

HŌNEN’S “LUKEWARM” FAITH: AUXILIARY ACTIONS IN THE FRAMEWORK  
OF EXCLUSIVE *NEMBUTSU*

by

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(Under the Direction of Nanette Spina)

ABSTRACT

The goal of my thesis is to determine the possible causes of the perceived “discrepancy” between Hōnen's teaching of exclusive vocal *nembutsu* and his personal religious practice post-departure from the Tendai sect. This thesis will argue that while Honen did have to censor his teachings in order to help his school gain legitimacy, he did not do so by compromising his faith. The supposed conflict between his message and his practice is primarily the result of interpreting his life and work through the lens of the more popular Shin school founded by Hōnen’s most famous disciple, Shinran.

INDEX WORDS: Amida, Hōnen, Jōdo-shū, *nembutsu*, Pure Land Buddhism, Shinran, *Senchakushū*

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my mother, Teresa Radosz. It took me years to realize what a strong person you are not only for having been a member of the Solidarity, but also for how you carried yourself throughout your life. I truly appreciate all of the work and sacrifices you have made in your life so that I could do well and have the opportunities that you were denied and had to give up, and all of the times you denied yourself something in order for me to have the chance to experience something new, take a risk or just to have fun. Words can never fully express the depth of my gratitude. I hope that if nothing else, I have made you proud.

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On a more serious note, I truly appreciate Dr. Kirkland's guidance through both my undergraduate and graduate careers, for encouraging me and opening me up to as well as making me interested in religion. He managed to turn someone who would always roll their eyes at the word into someone who respects and wants to learn more about the lived experience that is religious tradition. I am extremely grateful for all of the opportunities he gave me to grow as a person and scholar, and even though he could not continue working with me until the end, this would not have been possible without him.

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## CHAPTER OUTLINE AND GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This thesis will focus primarily on Hōnen, the *Senchakushū* and the theology which justifies the inclusion of non-*nembutsu* practices within the scope of “exclusive *nembutsu*.” In this section, I will be providing a chapter outline as well as an introduction to important terms which will appear throughout this thesis.

*Nembutsu* can refer to a number of practices that relate to being “mindful of the Buddha.” The term comes from Amida’s 18<sup>th</sup> Vow<sup>1</sup> as it is expressed in the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life*, known in Chinese as the *Wu-liang-shou ching*, and also commonly referred to as the *Larger Sūtra*. The 18<sup>th</sup> Vow itself is often referred to as either the “Original Vow” or the “Primal Vow.” In the context of this thesis, the term “*nembutsu*” will generally refer to the specific practice of calling the name of Amida Buddha either externally or internally. *Nembutsu* as an external practice is when the practitioner actually vocalizes the phrase “*Namu Amida Butsu*.” This form, known as invocational *nembutsu*, is the orthopraxis of Hōnen. As an internal practice, it can function as a form of meditation related to the state of samādhi, or the visualization of Amida Buddha and his Pure Land, Sukhāvātī.

The purpose of *nembutsu* is to facilitate a birth (or “rebirth”) in the Pure Land otherwise known as *ōjō*. When the term “rebirth” is used in the context of salvation in the Pure Land tradition, particularly in this thesis, it means specifically “[re]birth in the Pure Land of Sukhāvātī” and should not be confused with the general notions of rebirth in Buddhism. The

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<sup>1</sup> Hōnen, *Senchakushū* English Translation Project., trans & ed. *Hōnen’s Senchakushū*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 73. The 18<sup>th</sup> Vow as presented in the *Senchakushū*: When I attain Buddhahood, if all sentient beings in the ten directions who aspire in all sincerity and faith to be born in my land and think of me even ten times are not born there, then may I not attain supreme enlightenment.

goal of the Pure Land traditions is to attain salvation, *ōjō*, through birth in Sukhāvātī. According to Hōnen, this requires a physical death and a literal “birth” in Sukhāvātī. In other forms of the Pure Land tradition, it can be seen as an acknowledgement of innate Buddhahood which can be realized during one’s life thus corresponding more to a mental state than a physical reality.

In Chapter 1, “Introduction to the Controversy,” I provide a general overview of the problem which drove me to write what is essentially a defense of Hōnen against the criticism that he did not practice what he preached. My conclusion, which is justified and explained more fully in subsequent chapters, is that Hōnen did not violate his own teachings since his practice adheres to his theology and soteriology as it is explained in the *Senchakushū*. The “tension” between the praxis and theology is the result of a common, albeit misguided, approach to understanding Hōnen through the teachings of the Shin sect. Essentially, for Hōnen, the term “exclusive *nembutsu*” means that *nembutsu* is the only means of attaining *ōjō*. It does not imply that *nembutsu* is the only practice which can be undertaken by devotees with the complete exclusion of all other actions.

Chapter 2, “Inclusion of Auxiliary Acts: A Historical Perspective,” will focus on the aspects of Hōnen’s life which might have prompted to incorporate non-*nembutsu* practices into his theology. Specifically, it will address the influence of his experience in Kurodani where meditative *nembutsu* was a common practice, and the impact of a powerful alliance of temples, known as “Old Buddhism,” *kenmitsu taisei* or *kenmitsu* alliance. This alliance included the major temples of pre-Kamakura period schools of Buddhism (Tendai, Shingon and Hossō), which owned a number of large estates, and had substantial influence over the Japanese imperial court. Their collective influence over the court and disapproval of exclusive *nembutsu* might have encouraged Hōnen to structure his theology in a way which would remain true to his personal

belief that only *nembutsu* can result in *ōjō* while also appeasing the temples by allowing more traditional Amida-based practices such as visualizations and offerings to be used as a supplement.

In Chapter 3, “Integration via Selection, Rejection and Faith,” I will be examining Hōnen’s theology from the *Senchakushū* showing how he arrives at his understanding of *nembutsu* as meaning “invocational *nembutsu*.” I will also show the process by which Hōnen adds auxiliary actions into his framework of salvation through faith in the Primal Vow.

Chapter 4, “Hōnen’s ‘Lukewarm’ Faith: Shin Perspective,” will address the issues of *tariki* (other-power) and *jiriki* (self-power) in Hōnen’s praxis by examining both his personal relationship to Shinran, founder of the Shin sect, and the differences in their approach to *nembutsu*. The Shin sect assumes that the *nembutsu* is a signifier of *shinjin* or “true faith” in Amida which means that the only true *nembutsu* is uttered at the moment salvation is attained as a result of Amida’s compassion. Any other *nembutsu*, especially ritual repetition, is necessarily self-power because it involves the belief that practice will help with salvation in some way. Hōnen’s theology does not include this assumption in its emphasis on faith-only salvation. Because the *nembutsu* was specifically chosen by Amida in the Original Vow, it can never constitute an act of self-power if one has faith in Amida’s other-power. Therefore, it is best not to assume that Shinran’s teachings are the necessary conclusion to Hōnen’s “underdeveloped” soteriology.

In Chapter 5, “Fruition and Completion: Hōnen’s Disciples,” I will be examining some of Hōnen’s other disciples: Kōsai, Ryūkan, Shōkū and Benchō. I will briefly address their relationship with Hōnen and the critical points at which their doctrines differ from his. The comparison shows that some disciples are much closer to Hōnen than Shinran in terms of

doctrine, but that each chose to situate himself in a slightly different position in regards to political and religious powers.

Lastly, Chapter 6, “Final Thoughts,” will close my thesis with a brief summary of my conclusion: Hōnen was a man of faith who contended with religio-political power structure of the early Kamakura period to create a new tradition which emphasized faith but reserved a place for practice.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTROVERSY

The purpose of this project is to discover and possibly resolve a contradiction between the values which spurred Hōnen into founding a separate Buddhist sect and the realities of his own personal faith and practice. I want to begin by exploring how Hōnen viewed the act of *nembutsu*<sup>2</sup> and upon what principles his belief was originally founded as well as why those views were different enough to prompt him to establish a new sect rather than continue on as a monk in the Tendai sect emphasizing *nembutsu* in his personal, private practice. Along with this, I want to address the apparent hypocrisy of Hōnen leaving Tendai stating that if he were to remain teaching *nembutsu* under the Tendai sect, his message of the exclusivity of *nembutsu* would be masked yet continuing to practice the acts which he had publically denounced. By elevating the *nembutsu* to the sole method which would result in rebirth in the Pure Land (*ōjō*), but continuing non-*nembutsu* practice after his departure, he seems to contradict the entire point of founding a new sect. However, I will show that there only seems to be a contradiction<sup>3</sup> or ambivalence<sup>4</sup> on Hōnen's part when one analyzes Hōnen's life and work from the point of view

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2 The practice of being "mindful of the Buddha." Specifically, by reciting the phrase "*Namu Amida Butsu.*"

3 Kojun Fukui, "Hōnen den ni tsuite no ni-san no mondai," *Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyū* 5-2 (Tokyo: Nihon Indogaku Bukkyō Gakkai, 1957), 567-571. As quoted in: Toshihide Adachi, "Recent Japanese Scholarship on Hōnen: The Historical and Bibliographical Dimensions." Jōdo-shū Research Institute, <http://www.jsri.jp/English/Jodoshu/conferences/AAS/adachi.html>. Also in: Takatoshi Hirokawa, "The Two Faces of Hōnen: A Reconsideration of the Criticism Concerning Hōnen's Exclusive Nembutsu Practice (senju nembutsu) and His Other Practices (shogyo)," Jōdo-shū Research Institute, <http://www.jsri.jp/English/Jodoshu/conferences/AAS/hirokawa.html>. Kojun notes that Hōnen had "two characters." He had the exclusive nembutsu at his core, but he wore Tendai Buddhism on the outside. He comments that these two natures are contradictory meaning his outward practice is not reflective of his theology and teachings

4 Daigan & Alicia Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism, Vol. 2: The Mass Movement* (Los Angeles & Tokyo: Buddhist Books International, 1976), 61.

of the more popular Shin school which was founded by Hōnen's most famous disciple, Shinran, or when one simply misunderstands Hōnen's teaching of exclusive *nembutsu*.

I will begin by looking at the Hōnen's foundation of the Jōdo sect from a historical perspective. Establishing a new tradition in Japan, particularly one which would directly compete with the established Tendai and Shingon sects or "Old Buddhism" would have been a large undertaking requiring not only the appeasement of the wealthy, powerful temples, but also the support of influential members of the court for leverage against and protection from the criticisms of the established sects. The introduction of a teaching which had mass appeal such as Hōnen's teaching of exclusive *nembutsu* directly undermined the power and influence of the temples. Specifically, exclusive *nembutsu* rendered the temples useless in the pursuit of spiritual advancement since it offered a practice which could easily be embraced by anyone at any time and which required no contribution to the temples. The threat of Hōnen's sect was not that it would eclipse the teachings of the Tendai sect; it actually supported the Tendai practice of *nembutsu* and created a place for the other Amida-related practices. The threat was to the political and economic power of the temples. Exclusive *nembutsu* meant that the lay community did not have to rely on the temples for help with achieving religious goals which implied that the temples would not receive the kind of financial support and imperial patronage which they had been enjoying. If the public and members of the court chose to support Hōnen's movement, the temples would lose their prestige and influence. This threat prompted them to lash out against Hōnen's movement with claims such as the inevitability that exclusive *nembutsu* would lead to "licensed evil," that it was not a legitimately established sect and that it insulted other Buddhist traditions as well as other Buddhas.

In order to protect his new movement, Hōnen had to respond to these claims and carefully navigate the religio-political structure not only to protect himself and his disciples from exile from the capital, but also so that his sect could gain legitimacy. In an attempt to stop the swell of criticism against him, Hōnen publically denounced Kōsai's teaching of *ichinengi*<sup>5</sup> and also issued the *Seven Articles Pledge*.<sup>6</sup> It is also possible that Hōnen's practice of auxiliary actions and upholding the vinaya (monastic code of conduct) after leaving the Tendai monkhood could have been in part a response to the pressure from the Tendai and Shingon schools. While this kind of concession could be dismissed as "weakness," the threat of the established sects' wrath and criticism was very real and necessitated a proper response.

Despite his conciliatory efforts, Hōnen and some of his disciples were exiled from the capital in 1207 and exclusive *nembutsu* was banned until 1211. In addition, two of his disciples were executed. Clearly, Hōnen was aware that keeping his teaching and his disciples alive as well as in the capital required some political finesse. Had he not made an effort to calm the outrage of the temples, it is very likely that his exile would have come sooner and that his teaching would have simply faded into the backdrop of traditional Tendai.

While the inclusion of auxiliary actions may have helped to ease tensions with the temples, this is not meant to imply that Hōnen only accepted them for political convenience. These practices are included and explained in his major theology work, the *Senchakushū*. Hōnen felt that ritual practice was important in the development of faith and that other Amida-related practices besides the *nembutsu* could help one maintain a close connection with Amida once

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5 *Ichinengi* means the practice of a "single-call." This is the *nembutsu* which is said at the moment of attainment and is the result of Amida's other-power and not a conscious choice to call the name.

6 The *Seven Articles Pledge* is a short document written by Hōnen in order to correct the behavior of his followers and to appease the criticism of the temple. Among other things, it states that Hōnen's followers should not preach their own teachings under his name, that they should not criticize other Buddhist schools and that they should not disrespect other Buddhas.



faith had been “firmly established.” The key point that is emphasized in the *Senchakushū* is that Primal Vow guarantees rebirth (*ōjō*) in the Pure Land to anyone who calls Amida’s name with faith. Therefore, only a single *nembutsu* said with faith is necessary, but it must be a *nembutsu* since that was practice specifically selected by Amida. However, ritual recitation of the *nembutsu* can help one establish the necessary faith by reorienting the devotee towards Amida. Once a full faith in Amida’s saving power has been realized, then one can incorporate additional Amida-based practices (auxiliary acts). Because these are added in after one has developed faith in Amida’s power, they do not and cannot detract from that faith and cannot be considered “self-power.” They can only bring one closer to Amida. Additionally, Hōnen advised that if the *nembutsu* was said without faith, then Amida would not respond to it regardless of how many times it was uttered. *Nembutsu* practice must be accompanied by faith only in Amida if it is to be efficacious. Within this framework, Hōnen’s non-*nembutsu* practices do not undermine his message as long as his faith was placed in Amida. Therefore, Hōnen was not ambivalent in his personal practice nor did he have “two characters.”

If Hōnen’s theology condones his religious practices, why would his behavior be viewed as hypocritical? This problem is actually the result of approaching Hōnen’s work from the perspective of Shinran’s teachings and his notions of self-power and other-power which are not terms that Hōnen used in reference to his own theology. However, as the Shin school of Pure Land Buddhism rose to prominence and because Shinran was a devoted disciple of Hōnen, the idea that Shinran’s teachings might be a necessary conclusion of Hōnen’s teachings emerged and they are often lumped together into a single category. While this assumption feels natural, it is misguided. It is this approach which greatly calls into doubt Hōnen’s faith and renders much of the contents of the *Senchakushū* useless and perhaps even a danger to spiritual progress. Viewing

Hōnen's work and life through Shinran's teachings is partially the reason that Hōnen's faith appears to only be "lukewarm" and that his religious practice seems to be hypocritical. Shinran emphasized a complete faith that rendered ritual pointless and even harmful because of its ability to detract from pure faith. Hōnen shared Shinran's view that complete faith in Amida was necessary, but his notion that practice and ritual were important did not in any way detract from the central position of faith. Ritual practice could strengthen faith by focusing one on Amida rather than on one's own merit building power. The assumption that ritual practice could lead to a reliance on the self emerges from Shinran's theology making it a unique interpretation of Pure Land teachings that is not in line with Hōnen's understanding of correct religious practice. Therefore, Shinran cannot be viewed as a more fully-realized version of Hōnen as doing so forces one to misunderstand Hōnen.

