An Account of My Hut

KAMO NO CHŌMEI

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方丈記

Translated from the Japanese with AI (Claude) and edited



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INTRODUCTION

"The flowing river never stops, and yet the water is never the same." With these words Kamo no Chōmei (c. 1155–1216) opens *Hōjōki*, "An Account of a Ten-Foot-Square Hut," which he finished in 1212. Born into the family of hereditary priests of the Shimogamo Shrine in Kyoto, he was a respected poet and musician, but he failed to win the shrine office he had hoped for and around the age of fifty left the world to become a Buddhist monk.

The first half of the book describes the disasters Chōmei witnessed in the capital: a great fire in 1177, a whirlwind and the sudden move of the capital in 1180, a famine that filled the streets with the dead, and the earthquake of 1185. Each shows how little the houses and ambitions of people can be relied on. The second half describes his own retreat to a tiny portable hut on Mount Hino, southeast of the capital, and the quiet pleasures of a life without possessions or obligations.

Short and carefully built, written in a prose that mixes Japanese and Chinese styles, *Hōjōki* is one of the classics of Japanese literature and of Buddhist reflection on impermanence. It ends with a twist: Chōmei asks whether his love of the hut is not itself the kind of attachment he left the world to escape, and finds he has no answer.

An Account of My Hut

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Fire, whirlwind, the move of the capital, famine and earthquake; then the life of a recluse in a ten-foot-square hut, and a final doubt about his attachment to it.

THE RIVER

The flowing river and the bubbles on its pools: people and their houses never last.

[1] The flowing river never stops, and yet the water is never the same. The foam that floats on its pools now vanishes, now forms again, and never stays for long. So it is with people in the world and their dwellings. In the jewel-paved capital, the houses of high and low stand ridge to ridge and vie with one another in the height of their tiled roofs. They seem to go on generation after generation without end, yet if we ask whether this is really so, few of the houses that stood long ago are still there. Some fell to ruin last year and were built anew this year. Others were great houses that have fallen and become small ones. So it is with the people who live in them. The place is the same and there are still many people, but of those I knew in the old days barely one or two remain out of twenty or thirty. Dying in the morning, born in the evening: this is the way of things, and it is just like the foam on the water. I do not know where those who are born and die come from, or where they go. Nor do I know for whose sake we trouble our hearts over these temporary lodgings, or what in them delights our eyes. The master and his dwelling depart as if vying with each other in impermanence, no different, one might say, from the morning glory and its dew.

Sometimes the dew falls and the flower remains; but though it remains, it withers in the morning sun. Sometimes the flower fades and the dew has not yet vanished; but though it has not vanished, it does not last until evening.

THE GREAT FIRE

The fire of 1177 that burned much of the capital in a single night.

[2] In the forty-odd springs and autumns I have lived since I first came to understand the nature of things, I have seen strange happenings in the world more than a few times. It was, I think, on the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month of the third year of Angen (1177), a night when the wind blew fiercely and would not die down, that around eight in the evening (the hour of the Dog) a fire broke out in the southeast of the capital and spread to the northwest. In the end it reached the Suzaku Gate, the Great Hall of State, the State Academy and the Ministry of Popular Affairs, and in a single night all were reduced to dust and ash. The fire started, so I am told, at the corner of Higuchi and Tomi-no-kōji, in a makeshift shelter where sick people were lodged.[1] Carried this way and that by the shifting wind, the fire spread now here, now there, widening like an opened fan. Distant houses choked in smoke; closer by, the wind drove the flames flat against the ground. Ash was blown up into the sky and caught the light of the fire, so that everything glowed crimson, and through it flames torn off by the wind flew through the air, leaping one or two blocks at a time as the fire spread. Could the people caught in it have been in their right minds? Some choked in the smoke and fell; others were overcome by the flames and died on the spot.[2] Others barely escaped with their lives and could not bring out their belongings. The seven treasures and ten thousand riches all turned to ash. How great the loss must have been! This

1 The Suzaku Gate was the main southern gate of the palace enclosure and the Great Hall of State its chief ceremonial hall; the Academy trained officials for the court.

