an image of worship; he kept no sacred books. In appearance not a monk nor yet worldly, he faced the west always, saying the nembutsu, and was like one to whom all else was forgotten.
To speak deeply about the meaning of the nembutsu is, on the contrary, a sign of shallowness. Even though your reasoning not go deep, if only your aspiration is deep, you are certain to attain birth.

Hônen

The way to say the nembutsu lies in having no "way." If you just say it earnestly, without taking account of your conduct or the good and evil of your heart, you will attain birth.

Hônen

Shôkô refused to engage in scholarship, saying:
Even those long devoted to learning abandoned it in favor of the nembutsu. In a person's all so fugitive moments, it is meaningless to neglect the nembutsu and study instead. Such activity is best left to the spare time that may remain after saying the Name.

Gyôgi taught: "Always be a companion to others and not yourself at center." In acting as a support to others lies true equanimity of heart.

Ji-Âmidabutsu of Shimotsumura

A hijiri cautioned his fellow practicer:
Do not hunger after possessions. Accumulating is easy, but the important thing is letting go.

Shimotsumura

Nin-amidabutsu forgot how to write Chinese characters and Japanese script; he used only the simplest syllabary.

Shimotsumura

However valiantly you have wakened the aspiration for enlightenment, take your active practice down a peg or two. Give heart the higher place, practice the lower.

Kôrenja
I had to rebuke some fellow practicers:
You’re like those who add baggage to the hijiri’s pack in order to strengthen their footing.

Kyōbutsu

Kyōbutsu-bō, in his last illness, three days before death, said:
The venerable Myōhen told me, “Just hold to the thought, ‘Buddha, save me!’ All else is useless.”
I never took this seriously, but the truth of it comes to me now. Even contemplating bodily corruption is meaningful only in normal circumstances, not when facing death.

Anoku-bō of Tōjōji said, “To learn the scriptural passages as used in ceremonial chant is to turn them into monkey-music.” I see now what he meant.

monkey-music. Literal translation of sarugaku, a term for popular entertainments, including the precursor of nō drama, often performed at temples and shrines.

While performing practice in Shikoku, Shinkai wrote on the wall of a farmhouse:

Say the nembutsu without becoming a “person of the nembutsu” and you will attain birth.

Someone asked which was better: to be anxious about birth, reflecting on one’s lack of genuine aspiration, or to feel convinced that one’s birth is certain, without examining one’s way of life.
I answered: “Long ago I met the lay-priest Ogura. He explained that birth is settled at the very first moment faith is awakened; it is simply that, since one’s span has not run out, one’s physical existence has yet to perish. His own attainment of birth was resplendent. I have heard that lay-priest Kumagai said much the same thing.”

Zenshō-bō also said, “Birth into the Pure Land is settled in the same sense that death is the inevitable end of all living things.” He attained a birth that was marvelous in all respects.

These two or three men—Ogura, Kumagai, Zenshō-bō—directly received Master Hōnen’s guidance and followed his teaching. It is imperative, then, that we abide in the realization that our birth is firmly settled.

(This was Gyōsen’s response to a question from Jishin.)
Hongaku-bō of Chinzei asked Myōhen, “It is said that uttering the Name when you are distracted does not constitute good; you must first still the mind and then recite it. How should I go about this?”

Myōhen answered, “That statement applies to the most adept. Inferior practicers like myself are wholly incapable of ridding the heart and mind of distractions. Hence, without concern about whether we are agitated or not, we simply take a rosary with a sturdy strand and turn the beads, saying the Name. To wait expectantly for the moment the mind is concentrated would mean never being able to say the nembutsu.”

Honen often said, “Oh, may I splendidly attain birth this time!”

Overhearing this, Jōgan-bō said, “If even you speak with such uncertainty, how anxious must others feel about birth.”

Then Honen smiled and said, “Until the very moment we mount the lotus-seat, how can we put an end to such thoughts?”

Awanosuke’s nembutsu and my own are exactly the same. We have nothing in mind aside from “Save me, Amida Buddha!”

Shan-tao’s teaching that we will attain birth through saying the Name “ten times or even once” gives us the essentials of trust in the nembutsu; his statement that we should “not abandon it from moment to moment” gives us the essentials of practice.

Shan-tao’s teaching. Concerning “ten times or even once”: ‘By saying the Name to the end of one’s life or down to but ten times or even once, a person easily attains birth through the power of the Buddha’s Vow’ (Hymns of Birth in the Pure Land, T47, 429a). Concerning “moment to moment,” see Passage 26.
Someone said to Myōhen, “For the brief period I engage in study I want to decrease my recitations of the Name.”

Myōhen replied, “The end of study lies nowhere but in the practice of nembutsu. If you intend to decrease your utterances, I cannot teach you.”

In my heart is the thought, “Amida Buddha, save me!” and on my lips is its utterance.

The late Master Hōnen said, “When you say the nembutsu for the sake of attaining birth, the great significance of this act fills your heart and, thus encouraged, you wish to utter it always. With this, know that you are already possessed of the three essential attitudes.”

Hōren said, “Please tell me frankly whether wisdom is essential for attaining birth, for if it is, I will devote myself to religious study. Or, if simply saying the Name is enough, I wish to know the reason for this.”

Hōnen answered, “The commentaries unequivocally affirm that saying the Name is the act that results in birth. They clearly state also that no distinction is made between the wise and the ignorant. Hence, the utterance of the Name is sufficient to attain birth. Rather than give yourself to study, wholeheartedly say the nembutsu. When you encounter Amida, Avalokiteśvara, and Mahāsthāmaprāta, what scriptural passage will not be plumbed? People who have yet to grasp the teaching of birth through the nembutsu should study it. But once they know it, they should lose no time for saying the Name by chasing after insignificant bits of wisdom.”

Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāta (J. Kanzeon, literally, “One who perceives the sounds of the world,” and Daiseishi, “One who has attained great power”). The bodhisattvas who accompany Amida Buddha, identified with compassion and wisdom, respectively. It is taught that they come at the point of death to take nembutsu practitioners to the Pure Land.