Shinran may not serve as the best lens for analyzing Hōnen, but this is not entirely surprising since Shinran was also likely not Hōnen's closest disciple. In fact, there were a number of men who studied under Hōnen who went on to found their own sects with varying degrees of similarity to Hōnen's teaching. However, even the sects with a theology more similar to Hōnen's than the Shin school show slight signs of divergence. Each of these founding figures seems to have come away with a slightly different understanding of the teachings. Each also had to navigate the same political atmosphere that Hōnen was forced to contend with and find their own place in the spectrum. Thus, it is best to look at work of the master in order to understand him rather than to attempt to piece together a story from the scraps of his legacy found in the works of his disciples.

## CHAPTER 2

### INCLUSION OF AUXILIARY ACTS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

When considering influential figures one Japanese critic confesses, “From the fifteen hundred years of the intellectual history of Buddhism, if I had to choose one thinker, it would have to be Hōnen.”<sup>7</sup> Through a unique definition of the *nembutsu* based on Shan-tao's interpretation of the Original Vow, Hōnen launched a religious movement and era in Japan which affected not only the religious converts but also impacted the religio-political structure in Japan. The introduction of single-practice certainly elevated tensions between “Old Buddhism” and the emerging patterns of religious activity, and Hōnen risked a lot by separating himself from the Tendai tradition to start a fledgling branch of his own. Despite the bold statement this separation made, Hōnen's personal practice did not appear to reflect anything as drastic as to demand a break from the Tendai tradition. He actually continued to publically practice many of things which he condemned as not being useful in bringing about *ōjō* seemingly going against his own teaching. These other practices such as meditation and prostrations to the Buddha fell into a category defined by Hōnen as “auxiliary acts.” In the *Senchakushū*, Hōnen outlines the proper method in which one can incorporate them into one's own religious practice without losing sight of the true meaning of the Primal Vow and exclusive *nembutsu*.

Hōnen's soteriological justification in the *Senchakushū* will be examined in the next chapter, but there are other potential reasons for the inclusion of the acts and for his seemingly ambivalent post-conversion practice: the political power structure in which Buddhist temples had

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7 Soho Machida, *Renegade Monk - Hōnen and Japanese Pure Land Buddhism*, trans. Ioannis Mentzas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 21.

strong ties to the court, and the much less impressive reason of personal pride. This chapter will focus on the possible socio-political reasons for Hōnen's choice to include and encourage the practice of auxiliary acts. I will be providing a short examination of Hōnen's life particularly his relationship to the Tendai monastic community prior to his separation from Tendai as well as after, the impact his fame could have had on his theology as well the events surrounding his exile and the power of Buddhist temples during the time he was teaching.

### **Hōnen's Life and Rise to Prominence**

Hōnen was born in 1133 to a local samurai. After a midnight raid on their land, Hōnen's father was killed and his mother, despite some reports to the contrary, most likely perished as well.<sup>8</sup> Following these events, nine-year old Hōnen went to the Bodaiji temple for three years. In 1145, he joined the monastic community on Mt. Hiei, but in 1150 he moved to a more secluded area of the mountain, Kurodani. It was not uncommon for monks to go to Kurodani to separate themselves from major temple affairs and to focus on religious practice, but it is also possible that this could be one of the first examples of Hōnen rejecting the politics on Mt. Hiei. Around the time of his move, the reigning abbot had been removed from power by warrior monks and the highest clerical positions were appointed to members of the aristocracy leaving monks of humble origins behind regardless their merits.

During his stay in Kurodani, Hōnen visited Nara which is where he probably first came into contact with the *tariki*-type<sup>9</sup> of traditional which he would later advocate. Kurodani itself was famous for its meditative *nembutsu* practice. These early encounters might have set the

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8 Matsunaga, 58. Other reports are based on a supposed letter attributed to Hōnen in which he asks his mother for permission to enter the monkhood, and on a later biography which states that she granted him permission. This story probably only exists to “demonstrate Hōnen's filial virtues” since she plays no additional role in his life.

9 *Tariki*, or other-power, refers to Amida's power which allows people to be born in his Pure Land. Salvation is the result of faith in Amida's other-power rather than one's own merit building activities.

stage for Hōnen's conversion experience in 1175 after reading Shan-tao's commentaries. The effect was so profound that he abandoned the Tendai tradition which he had been practicing for thirty years in favor of beginning his own school.

Matsunaga notes that “this in particular meant abandoning Genshin's Tendai form of *nembutsu* meditation, with its emphasis upon visualizations of the Pure Land mingled with other devotions.”<sup>10</sup> This statement seems at least somewhat misleading and warrants a bit of clarification. Hōnen was most directly influenced by Shan-tao, but the Kurodani area in which he lived for a number of years was center for the teachings of Genshin.<sup>11</sup> There can be little doubt that Hōnen was also influenced by Genshin. What makes Hōnen distinct from Genshin on this topic is his definition of *nembutsu* as specifically recitation *nembutsu*. Therefore, while Genshin advocated meditative *nembutsu* as a means of receiving visions, Hōnen advocated the constant repetition of the *nembutsu* as a means of achieving a state of samādhi. The actual experience of samādhi is the same in both instances; only the path one takes in order to achieve the visions varies. Hōnen was purported to have experienced these visions late in life in a dream. While this is not exactly the manner in which one ought to have such a religious experience – the waking, but meditative state is preferred – it was taken as proof that his doctrine was valid.<sup>12</sup> It was also one of the ways in which Hōnen seemed less than faithful to his own teachings of single practice.<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, the message on this topic is not entirely clear though Hōnen does say:

Thus, if people in this world wish to perform the practice of seeing the Buddha and do not practice the *nembutsu*, they are not only going against Amida's original vow made in

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Blum, “Kōsai and the Paradox of *Ichinengi*: Be Careful What You Preach,” *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, third series No. 6, 71.

<sup>13</sup> Visualizations fall into the category of auxiliary acts so there is a place for them according to Hōnen which is validated by his own claim to have experienced them in a dream. However, Hōnen also stated that these visions are inferior to the beauty of the natural world making them inadequate and calling into question their usefulness.

the distant past, but are also at variance with the more recent intention of Śākyamuni when he entrusted the *nembutsu* to Ananda.<sup>14</sup>

Essentially, the point seems to be that samādhi is a great achievement and *nembutsu* is conducive to that goal; however, samādhi should not be understood as the final goal of *nembutsu* practice. In light of this, it would perhaps be better to say that Hōnen modified Genshin's teaching rather than abandoned it.

After leaving the Tendai monkhood, Hōnen described the necessity of creating the Jōdo sect by declaring:

Unless I started a separate sect, the truth that the common man may be born into the Buddha's land of compensation will be obscured and it will be hard to realize the deep meaning of Amida's Original Vow.<sup>15</sup>

By emphasizing the need for separation from the Tendai sect and from all other sects for that matter, Hōnen not only highlighted the difference between his beliefs and that of all the other Buddhist sects, he also emphasized the importance of his interpretation of the Original Vow and its implications. On the surface, Hōnen's practice looked similar to Tendai, so without formally leaving the sect he feared that people would conflate his meaning with traditional Tendai doctrine.<sup>16</sup> Within the very hierarchical Tendai monastic community of Mt. Hiei, Hōnen was set to rise to the top, and by leaving it, he "rejected what he saw as the authoritarian and elitist

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14 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 135.

15 Joseph A Fitzgerald, ed. *Hōnen the Buddhist Saint: Essential Writings and Official Biography*. (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), 23.

16 Nembutsu, visualizations and other Amida centered practices are common in Tendai so even selecting nembutsu as the "best" practice doesn't draw a very clear line between the new "single-practice" movement and traditional Tendai. We can speculate that because Hōnen was a well-known and respected scholar, the movement may have gained some ground within Tendai had he not left the tradition. However, it is possible that after his death, the loss of such a prominent figure might have resulted in the movement just blending back into the larger tradition especially because Hōnen did not stress an outward expression in his personal practice that was drastically different. For this reason, separation was critical to the survival and propagation of his soteriology.

tendencies of the Tendai ecclesia.”<sup>17</sup> Along with this, Hōnen was extremely critical of scholasticism even though he was praised and known for being a great scholar himself. The knowledge which he had gained over the years had brought him no closer to gaining salvation, and he felt that being a learned man could actually make salvation more difficult. Hōnen claimed that “if one becomes a learned man, there is danger of his losing the disposition to practice *nembutsu*.”<sup>18</sup>

The proper disposition includes realizing that one does not have the power to bring about salvation. Learned men and those steeped in good works tend to fall back on these merits as a means for salvation; they believe that they have earned their salvation. This does not have to be a conscious, deliberate action; it is a natural, often subconscious tendency to assume one is deserving of some sort of reward especially if one is a “good” person who has worked toward accumulating merit. Such an attitude is not inherently bad, but it does prevent one from truly giving oneself to Amida's saving power and thus can be counterproductive. Hōnen also believed that scholars “become too adherent to knowledge and are apt to lose sight of the fact that they are responsible for teaching others” producing the kinds of elitist attitude which keep salvation from the poorer, less educated and under-privileged masses.<sup>19</sup>

Hōnen's departure from Tendai was clearly based on more than just the need to emphasize *nembutsu* practice, and by leaving he was not completely turning his back on all other forms of Buddhism. One can see this simply enough in the fact that he did not abandon all non-*nembutsu* practices and that he upheld the vinaya, but it is also evident in the fact that Hōnen did not condemn other forms of Buddhism. Of course, he believed that his method was correct, but he also criticized sectarianism saying:

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17 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 12.

18 Harper Havelock Coates and Ryūgaku Ishizuka, *Honen the Buddhist Saint* (New York: Garland, 1981), 397.

19 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 13.

The scholars of the different sects fail to comprehend that every sect has its own peculiar stand-point, and so as soon as they discover something contrary to their own, they at once pronounce such teaching false. This is quite unreasonable.<sup>20</sup>

It is unfortunate for Hōnen that his critics clearly fell into the category of scholars described here, but if Hōnen was not a supporter of sectarianism why would he leave to found his own sect? Hōnen did feel that separating himself from Tendai was important for his message. However, after his departure in 1175, he did not immediately begin founding a new tradition and his followers were a loosely associated group of like-minded monks who chose to follow what was more of a style than a new doctrine.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, his teachings carried with them a unique quality not found in the work of Genshin which lead to the eventual official, doctrinal break with Tendai symbolized by the *Senchakushū*.

In 1186, Hōnen was invited to participate in a debate at Ōhara with other prominent Buddhist scholars including Kenshin who would become a Tendai abbot and Jōkei of the Hosso sect and who would later greatly criticize him. There, he supposedly gave a lecture on *nembutsu* and answered questions regarding its merits. This event has been traditionally considered as the time at which Hōnen gained official recognition from the established Buddhist sect; however, it is possible that the Ōhara Debate has been “overglorified, since there was no reason why the established sects should offer Hōnen such an advantageous position.”<sup>22</sup> Regardless of the actual impact of the debate, by this time, Hōnen was attracting not only a lot of followers, but also patrons.

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20 Coates, 158.

21 These monks often practiced the kind of inner devotion supported by Hōnen, but never broke with Tendai.

22 Matsunaga, 60.



Kujō Kanezane was one of Hōnen's most enthusiastic patrons.<sup>23</sup> Kanezane was the Fujiwara regent and a powerful court figure until a conspiracy caused his removal in 1196.<sup>24</sup> According to Shunjō's biography of Hōnen, Kanezane thought so highly of him that whenever Hōnen came to visit, he would “come down the palace steps to meet him and gave him the most cordial welcome.” The court officials seemed to take note of this and treated Hōnen in the same fashion until eventually Hōnen got annoyed with the fuss and refused to go out except to see Kanezane. When a disciple questioned this, Hōnen told him that he and Kanezane had “an affinity for each other from a previous life.”<sup>25</sup> It was actually at Kanezane's request that Hōnen wrote the *Senchakushū*. It was completed in 1197 and outlined the teachings of his sect, as Kanezane requested, and it also included a post-script requesting that it not be published until after his death. The manuscript was presented by Hōnen to various disciples for them to copy.

After Hōnen had become widely known, three waves of opposition rose against him: the Genkyū persecution in 1204, the Ken'ei persecution in 1207 and the Karoku persecution which actually occurred after his death in 1217. Hōnen's growing popularity inspired jealousy from the temples that united under the Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei, and they lodged a formal complaint about Hōnen to the authorities demanding that his teachings be banned. Emperor Go-Toba chose to act as a mediator in this case because he was sympathetic to the movement, and later in life, he even became a *nembutsu* follower.<sup>26</sup> Hōnen was left in a position of uncertainty. On the one hand, he knew that the temples' complaints were more the result of jealousy than anything else; however, he felt some of his followers were also taking his teachings too far. Basically, some people chose to justify hedonistic and immoral behavior on the grounds that Amida would save them

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23 Kanezane was not exclusively a supporter of Hōnen. He was also a patron of Eisai who is credited with bringing the Rinzaï Zen tradition to Japan.

24 Ibid.

25 Coates, 249-250.

26 Matsunaga, 63.

regardless. Another issue was that some disciples presented their own interpretations of the *nembutsu* teaching as Hōnen's teaching. Generally, these were more radical and prone to condoning hedonism. In order to appease the Tendai abbot and also to outline appropriate behavior for his disciples, Hōnen wrote the *Seven-article Pledge* (*Shichikajō kishōmon*). The points reflected the kinds of things Hōnen was witnessing in his following and that he wanted done away with — such as general religious intolerance, converting people in the *shōdō* style and attributing one's personal interpretations to him.<sup>27</sup> This maneuver seemed to satisfy the Tendai abbot, but in 1205 the Kōfukuji temple petitioned again the now Retired Emperor Go-Toba to put a stop to the *nembutsu* movement. The petition, the *Kōfukuji sōjō*, is attributed to Jōkei and covers “nine points of sacrilege and crimes committed by *nembutsu* followers.”<sup>28</sup> The nine points are worth noting particularly because they address the issues of political importance to the temples such as the fact that the sect was founded without official edict, which was unprecedented. However, the petition also covered improper treatment of Śākyamuni and the Shintō gods and the rejection or neglect of other practices.

On top of pointing out the crimes of the *nembutsu* followers, the petition also singled out Gyōkū and Anraku for punishment. Both men were considered radicals though for different reasons. Gyōkū was a supporter of *ichinen ōjō*, salvation through a single calling, much like Shinran and Kōsai and Anraku had the “misfortune” of being a handsome, dynamic young preacher who was extremely attractive to women. Most likely, they were simply a very visible symbol of the popular appeal of *nembutsu*.<sup>29</sup> Whether or not Anraku would have been punished solely because of the petition is unknown, but different event sealed his fate. In 1206, Anraku and Jūren were holding a service in the palace, and everything beyond that is speculation. One

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27 Ibid., 63-64.

28 Ibid., 64.

29 Ibid., 63.

story states that the court ladies were “instantly captivated” by the monks' singing and in the evening, they invited Anraku and others to spend the night in their quarters.<sup>30</sup> There is no definitive evidence of any misconduct but as one or two of the ladies enjoyed the emperor's favor, he was not at all pleased. Another version of the story has the same ending but is a bit less dramatic: the monks simply converted the court ladies.<sup>31</sup> The insult of the situation with the court ladies combined with the petition lead to a massive suppression of the movement as well as the beheading of Anraku and Jūren along with two others. At this point Hōnen and number of his disciples were also sentenced to exile. Because of his friendship with Kanezane, he was exiled to Tosa which was reasonably accessible. Thanks to having been such a respected leader and gifted theologian, even after his exile he had many sympathizers in court who were willing to work to get him a pardon and the the opposition was not able to crush his movement.<sup>32</sup> He was pardoned at the end of that year, but not allowed to reenter the capital until late in 1211. Hōnen died at the age of eighty in 1212.