2 A block (chō) of the capital's grid measured about 120 meters.

time sixteen houses of senior nobles burned, and the others were beyond counting. In all, they say, the fire took two thirds of the capital. Several thousand men and women died, and horses, oxen and other animals beyond reckoning. Of all human pursuits, which are all foolish, spending one's wealth and troubling one's heart to build a house in so dangerous a capital must surely be the most futile.

THE WHIRLWIND

The whirlwind of 1180 that tore through the capital.

[3] Again, around the twenty-ninth day of the fourth month of the fourth year of Jishō (1180), a great whirlwind arose near Nakanomikado and Kyōgoku and blew violently as far as the Rokujō area. It swept across three or four blocks, and of the houses caught in it, large or small, not one escaped damage. Some were knocked flat; of others only the beams and pillars were left. It tore gates off and set them down four or five blocks away; it blew away fences so that one property ran into the next. Still more, the goods inside the houses rose into the sky, every last one of them, and cypress-bark shingles and boards flew about like winter leaves scattered by the wind. It raised the dust like smoke, so that nothing at all could be seen, and in the tremendous roar no one could hear anyone speak. Even the karmic wind of hell, I thought, could be no worse than this. Not only were houses damaged and destroyed; while people were repairing them, countless were hurt and left disabled. The wind moved off toward the southwest and brought grief to many people. Whirlwinds are common enough, but has anything like this ever happened? This was no ordinary event. I wondered whether it might be a warning of some kind.[3]

3 In Buddhist cosmology a wind produced by karma blows through hell, driving the damned before it.

THE MOVE OF THE CAPITAL

The sudden move of the capital to Settsu in 1180, and the ruin it left behind.

[4] Again, around the sixth month of the same year, the capital was suddenly moved. No one had imagined such a thing. From what I have heard of the beginnings of this capital, several hundred years have already passed since it was established as the capital in the reign of Emperor Saga. Since it was not something to be changed lightly without special reason, people's deep distress over it was more than understandable. But there was nothing to be done, and starting with His Majesty the Emperor, the ministers and senior nobles all moved to the capital at Naniwa in Settsu.[4] Of those who served at court, who would stay behind alone in the old capital? Those who set their hopes on office and rank, or relied on the favor of a lord, strove to move as soon as they could, if only a day sooner. Those who had missed their chance, been left behind by the world and had nothing to hope for stayed on in grief. The dwellings that had once vied eave to eave fell further into ruin with each passing day. Houses were dismantled and floated down the Yodo River, and the land turned into fields before one's eyes. People's minds all changed. They valued only horses and saddles, and no one had any use for ox-carriages. They wanted only estates along the western and southern seaboards and cared nothing for manors in the eastern and northern provinces. At that time, as it happened, I had occasion to go to the new capital in the province of Tsu. Looking at the place, I saw that the land was cramped, too narrow to lay out the grid of streets. To the north it rose high against the mountains; to the south it sloped down close to the sea. The sound of the waves was always loud and the sea wind especially fierce. The palace stood among the mountains, so that

4 The new capital was actually at Fukuhara (in modern Kobe), the base of Taira no Kiyomori. Heian-kyō was founded in 794 under Emperor Kanmu; under Saga (r. 809–823) it was confirmed as the capital.

I wondered whether the famous log palace had been like this; it was quite unusual, and had a certain elegance of its own.[5] The houses pulled down day after day and carried downstream until the river was almost choked with them: where, I wonder, were they being rebuilt? Empty land was still plentiful, and few houses had been built. The old capital was already in ruins, and the new one not yet built. Everyone without exception felt like a drifting cloud. Those who had lived there from the start grieved at losing their land, and those who had just moved there lamented the burden of building. Looking along the roadsides, I saw that those who should ride in carriages rode on horseback, and those who should wear court robes and caps or plain linen robes wore the *hitatare*. The manners of the capital had changed overnight, and people looked no different from rustic warriors. I had heard that such things are omens of a world falling into turmoil, and so it proved. As the days went by the world grew more unsettled and people's minds found no peace, and since in the end the people's grief did not go unheeded, in the winter of that same year His Majesty returned to this capital after all.[6] But what became of all the houses that had been torn down? They were not all rebuilt as they had been. I have heard faintly that in the wise reigns of old, the rulers governed the land with compassion. The palace was thatched with reeds, and even its eaves were left untrimmed. When they saw that little smoke was rising from the people's hearths, they remitted even the fixed taxes. This was because they cared for the people and helped the world. One can tell what the present age is like by comparing it with the past.[7]

5 The log palace (Ki no Marudono) at Asakura in Kyushu, a rough residence of the court in 661, known from a poem attributed to Emperor Tenji.