Even those who lack the three essential attitudes will come to attain them if they follow the ancient method of thinking perforce that their birth is firmly settled.
All things considered, the fundamental teaching of Pure Land Buddhism amounts to no more than the thought, "Amida Buddha, save me!"

In the course of life in this world, the unenlightened person will inevitably feel desire for esteem and wealth. The understanding and practice for birth into the Pure Land, however, must be wholly genuine and real.

After his attainment of birth, Honen appeared to Jushinbō of Miidera in a dream and answered his question: Though you ask, Amida Buddha is completely without appearances. One can only say the Name.

You need not set aside special periods for the nembutsu, but when your mind is concentrated—as when you intone the Name during the chanting of the Liturgy of Praise—carefully maintain the aspiration to see the Buddha before you.

special periods. For example, one-day or seven-day periods of constant nembutsu recitation. 

see the Buddha before you. Taught as the goal of nembutsu practice in some strains of the Pure Land teaching. On Mount Hiei, for example, practice of constant circumambulation of a statue of Amida while chanting the nembutsu was taught to culminate in seeing the Buddhas of the cosmos before one. This idea is related to the concept of attaining birth by seeing Amida at the moment of death and being taken to the Pure Land.

Smaller Sutra. One of the three major Pure Land sutras; also known as the Amida Sutra, the title of the more widely used of two Chinese translations.

When the time for midday worship came, Shōkō would break off whatever he was doing and immediately begin the chant of the Smaller Sutra and the recitation of hymns and nembutsu—even in the midst of a sermon, and though there might be but a few words remaining. It is said that the practicers gathered to hear him could not help but join in the hymns also.

Smaller Sutra. One of the three major Pure Land sutras; also known as the Amida Sutra, the title of the more widely used of two Chinese translations.
Someone asked, "The Contemplation Sutra teaches how one may see Amida Buddha's body and land. Should I do such meditations even if I practice utterance of the Name?"

Honen answered, "In the beginning I too performed such useless practices, but not any longer. I entrust myself solely to the utterance of the Name."

Jōgan

A person jumping over a ten-foot ditch will try to leap fifteen. Those aspiring for birth should attain the settled faith, and still continue their effort.

Honen

If you abide in an attitude of self-power, even saying the Name but a single time will be an expression of self-attachment. If you entrust yourself to Other Power, utterance after utterance, nembutsu after nembutsu, will be the manifestation of Other Power.

Honen

How lamentable it is that those who believe in causality are weak in their faith in Other Power, and those who believe in the Primal Vow do not acknowledge the law of causality. If you entrust yourself wholly to Amida's Vow and further believe in causation, you will be in accord with the Buddha's intent and will attain birth.

Nen'ā

causality. Buddhist tradition teaches that one reaps the fruits of one's own acts; good acts result in favorable life conditions in the future, and evil acts result in pain. Through the power of Amida's Vow, however, even those who have spent a lifetime in evil can attain birth in the Pure Land. These two assertions are not in contradiction because the Pure Land path, like all forms of Buddhism, is based on practice through which one's existence is transformed by the truth or reality expressed in the teachings. Pure Land Buddhism is distinctive in that the transformative practice has been accomplished by Amida Buddha, and it becomes the beings' own practice as the utterance of the Name.

Honen

With a heart free of deceit, I entrust myself to Amida's
Primal Vow, certain that I will attain birth. This is termed the three essential attitudes.

NEN'A

131

Be diligent in making yourself a hijiri. Of obstacles to birth, none exceed covetousness. Among the various forms of evil, the foremost is hunger for things.

GYÖSEN

132

If you truly desire to attain birth, just say the nembutsu, without becoming solicitous about others or involving yourself in sundry matters. You can hope to aid other sentient beings when you return to this defiled world from the Pure Land.

ANONYMOUS

Shinran states: “In our present lives, it is hard to carry out the desire to aid others, however much love and tenderness we may feel; hence, such compassion always falls short of fulfillment. Only the saying of the Name manifests the heart of great compassion that is replete and thoroughgoing” (Tannishō, 4).

133

Learn well the taste of the nembutsu!

KYÖJITSU

134

It is a great pulley that Amida has furnished!

CHIEF ABBOT KENSHIN

135

Those who revere Shan-tao should endeavor in no practice other than the Name. Nevertheless, they should accept as a matter of course those opportunities to do good that spontaneously present themselves and that do not become obstacles to the nembutsu. They should not find such activities distasteful, thinking they are to be rejected. But neither should they take them up in the time devoted to nembutsu, thinking it important to perform them.

JÖGAN

Shan-tao enumerates five forms of practice focusing on Amida Buddha as the “five right practices” for attaining birth: 1) sutra chanting, 2) contemplating Amida and the Pure Land, 3) worshiping Amida, 4) saying the Name, and 5) offering praise and homage to Amida. Of these, he singles out saying the Name as the “act of true settlement” of birth. This is the central act, and other good practices are taught as auxiliary or supportive of one’s nembutsu practice.
Although the Buddhist teaching states that virtues are best hidden, purposely making a show of foolishness is also a fault, one that will turn into indolence. It is like going to one's quarters instead of the practice hall and, because it is a place for sleep, soon dozing off in the midst of uttering the nembutsu. The auxiliary practices, then, are important for the encouragement they give the unenlightened, who are forever inclined to shiftlessness.

Jōgan

Those who aspire for the world beyond cease to do the things they want; for all that they desire in their hearts to do is wrong.

Anonymous

Once, when Kyōbutsu-bō was practicing in Ōshū, he was given lodging in a layman's house. He found that the walls and surrounding fences had all been allowed to fall into disrepair and asked about it. The owner explained, "I'm planning to move to the Renown County area."

Tears came to Kyōbutsu's eyes, and turning to his fellow practicers he said, "When aspiration fills the heart, a person naturally casts off attachments to this defiled world. This is a telling reply."

Renown County. Kyōbutsu takes the place name, in its literal meaning, as a reference to the Pure Land.