The final persecution followed his death and was instigated by Ryūkan's written defense of Hōnen in response to Josho's *Dansenchaku*. Tendai monks angry about the response went to the emperor again with their complaint and this time Ryūkan and Kōsai were to be exiled. Following these events, in 1227, nearly all of Hōnen's writings were destroyed when his tomb was raided.

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30 Ibid., 67.

31 Blum, 62. Also in: Ron Herman and Marc Treib, *A Guide to the Gardens of Kyoto* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2003), 123.

32 Matsunaga, 68.

### Conflict with the Established Temples

An organization of temples referred to as the *kenmitsu* alliance or “Old Buddhism” stood in opposition to Hōnen’s teachings and single-practice. Temples such as Enryakuji, Kōfukuji, Tōdaiji and others secured prominent economic roles for themselves and also allied themselves with state authority. As a result, they had a great deal of influence everywhere and controlled large estates even extending their influence to Shinto shrines. Within Enryakuji there was a tireless power struggle with monks fighting amongst themselves for the position of abbot — pointlessly, one might add, since the position would undoubtedly be taken up by the aristocrat who financed the most additions to the Mt. Hiei estates.<sup>33</sup> Powerful temples like Enryakuji regularly drafted low ranking monks and peasants and used them essentially as mercenaries. The temple complexes themselves were more than just religious institutions; they wielded a great deal of autonomous political power. The Mt. Hiei complex owned over 350 estates and was the *de facto* master of the Ōmi province in which most of these estates were located and other complexes had control over more territories. The imperial court and even seasoned politicians like Goshirakawa could only really cast a wary eye on Mt. Hiei and its monks who were “often tantamount to an unruly mob.”<sup>34</sup> In the *Genpei seisuiki*, these feelings are expressed in the following passage:

The cloister Emperor Shirakawa, it has been told, always lamented that three things defied him: the water of Kamogawa, dice, and mountain monks.”<sup>35</sup>

The temples not only threatened the court, they also fought amongst themselves. From the time Hōnen entered the priesthood in 1145 until his hermitage in 1150 no less than sixteen riots occurred.

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33 Machida, 39.

34 Ibid., 40-41.

35 Ibid.

Having lived on Mt. Hiei, Hōnen was certainly familiar with the temples' ferocious attempts at gaining and keeping power, so it is unlikely that he did not realize that a full-blown religious movement would upset the status quo and have tremendous repercussions. To be fair, his goal in leaving Tendai initially was not to become the founder of a new sect and start an entire religious movement, but there was no real way to slow it down after it had begun. Even his attempts to reign in certain disciples only went so far ultimately falling short. One scholar notes that to quell the rising tide against *nembutsu*, Hōnen's disciples after his death chose to “blunt the heretical edge of exclusive *nembutsu* as much as possible.”<sup>36</sup> This statement seems so general that it errs on the side of falsehood. Of course, some disciples such as Shōkū and Benchō took this route by both extolling the primacy of *nembutsu* but also admitting that other practices can work as well. Others, however, plunged even farther into the “heretical” depths like Shinran and Kōsai. There also seems to be an implication here that Hōnen did not “blunt the edge” himself which is simply untrue since his response to criticism and persecution was apologetic and submissive.

Anticipating the reaction of the established sects, Hōnen specified that the *Senchakushū* not be published until after his death because the contents might inflame the opposition. While one cannot comment on this definitively, it is also possible that the inclusion of the auxiliary acts was meant as a conciliatory measure or even that Hōnen's goal in 1175 was not to immediately found a movement but rather to follow a practice that was right for him while limiting his commentary on other actions. Hōnen believe that practice ought to accompany faith, but the practice he was referring to was *nembutsu* recitation and not the auxiliary acts which could be viewed as a supplement or just cast aside altogether. The inclusion of auxiliary actions as a part of the spiritual path allowed Hōnen to maintain a visible link with Tendai which would have

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 8.

appeared less heretical. While it proved to not be enough to assuage the animosity of the established sects, it can still be viewed as a concession on Hōnen's part. Another side to this argument however, is that pleasing the temples was not the sole purpose of the inclusion.

Other than an attempt at maintaining temple relations and the possible religious merits of auxiliary actions, Hōnen might have simply created a system which allowed him to follow his religious inclination without giving up the things which had brought him a great deal of prestige and notoriety; namely, being a Tendai master. After leaving Tendai, he continued participating in formal ordination rites using esoteric tantric ritual, and he was known as an “outstanding ordination master.”<sup>37</sup> At the request of Kanezane he even “ordained laity for the cure of illness.”<sup>38</sup> Even the recitation of *nembutsu* lead to a trance-like state and visions which he had earlier challenged. Without the system that includes the auxiliary acts, Hōnen would have been violating his own teachings, but within the system his actions were justified. Pride in his personal achievements must have been something he considered; Buddhist saint or not, he was also human. There is no reason to assume that this was the driving reason in any of his choice, however. Most evidence points to the fact that if it really played a role it was only a very minimal one.

### **Dangers of Hōnen's Teachings**

The temples being in a politically and ideologically powerful position seemed to have little to fear except perhaps each other so the reason they turned on Hōnen and his following is a testament to the value of his teachings and their power to change society. Hōnen's teaching of exclusive *nembutsu* “surpassed the bounds of doctrinal heresy and acquired a subversive force,

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37 Matsunaga, 61.

38 Ibid.

politically and economically.”<sup>39</sup> The *nembutsu* teaching was meant, in theory, to appeal to everyone but there is no denying that its primary role was to elevate the status of those who would within the context of “Old Buddhism” have been left behind. The *Kōfukuji sōjō* states:

In his own country the Great King of Enlightenment dispenses his ranks of the Nine Stages at the gate where the wise and the foolish come to his court. His principle of selection is surely that one receives in accord with his performance in observing virtuous behavior in former lives. It would be in excess stupidity for one to rely entirely on the Buddha's power without taking into account his own condition in life.<sup>40</sup>

In the full version of this section of the text, this excerpt stands in comparison to a passage about an emperor who demands work of everyone according to their ability and intelligence. The point is to establish that one who is of a lower status cannot propel himself to a position of prestige in the temporal world much like a foolish man though he applies himself day and night to a task that is beyond his skill will fail. Therefore, in the spiritual world, one is “reincarnated only in accordance with his lowly birth.”<sup>41</sup> Hōnen shook this entire system, and he did not do so by denying the existence of the Nine Stages nor did he do it by preaching “flat egalitarianism” in which everyone regardless of circumstance could be reborn at the highest level. Instead, he reversed the order of salvation and allowed those who were uneducated and tainted with sin to attain *ōjō* and to do so far more easily than the high-ranking monks. He was able to, in a sense, revoke their ticket to salvation by linking scholasticism to a dependence on self and an arrogance that would prevent *ōjō*. So, “a terrible sinner can be reborn into a higher life just as faithful students of the sacred texts can be reborn as lowlife.”<sup>42</sup> By placing the “envied elite monks at

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39 Machida, 7.

40 Ibid., 9

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 11.

the summit of the religious estate system” at the back of the line, Hōnen's teaching was able to win a far more vast following than it would have gotten by simply sticking to the truism that salvation is equally available for everyone by appealing to the masses' feeling of oppression.<sup>43</sup>

Hōnen also did away with the six *pāramitās* which happen to include charity claiming that “if financing towers and statues [is] a condition for salvation, then hopeless are the poor.”<sup>44</sup> Elimination of the connection between donations to the temples and salvation had the obvious effect of lowering the number of donations which temples received. However, the change also had the potential of costing the temples some of their influence in the court where they could “sell” salvation because of the merit building nature of generosity. Essentially, Hōnen hit the temples economically and this was an assault that they could not ignore.

### Conclusion

One would be wrong to assume that Hōnen's conversion experience while reading the works of Shan-tao was the only factor in his creating the doctrine that is expounded in the *Senchakushū*. The views Hōnen expressed during his lifetime especially after his departure from Tendai were the result of numerous contributing sourcing including his training as a Tendai monk, his years in the Kurodani area studying the works of Genshin and the overarching influence of the established sects to name a few. The effect that Shan-tao had on Hōnen is undeniably large and absolutely played a role in his choice to include the auxiliary acts in his system as did his personal readings of the sutras and the commentaries on them. This was not his only source of “inspiration,” though. The need to have some sort of relationship with the

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43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 10.



established sects in order to escape the full force of their wrath and perhaps even a bit of pride in his self-power helped Hōnen to create a his unique take on the Pure Land tradition.

## CHAPTER 3

### INTEGRATION VIA SELECTION, REJECTION AND FAITH

In this chapter, I will be discussing how Hōnen justifies the continued practice of what are referred to as “auxiliary acts” and how those have been woven into the framework of exclusive *nembutsu*. From a historical perspective, it is clear that Hōnen had to respond to the established temples by publicly speaking out against false teachings spread under his name and also against more radical forms *nembutsu* such as Kōsai’s *ichinengi* school. His exile and the raid on his tomb speak to just how controversial his conservative and conciliatory approach was and are justifiable grounds for Hōnen’s “ambivalent” behavior. However, while this, at first glance, does appear to be grounds for the accusation of hypocrisy, his possible “political concessions” are actually fully justified by his theology as it is explained in his magnum opus, the *Senchakushū*.

Hōnen’s spiritual practice was always fully grounded in Amida’s Primal Vow with faith as the cornerstone of any kind of practice beginning with *nembutsu* and continuing with the auxiliary actions. The outward expression was never arbitrary nor was it an appeal to self-power. Through a systematic approach to all Buddhist practices, one can begin with the *nembutsu*, establish faith exclusively in Amida’s power and then proceed to incorporate additional Amida-center practices while never detracting from faith. After rebirth in the Pure Land, one can use all Buddhist practices such as those of the Dhrama Gate of Sages which are rendered ineffectual in our world. Hōnen’s system is comprehensive; all practices prior to rebirth are meant to focus the practitioner on Amida’s other-power including auxiliary actions and

all practices prior to rebirth lead to the goal of Buddhahood. The key factor which separates this approach from that of the Tendai sect is that the *nembutsu* is the single, specific practice selected by Amida which makes it the most important and the only one viable option if one wishes to attain rebirth. All other practices are supplemental; they can bring one closer to Amida, but they will not lead to rebirth. Additionally, no practice, including the *nembutsu*, will lead to rebirth without faith.

Performing the auxiliary actions prior to a full establishment of faith in Amida and the *nembutsu* can potentially lead to self-reliance or mechanical, absent-minded ritual. However, when used correctly these practices do not undermine faith. Therefore, “exclusive *nembutsu*” does not necessarily imply that practice must be limited to *nembutsu* for the entirety of one’s life. The meaning is strictly that *nembutsu* is the only action which will allow one to obtain Amida’s grace. Based on this understanding of *nembutsu*, Hōnen’s religious practices after departure from the Tendai sect are neither hypocritical nor contradictory and he certainly was not ambivalent.

### **On the Nembutsu**

The foundation of Jōdo shū is the Original Vow of the Bodhisattva Dharmākara as interpreted by Hōnen. The vow as presented in the *Wu-liang-shou ching* (*Sūtra of Immeasurable Life*) says:

When I attain Buddhahood, if all sentient beings in the ten directions who aspire in all sincerity and faith to be born in my land and think of me even ten times are not born there, then may I not attain supreme enlightenment.<sup>45</sup>

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45 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 73.

On its own, the Original Vow is very ambiguous. The issue lies in defining what constitutes “thinking” of the Buddha. The term rendered in this translation as “think of me” is the word “*nen*” (念) which actually has a variety of meanings including “to think about,” “to recollect,” “to be mindful,” and even “one instant.” Another translation of the Original Vow uses the term “to reflect” rather than “to think” because it is more ambiguous and helps demonstrate the lack of clarity of meaning in the passage.<sup>46</sup> The term “*nembutsu*” (念仏) is the “*nen*” (reflection, contemplation) of “*butsu*” (the Buddha). In other words, it means something like “Buddha-reflections.” The act of reflecting on a Buddha is by no means limited to the invocation of a name and can easily be extended to include meditation, visualizations, doing prostrations, reading sūtras or even just remembering Amida. There is no specific reference to invocational *nembutsu* in the Original Vow so any correlation between “*nen*” and “*koe*” (“voice”; implying vocal/invocational *nembutsu*) is purely based on interpretation.

In the third chapter of the *Senchakushū*, Hōnen declares that “*nen*” refers to the act of invocational *nembutsu* alone. After citing the original version of the passage from the *Wu-liang-shou ching*, he goes on to list the passage as it appears in the *Kuan-nien fa-men (Dharma Gateway of Contemplation)* and the *Wang-sheng li-tsan (Hymns in Praise of Birth)*. In both of these texts, there is no ambiguity since the phrase “think of me” is instead replaced with “recite my name.” Hōnen goes on to explain why reciting the name is the correct method of reflection. At this point, it is important to note that while Hōnen’s justification for the selection of invocational *nembutsu* as the appropriate understanding of “*nen*” in chapter three is highly significant, it is not a particularly good explanation of why one should agree with this idea nor

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<sup>46</sup> “To reflect” is the translation Allan Andrews uses in “Pure Land Buddhist Hermeneutics: Hōnen’s Interpretation of *Nembutsu*.” It is more appropriate because “to think” comes across with a more direct meaning which could potentially exclude the myriad of acts which could be associated with “*nen*.”

does it really provide insight into how he reached this conclusion himself. Hōnen has simply accepted this interpretation and is attempting to explain it from a standpoint of acceptance rather than showing how he arrived at this acceptance. This point is made clear by the fact that he immediately followed up the ambiguous version of the vow with the two pre-interpreted versions without exploring the other possible meanings of “*nen*” and without offering any means of connecting the latter two passages to the first. Essentially, the juxtaposition of the three passages shows that he has already assumed that the three passages share the same meaning. He did however recognize the potential problem of creating the association but not explaining it, and so the issue is addressed, albeit briefly, at the end of the chapter. He states that “to think of” and “to recite” are actually “one thing” and that this is proven in the *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching* (*Meditation Sūtra*) by the following passage:

If they recite “*Namu Amida Butsu*” with uninterrupted voice while thinking [of him as few as] ten times, then, because they recite the Buddha’s name, with each repetition their sins accumulated during the births and deaths of eight billion kalpas are removed.<sup>47</sup>

Hōnen claims that “think of” and “recite” in this passage mean the same thing. More precisely, he is implying that “*nen*” means “*koe*” and is therefore representative of invocational *nembutsu*.<sup>48</sup> Since he has determined that the terms share the same meaning, he can apply this logic to the Original Vow and validate the replacement of the rather noncommittal “*nen*” with something more specific and limiting the scope of what can be considered “*nembutsu*.” However, the passage from the Meditation Sūtra itself seems to imply that they are not necessarily the same since one is reciting the name while also thinking of the Buddha. Thus, rather than being “one thing”, they are two different acts done concurrently to achieve the goal of sin removal. This

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47 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 80.

48 Machida, *Renegade Monk - Hōnen and Japanese Pure Land Buddhism*, 98.

further supports the idea that “*nen*” cannot simply be reduced to meaning “*koe*” and ought to keep its broader meaning of “think of” or “to reflect.”

Hōnen offers a second passage to prove his point: “With a great thought, one sees a great Buddha; with a small thought, one sees a small Buddha.”<sup>49</sup> This excerpt from the *Ta-chi ching*, like the Original vow, does not include any mention of invocational *nembutsu* and the meaning that Hōnen seeks to derive from it is actually provided by Master Huai-kan’s interpretation which explains that to have a “great thought” is to say the *nembutsu* in a loud voice and to have a “small thought” is to say it in a quiet voice.<sup>50</sup> As with the previous quotation, there is no direct connection between the act of thinking or a single thought and the act of invocational *nembutsu* that would suggest that they are one and the same. The only real authority which Hōnen goes on in establishing this connection is that of other Pure Land masters; he inherits this understanding. Since Hōnen did not convert to Pure Land from Tendai until after reading the works of Pure Land masters, it is safe to say that Hōnen modeled his beliefs after theirs, accepting their works as truth.

