

The Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei



THE Lotus Sutra is the heart and core of the sacred teachings expounded by Shakyamuni Buddha during the course of his lifetime, the foundation of all the eighty thousand doctrines of Buddhism. The various exoteric and esoteric sutras such as the Mahavairochana, the Flower Garland, the Wisdom, and the Profound Secrets sutras spread in China, India, the palaces of the dragon kings, and the world of heavenly beings. In addition, there are the teachings expounded by the Buddhas throughout the lands of the ten directions, which are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges or as the dust particles of the land. Even if one were to use all the water in the oceans to produce sumi ink and fashion all the trees and bushes of the major world system into writing brushes, one could never finish writing them all. Yet when I examine them and weigh their contents, I see that among all these sutras the Lotus Sutra occupies the highest place.

Nevertheless, among the various schools of India and in Buddhist circles in Japan, there were many scholars and teachers who failed to understand the Buddha's true intention. Some of them declared that the Mahavairochana Sutra is superior to the Lotus Sutra. Others said that the Lotus Sutra is inferior not only to the Mahavairochana Sutra but

to the Flower Garland Sutra as well, or that the Lotus Sutra is inferior to the Nirvana, Wisdom, and Profound Secrets sutras. Still others maintained that the sutras each have their distinctive character, and therefore possess various superior or inferior aspects. Some said that the worth of a particular sutra depends upon whether or not it accords with the capacities of the people; sutras that fit the capacities of the people of the time are superior, while those that do not are inferior. Similarly, some persons claimed that, if people had the capacity to gain the way through the teaching that all things have substance, then one should condemn the teaching that all things are without substance, praising only the former teaching. And the same principle, they said, should be applied to all other situations.

Because no one among the people of the time refuted such doctrines, ignorant rulers and officials of states began to put great faith in them, donating cultivated fields to support those who taught them until their followers grew to be numerous. And once such doctrines had become long-standing, people came to be firmly convinced that they were correct and no longer even dreamed of questioning them.

But then, with the arrival of the latter age, there appeared one wiser than the scholars and teachers whom the

people of the time followed.¹ He began to question one by one the doctrines upheld by the early scholars and teachers and to criticize them, pointing out that they differed from the sutras on which they were based. Or he clarified solely in the light of the various sutras that, in formulating their doctrines, the scholars and teachers had failed to distinguish which sutras had been preached early in the Buddha's teaching life and which later, as well as which were shallow and which profound. Thus attacked, the adherents of these doctrines found themselves unable to defend the erroneous teachings of the founders of their various schools, and were at a loss how to answer. Some in their doubt declared that the scholars and teachers must surely have had their passages of proof in the sutras and treatises, but that they themselves, lacking the requisite wisdom, could not defend these doctrines effectively. Others, also doubtful, decided that while their teachers had been worthies and learned persons of antiquity they themselves were ignorant people of the latter age. In this way, they convinced persons of virtue or rank to ally with them and totally opposed the one who challenged their beliefs.

But I have discarded prejudice, whether against the opinions of others or in favor of my own, and set aside the views propounded by scholars and teachers. Instead, relying solely on the passages of the sutras themselves, I have come to understand that the Lotus Sutra deserves to occupy first place. If there are those who assert that some other sutra surpasses the Lotus Sutra, we must suppose it is for one or another of the following reasons: First, they may have been deceived by passages in other scriptures that resemble those of the Lotus Sutra. Or they may have been deceived by "sutras" that have been fabricated by persons of later times and passed off as the words of

the Buddha. Lacking the wisdom to distinguish true from false, they may have consequently accepted such texts as the Buddha's actual words. Beginning with Hui-neng and his *Platform Sutra* or Shan-tao and his *Teaching on Meditation Sutra*,² there have been numerous false teachers in India, China, and Japan who have simply made up their own "sutras" and preached them to the world. In addition, there are many others who have made up what they claim to be scriptural passages, or who have inserted their own words into passages of the scriptures.