Followers of Kyōbutsu were speaking of what they wished for in the Pure Land way. One of them (Tsuchio Shirōtarō) said, "Plain words about attaining the world beyond unencumbered by doctrine."

Kyōbutsu, struck by this, exclaimed, "A superb thought! There is nothing to match that for getting to the quick."

Reclusion has nothing to do with harboring a deep aversion for humankind. And to fear people without cause also reflects a warped outlook. Rather, at the heart of abandoning the world lies a profound rejection of the craving for esteem and wealth.

Since all practicers in their foolishness find it difficult to manage alone, you would probably do well to associate with one or two others who do not arouse strong yearnings for fame and possessions. If the number increases, however, there are bound to be problems.

Anonymous
To part from the three evil courses and be born human is cause for great joy. Our position in the world may be wretched, but can it be worse than that of beasts? The household we are born in may be destitute, but our lot still surpasses that of famished ghosts. Our hopes and wishes may be frustrated, but this can hardly be compared with the pain in hell. Moreover, dwelling in this world consciously experiencing its sorrow is an opportunity to weary [of samsaric existence]. Be glad, therefore, at having been born a human being.

However shallow our trust, the Primal Vow itself is fathomless; if we simply entrust ourselves to it, then, we will unfailingly attain birth.

However spiritless our utterance of the nembutsu, if we but say it, we gain with certainty Amida's welcome at death. Vast are the virtues of the Primal Vow, so rejoice at having encountered it.

It is taught that delusional thinking is, by nature, the fundamental ground of foolish beings' existence. Apart from our delusional aversions and attachments, we have no mind. Up to the very point of death we will be foolish beings wholly possessed of delusional thoughts and feelings, but if we say the nembutsu in full awareness of this, we will be blessed with Amida's coming, and at the
moment we mount the lotus dais, our delusions will be overturned, becoming the mind of enlightenment.

The nembutsu emerging to utterance from our delusional thoughts is like a lotus blossom unstained by the mud. Do not doubt, therefore, that your attainment of birth is settled.

The teachings speak of three essential attitudes, four rules of practice, and so on, but these are all inherent and fulfilled in the thought that you will decidedly be born through Namu-amida-butsu. If you imagine that there is some abstruse matter apart from this, you will isolate yourself from the compassion of the two Honored ones, Sakyamuni and Amida, and slip through the net of the Primal Vow.

You may have carefully studied all the teachings that Sakyamuni taught during his lifetime, but if you entrust yourself to the nembutsu, then you should—by turning yourself into a foolish person ignorant of even a single written character, and becoming the same as the unlettered women and men who take religious orders while remaining at home—simply say the nembutsu with wholeness of heart, free of any pretensions to wisdom.
As testimony, I seal this with the imprint of my hands.

*The faith and practice taught in the Pure Land path are exhaustively stated on this single sheet of paper. I know no special doctrine whatsoever apart from what is written here. To keep erroneous doctrines from arising after my death, I have thus recorded my thoughts.*

Sealed: Genkū (Honen)

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Words on the Dharma in One Page
Myōhen’s *Isshi hōgo*

The virtuous masters of old were superbly accomplished in wisdom and the various forms of practice, and their deaths were splendid as they freely fulfilled their hearts’ desire.

Most teachers of the different schools at present, though they study texts, possess little resolution to achieve enlightenment. They use the Buddha’s words as a bridge for making their way in the world, and turn the sacred teachings into means for supporting their material existence. Thus, their training in ordinary times is wholly for the sake of esteem and profit, and while they idly debate between the accommodated teachings and the real, days and months pass swiftly by. Suddenly they find that the time of death is upon them, and know not what to do. Vacillating between saying the nembutsu and reciting mantras, they are overcome with anxiety. It is like rushing to dig a well when caught in a drought.

From ordinary times, then, set your thoughts wholly on the means by which to resolve the one great matter: breaking free from samsaric existence.
Biographical Notes

Anoku-bo. Unidentified. Tōjōji is said to have been in Hitachi province, in the Kantō region.

The term “-bo,” originally indicating a monk’s cell, came to signify monks themselves and was frequently added as an element in Buddhist names.

Awanosuke. Had been a fortune-teller living in Fushimi, south of Kyoto, and notorious for his love of wine and women. Once, while on his way to Harima province, he lost his way, and realizing that in the course of his life in this world also he needed a guide, took refuge in Honen, becoming a devoted follower. He began the custom of holding two rosaries of one hundred eight beads, using one as he recited the nembutsu and the other in keeping count; this is the origin of the double-stranded nenju. It is said that late in life he went to the Konjikido in Hiraizumi and there, while sitting with hands together in nembutsu, attained birth.

Chūren. Unidentified.

Bishop Eshin. Title for Genshin (942–1017), the first major Pure Land thinker in Japan. His father died when he was seven, and at the age of nine he embarked on monastic life at Mount Hiei. Quickly showed aptitude in Tendai studies, but rejecting worldly recognition and rewards, retired to a secluded temple on the mountain, Eshin-in at Yokawa, to dedicate himself to study and practice. Mastered a wide range of Tendai teachings and founded the Eshin branch of Tendai scholarship. The most influential of his numerous works, however, was Essentials for Birth, which encourages all people to reject mundane attachments and aspire for the Pure Land, and teaches various forms of practice for attaining birth, including utterance of the nembutsu.

Ganshō. Kamakura warrior Katsurayama Gōrō; Kōya hijiri.

Gedatsu (1155–1213). Also known as jōkei. Born into an influential branch of the Fujiwara clan; nephew of Myōhen. At the age of eight, began his Buddhist studies in Kōfukuji, the ancient and powerful Nara temple of the Hossō (consciousness-only) school. Took the tonsure at the age of eleven, and eventually gained renown for his scholarship, preaching, and saintly adherence to precepts. In 1192, disillusioned by the worldliness of the ecclesiastical establishment, he left Kōfukuji to take up a life of reclusion on nearby Mount Kasagi. There he devoted himself to study and discipline, and worshiped Maitreya Bodhisattva, the future Buddha, aspiring for birth into Maitreya’s pure land, Tuṣita heaven. In 1205, he wrote the “Kōfukuji Petition,” a request to the imperial court by established temples that Honen’s teaching be banned. This petition contributed to Honen’s exile in 1207.