The most influential of these masters is Shan-tao (Zendō) who was not only the catalyst for Hōnen’s conversion to Pure Land but also the one whose interpretations of the Original Vow are present at the beginning of the third chapter of the *Senchakushū*. Shan-tao was the first to explicitly link the Original Vow with invocational *nembutsu*, and Hōnen draws heavily on his commentaries admitting:

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49 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 80.

50 *Ibid.*, 148. In a later chapter of the *Senchakushū*, Hōnen specifically states that one ought to rely on masters not their disciples. Since Huai-kan was a disciple of Shan-tao, one should rely on Shan-tao instead and be careful when accepting what any disciple says since the opinions of disciples tend to differ from those of the masters.

Long ago I [a monk of humble accomplishment] chanced to read this book by Shan-tao and came to learn something of its teachings. Thereupon, I resolutely abandoned the other practices and took refuge in the *nembutsu*.<sup>51</sup>

Hōnen places all of his faith in Shan-tao's interpretation of the Original Vow and states that he relies "solely on Shan-tao."<sup>52</sup> Hōnen's admiration for Shan-tao and his teachings was so profound that he even went as far as to suggest that Shan-tao is a manifestation (*avatara*) of Amida<sup>53</sup> and thus the *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching* is "the direct teaching of Amida himself."<sup>54</sup> If one accepts this to be the case, then "*nen*" must mean "*koe*," and Hōnen certainly does seem to accept this as fact. Of course, associating Shan-tao with Amida also lends more credit to Shan-tao's *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching* which then becomes a Buddha's exposition about his own vows rather than simply the hypothesis of a well-known master. Regardless of whether Shan-tao is or is not a manifestation of Amida, it is certain that his commentary, in Hōnen's own words, "laid the foundation for the Jōdo sect."<sup>55</sup>

Hōnen's deep devotion to Shan-tao is the largest part of why he accepts "*nen*" as "*koe*," but there are two other major reasons which support this conclusion. One of these is the Buddhist doctrine of the three periods of the dharma: perfect, superficial and degenerate.<sup>56</sup> Hōnen believed that we are already in the degenerate dharma period which means that true teachings have been largely lost or corrupted and that people are no longer as spiritually capable as they had been previously during the time when Śākyamuni was teaching. So rather than continue attempting to gain enlightenment from learning and discipline, the dharma-gate of the

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51 Ibid., 152.

52 Ibid., 148.

53 Hōnen's suggestion is not an original one; he says that this was a prevalent idea during the T'ang Dynasty and is incorporating it into his argument.

54 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 152.

55 Fitzgerald, *Hōnen the Buddhist Saint*, 24.

56 Allan A. Andrews, "Pure Land Buddhist Hermeneutics: Hōnen's Interpretation of *Nembutsu*," *Living in Amida's Universal Vow*, Ed. Alfred Bloom, (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), 232.

sages,<sup>57</sup> which is far too difficult if not simply impossible in this age, one ought to embrace the teachings of the Pure Land-dharma gate which were recommended by Śākyamuni specifically for the age of degenerate dharma. It should be noted that the teachings of the dharma-gate of the sages are not being dismissed as less true than those of the Pure Land dharma-gate;<sup>58</sup> they are just not as effective in this age and should for that reason be pushed aside in favor of the teachings of the Pure Land dharma-gate. Amida realized the difficulty of attaining enlightenment by the dharma-gate of the sages in the period of degenerate dharma and offered a way in which everyone could attain rebirth. This leads into the second reason why “nen” is rendered as “koe”: invocational *nembutsu* is easy. Hōnen explains:

If the original vow require us to make images of the Buddha and to build stūpas, the poor and destitute would surely have no hope of birth, but the fact is that the rich and the highborn are few, while the poor and lowborn are exceedingly many. If the original vow required us to have wisdom and intelligence, the dull and foolish would surely have no hope of birth, but the fact is that the wise are few and the foolish are very numerous. . . .

As for the various other practices they should be understood in the same way.<sup>59</sup>

By doing away with the various practices which place limits on what kind of person is capable of attaining rebirth, one opens the way for all beings. Amida, “filled with impartial compassion and wishing to save all beings universally,” did just that by choosing to make invocational *nembutsu* the only practice required for attaining rebirth.<sup>60</sup> There is even a provision for those who cannot actually say the *nembutsu* since “so long as one has a very deep faith, it is enough to listen to

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57 Also known as the Gateway of the Holy Path, this refers to all Buddhist practices which are not focused on Amida Buddha and his Pure Land such as those of the early Buddhist tradition.

58 Also known as the Gateway of the Pure Land, this path includes all Amida-centered practices including the *nembutsu*, visualizations of Amida and reading sutras which are associated with Amida.

59 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 77-78.

60 Ibid., 78.



other men's repetitions of the *nembutsu*.”<sup>61</sup> Since the practice is something that is easily accessible to the common man, it follows logically that it would be the practice selected by the Buddha in the Original Vow since he wishes to save everyone and not just the individuals privileged enough to meet the more difficult requirements set by other sects. Thus, primarily through the influence of Pure Land masters but with the support of the Buddhist view of history and the relative ease of invocational *nembutsu*, Hōnen came to accept that the Original Vow refers to invocational *nembutsu* only.

Having accepted “*nen*” as invocational *nembutsu*, Hōnen begins justifying *nembutsu* as the proper method of attaining rebirth in the Pure Land by dividing the vows that all buddhas make into two categories: general and special. The general vows he refers to as “the four universal vows,” and the special vows are the personal vows of each bodhisattva. The focus for Hōnen is the forty-eight special vows of the Bodhisattva Dharmākara. In order to prove that invocational *nembutsu* is the chosen method for rebirth in the Pure Land, Hōnen explains that the Original Vow was specifically selected (*Senchaku hongan*) and thus invocational *nembutsu* was also specifically selected. The idea of selection (*senchaku*) is something Hōnen takes a lot of time to consider and it is highly significant that his work is entitled “The Treatise on the Selection of the *Nembutsu* in the Original Vow” (*Senchaku hongan nembutsu shū*). For Hōnen, the importance of selecting something lies not only in what is chosen, but also the process of selection and the implications of making a choice. To select something, one must first acknowledge that one has other options and thus is taking up one particular thing from a multitude of possibilities. By choosing something from that range of possibilities, one is not merely selecting a single option, but one is also rejecting the other options. The fact that selection comes paired with rejection is extremely important for Hōnen. Realizing that by

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61 Fitzgerald, 55.

selecting one is also renouncing all other possibilities causes the act of rejection to move from being a passive, unconscious act to an active one. The option that was selected is made more significant by virtue of the fact that it was not just chosen but that other options were consciously dismissed in its favor.

In the *Senchakushū*, Hōnen simply defines “to select” as “to take up some while rejecting others”<sup>62</sup> and applies this more meaningful definition of selection to the first four of the forty-eight vow. For each vow, he explains what was selected as well as what was reject and states “hence the word ‘select’” thereby forcing one to recognize the true meaning and importance of selection.<sup>63</sup> He proceeds to do the same for the eighteenth vow noting that “practices for birth are of many different kinds” and different Buddha lands require different practices for birth. In fact, there are so many different practices that Hōnen even mentions that “it is not possible to discuss them all in detail”. However:

Here [in the eighteenth vow], he [Dharmākara] selected to cast aside various practices , such as ... dana, observance of the precepts, and lastly filial piety, and selected to make his own the wholehearted recitation of the Buddha’s name.<sup>64</sup>

By taking the time to emphasize that there are countless options presented by other Buddhas and by showing Amida’s rejection of them and selection of *nembutsu*, Hōnen proves that invocational *nembutsu* is the sole method for attaining rebirth in the Pure Land and that the other possible methods are not proper means of reaching the same goal.

This is not the only selection of the *nembutsu*, though. Hōnen recognizes eight selections of which *senchaku hongan* is the first. The others are: *senchaku sandan*, selection through the praise of Śākyamuni; *senchaku rukyō*, selection by Śākyamuni when he caused it to be alone;

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62 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 74.

63 Ibid., 74-75

64 Ibid., 76.

*senchaku sesshu*, selection by Amida's divine light embracing those who practice it; *senchaku kesan*, selection by Amida when he praised any being who uttered his name; *senchaku fuzoku*, selection by Sakyumuni when he entrusted Ananda to pass it on to future generations; *senchaku shōjō*, selection by the Buddhas witnessing the authenticity of *nembutsu*; and finally, *senchaku gamyō*, Amida's selection of his name.<sup>65</sup> The fact that *nembutsu* was selected for on so many occasions sets it apart from all other practices. As part of the Original Vow, anyone who practices *nembutsu* will attain rebirth or else Dharmākara's vow has not been fulfilled. Since the vow has been fulfilled by Dharmākara becoming Amida Buddha, it is then necessarily true that if one performs *nembutsu*, one will be reborn. Hōnen defined *nembutsu* as specifically invocational *nembutsu* so reciting the name is the chosen method rather than any of the other miscellaneous practices which might be considered "buddha-reflections." As a result, practices other than invocational *nembutsu* serve no real purpose because they do not aid in rebirth and should be discarded.

### **Integration of Auxiliary Acts**

Hōnen advises:

Let the *Nembutsu* of the Original Vow stand by itself and receive help from no other quarter. By outside help I mean that of one's wisdom, the observance of the commandments (*sīla*), religious aspiration, deeds of charity, and the like.<sup>66</sup>

Even though his own logic and words make it clear that invocational *nembutsu* is the only method which should be practiced in an effort to attain rebirth, Hōnen did not adhere to his own suggestions. He certainly applied himself to reciting the *nembutsu* and supposedly repeated the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., *Hōnen's Senchakushū*, 200-202.

<sup>66</sup> Fitzgerald, *Hōnen the Buddhist Saint*, 32.

name seventy thousand times a day, but this should not be taken to mean that he discarded all other Buddhist practices. In fact, he did just the opposite and continued to uphold the precepts in “a manner worthy of a master of the vinaya.”<sup>67</sup> In order to fit these extraneous practices in with the logic of exclusive invocational *nembutsu*, Hōnen reevaluated them as auxiliary actions which complement invocational *nembutsu* and which should be taken up after one has established faith Amida.

The act of simply repeating the name does not constitute proper *nembutsu* practice if one does not have complete trust in the Original Vow and Amida’s saving grace. Recitation of the *nembutsu* without proper faith is self-power (*jiriki*); this is an attempt to work one’s way into the Pure Land by one’s own efforts via personal strength. The idea is essentially that by saying the name, one can earn salvation. However, this is not true faith in Amida and the Original Vow since it hinges on personal effort. True faith comes from accepting that salvation is the result of other-power (*tariki*) which is Amida’s power alone. The number of times one recites the *nembutsu* is not nearly as important as the earnest with which one is requesting Amida’s help. Salvation can be earned with only a few repetitions as long as one has a strong conviction. Hōnen did not see self-power as something one should completely ignore, however. Instead, he felt one should balance the two principles. A person who relies solely on self-power does not allow any room for assistance from Amida which is necessary for salvation. On the other hand, a person who completely gives into other-power becomes incapable of helping themselves. Rather than picking either extreme, Hōnen advocates believing in one’s own strength while also giving oneself wholeheartedly to religious practice.<sup>68</sup> In this manner, it is possible to receive Amida’s help and achieve *ōjō*.

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67 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 13.

68 *Ibid.*, 193.

Establishing faith in Amida is crucial to the process of attaining rebirth, but once this is done, the faithful person can reintroduce all the acts which were set aside in favor of invocational *nembutsu*. The entire process is set up as series of selections and rejections<sup>69</sup> in which one is almost mimicking Amida's process of selection within the Original Vow. To begin with, one has to select a single path from all of the Buddhist teachings. The choices are the Gateway of the Holy Path (*shōdōmon*) or the Gateway of the Pure Land (*jōdomon*).<sup>70</sup> Gateway of the Holy Path does lead to enlightenment, but is not a reasonable choice so one should reject it and instead select the more practical Gateway of the Pure Land. For Hōnen, it seems that this selection has already been made because both Amida and Śākyamuni have selected the Gateway of the Pure Land for the degenerate age. People seeking rebirth in the Pure Land and more specifically, those who are ultimately seeking enlightenment, do not really have a choice in this matter at all. The Gateway of the Holy Path is presented by Hōnen as an option that is entirely unfeasible. For the common man, too many obstacles stand in the way of following the way of the sages including wealth and intelligence, but even one who is well off in these respects would still be hindered by the fact the world is in its degenerate age so proper practice would not be possible. Since the option of the Gateway of the Holy Path is simply unavailable, there is no real selection involved. Instead, one must realize that the Gateway of the Pure Land is the only way to attain rebirth and enlightenment. Once a person has come to this realization, the real process of establishing faith by selection begins.

Within the Gateway of the Pure Land there are a large number of acts, but Shan-tao separates them into two groups: the right practice and miscellaneous practice (*zōgyō*). According to Shan-tao:

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69 Ibid., 39.

70 Also referred to as the dharma-gate of the sages and the Pure Land dharma-gate, respectively.

Right practice consists in performing only the kinds of discipline derived from the sutras on birth in the Pure Land; hence the name “right practice.”<sup>71</sup>

Shan-tao divides right practice into five kinds: 1) reading and reciting the *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching*, the *A-mi-t'o ching* and the *Wu-ling-shou ching*, 2) rightly contemplating the rewards in the Pure Land, 3) doing prostrations, 4) reciting the name, and 5) giving praise and offerings. Hōnen splits praise and offerings into two separate categories thus creating six right practices. From among these six practices, the fourth, reciting the name, is deemed the rightly established act (*shōjōgō*) because “reciting the name is the practice specified in the original vow of the Buddha.”<sup>72</sup> The remaining practices are referred to as auxiliary acts (*jōgō*) and are not essential to birth since they are not specified in the original vow. Neither Shan-tao nor Hōnen suggest that the auxiliary actions should be cast aside, though. Since they are focused on Amida and the Pure Land, the auxiliary acts keep one's heart and mind “intimately with and near Amida Buddha”<sup>73</sup> and so one always keeps the Buddha in mind. Thus, the auxiliary acts reinforce the rightly established act and create a stronger connection with Amida. This view of the auxiliary acts and the rightly established act fits well with Hōnen's ideas about self-power and other-power needing to be balanced. The rightly established act is an appeal to other-power since reciting the name is a means of asking for Amida's grace so one can attain rebirth, but this reliance on other-power is balanced out by the auxiliary acts which are examples of self-power. The auxiliary actions cannot help one attain rebirth on their own because self-power cannot help one attain rebirth. They are a means of helping oneself to remain focused on the rightly established act which will help in attaining rebirth.

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71 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 63.

72 *Ibid.*, 65.

73 *Ibid.*, 64.

Miscellaneous practices are all other good actions which do not pertain specifically to Amida and the Pure Land. This includes all of the actions listed as part of the right practices if they are done in relation to any Buddha other than Amida, *dāna* (giving) and the observance of the precepts. Prior to the establishment of faith, these can be viewed as non-helpful types of self-power since they do not focus on Amida. The second step in the selection process is between these practices and the right practices. Hōnen states that one “ought to cast aside the miscellaneous and take up the exclusive practice.”<sup>74</sup> He explains this selection with five pairs of contrasts: 1) intimate vs estranged, 2) near vs far, 3) intermittent vs uninterrupted, 4) necessary to dedicate merit vs unnecessary to dedicate merit, and 5) pure vs miscellaneous.<sup>75</sup> The first two pairs can be taken together. Intimate and near refer to the relationship one creates with Amida by practicing the right practices. Since they are focused on Amida, they forge a close bond between the Buddha and the practitioner. To support this, Hōnen quotes the *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching shu*:

When sentient beings arouse themselves to practice and always recite with their lips name of the Buddha, the Buddha will hear them. When they constantly and reverently bow down to the Buddha, the Buddha will see them. When they constantly think of the Buddha in their hearts, the Buddha will know them. When sentient beings remember the Buddha, the Buddha, also, remembers them. In these three acts, the Buddha and sentient beings are not separate from each other.<sup>76</sup>

On the other hand, miscellaneous acts do not create this kind of relationship. They are not specific to the Buddha and so they do not cause the Buddha to see, hear or think of the ones practicing them. Hence, miscellaneous acts are “estranged” and “far.” While they are not

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74 Ibid., 71.