Unfortunately, there are ignorant people who accept these spurious texts as genuine. They are like a sightless person who, if told that there are stars in the sky that shine more brightly than the sun or moon, will accept that assertion as fact. When someone says that his or her own teacher was a worthy or wise person of ages past while Nichiren is a mere foolish man of the latter age, the ignorant will tend to agree.

This is by no means the first time that doubts of this kind have been raised. In the time of the Ch'en and Sui dynasties (557-618) in China, there was a lowly priest called Chih-i, who later became teacher to the emperors of two dynasties and was honored with the title Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-che. Before he rose to honor, this man not only refuted the doctrines of the various Tripitaka masters and teachers who had lived in China in the preceding five hundred years or more, but he also refuted those of the scholars who had taught in India over the course of a thousand years. As a result, the wise men of northern and southern China rose up like clouds in opposition, while the worthies and learned persons from east and west came forth like ranks of stars. Criticisms fell on him like rain, while his doctrines were attacked as though by strong winds. Yet in the end he succeeded in refuting the one-sided

and erroneous doctrines of the scholars and teachers, and established the correct doctrines of the T'ien-t'ai school.

Likewise, in Japan during the reign of Emperor Kammu there was a humble priest named Saicho, who later was honored with the title of the Great Teacher Dengyo. He refuted the doctrines that had been taught by the Buddhist teachers of the various schools in Japan during the two hundred and some years following [the introduction of Buddhism in] the reign of Emperor Kimmei. At first people were infuriated with him, but later they all joined in becoming his disciples.

These people had criticized T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo by saying, "The founders of our schools were scholars of the four ranks of sages, and worthies and learned persons of antiquity, while you are no more than an ordinary, foolish man of the end of the Middle Day of the Law." The question, however, is not whether one lives in the Former, the Middle, or the Latter Day of the Law, but whether one bases oneself upon the text of the true sutra. Again, the point is not who preaches a doctrine, but whether it accords with truth.

The non-Buddhists criticized the Buddha, saying: "You are a foolish man living at the end of the kalpa of formation and the beginning of the kalpa of continuance,³ while the original teachers of our doctrines were wise men of ancient times, the two deities⁴ and the three ascetics." In the end, however, all the ninety-five non-Buddhist schools were discarded.

On considering the eight schools of Buddhism, I, Nichiren, have discovered the following: The Dharma Characteristics, Flower Garland, and Three Treatises schools, which are based upon provisional sutras, declare that the provisional sutras are equal to the true sutra, or even that the true sutra is inferior to the provisional sutras. These are obviously errors originating with the

scholars and teachers who founded these schools. The Dharma Analysis Treasury and Establishment of Truth schools are a special case,⁵ while the Precepts school represents the very lowest level of the Hinayana teachings.

Scholars surpass ordinary teachers, and the true Mahayana sutra surpasses the provisional Mahayana sutras. Thus the Mahavairochana Sutra of the True Word school cannot equal the Flower Garland Sutra, much less the Nirvana and Lotus sutras. Yet when the Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei came to judge the relative merits of the Flower Garland, Lotus, and Mahavairochana sutras, he erred in his interpretation by declaring that, though the Lotus Sutra and the Mahavairochana Sutra are equal in terms of principle, the latter is superior in terms of practice. Ever since that time, the True Word followers have arrogantly asserted that the Lotus Sutra cannot even compare to the Flower Garland Sutra, much less to the True Word sutras, or that, because it fails to mention mudras and mantras, the Lotus Sutra cannot begin to compete with the Mahavairochana Sutra. Or they point out that many of the teachers and patriarchs of the Tendai school have acknowledged the superiority of the True Word school, and that popular opinion likewise holds the True Word to be superior.

Since so many people hold mistaken opinions on this point, I have examined it in considerable detail. I have outlined my findings in other writings, which I hope you will consult. And I hope that people who seek the way will take advantage of the time while they are alive to learn the truth of the matter and pass it on to others.

One should not be intimidated by the fact that so many hold such beliefs. Nor does the truth of a belief depend on whether it has been held for a long or short time. The point is simply whether or not it conforms with the

text of the scriptures and with reason.