Gyōgi (670–749). Renowned for his propagation of Buddhism during the Nara period; considered a forerunner of the wandering hijiri. Entered the Nara temple Yakushiji at the age of fifteen and studied the Hossō school. Practiced austerities in the mountains, then worked to transmit the teaching to common people. He traveled widely, establishing dōjō or seminaries and undertaking such projects as building roads and bridges, digging canals for irrigation, and founding clinics. His activities were recognized by Emperor Shōmu, who appointed him great archbishop (daisōjo), the highest clerical rank, and commissioned him to collect contributions from throughout the country for constructing the statue of Vairocana Buddha at Tōdaiji. Regarded as a bodhisattva during his lifetime.

Gyōsen (d. 1278). First studied Shingon teachings under Jōhen (1166–1224), a Shingon scholar-monk with a strong appreciation of Honen’s teaching. Became accomplished in meditative practices; later turned to the nembutsu. Said to have been a disciple of both Shōkō and Zenshō. Lived in Kōzuke province (Gumma) and taught those who came to him. Compiled Biographies of Birth through the Nembutsu (Nembutsu ōden), which consists of sketches of nembutsu practitioners, including a number from the warrior class in his area, focusing on experiences at the time of death.
Harima. Unidentified. May simply indicate a hijiri from Harima province (modern Hyōgo).

Hōnen (1133–1212). Also known as Genkū. Established the Jōdo school based on the sole practice of saying the nembutsu. When he was nine, his father, a provincial samurai official, was struck down in a property struggle; his dying wish was that his son not seek revenge. Hōnen was forced to flee to a local temple for safety. In 1145, he went to Mount Hiei, and two years later, at the age of fifteen, was ordained. He devoted himself to basic Tendai studies for several years. It was a time, however, when Enryakuji and its soldier-monks were embroiled in political conflicts; therefore, in 1150, Hōnen retired to Kurodani, an isolated area of the mountain which served as a retreat for Pure Land practice. There he studied under Eiku. In 1156, went for a time to Nara to study the Pure Land teachings of the older schools. In 1175, on reading a commentary on the Contemplation Sutra by the Tang dynasty master Shan-tao, awakened to the attainment of birth through simply saying the nembutsu entrusting oneself to Amida's Vow. Finding the Tendai Pure Land practices unnecessary, he left his life of nearly three decades on Mount Hiei and descended to Kyoto, settling at the foot of the eastern hills. Taught the path of nembutsu to people of all levels of society, attracting numerous disciples. Criticism from the established temples gradually mounted, until he was exiled from the capital and his teaching banned by imperial order in 1207. Pardoned in 1211; returned to Kyoto, where he died in 1212.

Hongaku-bō. Unidentified. The name is found in the lineage of Ryoikan's Chōrakuji branch of the Jōdo school, which states that Hongaku lived in Kyushu where he spread the teaching.

Hōken (1146–1228). Also known as Shinkū. From a family of high court officials. At the age of twelve, began Buddhist studies at Kurodani under Eikū, a master of Tendai Pure Land teachings and the "quickly perfecting precepts" (endori-kai). Hōken was a fellow student, and after Eikū's death, Shinkū became his earliest disciple, establishing the lineage of Eikū-Genkū (Hōken)-Shinkū. In 1204, Shinkū wrote the "Seven Article Pledge" with which Hōken's following responded to criticism of their conduct from Mount Hiei, and after Hōken's exile in 1207, he became the leader of the remaining movement, laying the foundation for the later Jōdo school. He attended Hōken after his return to Kyoto, becoming custodian of his remains and belongings, and worked to maintain the movement amid periodic attacks from Mount Hiei. Among his students was Myōzen.

Jakugan-bō. Disciple of Myōhen; lived on Mount Kōya.

Ji-amidabutsu. Unidentified. Shimotsumura is in modern Wakayama prefecture.

The use of names ending "-amidabutsu" (Amida Buddha) among nembutsu hijiri is commonly traced to Shunjō, who called himself "Nama-amidabutsu" to encourage disciples to say the Name. However, there is evidence of earlier usage among monks practicing yūzū-nembutsu.

Jien (1155–1225). Ranking Tendai prelate and one of the foremost men of letters of his age. Son of regent Fujiwara Tadamichi. Entered monastic life at the age of eleven; eventually served as chief abbot of Enryakuji on Mount Hiei. Known as a historian (author of Gukanshō, in which he is critical of Hōken's following) and prolific poet (see section 36). Brother of regent Kujō Kanezane, one of Hōken's main supporters.

Jishin (d. 1297?). Disciple of Nen'a.

Jōgan (1168–1251). Also known as Shūgen. Born into the Fujiwara clan, the son of a high minister. Resided at Ninnaji, where he studied the Shingon school, gaining knowledge of traditional learning concerning Sanskrit characters. Converted to Tendai before finally becoming a disciple of Hōken and retiring to an isolated temple in the Daigoji compound. Later moved to a hermitage at Takedani, near Kiyomizu. An incident in which he recommends Shingon dharani over the nembutsu to benefit the dead is told in Essays in Idleness, section 222.

Jūshin-bō. Two biographies for monks of this name survive. (1) Also known as Kakuyu or Shutsu'a (1158–1233). Son of a scholar of Chinese classics; studied Tendai esoteric teachings at Miidera. Later, heard the nembutsu teaching from Hōken. About the age of forty, retired to a hermitage in the northern part of Kyoto city and taught the attainment of birth in the Pure Land through various practices. Hōken's disciple Kakumei-bō Chōsai studied under Jūshin after Hōken's death and...
spread his teaching. (2) Also known as Kakken; eminent Tendai monk, brother of Hören-bó Shinkü. It is not known which figure is referred to here, or whether they are indeed different monks.