75 Ibid., 67.

76 Ibid., 67.

necessarily responsible for forcing any kind of separation between a practitioner and the Buddha, they also do not encourage the formation of a bond. Since the Gateway of the Pure Land is the only available method for enlightenment, it is essential that one develop an intimate bond with Amida. The right practices are also “uninterrupted” because they all demand that one reflect on Amida. It is not possible to do any of them without remembering the Buddha whereas the miscellaneous acts are not dependent on any reflections on Amida. So, while it is entirely possible that one can perform a miscellaneous act and still remember Amida, it is also very likely that one will do so with no thoughts of Amida at all or maybe only a few. Since there is no certainty that one will focus on Amida, miscellaneous acts result in only an “intermittent” bond with Amida. The fourth reason addresses the issue of creating merit. A person can create enough merit to attain rebirth through miscellaneous acts, but one must dedicate all their practices to that end for it to work.<sup>77</sup> If they do not dedicate all their practices to gaining merit, they will not achieve rebirth. This actually seems to be more of an appropriate method for attaining enlightenment via the Gateway of the Holy Path than through the power of Amida. It is a complete reliance on self-power which Hōnen does not condone. Also, just because it can be done in this manner does not mean it should be nor does it mean that it will be easy. Building merit through miscellaneous acts is one of the ideas which Hōnen vetoed when he accepted invocational *nembutsu* because it is a process that can be considered too difficult for the common man. Unlike miscellaneous acts which must be consciously dedicated to the desired end, the right acts automatically build merit for rebirth without extra effort and thus are the better choice. Hōnen's final pair of contradictions lists the right acts as pure or “purely directed towards birth in the land of Sukhāvātī.”<sup>78</sup> Again, because the right acts are focused on Amida and rebirth in the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 68.



Pure Land, they are superior to miscellaneous acts which are not. For those reasons, the right practices should be selected.

Understanding why the miscellaneous acts are rejected at this point is extremely important. They are not “bad” practices and Hōnen does admit that they build merit so the question is: why not keep both the right practices and the miscellaneous practices? The reason is that miscellaneous practices are based on self-power. Unlike the auxiliary acts which are also self-power, miscellaneous acts do not create room for Amida's other-power and so do not allow for Amida's help. Because faith in Amida is what empowers the practice of invocational *nembutsu*, one must first and foremost create that foundational faith. Allowing miscellaneous practices before that faith is established undermines the saving power of Amida and serves to mask the message in the Original Vow. It must be clear that if one wishes to attain rebirth one has to place their faith in Amida and invocational *nembutsu* and that one cannot rely on or defer to anything else.

When one has cast aside the miscellaneous acts (understanding fully the reason for their rejection), formed a strong, intimate bond with Amida and realized that it is through his compassion that rebirth in Sukhāvātī is attained, one can then reintegrate the miscellaneous acts. This can **only** be done after the firm establishment of faith. When the miscellaneous acts are reintegrated, they become known as “different kinds of auxiliary acts” (*irui no jogō*). The term “different” here refers to the fact that they are not necessarily Amida-related practices. The original auxiliary acts are then called “similar kinds of auxiliary acts” (*dōrui no jogō*) since they are directly related to the rightly established act. When practiced correctly and with established faith, the distinction between miscellaneous practices and the *nembutsu* is dissolved; they all

become an extension of *nembutsu*.<sup>79</sup> Together all these practices lead to rebirth. Once one is reborn in the Pure Land, the practices which are part of the Gateway of the Holy Path can be reappropriated as well.<sup>80</sup>

It is important to reiterate that according to Hōnen's view of the Original Vow, it is only the rightly established act, invocational *nembutsu*, which is needed for rebirth. Granted, the name must be recited with proper faith in Amida's saving power, but neither the miscellaneous acts nor even the auxiliary acts are truly necessary to attain rebirth if Hōnen's original logic is accepted. If they are taken to be necessary, then the logic of exclusive *nembutsu* is undermined. In order to keep with the original logic, all actions besides invocational *nembutsu* have to be understood as only being helpful to the process and not as being essential to it. There is no real reason in Hōnen's view for why one should not perform something helpful, though. In fact, Hōnen extends auxiliary actions to anything and everything which can aid in the practice of *nembutsu* saying:

We should spend our life so that we can recite the *nembutsu*. If something hinders our practice of the *nembutsu*, it should be abandoned and stopped... Clothing, food and shelter: these three are the auxiliary acts of the *nembutsu*; that is to say that anything that can enable a secure life is an auxiliary act of the *nembutsu*.<sup>81</sup>

So even simple daily actions can be considered auxiliary because they provide people with what they need in order to keep up the practice of *nembutsu*.

The process of selection, rejection and reintegration with proper understanding also explains how Hōnen could advocate exclusive *nembutsu* but keep up additional practices. By looking at certain actions as conducive to *nembutsu*, Hōnen is able to allow the many practices

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79 Ibid., 44.

80 Ibid., 45.

81 Ibid., 13. Quoted from the the *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen shōnin zenshū*.

which should be discarded to keep a place in the lives of Jōdo shū practitioners without endangering the meaning behind exclusive *nembutsu*. The major reason for this allowance stems from Hōnen's trust of Shan-tao since the majority of his beliefs are not original in nature and are actually borrowed for other Pure Land masters. That is not to say that this is the only reason for their inclusion. Hōnen's belief that one cannot totally rely on other-power is certainly a very important justification as is understanding the importance of selection and the personal faith in Amida. Assuming that after his conversion in 1175, Hōnen established complete faith in Amida, then none of the practices which he performed were out of line in terms of his ideals even though they made him appear to be just like his Tendai predecessors. The key to practicing auxiliary actions within the Jōdo sect and the major difference which caused Hōnen to separate from Tendai is the underlying faith in Amida's other-power. This faith allows all other rituals to be practiced (assuming one wishes to do so) without overshadowing the fact that salvation can only be attained through invocational *nembutsu*.

## CHAPTER 4

### HŌNEN'S "LUKEWARM" FAITH: SHIN PERSPECTIVE

Buddhism functions as an umbrella term for a myriad of practices and beliefs; it is not subject to a single specific orthodoxy. As a result, "faith" as well as what it means to be "faithful" must be analyzed not so much by looking at Buddhism as a whole, but rather by looking at the role which faith plays in specific sects and even what faith meant to each individual founder. In Pure Land Buddhism, faith reaches a pinnacle of importance since salvation is based solely on faith in Amida. Here, the question of faith is linked to the ideas of *tariki* and *jiriki* and centered around the practice of *nembutsu*. The goal of this paper is to examine precisely how Hōnen and his disciple Shinran define faith in terms of *nembutsu* while also highlighting that even though Shinran stresses faith to an extreme which Hōnen does not reach, this should not eclipse or in any way diminish the value of faith in Hōnen's ideology nor should it paint Hōnen as a man of questionable faith. To begin, I intend on explaining the perceived problem of faith in Hōnen's version of Pure Land as presented by critics. I will then examine Hōnen's short and direct response to these accusations and seek to refute them to some extent by outlining the true nature of the question being asked and how Hōnen and Shinran approach the function of *nembutsu*.

## Defining the Conflict

The foundation of Hōnen and Shinran's Pure Land Buddhism is the Primal Vow of Amida in the *Larger Sūtra*.<sup>82</sup> The conclusion Hōnen draws from the Vow, based on the works of Shan-tao, is that *nembutsu* is the only right practice for those seeking to be reborn in the Pure Land because it is the practice which Amida Buddha singled out as correct from the multitude of practices used to venerate various Buddhas.<sup>83</sup> As a result, *nembutsu* is elevated to being the only right practice and by extension the only one which can guarantee salvation. The Primal Vow specifies that the *nembutsu* must be said in "all sincerity and faith" which eliminates the ability to mindlessly repeat the *nembutsu* expecting enlightenment, but it also sets up a problem. How many repetitions are necessary to demonstrate faith, and how does one define the kind of faith which results in birth? Also, at what point does one cross the line from faith and right practice to a reliance on the self?

Since *nembutsu* is termed the rightly established act, Hōnen has no qualms about advocating the continuous ritual chanting of the name as opposed to a single utterance which is the path supported by Hōnen's disciple, Shinran.<sup>84</sup> For Shinran as well as for many of Hōnen's critics, both his Kamakura contemporaries and modern onlookers, Hōnen's almost chronic repetition of the *nembutsu* is seen less as an acceptance of Amida's saving power and the Primal Vow, and more as a turn to the types of actives which are discouraged by Pure Land Buddhism; it is essentially labeled as *jiriki* or at least a practice which toes the line. The point of contention

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82 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 72. "When I attain buddhahood, if all sentient beings in the ten directions who aspire in all sincerity and faith to be born in my land and think of me even ten times are not born, then may I not attain supreme enlightenment." This is the original passage from the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life* found in the *Wang-sheng li-tsan*.

83 While the *nembutsu* is the only practice which can guarantee rebirth, Hōnen does allow for many other Amida focused practices. The method for applying these practices is outlined in his masterwork the *Senchakushū*.

84 It is worth noting here, briefly, that Shinran was not a critic of Hōnen. This will be addressed in greater detail later, but it is important to realize that while their doctrines differ, this is by no means Shinran's way of separating himself from Hōnen's teachings.

is simple: if calling the name only once in faith is sufficient to seal one's place in the Pure Land, then why would one continue on especially to the point of constant ritual repetition? If one continues to recite the name, then the concept of faith is completely undermined since there appears to be an uncertainty about salvation which necessitates the need for multiple repetitions to ensure what should already have been both given and received.

This all appears to boil down to the ideas of *tariki* and *jiriki*. If there is uncertainty and one is saying the name essentially in response to this uncertainty, this is *jiriki*. If one feels that the way in which one can attain birth is by building a storehouse of merit and karma through *nembutsu*, then one is participating in an act of *jiriki*. Any action which a *nembutsu* practitioner could possibly undertake that involves saving oneself through any kind of work, *nembutsu* included, is *jiriki*. Therefore, multiple repetitions are certainly *jiriki* since there is no reason to recite the name more than once and the only way to truly attain birth is through a single *nembutsu* that is said with faith in Amida's other power, *tariki*. This is the stance that Shinran takes in regard to *nembutsu* and why he did not subscribe to Hōnen's idea of numerous, even ceaseless, repetitions.

Unfortunately, Hōnen never specifically clarified the relationship between faith, multiple recitations and *tariki* in his life time and after his death the debate over the 'merits of faith versus practice' and 'one recitation versus many' only intensified.<sup>85</sup> In 1227, during an attack on his tomb, nearly all of his writings except for the *Senchakushū* were lost, so we are even more crippled in our effort to correctly understand this relationship as he understood it. Hōnen's disciples made an effort after his death to clarify Hōnen's thoughts which eventually resulted in two major trends of thought,<sup>86</sup> but it would be unwise to look to them for a true reflection of

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85 Matsunaga, 71.

86 Ibid., 78. The first was a "conciliation with other sects" by advocated practices other than the *nembutsu*. The

Hōnen's beliefs. In fact, I believe that it is the effort of looking at Hōnen through Shinran's work and the work of his other disciples which casts a negative light on Hōnen's practices and fuels a misunderstanding of his intentions. This is, I believe, one of the main ways in which some arrive at the conclusion that Hōnen supported *jiriki* practices as a means of salvation and that he, despite advocating exclusive *nembutsu*, was actually ambivalent in his personal practice. So, in order to gain an accurate understanding of Hōnen, it is important that one, to a great extent, disregards the developments of those that came after him and focus instead on his own words and the unique way in he viewed faith and *nembutsu*. From this perspective, the primary question becomes less about *tariki* and *jiriki*, but rather a question about how *nembutsu* functions in relation to faith. The answers to this question are what actually define the distinction between Hōnen and Shinran and they do so in a way which is a far more accurate representation of both men's conceptions of faith and practice than the overly simplistic *tariki/jiriki* dynamic.

### **Shinran's Relationship with Hōnen**

During his life, Hōnen was a prominent figure in society and a famous Buddhist scholar while Shinran was a “nonentity.”<sup>87</sup> It is therefore somewhat surprising that it is Shinran's sect, Jōdo Shinshū, which claims the title of the largest Pure Land Buddhist sect while Hōnen's Jōdo sect is the second largest.<sup>88</sup> While I do not believe that all the criticism of Hōnen's “*jiriki* ways”

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second was a greater move towards the idea of single-calling (*ichinengi*). Matsunaga states that the former is more representative of Hōnen's personal life while the latter is more of a development of the theology of the Senchakushū. While I agree with the first part, I would say that more needs to be said of the second part. It is not just a further development, it is a new development. Hōnen retained the idea of other practices within the *Senchakushū* as well as the idea of multiple recitation being beneficial. The move to eliminate both of those does not appear to be something Hōnen was personally interested in or something that he saw as entirely necessary provided that one *correctly* understood the meaning of the Primal Vow.

87 Ibid., 94

88 Earhart, Byron H. *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity*. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Learning/Wadsworth: 2004), 103. This success is largely an effect of Rennyo's structural contributions which strengthened the sect after its decline following Shinran's death.

stems from this, I do think that the influence of Jōdo Shinshū success encourages some to analyze Hōnen through the developments that Shinran brought into the Pure Land movement. Generally, the idea transmitted is one of “fruition and completion;” Hōnen is reduced both chronologically and logically to just a stage on the way to Shinran.<sup>89</sup> As stated before, this is detrimental to understanding Hōnen and I feel that giving a brief overview of the relationship Hōnen and Shinran shared will help to clarify why it is important to not fall back on Hōnen's disciples, particularly Shinran, for a more complete view of Hōnen's ideology.

Shinran joined Hōnen's Pure Land movement in 1201 and stayed with him until their exile in 1207 after which they did not meet again, but he was by no means the most prominent disciple. Dobbins states, “The precise relationship between Hōnen and Shinran is difficult to define because of conflicting evidence in different sources.”<sup>90</sup> In fact, outside of Shinshū sources, Shinran is not mentioned, and there is very little evidence to indicate what Hōnen actually thought of Shinran. In the list of 190 signatures on the *Shichikajō kishōmon* (“Seven Pledge Article”), Shinran is found at number eighty-seven. In a 1257 record of Hōnen's five “proper followers,” Shinran's name is omitted.<sup>91</sup> However, in 1205, Hōnen allowed Shinran to copy his masterwork, the *Senchakushū*. Due to its highly controversial nature, Hōnen requested that work not be released until his death and only allowed it to be secretly circulated among a select group of disciples.<sup>92</sup> Shinran describes the even in his *Kyōgyōshinshō*<sup>93</sup>:

I, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Śākyamuni, discarded sundry practices and took refuge in the Primal Vow in 1201. In 1205 Master Genkū, out of his benevolence, granted me

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89 Machida, 138.

90 James C. Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 25.

91 Matsunaga, 71.

92 Hee-Sung Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. (Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1995), 39.