6 The hitatare was the everyday garment of warriors, in contrast to the formal court dress and linen hunting robes of courtiers.

7 An allusion to Emperor Nintoku, who, seeing little smoke rising from the people's hearths, remitted taxes for three years while his own palace fell into disrepair.

THE FAMINE

Two years of drought, storms and famine (1181–82); the dead fill the streets of the capital.

[5] Again, it was around the Yōwa era (1181–82), I think—it was long ago and I do not remember clearly—that for two years the world was stricken by famine and dreadful things happened. Drought in spring and summer, or great winds and floods in autumn and winter: one misfortune followed another, and none of the five grains ripened. In vain people plowed in spring and planted in summer; there was no bustle of reaping in autumn and storing in winter. Because of this, the people of the provinces either abandoned their land and crossed the borders, or forsook their homes and went to live in the mountains. All kinds of prayers were begun and extraordinary rites performed, but they had no effect whatever. The capital, as is its way, depends on the countryside for everything, and since nothing at all came up from there, how could it keep up appearances? Unable to endure any longer, people tried to sell their treasures one after another, all but throwing them away, yet no one so much as looked at them. The few who did trade held gold cheap and millet dear. Beggars crowded the roadsides, and the voices of grief and lament filled one's ears. So the first year came painfully to an end. We thought the next year would surely bring recovery, but on top of everything an epidemic broke out, and things only grew worse, past all remedy. People everywhere were starving to death, and as their plight grew more desperate day by day, they were like the fish in the parable of the dwindling water. In the end even people of decent appearance, in hats and with their legs wrapped, went begging from house to house with nothing else in mind. One would see these wretched, dazed people walking along, and the next moment they had collapsed and lay where they fell.[8] Along the earthen walls and by the roadsides, those

8 From a Buddhist verse: as each day passes life shrinks, like fish in a dwindling pool—what joy is there in that?

who had starved to death were beyond counting. Since no one took the bodies away, the stench filled the whole world, and as their faces and forms decayed there was much one could not bear to look at. Still worse, along the riverbed there was not even room for horses and carriages to pass. Even humble folk and woodcutters ran out of strength, so that even firewood grew scarce. Those with nothing else to rely on broke up their own houses and took the wood to market to sell, yet what one person brought, they say, was not enough to sustain life for a single day. Strange to say, mixed in with this firewood were pieces of split wood with red paint or flakes of silver and gold leaf clinging to them here and there. When I asked about it, it turned out that people with no other means had gone to old temples, stolen the buddha images, torn the furnishings from the halls, and broken them up. Born into this defiled and evil age, I saw such heartbreaking deeds.

6 There was something pitiful too. Of those who had a wife or husband they could not bear to part from, the one whose love was deeper always died first. The reason was that they put themselves second, and whatever they happened to obtain by begging they gave first to the one they cared for, whether husband or wife. So too, where there were parents and children, it was always the parent who died first. There were even small children who, not knowing that their mother's life had ended, lay sucking at her breast. At Ninnaji, a man called the Hōin Ryūgyō of the Jison'in, the Treasury Minister's son, grieved that people were dying beyond counting in this way. He enlisted a number of holy men, and wherever the head of a dead person was seen, they wrote the letter A on its forehead, to bind the dead to the Buddha. Wishing to know their number, he counted them over the fourth and fifth months: within the capital, south of First Avenue and north of Ninth, west of Kyōgoku and east of Suzaku, the heads lying by the roadsides came to more than forty-two thousand three hundred in all.[9] Many more died before and

9 Hōin was the highest rank in the Buddhist clergy. In esoteric Buddhism the letter A, first of the Sanskrit alphabet, stands for the unborn origin of all things.

after that time, and if one were to add the riverbed, Shirakawa, the western half of the capital and all the outlying districts, there would be no end to it. And how much more in all the provinces along the seven circuits! In recent times, when Retired Emperor Sutoku was on the throne, around the Chōshō era (1132–35), I have heard that something similar happened, but I do not know what the world was like then. What I saw with my own eyes was something unheard of, and terribly sad.[10]

THE EARTHQUAKE

The great earthquake of 1185 and its months of aftershocks.