Kakumei-bó (1184–1266). Also known as Chōsai. Son of the lord of Iyo (modern Ehime) Fujiwara Kuniaki. Went to Kyoto at the age of nine and studied Chinese classics. At the age of nineteen, became a monk and studied under Hönen. As a close attendant of the aging master, he accompanied him into exile in 1207, and returned with him to the capital in 1211. After Hönen’s death, studied widely, including precepts and Tendai meditation practices; also long practiced zazen under Zen master Dōgen. Founded a temple in his native Shikoku. Devoted his later years to writing and lecturing, living at Kubonji in northern Kyoto. There he attracted a number of disciples; Gyōnen, prominent Kegon scholar and chronicler of the Pure Land streams of the period, heard his lectures on Shan-tao’s Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra. However, his branch of the Pure Land school, though conciliatory toward other schools in that it recognized attainment of birth through various practices and not nembutsu alone, soon declined.

Kenshin (1130–1192). Monk of the Eshin branch of Tendai. Son of the lord of Mimasaka (modern Okayama) Fujiwara Akiyoshi. Went to Mount Hiei while still a child and gained high rank and reputation as a scholar of exoteric and esoteric teachings. At the age of forty-three, however, he retired to a secluded life of practice at Ohara, north of Kyoto. In 1186, he is said to have invited Hönen to a gathering with scholar-monks of various schools in order to discuss the teaching of the sole practice of nembutsu. Participants included, among the monks mentioned in Plain Words, Myōhen, Gedatsu-bó Jōkei, and Shunju-bó Chōgen. Deeply impressed by Hönen’s message, Kenshin abandoned other practices and devoted himself to the nembutsu, participating in sessions of constant recitation with twelve fellow aspirants. In 1190, he was appointed to the office of chief abbot (zasu) of Enryakuji.

Kenshō-bó. Nembutsu hijiri who practiced on Mount Koya, then retired to Matsukage-yama (Shōin) in the hills of Yamashina, southeast of Kyoto, where many monks of Myōhen’s lineage lived (Gorai, Kōya hijiri, p. 226).

Kū-amidabutsu. Name taken by Myōhen after meeting Hönen (section 4) and converting to his teaching.

Kumagai (1138–1207). Also known as Rensei. Gained fame as a fierce warrior during the struggle between the Taira and the Minamoto. Born a samurai of the Taira clan named Jiro Naozane; son of the head of the Kumagai district in Musashi province (modern Saitama). With his father, served Minamoto Yoritomo. In 1192, after losing a boundary dispute, renounced worldly life and studied under Hönen, becoming a devoted follower. With a warrior’s directness, he constantly recited the nembutsu and avoided turning his back toward the west in his daily activities. Said to have predicted the day of his death and achieved birth in the Pure Land before many witnesses. The legend of his slaying of the Taira youth Atsumori and subsequent revulsion from violence is one of the best known chapters of the Tales of the Heike.

Kyōbutsu. From Makabe in Hitachi province in eastern Japan. Nothing is known of his Buddhist training, but from information in Plain Words, he seems to have become a Kōya hijiri and to have met Myōhen when about the age of forty, becoming an important disciple. He also had associations with Hönen. Perhaps roughly contemporaneous with Shinran (Gorai, Bukkyō bungaku, p. 208).

Kyōjitsu. Also known as Enkai. Practiced Tendai on Mount Hiei and later turned to Pure Land teachings under Hönen’s disciple Ryūkan.

Kyōrenja (1199–1281). Also known as Nyō’a. Originally studied the doctrine of ichinen (literally, “one thought-moment” or “one utterance”), which emphasizes the mind with which the nembutsu is said. In 1214, however, he attended the memorial service on the third anniversary of Hönen’s death, and on hearing a sermon by Seikaku (1176–1235), an advocate of diligent recitation throughout life, converted. Went to Kyushu to study under Shōkō, becoming one of his leading disciples. At the age of thirty-eight, after Shōkō’s death, went to Kamakura and actively spread the teaching. Author of several commentaries. Also see the note on the cover illustration.

Names ending in -renja (“lotus society”) were adopted by Pure Land Buddhists identifying themselves with the White Lotus Society, a group of monk and lay aspirants formed in China by Hui-yuan (J. Eon) in the
fifth century. Nembutsu recitation as a member of a fellowship was a widespread form of practice in the Heian and Kamakura periods.

Kyozen-bō. Of Hitachi province (modern Ibaraki). Disciple of Honen; later studied under Myōhen on Mount Kōya.

Kyošin (d. 866). Early Heian-period figure who originally trained at Kōfukuji in Nara, becoming an respected scholar-monk. Aspiring for birth in the Pure Land, however, he decided to abandon his priestly accomplishments. Made a wandering pilgrimage throughout Japan, eventually settling near the village of Kako, in present Hyōgo prefecture. There he abandoned the monk’s life, building a thatched hut and taking a wife. He lived in poverty, working fields and carrying baggage for travelers, and passed thirty years in utterance of the nembutsu. He was a forerunner of the Kamakura-period nembutsu practitioners, and his story is found in Konjaku monogatari and other sources. Shinran, in a record of his sayings, is quoted, “I follow the example of the shami Kyošin” (Gaijashō, compiled in 1337), and Ippen, when seriously ill, sought to travel to Kyōshin’s grave to die.

Myōhen (1142–1224). Also known as Kū-amidabutsu. Entered Tōdai-ji after his father, the influential counselor of state Fujiwara Michinori, was killed in the Heiji Rising in 1159. Studied the Sanron school and esoteric Buddhism. Gaining renown for his learning, was invited to lecture at the annual Vimalakirti session at Kōfukuji and received the title “Master of Precepts,” but rejecting worldly pride and esteem, retired to Mount Kōmyō, a temple between Nara and Kyoto used for recluse Pure Land practice by Tōdaiji monks. Soon seeking further distance from the secular world and deeper study of esoteric Buddhism, went to Mount Kōya around 1173. Lived at Renge-zammaiin in a secluded valley known as Rengedani; this small temple became known as “the hermitage” (go-anjitsu, see section 76). Many recluse monks gathered around him to perform nembutsu practices under his guidance, and he is recognized as the founder of the Rengedani hijiri and a leading figure in the formation of the Kōya hijiri who roamed the countryside during this period. Though he adamantly refused the clerical rank of bishop (sōzu), he was known by this title. The encounter in section 4 was his first with Honen. It is said to have taken place at Shitennoji in Osaka and to have decisively altered Myōhen’s nembutsu practice.