93 Shinran's masterwork which was composed after his exile around 1224.



permission to copy his *Passages on the Nembutsu Selected in the Primal Vow*. In the same year, on the fourteenth day of the fourth month, the master inscribed [the copy] in his own hand with an inside title, “Passages on the *Nembutsu* Selected in the Primal Vow,” with the words, “Namu-amida-butsu: as the act that leads to the birth in the Pure Land, the *nembutsu* is taken to be fundamental,” and with [the name he had bestowed on me,] “Shakkū, disciple of Śākyamuni.”<sup>94</sup>

Receiving the right to copy the *Senchakushū* was a mark of privilege and suggests that Shinran was a member of Hōnen's inner circle. In 1207, he was among the men that were exiled along with Hōnen, but this event does not seem to highlight any particular sort of closeness between Hōnen and Shinran. The actual reason that Shinran was part of this group is unknown and different scholars present different possibilities including: violating the celibacy of monks, being one of the disciples to have copied the *Senchakushū* and even being a more radical and thus more dangerous thinker than his leader Hōnen. The best conclusion that can be drawn about Hōnen's opinion of Shinran is, as Dobbins points out, that he was a trusted disciple, but not a leading protégé.<sup>95</sup>

Shinran's view of Hōnen on the other hand, is quite well defined, and it is clear that Hōnen had a profound impact on him. To him, Hōnen was the “foremost religious personage of the period.”<sup>96</sup> In Shinran's *Wasan (Hymns)* he says the following of Hōnen:

Our teacher Genkū appeared  
Through the power of the Light of Wisdom,  
And revealing the true Pure Land way,

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94 Dennis Hirota, trans. *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), 290.

Also appears in: Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*, 39-40.

95 Dobbins, 26.

96 Ibid.

He taught the selected Primal Vow.<sup>97</sup>

Shinran notes here that Hōnen revealed the “true (shin 真)” Pure Land way and this is something he really took to heart. In his writings, he used the term “shinshū 真宗” to refer to the “true teachings” which are those attributed to Hōnen; Shinran would have considered himself a member of the Jōdoshū school of thought and not as a religious founder.<sup>98</sup> In fact, Shinran always believed that “what he preached was identical to Hōnen's thought, and for that reason he gave Hōnen total credit for it and claimed none for himself.”<sup>99</sup> Shinran believed the *Senchakushū* itself to be work both “supreme and profound.”<sup>100</sup> It is thus interesting that the term which Shinran used to refer directly to Hōnen's teachings, shinshū, became the name of Shinran's sect. This was an application neither foreseen nor intended.

Shinran's attitude towards Hōnen and his belief that he was spreading the exact same message as Hōnen would suggest that he would be an excellent tool for understanding and analyzing his master, but that is not the case. What Shinran preached was not exactly what Hōnen had taught, and it is also not exactly what is presented in the *Senchakushū*. There are clear and critical doctrinal differences between Hōnen and Shinran. So, while Shinran's faith in Hōnen's teachings was absolute, the actual interpretations and conclusions which he draws from them are not identical to those drawn by Hōnen.

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

The apparent *jiriki* nature of the ritual chanting of the *nembutsu* is a fact which Hōnen was confronted with during his lifetime. His response was direct and simple:

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97 Hirota, *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 387.

98 Dobbins, 64.

99 Dobbins, 64.

100 Hirota, *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 291.

Again, to say that frequent repetitions of the sacred name mean the encouragement of the principle of self-effort shows the utter ignorance of the facts and is a deplorable blunder. Even one repetition or two of the sacred name must be said to be the *Nembutsu* of salvation by one's own power, if one does it with that thought in his heart; while a hundred or a thousand repetitions day and night for a hundred or a thousand days, so long as one does it with an entire trust in the merits of the great Vow, looking up in confidence to Amida with every repetition, constitute the *Nembutsu* of salvation by Amida's power alone.<sup>101</sup>

Since Hōnen could so confidently dismiss these accusation, one must examine “the facts” which allowed him to do so rather than to continue to view the many-callings as *jiriki*. Even in this reply, one major element is evident: it is faith which is the deciding factor in whether an act is *tarik* or *jiriki* not the number of times which it performed.

In the *Senchakushū*, Hōnen defines *nembutsu* as the Rightly Established Act, specifically selected by Amida for its ease in the Primal Vow. He emphasizes that it is only *nembutsu* which is the correct practice, but he does not ignore all other practices. Instead, he employs a process of selection and rejection which allows one to properly reach the conclusion that *nembutsu* is not only the right practice but also that it is possible to incorporate other practices without undermining the meaning of the Primal Vow. By first rejecting all non-Amida centered practices and turning only to the Five Right Practices, one focuses on Amida alone which links the heart with Amida and helps one to realize that one must rely only on Amida's saving power for salvation. Even within the Five Right Practices, there is still a separation between the four auxiliary acts and the Rightly Established Act which must always take precedence. Before all other practices can be added, one must reach a “firm establishment of

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101 Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism, Vol. 2: The Mass Movement*, 69.

faith.” This is a gray area for Hōnen as he never revealed what characterizes a truly faithful person. In terms of salvation, the lack of clarity is problematic since it prevents one from knowing when salvation has actually been attained. Hōnen seems uncertain about this point as well, saying:

Birth into the Pure Land is certain, when you think it so, but also uncertain when you think it so.<sup>102</sup>

Hōnen has also stated that until one is “truly sitting upon the lotus stand in the Pure Land” it is not possible to be free of the worries that one has not attained.<sup>103</sup> This uncertainty could be viewed as the driving force for the many-callings, but this was not Hōnen's intention for no matter how many times the name is called, the only way to experience salvation is through faith.

In his response to his accusers, Hōnen makes a critical assumption about the nature of *nembutsu*. If he understands *nembutsu* as something which can be performed either as an act of *tariki* or *jiriki* and faith is what draws the line, then faith is not inherent in the action. While this seems in some ways self-evident, it is the fundamental difference between the ideologies of Hōnen and Shinran. Shinran believed that faith could not be separated from the *nembutsu*, they were the same. In other words, *nembutsu* without faith is not true *nembutsu*. This was not a belief which Shinran inherited from his master Hōnen. For Hōnen, faith and the *nembutsu* are two separate entities. *Nembutsu* is a practice only; it is not the faith itself. The practice cannot be *jiriki* since it was selected by Amida in his Primal Vow; only the intention to work one's way into the Pure Land via *nembutsu* is *jiriki* and this is, of course, guaranteed to fail. Dennis Hirota explains:

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102     Fitzgerald, 36

103     Ibid.

Although we say the Name, worship, and think on the Buddha, these are not practices of the self; they are simply the practicing of Amida Buddha's practice. This means that when we, with the mind taking refuge, allow ourselves to be carried by the Primal Vow and our bodily, verbal and mental acts all ride upon the reality of Amida's Buddhahood, then the body is no longer an existence separate from Buddha, the mind is no longer a mind separate from the Buddha.<sup>104</sup>

Again we see the importance of faith as the deciding factor in the phrase, “with the mind taking refuge.” Thus, because *nembutsu* is not a manifestation of faith or a lack of faith, it cannot really be termed an attempt at self-power unless there is an active desire to use as a means for “buying” one's way into the Pure Land. Hōnen declares that there is “nothing so profound in the *nembutsu* at all” and that “the only thing to know is that anyone who calls upon the sacred name is certain to be born in the Pure Land.”<sup>105</sup> On its own, *nembutsu* is nothing more than a practice, but with proper faith, it becomes an agent of salvation.

At this point, the question of faith and the purpose of many-callings resurfaces. Regardless of whether or not the *nembutsu* is recited many times in faith, the fact remains that only a single-calling in faith is needed for salvation. Many-callings retains the distinct air of a vain attempt at quelling the fear that one has not yet attained, and Hōnen admitted that one cannot truly be certain. Hōnen's answer to this is the following:

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. If, because it is taught that you should say the Name “moment by moment without interruption,” you believe one or ten utterances to be indecisive, then practice is hindering faith. As your faith, accept that

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104 Dennis Hirota, “On Attaining the Settled Mind: The Condition of the Nembutsu Practitioner.” *Religions of Japan in Practice*. Ed. George J. Tanabe, Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 265.

105 Fitzgerald, 97.

birth is attained with a single utterance; as your practice, endeavor in the *nembutsu* throughout life.<sup>106</sup>

If the ritual repetition were to serve as response to these worries, it would be an act of self-power since that would be an attempt to work one's way into the Pure Land under the assumption that if one or ten repetitions do not work, perhaps a greater amount can amplify Amida's saving power. To avoid this pitfall, Hōnen reminds the *nembutsu* practitioner that one must recite the *nembutsu* as if one has already received.<sup>107</sup> In order to do so, one must already have faith in Amida's saving grace and this prevents practitioners from getting caught up in a self-power trap. Despite the encouraging multiple recitations, the constant emphasis on faith in Hōnen's words makes it clear that there is no replacement for Amida's other power, *tariki*.

Nevertheless, the question of why one should continue chanting remains. As mentioned before, this was a point on which Hōnen never elaborated. The primary purpose of the many-callings seems to be that Amida provided a simple practice out of his compassion for those who wished to be saved but were incapable of other practices, and one should recite the name many times in “heartfelt response to Amida's vow.”<sup>108</sup> The value of the practice could be the same as for that of the four auxiliary actions, simply to keep one's heart and mind connected with Amida even after birth has been attained. Another possibility is that the *nembutsu* has a “purifying nature” and has also been said to remove sins, this allows it to serve as a stepping-stone to achieving the three qualities of mind (*sanjin* 三心) which are traditionally necessary in Buddhism for enlightenment.<sup>109</sup>

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106 Dennis Hirota, “Plain Words on the Pure Land Way” *Religions of Japan in Practice*. Ed. George J. Tanabe, Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 272.

107 Fitzgerald, 35.

108 Machida, 141.

109 Matsunaga, 99.

The three kinds of mind are described in detail in the eighth chapter of Hōnen's *Senchakushū*. There he states that they are “vital to practitioners” and “if one possess the three kinds of mind, one will certainly attain birth.”<sup>110</sup> The first of the three minds is the “utterly sincere mind” or the belief that through the practice of *nembutsu*, one will be reborn in the Pure Land because this is what was stated in the Primal Vow. The second mind is the “profound mind” which trusts that Amida will save those who call upon him through birth. The third mind is one of dedicating merit which believes that the merit of *nembutsu* will be directed towards birth in the Pure Land. Hōnen was careful to note that *nembutsu* is not to be considered our merit in the sense that more callings does not translate into a greater chance for salvation.

So, the practice of *nembutsu* before the firm establishment of faith is basically a process by which one creates the three minds which are the minds of the truly faithful and thus the saved. If approached in this manner, there is a purpose for the many-callings before and after the establishment of faith. This purpose does not detract from the Amida's saving power nor does it advocate a turn to self-power.

The idea of the three minds does pose a problem. If the three minds are absolutely required for saying the *nembutsu* in the correct fashion for birth, then one becomes dependent on the subjective condition of one's mental state. Such a premise violates the idea that the *nembutsu* was given as an easy practice for everyone since not everyone will be able to develop the appropriate mental states. This shifts the power away from the Primal Vow and thus away from Amida's other power. One of Hōnen's disciples expressed concern over this matter and Hōnen promptly pointed out that “there is no other thing for sentient beings than simply calling the Name.”<sup>111</sup> Hōnen shows that there is ultimately no real difference between saying the *nembutsu*

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110 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 111.

111 Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*, 61.

with three minds and saying it without because the efficacy of the *nembutsu* is not dependent on us at all; it is entirely based on Amida's compassion and other-power.

### **Comparison with Shinran**

As mentioned earlier, Shinran viewed the *nembutsu* as far more than a just a simple practice. For him, it could not be separated from faith since faithless *nembutsu* is not actual *nembutsu* at all; in essence they are the same thing. Shinran held a more pessimistic view of human nature than Hōnen and even an act as “easy” as *nembutsu* cannot be free from the corruption of self-effort. No man, Shinran included, is capable of practicing the *nembutsu* without the underlying thoughts of self-salvation and even the most well intentioned man will undoubtedly fall back on using the *nembutsu* as a means of trying to himself. This is because “as long as one possess a calculating mind, one endeavors in self-power.”<sup>112</sup> For this reason, Shinran also believe that it is the wicked who are most likely to be saved both because they need the salvation more than others and also because a person who is weighed down with many sins will be less likely to think that he can create his own salvation. The burden of the sins forces the wicked to look for salvation beyond themselves. Shinran states those who “aspire for the Pure Land must not behave outwardly as wise or good.”<sup>113</sup> This is another point on which Hōnen and Shinran disagree. Shinran, of course, did not actually encourage doing evil actions. He disowned his son, Zenran, for teaching that active misconduct could help one attain rebirth. There is a difference between not advocating and discouraging, though. Hōnen believed that while one should not do good works as an attempt to save oneself that did not mean that a person should resort to being sinful as a means of demonstrating an understanding that it is Amida's

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112 Hirota, *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 520.

113 Alfred Bloom, ed. *The Essential Shinran: A Buddhist Path of True Entrusting*, (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), 49.



power which saves. Hōnen believed that none of the scriptures advocate sin thus this sort of “licensed evil” will not result in birth.

Shinran did not share Hōnen's idea that many-callings could in any way be beneficial; instead, they are almost guaranteed to be detrimental since they are grounded in self-effort. While Hōnen continued to emphasize the positive aspects of the many-callings, he was aware that the role they play in salvation is minimal if there is any role at all, but he was not willing to dispense with the practice. Shinran, on the other, took a more decisive stance and did away with the need to say *nembutsu* almost completely.<sup>114</sup> If all the saving-power rests with Amida, there is no reason to say the name more than once. More importantly, even the single utterance is not something which one can choose to do on one's own and therefore *nembutsu* is called a “non-practice” and “non-good.”<sup>115</sup>

Shinran's stance radically changed the idea of faith in a way which Hōnen's Pure Land was not able to due to the view of *nembutsu* as a practice. Traditionally, faith is a voluntary action; one chooses to believe. However, the idea that one can choose to believe renders the action fully within the scope of *jiriki*. Therefore, if one must have faith in order to be saved, but “conventional faith” is a choice or a self-effort, then there must be another option otherwise birth is impossible.<sup>116</sup> The only way in which salvation is possible then is to have faith be a gift from Amida as well as salvation. Unno explains:

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114 It is perhaps worth noting again that Shinran did believe that he was only relaying his master's teaching despite the glaring differences in ideology. Since the split here is so great, one must wonder how Shinran could justify such a claim. It is possible that Shinran believed this to be the clear conclusion to what Hōnen was preaching as many others do. Another option is that Shinran idealized Hōnen in the leadership position and as a faithful disciple was unwilling to claim credit for his expansion on Hōnen's idea.

115 Keel, 63.

116 Matsunaga, 95.

Thus, saying of *nembutsu* is received basically as a call from Amida, but simultaneously it is our response to that call.<sup>117</sup>

The call from Amida is the faith which Amida graces a person with and the response, the vocational *nembutsu*, is the acceptance of Amida's saving power, *tariki*. Within the *nembutsu* one is receiving both faith and salvation directly from Amida; there is no room for self-effort. The three minds which Hōnen says we ought to develop through the help of *nembutsu* are present here as well and necessary. However, for Shinran, they are not something which one can develop. They are prerequisites to the single correct *nembutsu*, but they are a gift of Amida which is received at the moment of salvation. Salvation, the three minds and faith are not something which we are capable of attaining ourselves; the power is entirely Amida's to the point that we cannot prevent salvation.<sup>118</sup> As a result, this includes everyone and is therefore truly representative of Amida's compassion.

Having given an overview of Hōnen's and Shinran's basic beliefs and understandings, it is now possible to address the flaws in seeing Hōnen's ideology and faith as inferior to Shinran's. This belief is usually grounded in the idea that Shinran was the logical successor to Hōnen and that it was “with Shinran that Pure Land faith and practice were consummated.”<sup>119</sup> This view is based on a misunderstanding of the role which *nembutsu* plays for the two men in relation to faith and assumes that Shinran's *nembutsu* is the correct one. While Shinran may have been a trusted disciple of Hōnen, his definition of *nembutsu* is not just a further development of Hōnen's ideas; it is an entirely different conception and should not be used as a focal point for judging which man placed greater emphasis on the Vow and *tariki* unless one enjoys an “apples to

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117 Taitetsu Unno, “The Practice of Jōdo-Shinshū,” *Living in Amida's Universal Vow*, Ed. Alfred Bloom, (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), 65

118 Machida, 141.

119 Machida, 137.

oranges” type of debate. It is also important to realize the implications of Hōnen's opinion of Shinran. The fact that he was not considered a “leading protégé” despite being close enough to Hōnen to obtain permission to copy the *Senchakushū* is another reason to avoid considering Shinran's developments as following along the same lines as Hōnen's and being a “natural” conclusion to them. Equally important is realizing that Shinran believed he was spreading Hōnen's message which, practice aside, is a message of reliance on Amida. There is no question about whether or not Shinran doubted Hōnen's faith in Amida; he did not.

