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The Rationale for Writing “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land”



IN the first year of the Shoka era (1257), with the cyclical sign *hinotomi*, on the twenty-third day of the eighth month, at the time when the hour of the dog gives way to the hour of the boar (around 9:00 P.M.), there occurred an earthquake of unprecedented magnitude. In the second year of the same era, cyclical sign *tsuchinoe-uma*, on the first day of the eighth month, there was a great wind. In the third year, cyclical sign *tsuchinoto-hitsuji*, a major famine occurred. In the first year of the Shogen era (1259), cyclical sign *tsuchinoto-hitsuji*, epidemics were rampant, and throughout the four seasons of the second year, cyclical sign *kanoe-saru*, the epidemics continued to rage without abating. By this time more than half the people of the nation had been laid low by death. The ruler of the country, alarmed at this state of affairs, turned to the scriptures of Buddhism and the non-Buddhist writings for help, ordering that various prayers be offered. These, however, failed to produce the slightest effect. On the contrary, famine and epidemics raged more fiercely than ever.

I, Nichiren, observing this state of affairs, proceeded to consult the great collection of Buddhist scriptures. There I discovered the reason why these prayers are without effect and on the

contrary actually make the situation worse, along with passages of proof to support it. In the end I had no other recourse than to compile a work to present my findings, entitling it *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*. In the first year of the Bunno era (1260), cyclical sign *kanoe-saru*, on the sixteenth day of the seventh month, at the hour of the dragon (7:00–9:00 A.M.), I handed it to the lay priest Yadoya¹ for presentation to His Lordship, the lay priest of Saimyo-ji, who is now deceased. This I did solely that I might repay the debt of gratitude that I owe to my native land.

The essence of this memorial is as follows. Buddhism was first introduced from the kingdom of Paekche to Japan during the reign of Emperor Kimmei, the thirtieth of the human sovereigns, in the hundred reigns of sovereigns following the seven reigns of the heavenly deities and the five reigns of the earthly deities. From that time until the reign of Emperor Kammu, the fiftieth human sovereign, a period of some 260 years, the various Buddhist scriptures were brought to Japan, as well as the six schools of Buddhism. At this time, however, the T'ien-t'ai and True Word schools had not yet been introduced.

During the reign of Emperor Kammu, there was a young priest named

Saicho, who was a disciple of the Administrator of Priests Gyohyo of Yamashina-dera temple. (He later came to be known as the Great Teacher Dengyo.) He made a thorough study of the six schools that had been introduced to Japan earlier, as well as of the Zen doctrine, but none of these seemed to satisfy him. Earlier, in the reign of Emperor Shomu, the Reverend Chienchen [Ganjin] of T'ang China had come to Japan and brought with him the commentaries of T'ien-t'ai. Forty or more years had passed, and Saicho was the first person to peruse them and understand the profound meaning of Buddhism.

In the fourth year of the Enryaku era (785), Saicho founded a temple on Mount Hiei in order to insure the continuance of peace in heaven and on earth. Emperor Kammu paid honor to the new establishment, designating it as a place of worship where prayers could be offered to the guardian star of the ruler. He ceased to heed the teachings of the six schools and instead gave wholehearted allegiance to the perfect doctrines of the Tendai school.

In the thirteenth year of the Enryaku era, the emperor moved the capital from Nagaoka to the city of Heian.² In the twenty-first year of the same era, on the nineteenth day of the first month, the emperor summoned fourteen great scholars of the six schools from the seven major temples of Nara, including such priests as Gonso and Choyo, to Takao-dera temple, and ordered them to engage Saicho in debate. These masters of the six schools were not able to hold their own against Saicho even for a single exchange of opinions, to the extent that their mouths became as incapable of speech as their noses. The five teachings of the Flower Garland school, the three periods of the Dharma Characteristics school, and the two storehouses and three periods propounded by the Three Treatises school³—all of

these doctrines were demolished by Saicho. Not only were the doctrines of the six schools refuted, but it was demonstrated how they all go against the correct teaching. On the twenty-ninth day of the same month, the emperor handed down an edict severely criticizing the fourteen debaters who had confronted Saicho. These priests in turn drew up a letter apologizing for their conduct and submitted it to the emperor.