Myōzen (1167–1242). Tendai scholar-monk; born into the Fujiwara clan, son of a high court official. Studied exoteric and esoteric teachings on Mount Hiei under Kōshin (section 134) and others. Built the Bishamon-dō in northern Kyoto where he lived in reclusion; attained the high clerical rank of hōin (Seal of Dharma). At first opposed Honen’s teaching, but after Honen’s death was converted through an encounter with Honen (section 35) and through reading Honen’s Passages on the Nembutsu Selected in the Primal Vow (Senjakushū).

Nen’ia (or Nenna; 1199–1287). Also known as Ryochii. Recognized as the third head of the Jōdo school (Chinzei branch). Through numerous writings, systematized its doctrinal base, and also prepared for its eventual growth in Kyoto by training many disciples and establishing temples, chiefly in the Kantō region. Born of the Fujiwara; his father served as a samurai in Iwami province (modern Shimane). Began Buddhist training in his home province at the age of twelve and received precepts at Mount Hiei in 1214. As a youth, studied widely under masters of Tendai, Hossō, Zen, and precepts, but from 1232, returned to his home province and devoted himself to constant nembutsu recitation. In 1236 went to Kyushu and studied the Pure Land teachings in the capital, went to Kyoto, where he made a pilgrimage to Zenkōji. From there, went to Kantō, where he received the support of influential figures and gained a respected position in the world of Buddhism of the day. In 1276, at the request of disciples who sought to unify the Pure Land teachings in the capital, went to Kyoto, where he spent eleven years teaching and writing. In 1286, returned to Kamakura, where he died the following year.

Nin-amidabutsu. May refer to Ninkū, thirteenth century monk, disciple of Shōkō.

Lay-priest Ogura (d. 1248). Also known by the Buddhist name Chimyō. According to Honen’s biography, Chimyō was born a samurai in Kōzuke province (modern Gumma). When serving in the capital in 1200, he heard Honen’s teaching and resolved to become a
monk. After six years with Hönen, returned to his native province and lived in a thatched hut in the village of Ogura, attracting followers and gaining renown as the “holy man of Ogura.” His death at the age of seventy was said to have been accompanied by such miraculous signs as purple clouds, music and fragrances.

“Lay-priest” (nyūdo) is a title for men who, retiring from secular involvements, adopt monk’s robes and shave their heads while remaining at home.

Ren-amidabutsu. Of Buzen province, northern Kyushu; disciple of Shōkō. It is recorded that in 1228 he participated in a special forty-eight day session of continuous nembutsu with Shōkō and Kyōrenja.

Saichō (767–822). Ordained at Tōdaiji, but dissatisfied with the worldliness of the official Nara temples, pursued practice and study in the seclusion of Mount Hiei before the capital was moved to Kyoto. Founded Enryakuji, the Tendai monastery on Mount Hiei, and transmitted Tendai teachings from China.

Shimbutsu-bo. Unidentified.

Shinchō. Unidentified.

Shinkai. Buddhist name of Taira Munechika, lord of Awa province on Shikoku. He was an adopted son of Munemori, who inherited the leadership of the Taira clan from Kiyomori and was eventually destroyed by the Minamoto at Dannoura. Munechika renounced worldly ties during the fall of the Taira, when in the prime of life. Joined Shunjō’s group of nembutsu practitioners and accompanied Shunjō to China. Based on Mount Kōya, he also wandered the country as a mendicant.

Shōkō (1162–1238). Also known as Benchō and Ben’a. Born in northern Kyushu; entered monastic life when seven years of age. From the age of twenty-two, he studied Tendai teachings for seven years on Mount Hiei, then returned to Kyushu. Stunned by the death of a brother three years later, he turned to Pure Land teachings. At the age of thirty-six, when in Kyoto to obtain an altar image, he met Hönen for the first time, and returned two years later to study under him. After five years, he returned to Kyushu where he built a number of temples and trained disciples. One distinctive feature of his thought is the teaching that forms of practice other than nembutsu may also lead to birth in the Pure Land. His nonexclusive stance helped his stream of the teaching, the Chinzei branch, spread and become the mainstream of the Jōdo school.

Shōren-bo. Said to have studied under Myōhen and Jōgan-bo. Resided at Ninnaji and was known for his mastery of the Contemplation Sutra.

Shōshin (1176–1253). Also known as Tankū. Grandson of Minister of the Left Tokudaiji Saneyoshi and son of the ranking Tendai prelate Enjitsu. Pursued esoteric and exoteric teachings on Mount Hiei, but later studied under Hönen, becoming one of his closest attendant disciples and even accompanying him into exile. Received precepts under Hönen and Shinkū; also known for his ability to attain samādhi. After Hönen’s death, lived at Nison-in in Saga, in the western part of Kyoto, where he built a large following. During persecutions in the late 1220’s, brought Hönen’s ashes to rest at Nison-in, making it the center for veneration of Hönen. Served as Myōzen’s spiritual advisor when the latter was near death; bestowed precepts on two retired emperors, Teuchikado and Go-saga. Composed an illustrated biography of Hönen on the thirty-third anniversary of his death.

Shunjō (1121–1206). Also known as Chōgen. Born in Kyoto, a member of the ancient literati Ki family. Entered the Shingon temple Daigoji at the age of thirteen. Later performed austerities in Shikoku, a site for practice closely associated with Kūkai, and on various mountains as a yamabushī (mountain ascetic). Became a wandering hijiri, performing such activities as recitation of the Lotus Sutra and week-long periods of constant nembutsu utterance. Assembled groups of kannin hijiri, mendicant monks traveling the countryside collecting contributions for temple construction and public works projects, and following the model of Gyōgi (section 102), built many bridges and roads as well as baths at hijiri centers and for public use. Went to Sung dynasty China for study three times; on the first occasion, in 1167, met his countryman Eisai, who later transmitted Rinzai Zen to Japan, and with him journeyed to Mount T’ien-t’ai and other Buddhist centers. Later dwelled on Mount Kōya, where he founded a hijiri retreat for constant nembutsu practice. Was entrusted by the government with collecting funds for and oversee-
ing the reconstruction of the major Nara temple Tōdaiji, which had sided with the Minamoto and been attacked by the Taira in 1180, and with restoring its immense statue of the Buddha Vairocana, the central Shingon Buddha often identified with Amida.