As I have shown, Hōnen believed and taught that it is only other-power which can lead to salvation; this places faith and the Vow above all else. Shinran inherited these ideas from Hōnen and they are undoubtedly similar. What he did not take from Hōnen was the idea that there ought to be a sort of practice and, in fact, Unno says that the only practice of a Shin Buddhist is compassion.<sup>120</sup> Therefore, the question is not and has never been one of faith; it is only one of practice. So while one critic praised Shinran for moving the religion away from Hōnen's “lukewarm” ways, I have to agree with Machida that this is based on a “lukewarm examination of Hōnen's faith.”<sup>121</sup>

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120 Unno, 63.

121 Machida, 138.

## CHAPTER 5

### FRUITION AND COMPLETETION: HŌNEN’S DISCIPLES

Due to the great success that Shinran's Jōdo Shinshū sect has experienced, it has sometimes been viewed by practitioners, historians and scholars as the natural progression of Hōnen's teachings as they are presented in his *Senchakushū*.<sup>122</sup> In the last chapter, I cautioned that viewing the contents of the *Senchakushū* through Shinran's teachings leads to an inaccurate understanding of Hōnen and of his master work. Shinran, however, was not Hōnen's only prominent disciple. While his sect went on to become the most popular, Hōnen had other close disciples who went on to find success. In this chapter, I will be examining some of Hōnen's other well-known disciples. I will give a brief overview of the teachings of their individual sects as well as their personal relationships with Hōnen, and, at the end of the paper, I hope to identify a more suitable lens or at least a disciple whose teachings are more in-line with the contents of the *Senchakushū*. The disciples I will be focusing on are Shōkū, Kōsai, Ryūkan, and Benchō.

#### **Establishing “Hōnen's Teaching”**

Before jumping into an examination of the disciples it is important to define what exactly this paper will consider to be the “teachings of Hōnen.” While there is uncertainty about exactly which works, if any, can be attributed to Hōnen personally, for the purposes of this paper the *Senchakushū* which is often described as Hōnen's masterwork and which has been used an

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122 Matsunaga, 61. Hōnen's “ambivalence” in his personal practice leads many critics to believe that he was not much different than his predecessors. In *Renegade Monk - Hōnen and Japanese Pure Land Buddhism* (pg137-138), Machida notes that Kurata Hyakuzō claims that Shinran had succeeded Hōnen and that it is with him “that Pure Land faith and practice are consummated.”

indicator of rank and closeness for the disciples will be considered a reasonably accurate representation of his views. The *Senchakushū* itself was not published until Hōnen's death as per his request due to his fear of persecution over the views expressed in it, but Hōnen did allow some of his disciples to copy it during his lifetime.

Within the *Senchakushū*, Hōnen explains, though not always in the clearest manner, how one ought to understand the meaning of the Original Vow as well as how one ought to practice. He adheres primarily to Shan-tao's interpretation: the Original Vow should be understood as the ultimate expression of how one can attain *ōjō*. He takes the original, ambiguous message in the vow to mean specially that invocational *nembutsu* is the only correct practice and that the act of calling the name with true faith once is sufficient. Hōnen does not stop there, however. He goes on to integrate all other forms of Amida-based practice into a model in which selection and rejection allow one to fully understand the importance of *nembutsu* above all, but still participate in other practice which are termed auxiliary actions. As long as one understands the significance behind the selections as well as the rejections and only engages in the auxiliary actions after a “firm establishment of faith,” then one is guaranteed salvation through the Primal Vow.

The original vow does not specify the number of times one must recite the *nembutsu*, and the phrase “even ten times” does not properly clarify the issue. This along with the role of auxiliary actions is the basis for many of the divisions among the Jōdo sects. Hōnen took the Vow's message very seriously: if one should call the name with true faith, once calling must be sufficient for *ōjō* or else the Vow is logically invalid. The vow cannot, of course, be invalid since Amida has indeed attained Buddhahood. To suggest that more than one calling is actually necessary would be to undermine the message of the Vow and Amida's compassion. Despite this, Hōnen encouraged his disciples and followers to practice the *nembutsu* often and he is said to

have practiced it incessantly himself. Even though one call was enough, Hōnen felt that there was benefit to *nembutsu* practice and that the continual practice did not imply a turn to self-power.

### **Kōsai and Ichinengi**

Hōnen's Jōdo sect is based entirely on the Amida's saving power via invocational *nembutsu*. Hōnen stressed that while one *nembutsu* is sufficient in obtaining *ōjō* as long as it is said with a true understanding of and firm faith in Amida's other power, he still encouraged the continued practice and valued multiple repetitions over just a single utterance. The primary difference between Hōnen and Shinran is centered on the question of practice: how many times must one recite the *nembutsu* in order to be saved. Shinran believed that it is only one, a single utterance that is both the call and Amida's answer. This is very similar to Kōsai's idea of *ichinengi* and due to the similar strains of thought found between the two, it is possible that Shinran was influenced was by Kōsai.<sup>123</sup>

Kōsai's dates are disputed but he left the Tendai monkhood and joined Hōnen when he was thirty-six. The nature of his relationship with Hōnen is also disputed between sources. Chinzei-ha sources state that he was personally cast out by Hōnen for his teachings, but this is absent from other historical sources. Kōsai is also listed as one of the disciples to be exiled, but he managed to avoid persecution both times.<sup>124</sup> Most likely, the information in the Chinzei-ha sources is fabricated since it not supported by any other sources, and the exiles are a testament to Kōsai's continued participation in Hōnen's following. The sect was also highly critical of the teachings of Kōsai and Gyoku and claiming that the two men were cast out by Hōnen himself

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123 Matsunaga, 78.

124 Mark Blum, *The Origins and Development of Pure Land Buddhism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 211. In both 1207 and 1227.

casts a shadow over their teachings if it does not altogether discredit them. Given that the Chinzei-ha and their founder, Benchō, fell on the side of *tanengi*<sup>125</sup> while Kōsai and Gyoku encouraged *ichinengi*, a rivalry is not surprising and by claiming that they were cast out by Hōnen, the Chinzei-ha could make their position more legitimate.

Despite being a close disciple of Hōnen, Kōsai did not preach the *nembutsu* with an emphasis on practice. *Ichinengi* is the “doctrine of a single *nembutsu*.” Specifically, it means that one can attain *ōjō* through one *nembutsu* in which “the mind of faith (*shinjin*) ... is in complete accord with the wisdom of the Buddha.”<sup>126</sup> This does not mean that one will not say the *nembutsu* again nor does it mean that one cannot; however, it does imply that more repetitions are unnecessary. Essentially, it is a strong shift away from practice towards faith-only based *ōjō*. As was the case with Shinran, this is a huge departure from the teachings found in the *Senchakushū* which encourage practice. *Ichinengi* also focuses more on the experience of non-verbal *nembutsu* while Hōnen's paradigm demands vocalization. Kōsai cites the *Larger Sūtra* as the source for the idea that practicing mental *nembutsu* is better than recitation, but he does not bother to specify where in the Sūtra.<sup>127</sup> Benchō uses this difference as a major criticism of Gyōkū, but it can be applied to Kōsai as well.<sup>128</sup> It is worth noting however that “*ichinen*” and the language of a single-thought moment coupled with faith is found in the many sutras from the Chinese canon, and yet even in the *Sukhāvativyūha* there are no examples of it implying recitation.<sup>129</sup> This is one of the ways in which Hōnen's (and Shan-tao's) interpretation is unique. It is interesting that even though Kōsai studied with Hōnen, he seems to have dropped one of his most dynamic ideas and innovative contributions to the Pure Land school in favor of a more

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125 *Tanengi* is the practice of “many-callings” which encourages ritual recitation of the *nembutsu*.

126 Ibid, 212.

127 Blum, *Pacific World*, 73.

128 Ibid., 74.

129 Ibid., 65-66.

tradition interpretation. That is not to say that Kōsai totally departs from Hōnen's teachings, his own teachings are built upon them particularly since Kōsai needs Hōnen's model of selection and rejection to validate the primacy of the *nembutsu*. For Kōsai, the single-thought moment was actually meant to be a samādhi state, though he avoided the term not wanting to break away from Hōnen's teaching of an easy path for everyone.<sup>130</sup> So, rather than focusing on how one would achieve it, Kōsai focuses on the “psychological experience of *nembutsu*-samādhi.”<sup>131</sup>

None of this is meant to imply that Hōnen did not lend significance to the single-thought moment experience because he did; the difference here, again, is the need for practice. Hōnen says the following:

The ten invocations or one invocation refers to the way one believes in the *nembutsu*.

Therefore, in terms of faith you should take the position that a single *nembutsu* (*ichinen*) brings about Birth (*ōjō*); and in terms of practice, I encourage you to vigorously engage in [*nembutsu*] practice throughout your life.<sup>132</sup>

He also says:

The highest grade of the lowest class of sentient beings are those people who have committed [one of the] ten evil acts. If, in their final moments of life they put forth a single *nembutsu* (*ichinen*), their sins will be dissolved and they attain *ōjō*.<sup>133</sup>

Hōnen demonstrates that faith is necessarily the belief in attaining *ōjō* through a single-thought moment. Of course, he does not go quite so far as Shinran and Kōsai and do away with practice.

When questioned specifically about the *ichinengi* doctrine, Hōnen replies that it is “generally preposterous, and hardly worth even discussing.” Those who follow this teaching are “foolish”

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130 Blum, *Origins*, 212.

131 Blum, *Pacific World*, 73.

132 *Ibid.*, 66. This is in response to a question about Shan-tao's explanation of how one should understand *nembutsu*. This was quoted in the Blum; it is translated from the *Saihō shinanshō*, in *Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*.

133 *Ibid.*, 67. Quoted in the Blum from the *Senchakushū*.



and have based their understanding on a “misinterpretation” of Shan-tao's explanation of ten versus one.<sup>134</sup> One ought to accept *ichinen* as faith, but this should never imply that further practice is unnecessary. For Hōnen, this point derives from a belief that while Amida's compassion is so great that it is capable of saving anyone, living a moral life and upholding traditional Buddhist values is still possible even in this degenerate age and therefore one should strive to uphold these values.

### **Ryūkan and Tanengi**

Ryūkan was born in the capital in 1148. Prior to meeting Hōnen, he was already well known for being a devoted *nembutsu* practitioner chanting the *nembutsu* 35,000 times per day and the Amida Sutra 48 times. He was educated primarily on Mt. Hiei where he “held the Tendai torch aloft for the world to see, and was a leader in the community.”<sup>135</sup> It is unknown exactly when he decided to join Hōnen, but he was allowed to copy the *Senchakushū* in 1204. This date is often used to mark his joining Hōnen's movement even though he does appear to have been associated with the *movement* sometime earlier.<sup>136</sup> Certainly, Ryūkan would have had prior contact with Hōnen to obtain the privilege to copy the *Senchakushū* so the date should not be considered definitive. Shunjō's fourteenth century biography of Hōnen briefly describes the beginnings of their relationship saying that Hōnen was unwilling to open his mind to Ryūkan at first. Only later, when he understood “how deep the man's longing for Ojō was” did he begin offering him instruction.<sup>137</sup> Ryūkan was quick to fall in line with Hōnen's teachings and increased his *nembutsu* repetitions to 84,000 per day and stopped chanting the Amida Sutra as

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134 Ibid. Quoted in the Blum from *Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*.

135 Coates, 715.

136 Matsunaga, 74.

137 Coates, 715.

Hōnen had advised. Ryūkan, despite joining Hōnen so late in life, rose to be an important disciple. He officiated the memorial service after Hōnen's death in 1212 and wrote the *Ken Senchaku* a defense of Hōnen which is no longer extant.<sup>138</sup> This response played a huge role in his exile in 1227. By the fifteenth century, Ryūkan's lineage was absorbed into the Chinzeiha.<sup>139</sup>

In terms of theology, Ryūkan was on the other side of the spectrum from Kōsai; he was an advocate of *tanengi*, “the doctrine of multiple *nembutsu*.” Ryūkan, like Hōnen, did not believe that *ōjō* could be attained during the normal course of one's life. Only at the moment of one's death can one attain the fruits of one's actions and be born in the Pure Land. This idea has the potential of provoking the same question that practice always does in the Pure Land tradition: if one can only attain at the moment of death, what is the purpose of any practice prior to one's final moments? Ryūkan clarifies this by stating that without any prior practice there is no basis for attainment to be realized and it is only after continuous practice that one can actually attain *ōjō*.<sup>140</sup> This explanation is reminiscent of sections in the *Senchakushū* where Hōnen shows the importance of being “near” or “intimate” with the Buddha in order to have the Buddha respond to the call.<sup>141</sup> It is worth noting here that none of the previous chanting causes the *ōjō* and the attainment is still essentially the result of one thought-moment at the time of death. That single thought-moment is the result of the Buddha's will as an enactment of the Primal Vow rather than the result of the constant practice. In this sense, Ryūkan is not so different from Kōsai and the way in which salvation occurs in this single thought-moment is very similar to Shinran's notion

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138 Matsunaga, 75. The text was written specifically in response to *Jōshō's Dan Senchaku which denounced the selection.*

139 Ibid.

140 Blum, *Origins*, 234

141 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 67-68.

of *tariki*.<sup>142</sup> The emphasis on repetition was thus not a denial of the power of Amida and the Original Vow; rather, it was a “reflection of his own devotion to long and continuous recitation practice.”<sup>143</sup> Ryūkan also felt that one ought not to get caught up in the “one versus many” argument since both are inseparable and the many can be seen “as the accumulation of the one.”<sup>144</sup> Like Hōnen, he does not appear to be caught up in the language of *tariki* and *jiriki* and overall his approach to practice is quite similar to Hōnen's. Ryūkan creates a place for practice within his teaching and emphasizes its importance while not hinging *ōjō* on practice.

A key difference between Hōnen and Ryūkan seems to be that Ryūkan places the moment of attainment specifically at the moment of death and this a bit of a deviation from the scheme presented in the *Senchakushū*. Hōnen outlines which practices should be incorporated and when based on what could be termed one's “spiritual stage.”<sup>145</sup> After a certain point of practicing the *nembutsu* and the four other Right Practices, one should reach a “firm establishment of faith.” After this, Hōnen allows for the inclusion of “miscellaneous practices.” Once one reaches that firm establishment of faith, *ōjō* should be guaranteed since one would be able to completely surrender one's self to Amida's saving power. If not, then it would be useless to mark this point at all and possibly even damaging to then suggest that followers could engage in other practices besides the Five Rightly Established Acts which might cause them to turn too far away from Amida. Those who are considered to be “far” lack the desire to see the Buddha so he does not respond to them.<sup>146</sup> The firm establishment of faith must then imply that one has

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142 Blum, *Origins*, 236. By drawing a parallel to Shinran's *tariki*, Blum makes a very strong statement about the nature of faith and other power at the moment of death which would render prior practice relatively pointless.

This comparison supports his conclusion that the reason for practice is more of a personal than a practical one.  
143 Blum, *Origin*, 233. The same understanding could certainly be applied to Hōnen to a degree. He also did not deny the saving power of Amida but was hesitant to go so far as to abandon practice and years of training as a Tendai monk.

144 Matsunaga, 75.

145 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 39.