[7] Again, around the second year of Genryaku (1185), there was a great earthquake. It was no ordinary one. Mountains collapsed and buried rivers; the sea tilted and flooded the land. The earth split and water welled up; boulders cracked and rolled into the valleys. Boats rowing along the shore were tossed on the waves, and horses on the road could not find their footing. Around the capital, in place after place, not one temple hall, shrine or pagoda was left whole. Some crumbled, others toppled, and the dust and ash rose up like thick smoke. The sound of the earth shaking and houses breaking was no different from thunder. If one stayed inside, the house might crush one at any moment; if one ran out, the ground split open. Without wings one cannot rise into the sky; not being a dragon, one cannot climb into the clouds. Of all frightening things, I came to feel, the most frightening is an earthquake. Among those caught in it was the only child of a certain warrior, six or seven years old, who had made a little house under the roof of an earthen wall and was playing some harmless, childish game there, when the wall suddenly collapsed and buried the child, crushing the body flat beyond recognition, with both eyes forced out an inch or so. The father and mother held their child and wept together without restraint, and I found it pitiful and heartbreaking to see. It seemed that in

10 The seven circuits were the highways and regions into which the provinces of Japan were divided.

grief for a child even the bravest forget shame, and I thought it touching and only natural. Such violent shaking stopped after a while, but the aftershocks went on and on. Not a day passed without twenty or thirty tremors strong enough to alarm anyone in ordinary times. After ten or twenty days they gradually came less often—four or five times a day, or two or three times, or every other day, or once in two or three days—and in all, I believe, the aftershocks went on for about three months. Of the four great elements, water, fire and wind constantly do harm, but the earth does not usually bring any extraordinary calamity. Long ago, around the Saikō era (854–857), I think, there was a great earthquake that did terrible things, even knocking the head off the Buddha at Tōdaiji, yet they say it was not as bad as this one. At the time everyone spoke of how futile things are, and it seemed that the impurity in their hearts had thinned a little; but as months and days piled up and the years went by, afterward no one so much as mentioned it.[11]

THE HARDSHIP OF LIVING IN THE WORLD

How rank, wealth, poverty and dependence on others torment the mind.

[8] So it is: life in this world is hard, and our bodies and dwellings are fleeting and vain, as I have described. Still more, the ways in which our hearts are troubled by where we live and by our station in life are too many to count. If one happens to be of no account and lives beside a powerful house, one may have cause for deep joy but cannot rejoice openly, and in sorrow one cannot cry aloud. One cannot move freely; standing or sitting, one lives in fear and trembling, like a sparrow near a hawk's nest. If one is poor and lives beside a rich house, one is ashamed morning and evening of one's shabby appearance and goes in and out fawning; seeing the envy of one's wife, children and servants, and

11 In Buddhist thought the four great elements—earth, water, fire and wind—make up the physical world. The great bronze Buddha of Tōdaiji in Nara lost its head in an earthquake in 855.

hearing how disdainfully the rich household behaves, one's heart is stirred from moment to moment and is never at peace. If one lives in a crowded place, there is no escaping harm when a fire breaks out nearby. If one lives in an outlying district, going back and forth is a great burden, and one is never safe from thieves. The powerful are deeply greedy; those who stand alone are looked down on by others. With wealth come many fears; with poverty, bitter grief. If one relies on others, one becomes their servant; if one takes care of others, one's heart is bound by affection. Follow the world and one suffers; refuse to follow it and one seems out of one's mind. Where can one settle, and what can one do, to shelter this body even for a while and comfort the heart even for a moment?

A LIFE OF SHRINKING HOUSES

Chōmei's family house, his smaller second house, and his retreat to Ōhara.