Thereafter, one sovereign after another paid allegiance to Mount Hiei, treating it with even greater deference than a filial son shows toward his father and mother, regarding it with greater awe than the common people manifest before the might of the ruler. At times the rulers issued edicts to honor it; at other times they were obliged to give their approval to its unjust demands. We may note in particular that Emperor Seiwa was able to ascend the throne as a consequence of the powerful prayers of the Reverend Eryo of Mount Hiei.⁴ The emperor's maternal grandfather, the Minister of the Right Kujo, for this reason submitted a written pledge of his fidelity to Mount Hiei. The General of the Right Minamoto no Yoritomo [the founder of the Kamakura shogunate], it will be recalled, was a descendant of Emperor Seiwa. And yet the government authorities in Kamakura, though they may or may not be following the right course in their administration, ignore and turn their back on Mount Hiei. Have they no fear of the punishment of heaven?

In the time of the Retired Emperor Gotoba, during the Kennin era (1201–1204), there were two arrogant men, Honen and Dainichi. Their bodies were possessed of demons, and they went about deluding the people of both high and low station throughout the country, until everyone had become a Nembutsu believer or else

joined the Zen school. Those who continued to pay respect to Mount Hiei became surprisingly few and lacking in ardor, and throughout the country the priests who were authorities on the Lotus Sutra or the True Word teachings found themselves ignored and rejected.

As a result, the Sun Goddess, Great Bodhisattva Hachiman, and the gods of the seven shrines of Sanno,⁵ who guard and protect Mount Hiei, as well as the other great benevolent deities who protect the different parts of the nation, could no longer taste the flavor of the Law. Their power and brilliance waned, and they abandoned the country. Thus the demons gained access to the nation and brought about disasters and calamities. These disasters, as I stated in my memorial, were omens signifying that our country would in the end be destroyed by a foreign nation.

Later, in the first year of the Bun'ei era (1264), cyclical sign *kinoe-ne*, on the fifth day of the seventh month, a comet appeared in the east, and its light shone over the whole country of Japan. This is an evil portent such as has never been seen before since the beginning of history. None of the authorities on the Buddhist scriptures or the non-Buddhist writings could understand what had brought about such an ill omen. I became even more grieved and distressed. Now, nine years after I presented my memorial [to the lay priest of Saimyo-ji], in the intercalary first month of this year, the official letter arrived from the great kingdom of the Mongols. The events that have occurred match the predictions made in my memorial as exactly as do the two halves of a tally.

The Buddha left this prediction, saying, "One hundred or more years after my passing, a ruler named Ashoka the Great will appear in the world and will spread my relics far and wide."⁶ In the reign of King Chao, the fourth ruler of

the Chou dynasty, the Grand Historian Su Yu made this prediction: "[A sage has been born in the western region.] One thousand years from now, the words of this sage will be brought to this country."⁷ Prince Shotoku predicted, "After my death, when two hundred years or more have passed, the city of Heian will be established in the province of Yamashiro."⁸ And the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai predicted, "Two hundred years or more after my death, I will be reborn in an eastern country and will spread my correct teaching."⁹ All of these predictions were fulfilled to the letter.

When I, Nichiren, observed the great earthquake of the Shoka era, and the great wind and famine that occurred in the same era, as well as the major outbreak of epidemics that took place in the first year of the Shogen era, I made a prediction, saying, "These are omens indicating that this country of ours will be destroyed by a foreign nation." I may seem to be praising myself for having made such a prediction, but if our country should be destroyed, it would most certainly mean the destruction of the Buddhist teachings as well.

The eminent Buddhist priests of our time seem to be of one mind with those who slander the Law. In fact, they do not even understand the true meaning of the teachings of their own schools. It is certain that, if they should receive an imperial command or instructions from the government authorities to offer prayers in an effort to avert the evils that beset the nation, they would only make the Buddhas and deities angrier than they are already, and then the nation could not help but face ruin.

I, Nichiren, understand the steps that should be taken to remedy the situation. Other than the sage of Mount Hiei,¹⁰ I am the only person in all of Japan who does. Just as there are not

two suns or two moons, so two sages are not to be found standing side by side. If these words of mine are false, then may I be punished by the ten demon daughters who protect the Lotus Sutra that I embrace. I say all this solely for the sake of the nation, for the sake of the Law, for the sake of others, not for my own sake. I will be calling on you in person, and so I am inform-

ing you of this. If you do not heed my advice, you will surely regret it later.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The fifth day of the fourth month
in the fifth year of Bun'ei (1268),
cyclical sign *tsuchinoe-tatsu*

To the Reverend Hogan



Background

In the first month of 1268, envoys from Khubilai Khan arrived in Kamakura and presented the shogunate with a message demanding, in veiled terms, that Japan acknowledge fealty to the Mongol empire. The envoys were sent back without an answer, and the government began taking steps to defend the country against foreign attack.