146 *Ibid.*, 68.

achieved some measure of salvation which will be fully realized upon death. This idea is supported by Hōnen's lament, “If only I had but attained,”<sup>147</sup> suggesting that attainment will occur sometime before death though perhaps without one's proper knowledge. Both the certainty and uncertainty about attainment should drive one to continue practicing. Ryūkan eliminates the need for any practice after an establishment of faith by making that establishment occur at the moment of death.

Another issue crops up when looking at Ryūkan, and it is present in Benchō's comment on both the *tanengi* and *ichinengi* positions:

Although the Jōdoshū is a single path of nenbutsu practitioners, the stream of those devoted to one nenbutsu (*ichinen*) and the stream of those devoted to many repetitions (*tanen*) [of nenbutsu] are divided like water and fire. The *ichinen* people laugh at those pursuing repetitious practice as being engaged in difficult or even ascetic practice. The people doing the repetitious practice criticize those taking the *ichinen* standpoint as having no commitment to practice and no self-cultivation.<sup>148</sup>

The important thing to note is that *tanengi* is by some referred to as “difficult” or “ascetic.” The Original Vow, according to the Pure Land tradition, is meant specifically to provide to a simple means by which the average person can attain *ōjō*; it should be easy for all. Arguably, repetition is not that difficult particularly since neither Hōnen nor Ryūkan specify how often one must say the *nenbutsu*; they only suggest that repetition is best. The difficulty seems to come at a different point with the issue of *nenbutsu-samādhi*: experiencing visions of the Buddha through repetition of the *nenbutsu*. In chapter twelve of the *Senchakushū*, Hōnen notes that it was *nenbutsu-samādhi* that was passed from Śākyamuni to Ananda and not the *samādhi* of seeing the

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147 Fitzgerald, 36.

148 Blum, *Pacific World*, 59. Translated from *Jōdoshū myōmoku mondō* by Benchō.

Buddha.<sup>149</sup> Because the samādhi of seeing the Buddha does not directly correspond to the Primal Vow, it cannot be considered a means of attaining *ōjō* even though it is a great achievement that requires an immense amount of effort and concentration.

In his notes on the *Genrushō*, Blum explains that Ryūkan “alludes to attaining a vision of the Buddha in the trance state of *nembutsu*-samādhi as indicative of the soteriological event for an individual.”<sup>150</sup> The problem here is the direct contrast to Hōnen's original intention of creating a path for all. The attainment of samādhi in the particular passage to which he is referring could be used to justify the *nembutsu* teaching much as Hōnen's attainment of samādhi was used to demonstrate the efficacy of his version of the Pure Land doctrine. The connection Ryūkan makes between *nembutsu* and *nembutsu*-samādhi is significant however since he appears to be including samādhi within the scope of the Vow. Gyōnen includes neither Ryūkan's nor his own further evaluation on this link. In the *Senchakushū*, Hōnen addresses the *nembutsu*-samādhi primarily in chapters twelve and sixteen. In chapter seven, *nembutsu*-samādhi is shown as a marker of karmic closeness with the Buddha. These visions are not mentioned in chapter two which primarily deals with the meaning of the Primal Vow in terms of auxiliary actions. Also, Hōnen does not clear up what constitutes a firm establishment of faith. It is possible, as Blum notes, that a better interpretation of the Original Vow makes *nembutsu*-samādhi the “practice of the Original Vow” since it “symbolically includes all *nembutsu* practice directed toward this aim, whether or not the practitioner actually achieves samādhi.”<sup>151</sup> While that may certainly be the case, the lack of mention of samādhi in chapter two suggests that it is a little bit outside of the purview of the Vow for Hōnen or at least that the primary focus should not be directed at

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149 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 133.

150 Blum, *Origins*, 235.

151 Mark L. Blum, “Samādhi in Hōnen's Hermeneutic of Practice and Faith: Assessing the *Sammai hottokki*,” *Wisdom, Compassion, and the Search for Understanding: The Buddhist Studies Legacy of Gadjin M. Nagao*, ed. John A. Silk (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 87.

*nembutsu*-samādhi. So then, what role does *nembutsu*-samādhi actually play in attaining rebirth? *Nembutsu* can be understood as having two meanings: a sacred and religious meaning as well as a practical one. The sacred and religious meaning refers to the saving power of the Vow which requires only a dedication to *nembutsu* practice and does not require one to attain samādhi. The practical definition refers to the possibility of attaining samādhi via constant practice. So, these visions which are also considered to be the highest possible achievement of the *nembutsu* practitioner might be a kind of byproduct of the practice rather than a practice in themselves. *Nembutsu*-samādhi serves as a spiritual attainment for serious, “professional” practitioners such as Hōnen and Ryūkan, but it does not violate the traditional Pure Land teaching that one does not need to have any sort of spiritual attainment to have salvation.<sup>152</sup>

### **Benchō and the Chinzei-ha**

Shōkōbō Benchō, the founder of the Chinzei-ha, studied at Mt. Hiei for seven years and in 1199, two years after first meeting Hōnen, he joined his following. While at first, he doubted that Hōnen could surpass his own knowledge, he was soon moved by Hōnen's great understanding and knowledge of the texts and his deep insight into the principles involved.<sup>153</sup> In 1198, Hōnen presented Benchō with a copy of the *Senchakushū*. Benchō studied with Hōnen for six years and returned to his home province in 1204. He is considered to be one of Hōnen's most powerful successors, his branch of the Jōdo sect is the most successful and he has come to be considered the second patriarch after Hōnen. The success of his group largely hinged on the fact

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152 Blum, *Wisdom, Compassion, and the Search for Understanding*, 89-90.

153 Coates, 746-747.

that he established ties with already powerful and influential sects (particularly he reestablished a tied with Tendai) and received much of his support from local land owners and bushi.<sup>154</sup>

The quote from Benchō presented earlier is rather deceptively neutral as Benchō actually falls on the side of *tanengi* and is often critical of the *ichinengi* perspective. So much so that the histories presented by his lineage include the (most-likely fictitious) event of Gyōku and Kōsai being tossed out of the following by Hōnen himself. Also, in what could be considered a very wise political move and power-play, Benchō took the accusations aimed at Hōnen's following and redirected them. Hōnen's teachings, according to his opposition, created an opening for people to stray from the traditional Buddhist moral ideals and fall into a “life of sin” because the *nembutsu* serves as a safety net and Amida cannot be kept away by one's sins thus salvation can be granted even when one breaks State and Buddhist rules. Benchō took these accusations and turned them away from Hōnen and the Chinzei sect by refocusing them on the followers of *ichinengi*. Blum suggests that this conflict was less about moral turpitude and more about settling a factional rivalry over succession driven by animosity over the success of the *ichinengi* position.<sup>155</sup>

In terms of doctrine, Benchō chose an even different path from Kōsai and Ryūkan that in some ways is reminiscent of Hōnen's inclusion of auxiliary actions. There are a number of reasons for why Hōnen may have decided to incorporate these acts, but one possible reason is to appease the powerful temple organizations and to ease tensions between his sect and others. Benchō does something similar by affirming that, in accordance with the Twentieth Vow, one can attain the Pure Land through practices other than the *nembutsu*. He clearly turns back towards the Tendai school by adding this measure, but by establishing this link with the Tendai

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154 Matsunaga, 72-73.

155 Blum, *Pacific World*, 65.

school, he was better able to propagate the *nembutsu* teaching.<sup>156</sup> Benchō's conciliatory effort is not a complete return to the Tendai tradition by any means, however. Gyōnen describes Benchō's doctrine as stating that it is only the *nembutsu* which is part of the Original Vow, all other practices are outside it. Hōnen's influence here is undeniable, but he would not have gone as far as to allow for other actions to bring about *ōjō*.<sup>157</sup>

Through his ties with establish sects, Benchō was also able to establish his own sect in the capital, a maneuver which surely contributed to the Chinzei-ha becoming the most successful branch of the Jōdo sect. Given this later outcome, Benchō's place in Gyōnen's history is rather interesting. Unlike Ryūkan, Shōkū and even Kōsai who have their own sections, Benchō gets shoved into a short section with Chōsai and “Others.” This implies that at the time at which Gyōnen was writing, about a century after Hōnen's death in 1311, the powerful legacy of the Chinzei sect was not yet established in the capital and Benchō was overshadowed by Ryūkan, Shōkū and Kōsai.<sup>158</sup>

### **Shōkū and the Seizan**

Shōkū joined Hōnen at the age of fourteen. In 1198, he participated in the compilation of the *Senchakushū*.<sup>159</sup> He studied the doctrines of Hōnen's school from the time he joined Hōnen's sect until the time of Hōnen's death in 1212, twenty-three years.<sup>160</sup> In 1207, he was on the list to be exiled but was able to escape this punishment through his connection to a Tendai abbot, Jien. After Hōnen's death, Shōkū went on to study under Jien. Throughout his life, Shōkū, an aristocrat, maintained a close association with the aristocracy and his following boasted many

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156 Matsunaga, 72-73.

157 Blum, *Origins*, 274.

158 *Ibid.*, 271.

159 Matsunaga, 73.

160 Coates, 761-762.



prominent court members. This influence and as well as a “harmonizing of other practices within the *nembutsu*” helped him establish his sect in the capital under the title of the “official Jōdo sect.”<sup>161</sup> Shōkū's friendship with Jien allowed him to escape the second exile in 1227 since he was able to prove his distance from the doctrine of single-practice by “serving as the funeral master at the time of Jien's death and performing Tendai rites.”<sup>162</sup>

Shōkū, like Ryūkan and Hōnen, would recite the *nembutsu* 60,000 times per day. In Shunjō's biography of Hōnen, he describes Shōkū's *nembutsu* as functioning like a piece of “white wood” (a *tabulas rasa*) which is colored by meditative and non-meditative practices.<sup>163</sup> The “coloring” does not violate the teaching of *nembutsu* as it is contained within it and self-power and other-power are not mutually exclusive. In this way, Shōkū maintains the primacy of *nembutsu* while allowing followers to continue their learning and exploring Buddhist teachings. He notes that at this time, there are still *sūtra*'s left and so we are in a better position than those in the most degenerate time; however, “with our present inferior capacity [we are] no whit different from those who will live in that age.”<sup>164</sup> Therefore, we can “color the wood” with other practices, but it is not necessary since even a dying man who is so caught up in the agony of death can attain *ōjō* simply by repeating the *nembutsu* with no thoughts about its meaning.

One of Shōkū's main distinctions from Hōnen is something which has also drawn a lot of criticism from the Shin school: the doctrine of the three kinds of mind. Hōnen deals with the three kinds of mind in chapter eight of the *Senchakushū*. There, they are defined as the “utterly sincere mind,” the “profound mind” and the “mind that trusts in the merit of *nembutsu*.”<sup>165</sup>

Hōnen comments on Shan-tao's definition of the triple mind saying, “we clearly know that if one

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161 Matsunaga, 73.

162 Ibid., 74.

163 Coates, 762.

164 Ibid., 765.

165 Hōnen, *Senchakushū*, 99-106. This is Shan-tao's commentary on the Meditation Sūtra.

possess these three kinds of mind, one will certainly be reborn.”<sup>166</sup> The triple mind is essentially the mind of one who is faithful, deeply devoted and one who understands the merit building power of the *nembutsu*. Shōkū offers a very traditional Mahāyāna take on this topic by making the direct cause of *ōjō* the attainment of the triple mind which makes it the objective of all practice. Hōnen states that the triple mind is necessary, but, as always, it is cannot be the cause. Amida is always the cause. On its own, Shōkū's interpretation is far more representative of traditional Mahāyāna than of the Jōdo school. However, in the context of the school, Shōkū's approach actually serves to correct a potential problem: *nembutsu* becoming overly mechanical and ritualistic.<sup>167</sup> Hōnen encouraged constant practice, but not constant mindless practice. Reminding practitioners of the importance of cultivating the triple mind, helped to stop the perception that one could simply chant the name and attain *ōjō*.

### **Conclusion**

After Hōnen's death, many voices rose from the crowding claiming to be the true successor and seeking to establish their own sects derived from Hōnen's new school with some of the strongest being Shinran, Kōsai, Ryūkan, Benchō and Shōkū. The squabble eventually lead to Ryūkan's school being absorbed into Benchō's Chinzei-ha which claimed the title of the most orthodox Jōdo sect. Shinran's unintentional school claimed the title of the biggest Pure Land sect in Japan and Shōkū's school got to claim to be the official Jōdo school and also produced the founder of the Ji school, Ippen.

It is difficult to gauge which disciple was the closest to Hōnen in terms of theology. Kōsai appears to be the most distinctly separate and yet Blum shows a great deal of similarity

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>167</sup> Blum, *Origins*, 248.

between the two in terms of methodology and rhetoric. Even though Shinran and Kōsai share a kind of *ichinengi* perspective, Kōsai is actually still a stronger choice for evaluating and understanding Hōnen simply because so much of Kōsai's doctrine is based on Hōnen whereas it often seems that all Hōnen and Shinran had in common was the belief in the Primal Vow. Nevertheless, teaching the superiority of mental *nembutsu* creates a huge divide between him and Hōnen which still puts him farther away from the teaching in the *Senchakushū* than the other three disciples. Regardless, Hōnen's influence on Kōsai is undeniable.

Ryūkan, Hōnen's oldest disciple, seems to be far more in line with Hōnen's teachings. Ryūkan's realization that practice is necessary is a clear reflection of Hōnen's teachings, though Ryūkan seemed to be on a more or less “correct” path prior to even meeting Hōnen. The fact that he officiated at Hōnen's memorial service is at least a mark of Ryūkan's respect for Hōnen and his written defense of Hōnen shows his faith in Hōnen's doctrine.

Benchō, who earns the title of second patriarch, seems to stray a bit more from the teachings in the *Senchakushū* than Ryūkan does simply because Hōnen makes it clear that *nembutsu* is more than just the only practice referred to in the Vow; it is the only practice of the myriad of practices which can result in *ōjō*. Unfortunately, it is unclear precisely why Benchō included this provision though one possible reason is as a conciliatory measure.

Shōkū like Benchō also allowed room for other practices, but not in the sense that they are capable of leading to *ōjō*. He still believed that it is only *nembutsu* and Amida's power which allows us to attain *ōjō*. Because of his close relationship to Hōnen, his years of studying Jōdo and his direct involvement with the *Senchakushū*, Shōkū is perhaps the closest to Hōnen's paradigm followed by Ryūkan. However, the question of who is the best representative of Hōnen's teachings is far more difficult to answer than my previous question about Shinran. Each

disciple carried forward some aspect of Hōnen's teaching and each added his own “spin” in an effort to sharpen the lines of the teachings.

## CHAPTER 6

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Through this thesis, I have shown that Hōnen was neither a man of weak faith, ambivalent in his personal practice, nor was he wearing the mask of Tendai over a face of exclusive *nembutsu* practice. These impressions, which are produced by a casual, passing glance at Hōnen's life, do not represent his external religious identity and do not even scratch the surface of his underlying soteriology. The imagined contractions are symptomatic of an analytical approach which is based in Shin understandings of *tariki* and *jiriki* and also in the strong sectarian notions which emerged as early as with Hōnen's own disciples.

Hōnen was undeniably influenced by thinkers such as Genshin and Shan-dao, but the tradition which he introduced to Japan was very much his own. Like other religious founders, he had to carve out a place for himself and his teachings in a system which already had well established Buddhist forms. In contending with these forms, the *kenmitus taisei* and his own understanding of the Primal Vow, he found himself in a historical middle ground between Tendai and more radical forms of exclusive practice such as Shin Buddhism and Kōsai's school of *ichinengi*. This position was neither arbitrary nor was it the result of an underdeveloped theology which necessarily had to be extended to match the understanding of the Shin sect. While at times, it may have served as a position of convenience, Hōnen's religiosity was always wholly grounded in faith in Amida and the exclusive saving power of invocational *nembutsu*.

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