In the case of the Pure Land school, the Chinese priests T'an-luan, Tao-ch'ò, and Shan-tao made numerous errors and led a great many people to embrace false views. In Japan, Honen adopted the teachings of these men, and not only taught everyone to believe in the Nembutsu but also attempted to wipe out all the other schools in the empire. Because the three thousand priests of Mount Hiei, as well as the priests of Kofuku-ji, Todai-ji, and the other temples of Nara—indeed, of all the eight schools—strove to put a stop to this, emperor after emperor issued edicts, and directives went out from the shogunate, all in an attempt to prevent the spread of this teaching, but in vain. On the contrary, it flourished all the more, until the emperor, the retired emperor, and the entire populace came to believe in it.

I, Nichiren, am the son of a humble family, born along the shore in Kata-umi of Tojo in the province of Awa, a person who has neither authority nor virtue. If the censures of the temples of Nara and Mount Hiei and the powerful prohibitions of emperors could not put a stop to the Nembutsu teachings, then I wondered what I could do. But, employing the passages of the sutras as my mirror and the teachings of T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo as my compass, I have attacked these teachings for the past seventeen years, from the fifth year of the Kencho era (1253) to the present, the seventh year of the Bun'eì era (1270). And, as may be seen by the evidence before one's eyes, the spread of the Nembutsu in Japan has been largely brought to a halt. Even though there are people who do not cease chanting the Nembutsu with their mouths, I believe they have come to realize in their hearts that the Nembutsu is not the path by which to free themselves from the sufferings of birth and death.

The Zen school likewise is guilty

of doctrinal errors. By observing one thing, you can surmise ten thousand. I can bring an end to the errors of the True Word and all the other schools at will. The "wisdom" of the True Word teachers and other eminent priests of the present time cannot compare to that of an ox or a horse, and their "light" is less than that given off by a firefly. To expect anything from them is like placing a bow and arrows in the hands of a dead man, or asking questions of one who is talking in one's sleep. Their hands form the mudra gestures, their mouths repeat the mantras, but their hearts do not understand the principles of Buddhism. In effect, their arrogant minds tower like mountains, and the greed in their hearts is deeper than the seas. And all these mistaken opinions mentioned above have come about because they are confused as to the relative superiority of the various sutras and treatises, and because none of them has corrected the errors originally propounded by the founders of these schools.

Persons of wisdom should of course devote themselves to the study of all the eighty thousand doctrines of Buddhism, and should become familiar with all the twelve divisions of the scriptures. But ignorant persons living in this latter age of ours, a time of evil and confusion, should discard the so-called difficult-to-practice way and easy-to-practice way that the Nembutsu believers talk of, and devote themselves solely to chanting Nam-myohorenge-kyo, the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra.

When the sun rises in the eastern sector of the sky, then all the skies over the great continent of Jambudvipa in the south will be illuminated because of the vast light that the sun possesses. But the feeble glow of the firefly can never shed light on a whole nation. One who carries in one's robe a wish-granting jewel can have any desire

fulfilled, but mere shards and stones can confer no treasures. The Nembutsu and other practices, when compared to the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, are like shards and stones compared to a precious jewel, or like the flicker of a firefly compared to the light of the sun.

How can we, whose eyes are dull, ever distinguish the true color of things by the mere glow of a firefly? The fact is that the lesser, provisional sutras of the Nembutsu and True Word schools are not teachings that enable ordinary people to attain Buddhahood.

Our teacher, the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, in the course of his lifetime of teaching, expounded eighty thousand sacred doctrines. He was the first Buddha to appear in this saha world of ours, which previously had not known any Buddha, and he opened the eyes of all living beings. All the other Buddhas and bodhisattvas from east and west, from the lands of the ten directions, received instruction from him.

The period prior to his advent was like the time before the appearance of the sovereigns and emperors⁶ of ancient China, when people did not know who their own fathers were and lived like beasts. In the time before Emperor Yao, people knew nothing about the duties to be performed in the four seasons, and were as ignorant as oxen or horses.