[9] I inherited the house of my grandmother on my father's side and lived there for a long time. Later I lost my connections and my fortunes declined, and since there was much I had to bear, in the end I could not stay on. Past thirty, I built a hut of my own choosing. Compared with my former residence, it was a tenth the size. I built only a place to live in and did not get as far as putting up proper buildings. Though I managed to build an earthen wall, I had no means to put up a gate. With bamboo for pillars, I made a shelter for my carriage. Whenever it snowed or the wind blew, it was not without danger. The place was near the riverbed, so the danger of floods was great, and the fear of robbers was ever present. In all, I spent more than thirty years enduring this unbearable world and troubling my heart.[12] Through the setbacks that came from time to time, I came of myself to understand how meager my luck was. And so, at the coming of my fiftieth spring, I left home and turned my back on

12 The original says "white waves" (shiranami), a stock term for robbers that also suits a house by the river.

the world. Having never had a wife or children, I had no ties that were hard to give up. I had no office or stipend; what was there to hold my attachment? Idly I lay among the clouds of Mount Ōhara, and there I passed I know not how many springs and autumns.[13]

THE TEN-FOOT-SQUARE HUT

The portable hut at Hino: its size, furnishings, and the life he leads there.

10 Now, as the dew of my sixty years is about to vanish, I have once again built a shelter for the last leaves of my life. It is, so to speak, like a hunter putting up a shelter for a single night, or an old silkworm spinning its cocoon. Compared with the dwelling of my middle years, it is not even a hundredth of it. As time has gone on, my years have declined year by year, and my dwelling has grown narrower with each move. This house is unlike any ordinary one. In area it is barely ten feet square, and it is under seven feet high.[14] Because I have not settled on a place, I did not claim a plot of ground to build on. I put together a frame of sills, roofed it with a simple covering, and fastened each joint with hooks. This is so that I can easily move it elsewhere if something does not suit me. When I rebuild it, how much trouble is there? The whole thing fills barely two carts. Apart from paying for the carts' labor, no other expense is needed. Now that I have hidden my traces deep in Mount Hino, I have put out a makeshift sunshade on the south side and laid a floor of bamboo slats. To its west I made a shelf for offerings of water. Inside, against the west wall, I have reverently installed a painted image of Amida, so that the setting sun shines on it as the light from between his brows. On the doors of the curtained shrine I have hung images of Fugen and of Fudō. Above the sliding panel on the north side

13 Ōhara, in the hills northeast of the capital, was a well-known retreat for recluses.

14 *Hōjō*, "ten-foot-square": one *jō* each way, about three meters. By tradition it was also the size of the room of the layman Vimalakīrti in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*.

I built a small shelf and set on it three or four black leather-covered baskets. In them I keep notes and extracts on waka and on music, and writings such as the *Essentials of Rebirth*. Beside them stand a koto and a biwa, one of each.[15] These are what are called a folding koto and a jointed biwa. Along the east side I have spread bracken fronds and straw mats to make my bed for the night. I opened a window in the east wall and set a writing desk there. By my pillow is a brazier, where I break brushwood and feed it to the fire. North of the hut I have claimed a small patch of ground and enclosed it with a rough, low fence to make a garden. There I have planted all kinds of medicinal herbs. Such is my makeshift hut. As for the place itself: to the south there is a bamboo water pipe, and I have piled up stones to hold a pool. The woods come close to the eaves, so there is no lack of kindling to gather. The place is called Toyama. Trailing vines bury the paths. The valley is overgrown, but the view to the west is open. So it is not without aids to contemplation. In spring I watch the waves of wisteria, which glow in the west like purple clouds. In summer I hear the cuckoo, and each time it calls, it promises to guide me on the mountain path of death. In autumn the voices of the evening cicadas fill my ears. They seem to be lamenting this world, empty as a cicada's shell.[16] In winter the snow moves me. The way it piles up and melts away can be likened to the sins that obstruct us. If the nembutsu feels tiresome, or I am not diligent in reciting the sutras, I rest of my own accord and slack off of my own accord. There is no one to stop me and no friend before whom I need feel ashamed. I do not make a point of keeping silence, yet living alone I am bound to keep the karma of speech in check. I do not make a point of observing the precepts, yet with no circumstances to tempt me,

15 Amida (Amitābha) is the buddha of the western Pure Land; light streams from between a buddha's brows. Genshin's *Ōjō yōshū* (*Essentials of Rebirth*, 985) is a guide to rebirth there; Fugen is the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, Fudō the guardian deity Acala.