Zenshō-bō (1174-1258). Tendai monk of Rengeji in Tōtōmi province (modern Shizuoka). At the age of twenty-nine, met Rensei (see section 109) and learned of Hōnen’s nembutsu teaching. Through Rensei, he went to live with Hōnen’s following at Yoshimizu, in the eastern hills of Kyoto. He became an important disciple, and several of Hōnen’s extant writings are addressed to him. After gaining assurance in his religious understanding, he returned to his original temple and actively spread the teaching. When Hōnen’s disciple and Tendai monk Ryūkan (1148-1227) was banished from Kyoto in the persecution of 1227, on his way to his place of exile he is said to have had a reunion with Zenshō, then a nembutsu hijiri who labored as a carpenter.

Selected Bibliography

Works in English

Coates, Harper Havelock and Ryūgaku Ishizuka. Honen the Buddhist Saint: His Life and Teaching. Kyoto: Society for the Publication of Sacred Books of the World, 1925. Includes biographical information and anecdotes concerning many of the figures quoted in Plain Words; much of the material is legendary, however, and related from the Jōdo school perspective.


Works in Japanese


一枚起請文

一紙法語

一大事の生死を出べきはかりことを平生よくく

おもひたずむべし。あなかしこ。

建隆三年正月二十三日

源空（花押）
横川法語

ふかたれじう

まづ三悪道をはなれて人間に生れること、おほきなるよ

などて、あらまにしつき事とし、願ひあひたるけに

ついて、ふかたれじうや、ふかく人をいと

ふかく故に、ふかく名利をいとふ故な

抑へ、ふかく名利をいとふ故に、ふかく名利をいと

かまで、したしむべきか、それもおくなら

かたな、難あるべきなりり

90

91
の下に、「こそて仏の、阿弥陀仏はたたかう間もいなさ。たと申すなり」と、上人こたへ給ひける。ねん

124 同上人云く、『聖対上人は、談義の溜まに

125 又手人云く、「行善人云く。『色相観

126 法輪上人云く、「一十丈の境をえむと思はん

127 又手人云く、『もし自力の心に住せば、一寸なは

128 又手人云く、『住生は、決定の信をてば、しかもあ

129 又手人云く、『行善人云く。『善悪を仰ぐ人は、名号

130 又手人云く、『往生は、決定の信をてば、定めて生

131 又手人云く、『行善人云く。『善悪を仰ぐ人は、名号

132 又手人云く、『行善人云く。『善悪を仰ぐ人は、名号

133 敬見日房の云く、『かまへて、念仏に気味おぼ

134 聖対上人の云く、『信仰をかみたるすること。

135 又手人云く、『行善人云く。『善悪を仰ぐ人は、名号

136 又手人云く、『行善人云く。『善悪を仰ぐ人は、名号

137 又手人云く、『行善人云く。『善悪を仰ぐ人は、名号

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174 又手人云く、『行善人云く。『善悪を仰ぐ人は、名号
「往生をとげられたり。此二三人は、同上人面授

の人々にて、彼等教訓例。若れは、決定徳の

思ひを可成也。此

慈心上人間、行

仙上人信じ

可用地仏

也。」

「あら、阿波介が念仏も、源空が念仏

にもかなる、何等なる等の仏仏は、有じて其

余の人は、いかに念仏はな。」

「あら、十声、一一声、等の仏、念仏信じ

に、念仏の仏仏を滅し仏仏はな。と、答へて云く、

「学問は念仏を修めむがためなり。もし数反を

減らさざるべし、教へててな」

∥

「法経人仏行往生の後、

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主
顕性房の云く、「我是過去の如々にして、疾く死なばやと云ひにて習ひなり。さつればこそ
三十余年が闊にかじしに故に、今は片時も忘れず。死を勘ぶ事は大事なる故に、心に
とめも、よくとてももととする事をは制すべき。生まれて、生話
を為せば、向うもやと云ひにて、むがつぶれて、呌びきをき。さつればこそ、符縁
を除ぬ事は、さつればこそ、不浄をも消せば、極楽とを

故に、向うへも勿論、儒者なりにて、心にはも忘れて、心には

仏の教は、西には他くらい、聖教をも住せ

阿弥陀仏、和漢の文字、みなもて忘却す。

羅敷云く、「念仏の義を深く云ふ事。

僧々云く、「心の善悪をも消さず、念仏を也

のひまは、さつも悪いかなし。念仏を申し

のば好きな人々々に、捨ててこそ念仏を申され

て学問をする事。無益也、念仏を申していま

す。

聖光上人、学問を不とし受けて云く。「一日来学

し給る人々々に、捨ててこそ念仏を申され

て、住生を也とべし。」

心の相違をも消さず、念仏を申し

て、住生を也とべし。」

心の相違をも消さず、念仏を申し

て、住生を也とべし。」

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心の相違をも消さず、念仏を申し

て、住生を也とべし。」

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心の相違をも消さず、念仏を申し

て、住生を也とべし。」
学問などしては、大抵は無道心になる事にてあら
るなり。  "

52 有云、「解脫上人、食事の気味覚びるを

53 有云、「心儀上人、つまに踏居し給ふ。さ

54 有云、「塵だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

55 又云、「心儀に此身を乞にかかせたま

56 又云、「心儀るとき儒者を、なげする

任期の身をかへりみで、仏力法力におひつり

57 有云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

58 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

59 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

60 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

61 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

62 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

63 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

64 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

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66 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

67 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

68 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

69 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

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71 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