In the period before Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in the world, there were no orders of monks and nuns; there were only the two categories of men and women. But now we have monks and nuns who are teachers of the True Word school, and who have decided to look upon the Thus Come One Mahavairochana as their object of devotion, demoting the Thus Come One Shakyamuni to an inferior position; or who are believers in the Nembutsu, and who pay honor solely to Amida Buddha, thrusting the Thus

Come One Shakyamuni aside. They are monks and nuns owing to Shakyamuni Buddha, but because of the erroneous teachings handed down from the founders of these various schools, they have been led to behave in this way.

There are three reasons why the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, rather than any of the other Buddhas, has a relationship with all the living beings of this saha world. First of all, he is the World-Honored One, the sovereign of all the living beings of this saha world. Amida Buddha is not the monarch of this world. In this respect, Shakyamuni Buddha is like the ruler of the country in which we live. We pay respect first of all to the ruler of our own country, and only then do we go on to pay respect to the rulers of other countries. The Sun Goddess and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman are the original rulers of our country, provisional manifestations of Shakyamuni Buddha who appeared in the form of local deities. One who turns one's back on these deities cannot become the ruler of this country. Thus the Sun Goddess is embodied in the form of the sacred mirror known as Naishidokoro,⁷ and imperial messengers are sent to Great Bodhisattva Hachiman to report to him and receive his oracle. Shakyamuni, the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment, is our august sovereign. It is he who is to be regarded as the object of devotion.

The second reason is that the Thus Come One Shakyamuni is the father and mother of all living beings in this saha world. It is proper that we should first of all pay filial respect to our own father and mother, and only then extend the same kind of respect to the fathers and mothers of other people. We have the example of King Wu of the ancient land of Chou, who carved a wooden image of his deceased father and placed it in a carriage, designating it as the general who would lead his

troops into battle. Heaven, moved by such conduct, lent him protection, and thus he succeeded in overthrowing his enemy, Chou, the king of Yin.

The ancient ruler Shun, grieved because his father had gone blind, shed tears; but when he wiped his hands, wet with those tears, on his father's eyes, his father's eyesight was restored.⁸ Now Shakyamuni Buddha does the same for all of us living beings, opening our eyes so as to "open the door of Buddha wisdom"⁹ innate within us. No other Buddha has ever yet opened our eyes in such a way.

The third reason is that Shakyamuni is the original teacher of all living beings in this saha world. He was born in central India as the son of King Shuddhodana during the ninth kalpa of decrease in the present Wise Kalpa, when the life span of human beings measured a hundred years. He left family life at the age of nineteen, achieved enlightenment at thirty, and spent the remaining fifty years of his life expounding the sacred teachings. He passed away at the age of eighty, leaving behind his relics¹⁰ to provide the means of salvation for all living beings of the Former, Middle, and Latter Days of the Law. The Thus Come One Amida, the Buddha Medicine Master, Mahavairochana, and the others, on the other hand, are Buddhas of other lands; they are not World-Honored Ones of this world of ours.

This saha world occupies the lowest position among all the worlds of the ten directions. Among these worlds, it holds a place like that of a prison within a nation. All the persons in the worlds of the ten directions who have committed any of the ten evil acts, the five cardinal sins, the grave offense of slandering the correct teaching, or other terrible crimes and have been driven out by the Buddhas, Thus Come Ones, of those worlds, have been brought together here in this saha land

by the Thus Come One Shakyamuni. These people, having fallen into the three evil paths or the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering and there duly suffered for their offense, have been reborn in the realm of human or heavenly beings. But because they still retain certain vestiges of their former evil behavior, they are inclined to easily commit some further offense by slandering the correct teaching or speaking contemptuously of persons of wisdom. Thus, for example, Shariputra, though he had attained the status of an arhat, at times gave way to anger. Pilindavatsa,¹¹ though he had freed himself from the illusions of thought and desire, displayed an arrogant mind, while Nanda, though he had renounced all sexual attachment, continued to dwell on the thought of sleeping with a woman. Even these disciples of the Buddha, though they had done away with delusions, still retained their vestiges. How much more so must this be the case, therefore, with ordinary people? Yet the Thus Come One Shakyamuni entered this saha world with the title "One Who Can Endure." He is so called because he does not berate its people for the slanders they all commit, but shows them forbearance.