16 Purple clouds in the west signal Amida coming to welcome the dying to his Pure Land. The cuckoo was thought to cross the Mountain of Death between this world and the next.

what would make me break them?[17] On mornings when I give myself to "the white wake," I gaze at the boats going to and fro at Okanoya and borrow the mood of the novice Mansei. On evenings when the wind in the katsura trees rustles the leaves, I think of the river at Xunyang and follow the school of Governor-General Minamoto. If I still have delight to spare, I often join the tune "Autumn Wind" to the sound of the pines, and play the piece "Flowing Spring" to the sound of the water. My skill is clumsy, but I am not trying to please anyone's ears. I play alone and sing alone, only to nourish my own heart.[18]

[11] At the foot of the mountain there is another brushwood hut, where the keeper of this mountain lives. A boy lives there, and he comes now and then to visit me. When I have nothing to do, I take him as my companion and we wander about. He is sixteen and I am sixty. Our ages are far apart, yet we take the same comfort in this. Sometimes we pull up cogon-grass shoots and pick rock-pear berries. Or we gather yam bulbils and pick parsley. Or we go down to the paddies at the foot of the hills, glean the fallen ears of rice and bind them into sheaves. If the day is fine, I climb up to the peak and gaze far off at the sky over my old home. I see Mount Kohata, the village of Fushimi, Toba and Hatsukashi. Fine scenery has no owner, so nothing stops me from taking comfort in it. When walking is no trouble and my wishes carry me far, I follow the ridge from here, cross Mount Sumiyama, pass Kasatori, and make a pilgrimage to Iwama, or pay my respects at Ishiyama. Or I make my way through the fields of Awazu to visit the traces of old Semimaru, and cross the Tanakami River to seek out the grave of Sarumaru Dayū. On the way back, as the season allows, I go looking for cherry blossoms, search for autumn leaves, pick bracken and gather nuts, partly to offer to the Buddha and partly as gifts to take home.[19] If the

17 The nembutsu: invoking Amida Buddha by reciting his name.

18 The monk Mansei likened the world to the white wake of a boat rowing out at dawn. Bai Juyi's "Song of the Pipa" is set by the river at Xunyang; Minamoto no Tsunenobu, Governor-General of Dazaifu, was a celebrated biwa master.

19 Semimaru was a legendary blind poet and biwa player of the Ōsaka barrier; Sarumaru Dayū was an early waka poet.

night is quiet, I remember old friends by the moon in my window, and the cries of the monkeys wet my sleeves. The fireflies in the grass could be mistaken for the distant fishing fires of Makinoshima. The rain at dawn sounds just like a storm blowing through the leaves. When I hear the copper pheasant cry *horo-horo*, I wonder whether it is my father or my mother. When the deer from the peak grow tame and come close, I know how far I have drifted from the world. Sometimes I stir up the buried embers and make them a companion for an old man waking in the night. This is not a fearsome mountain, yet even the owl's call moves me. The moods of the mountain, changing with each season, are never exhausted.[20] How much more so for someone who thinks deeply and knows deeply: for such a person it would surely not stop at these things. When I first came to live here, I thought it would be only for a little while, but five years have now passed. My makeshift hut has become something of an old house. Rotting leaves lie deep on the eaves, and moss grows on the sills. When, as chance has it, I hear news of the capital, I learn that many people of high rank have passed away since I shut myself up on this mountain. And those of no account are far too many to know. And how many houses have been destroyed in the repeated fires? Only my makeshift hut is at peace and has nothing to fear. Cramped though it is, it has a bed to lie on at night and a seat to sit on by day. For housing one person it lacks nothing. The hermit crab prefers a small shell, because it knows itself well. The osprey lives on rough shores, because it fears people. I am the same. Since I know myself and know the world, I desire nothing and do not mix with others. I wish only for quiet, and my pleasure is to be free of cares. In general, when people in the world build dwellings, they do not necessarily build for themselves. Some build for wife, children and household; others build for kin and friends. Some build even for their lord or teacher, or for their treasures, horses and oxen. I have now built for myself, not for others. Why? Given the ways

20 The pheasant echoes a poem attributed to the monk Gyōki: hearing its cry *horo-horo*, he thinks, is it my father, is it my mother?

of the present world and my own situation, I have no one to live with and no servant to rely on. Even if I built it large, whom would I lodge? Whom would I settle in it?