72 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

73 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

74 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

75 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

76 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

77 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

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81 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

82 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

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103 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

104 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一

105 又云、「専だすけ給へと思ふ心を、第一
なお、御運躍る龍賢一もよく
ふるい。それこそ、御運躍る龍賢一もよく

手記は、不経済にて有りあり。

46 又云く。或人たずね申されて云く。

47 折々被仰云く。一来在世のためと思へども、

48 行徳房云く。一関心に作る罪をほ頁やにてこ

49 又云く。一天地はその要にたれど、 createContext(107)

50 又云く。一専道をねぶとふるふ。別に

51 一言説抄抄写本

敬運社の云く。一日本来世の心あるものも、
死ねただに存すれば、一切に大事はなかった。この身を愛し、命数を守らむ。一切のことは起こることなり。あまじて死なれどもよろこびなりと。

我人も真実に後世をたすから、おもしろだに存すれば、(rank)に存すれば、何事もやすくおぼえる也。しかるも、いかなる者も、道理をつよくたてて、心にまわすや、生死界の事を、ものがましくおもむkerからざるべし。

又く、(近来の世の)人といふば、もとよき者をつれは、いみじき学生、説師なり、高野にのぼつれば、(めがき)言葉をゆきし、高野の言語の學生にな(り)、或はもと仏名の(?)文字たるにきはれんし、しかるも、(筆名)の心をしんずることなり、ききを求める事、うたてき事なりと習ひあつたし、かなきを求める様、あるをたかつこそと、かなきを求める様、あるをたかつこそと。

今を執、名聞(高野)をしんずことも、臨世をなりし、比までは、猶生世をながし、ぬきは、ちかくもほしく、どてかへして、今を執、名聞(高野)をしんずことも。

又、(近来の世の)人といふば、もとよき者をつれは、いみじき学生、説師なり、高野にのぼつれば、(めがき)言葉をゆきし、高野の言語の學生にな(り)、或はもと仏名の(?)文字たるにきはれんし、しかるも、(筆名)の心をしんずることなり、ききを求める事、うたてき事なりと習ひあつたし、かなきを求める様、あるをたかつこそと、かなきを求める様、あるをたかつこそと。

又く、(近来の世の)人といふば、もとよき者をつれは、いみじき学生、説師なり、高野にのぼつれば、(めがき)言葉をゆきし、高野の言語の學生にな(り)、或はもと仏名の(?)文字たるにきはれんし、しかるも、(筆名)の心をしんずることなり、ききを求める事、うたてき事なりと習ひあつたし、かなきを求める様、あるをたかつこそと、かなきを求める様、あるをたかつこそと。

しやめもこすれど、ききを求める事、うたてき事なりと習ひあつたし、かなきを求める様、あるをたかつこそと、かなきを求める様、あるをたかつこそと。

しやめもこすれど、ききを求める事、うたてき事なりと習ひあつたし、かなきを求める様、あるをたかつこそと、かなきを求める様、あるをたかつこそと。
又云く、「善導の御釈を仰見するに、源空が大智を現す」物を大口にひく、むせて死ぬ事もあるぞ。しかつて南無阿弥陀仏と見えぬ、南無阿弥陀仏と見ぬのこその名をささねか。又云く、「煩悩の大しくあつきたものをかへり見、心はるかに後に近し、良友はにねていたる、去るにあらぬ体なり。年にしたがひ、日を消す時は、南無阿弥陀仏と南無阿弥陀仏と、左に右に南無阿弥陀仏ととなはて、声につきて、決定従生をなさるや。又云く、余事をし念仏せんと思ふべからせられば、とく成る也。」

又云く、「【聖光上人】雲く、築をたるに、片目をふらはせたる色にて、つねにはあらたるや。云々、禅釋反云く、「故上人の教あり。」たとひ余事をいとむとも、念仏しむれとするも、余事をし念仏せんと思ふべからせられば、とく成る也。」

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用なり、とくかへりたまへ。これに候ふものども
は、後世の心候は可が、いたつらにあらむよ
はとてこそ、学問をば候へとて、進返されし
云云。

明遍雲く、所以真実に仏土をねが、い
を戦候はつ、散心称名をもって往生候ばた
がひたく候か。其心真実ならば、百千の不審
をひらきて、甚深の義理を悟候ことも、往生か
なる所に住ますべく候ふらん。仰せて云く、

毘林に申しこて云く、「非人師とは、いか
なる所に住まべし、いかなる所にてもありな
て後の人、とくかへりとて、変改の条、無下
に、生死を出離せむることは、今生にあひた
ふに、此縁にあひながら、むなしく遙かして、
一時ま受けずらぬとおぼゆるなり。しか
れば、生をかわれらざること今生にあひた
る徳はなけれども、失がなきも。

又云く、「最後をたすからときもはもの
は、かまへて人目にたべべきなさるものなり。人
をば人が複するなり。聖法師の、今生に徳をひ
る事は、大略、後世のためには捨て物なり。一

又云く、「いやたまにわらはさぎある。合格
人にには、進世が、はや第一のよしなき事にてあり
りに、不習の仏土にるべし。其故は、阿弥陀仏
こごに、不習の仏土にるべし。
一言芳談

一言芳談抄巻之上

有云、『悪心僧都、伊勢大神宮へまら
て、七日参籤をなす私家に、宝殿の御戸たち
までにひらけて、をしめなる貴女一人、いわだま
へり。示して云く、「神宮は、本庁の都へ、かへり
おはします。これば御留守に待るものなり。末代
の衆生、出離の要道をたづる事あらず、弥陀仏
を念ぜると、末次にことなはせよ。すかはおやれ
廻る。」

有云、『悪心僧都、善光寺参詣のかへりあし
して今度宿仏をなすべく候』上人云く、「念
仏申してこそは、開帳とは、誠し見る。」

有云、『我仏は、念仏申してこそは、開帳とは、誠し見る。』

高野の明徳僧都、善光寺参詣のかへりあし
して今度仏をなすべく候』上人云く、「念
仏申してこそは、開帳とは、誠し見る。」
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