At this time, Nichiren Daishonin wrote the short work known as *The Rationale for Writing "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land"* and sent it to a priest named Hogan. Little is known about him; he was a Buddhist priest, but he would appear to have been active in government circles. The Daishonin explains the circumstances that led to his writing of *On Establishing the Correct Teach-*

ing for the Peace of the Land eight years earlier and points out that the arrival of the Mongol emissaries with a demand for allegiance substantiates the prophecy of foreign invasion that he had made in that treatise.

In the tenth month of the same year, Nichiren Daishonin sent letters to eleven high-ranking political and religious leaders, including the regent Hojo Tokimune, the Zen priest Doryu of Kencho-ji, and the True Word Precepts priest Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji, pointing out that the predictions in his *On Establishing the Correct Teaching* were now being fulfilled and demanding the opportunity to demonstrate the validity of his teachings in public religious debate. He received no response to his letters.

Notes

1. Yadoya Mitsunori, a ranking official who was close to Hojo Tokiyori (1227–1263), the retired regent. Tokiyori was known as the lay priest of Saimyo-ji.

2. The ancient name of Kyoto. Earlier the capital had been moved from Nara to Nagaoka.

3. These are systems by which these schools sought to classify the body of Buddhist scriptures. The five teachings of the Flower Garland school are Hinayana, elementary Mahayana and final Mahayana

teachings, and the sudden teaching and the perfect teaching. The three periods of the Dharma Characteristics school divides the sutras into: (1) the teaching that the elements of existence are real; (2) the teaching that all is non-substantial; and (3) the teaching of the Middle Way. The two storehouses of the Three Treatises school are teachings for voice-hearers and teachings for bodhisattvas, and the three periods of that school are: (1) the doctrine that both the mind and objective reality are real;

(2) the doctrine that the mind alone is real; and (3) the doctrine that both the mind and objective reality are without substance.

4. Emperor Seiwa (850–880), in youth known as Prince Korehito, was the fourth son of Emperor Montoku. According to tradition, Emperor Montoku was unable to decide whether to name Korehito or another of his sons as successor, and had the two princes engage in a sumo wrestling match to settle the matter. It is said that Prince Korehito won because of the prayers offered on his behalf by the Tendai priest Eryo. "The emperor's maternal grandfather," which appears in the next sentence, refers to Fujiwara Yoshifusa (804–872), who established a basis for the prosperity of his clan.

5. Sanno refers to Sanno Shrine, another name of Hie Shrine located at the foot of Mount Hiei. Sanno, or Mountain King, is also the name of the main god of the shrine who is revered as the guardian deity of Mount Hiei and the Tendai school. The seven major shrines are located in the compound of Hie Shrine.

6. A rephrasing of a passage in *A History of the Buddha's Successors*. "My relics" indicates both the Buddha's physical remains and the teachings he expounded.

7. *The Record of the Lineage of the Buddha and the Patriarchs*. This work states that, in

the twenty-fourth year (trad. date 1029 B.C.E.) of the reign of King Chao, on the night of the eighth day of the fourth month, five-colored rays of light spread across the sky, the earth shook in six different ways, and, though no rain fell, the rivers, streams, wells, and ponds overflowed with water. King Chao was alarmed, but the Grand Historian Su Yu performed divinations and announced, "A sage has been born in the western region. One thousand years from now, the words of this sage will be brought to this country." It is said that, just as he predicted, 1,015 years after the Buddha's passing, during the reign of Emperor Ming in the tenth year of the Yung-p'ing era (C.E. 67), the doctrines of Buddhism were introduced to China.

8. A rephrasing of a passage in *Gleanings from the Records on Prince Jōgu*. In 794, some two hundred years after Prince Shotoku (also known as Prince Jōgu) passed away in 622, the capital was established at Heian, or present-day Kyoto.

9. This passage is found in *The Reverend Tao-sui's Account of the Transmission of the Law*. When Tao-sui met Dengyo upon the latter's coming to China from Japan, he identified Dengyo as the reincarnation of T'ien-t'ai, based on T'ien-t'ai's prediction.

10. The sage of Mount Hiei refers to the Great Teacher Dengyo.