WHY HE LIVES ALONE

Friends, servants and the body: why Chōmei relies on no one and serves himself.

[12] Those who are friends to others value wealth and put attentiveness first. They do not necessarily love those who have feeling or are upright. Better, then, simply to take music, flowers and the moon as my friends. Those who are servants to others look to how great the rewards and punishments are, and give weight to generous favors. However kindly one cares for them, they do not wish for an easy, leisurely life. Better, then, simply to make myself my own servant. If there is something to be done, I use my own body. It is not that this is never tiring, but it is easier than ordering people about and looking after them. If I need to go somewhere, I walk. It is hard, but better than fretting over horses and saddles, oxen and carriages. Now I divide my one body to serve two uses. My hands are my servants, my feet my carriage, and they suit my mind well. My mind, too, knows the body's hardships, so it rests the body when it suffers and uses it when it is well. Even in using it, the mind does not overdo it often; even when the body is sluggish, the mind is not disturbed. What is more, to walk constantly and work constantly must be good for one's health. Why sit idle to no purpose? To burden others and trouble them is, besides, sinful karma. How could I borrow the strength of others?

[13] So too with clothing and food. A robe of wisteria fiber, a hempen quilt: whatever I come by covers my skin. Cogon-grass shoots from the fields, nuts from the peaks: they are barely enough to keep me alive. Since I do not mix with people, I have no regrets, no shame at how I look. Since food is scarce, my meals are plain, yet they still taste sweet. I do not say all this to set myself against people who live in pleasure and wealth. I am

only comparing past and present for myself alone. Ever since I left the world and cast my self aside, I have had neither resentment nor fear. I leave my life to the course of Heaven, neither clinging to it nor weary of it. I liken my self to a drifting cloud, neither relying on it nor finding it wanting. The height of my pleasure in this life is a nap on my pillow; my hopes for the rest of my days lie in the fine sights of each season.

THE THREE WORLDS ARE MIND ALONE

Contentment in the hut, and why only one who lives this way can judge it.

[14] The three worlds are mind alone. If the mind is not at peace, oxen, horses and the seven treasures are worthless, and palaces and towers hold no attraction. Now I myself love this lonely dwelling, this hut of a single room. When I happen to go out to the capital, I am ashamed of having become a beggar. Yet when I come back and stay here, I pity those who cling to the dust of the world. If anyone doubts what I say, let them look at fish and birds. Fish never tire of water; unless you are a fish, how could you know its mind? Birds long for the woods; unless you are a bird, you do not know its mind. So it is with the savor of a secluded life. Who could understand it without living it?[21]

THE MOON SINKS TOWARD THE RIDGE

Chōmei turns on his own love of the hut and questions his mind; colophon of 1212.

[15] Now the moon of my life is sinking, and my remaining years are close to the mountain's rim. Soon I will face the darkness of the three evil paths. What will I have to plead for myself then? The gist of the Buddha's teaching to us is that we should not cling to anything. Now even my love for this grass hut is a fault, and my attachment to quiet solitude must also be a hindrance.

21 The three worlds: of desire, of form and of formlessness, that is, the whole round of rebirth.

How can I go on telling of useless pleasures and waste precious time in vain?

16 In the quiet before dawn, I kept pondering this truth, and I questioned my own mind: "You left the world and went into the mountains and forests to discipline the mind and practice the Way. And yet, though you look like a holy man, your mind is steeped in impurity. Your dwelling may sully the traces of the layman Vimalakīrti, but what you actually practice falls short even of the practice of Cūḍapanthaka. Is it that the karmic reward of poverty and low station is tormenting you? Or has the deluded mind come over you and driven you mad?" At that, my mind gave no answer at all. All I did was set my tongue to work, recite an unasked-for nembutsu two or three times, and fall silent. It is now the second year of Kenryaku (1212), around the last day of the third month, and I, the monk Ren'in, write this at my hut in Toyama.[22]

17 "Even the mountain rim where the moonlight sets has been bitter to me; if only I had a way to see the light that never fails."

22 Cūḍapanthaka was the Buddha's slowest disciple. The "unasked-for nembutsu" is a perfunctory, half-hearted one; Ren'in is Chōmei's Buddhist name.