These, then, are the special qualities [possessed by Shakyamuni Buddha, qualities] that the other Buddhas lack.

Amida Buddha and the other various Buddhas were determined to make compassionate vows. For this reason, though they felt ashamed to do so,¹² they made their appearance in this saha world, Amida Buddha proclaiming his forty-eight vows, and Medicine Master Buddha, his twelve great vows. Perceiver of the World's Sounds and the other bodhisattvas who live in other lands also did likewise.

When the Buddhas are viewed in terms of the unchanging equality of their enlightenment, there are no distinctions to be made among them. But when they are viewed in terms of the

ever-present differences among their preaching, then one should understand that each of them has his own realm among the worlds of the ten directions, and that they distinguish between those with whom they have already had some connection, and those with whom they have no such connection.

The sixteen royal sons of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence each took up residence in a different one of the lands of the ten directions and there led their respective disciples to salvation. The Thus Come One Shakyamuni, who had been one of these sons, appeared in this saha world. We ordinary people, too, have been born into the saha world. Therefore, we must not in any way turn away from the teachings of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni. But people all fail to realize this. If they would look carefully into the matter, they would understand that [as the Lotus Sutra says] "I [Shakyamuni] am the only person who can rescue and protect others,"¹³ and that they must not cut themselves off from the helping hand of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni.

For this reason, all the living beings in this saha world, if they detest the sufferings of birth and death and wish to have an object of devotion to which they can pay respect, should first of all fashion images of Shakyamuni Buddha in the form of wooden statues and paintings, and make these their object of devotion. Then, if they still have strength left over, they may go on to fashion images of Amida and the other Buddhas.

Yet when the people of this world today, being unpracticed in the sacred way,¹⁴ come to fashion or paint images of a Buddha, they give priority to those of Buddhas other than Shakyamuni. This does not accord either with the intentions of those other Buddhas, or with the intentions of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni himself, and

is moreover at variance with secular propriety.

The great king Udayana, when he carved his image of red sandalwood, made it of no other Buddha, and the painting offered to King One Thousand Stupas¹⁵ was likewise of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni. But people nowadays base themselves upon the various Mahayana sutras, and because they believe that the particular sutra they rely on is superior to all others, they accordingly relegate Shakyamuni Buddha to a secondary position.

Thus all the masters of the True Word school, convinced that the Mahavairochana Sutra surpasses all other sutras, regard the Thus Come One Mahavairochana, who is described therein as the supreme Buddha, as the one with whom they have a special connection. The Nembutsu priests, on the other hand, putting all their faith in the Meditation Sutra, look upon Amida Buddha as the one who has some special connection with this saha world of ours.

Because the people of our time in particular have mistaken the erroneous doctrines of Shan-tao and Honen for correct teachings and taken the three Pure Land sutras as their guide, eight or nine out of every ten temples that they build have Amida Buddha enshrined as the principal object of devotion. And in the dwellings of both lay believers and priests, in houses by the tens, the hundreds, or the thousands, the image hall attached to the residence is dedicated to Amida Buddha. Moreover, among the thousand or ten thousand paintings and images of Buddhas to be found in a single household today, the great majority are of Amida Buddha.

Yet people who are supposed to be wise in such matters see these things happening and do not regard them unfortunate. On the contrary, they find such proceedings quite in accord with their own views and consequently greet

them with nothing but praise and admiration. Paradoxical as it may seem, evil people who have not the least understanding of the principle of cause and effect and who are not dedicated to any Buddha whatsoever would appear to be the ones free from error with respect to Buddhism.

Shakyamuni, the World-Honored One, who is our father and mother and is endowed with the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent, is the very one who encourages us, the people driven out by all other Buddhas, saying, "I am the only person who can rescue and protect others." The debt of gratitude we owe him is deeper than the ocean, weightier than the earth, vaster than the sky. Though we were to pluck out our two eyes and place them before him as an offering until there were more eyes there than stars in the sky; though we were to strip off our skins and spread them out by the hundreds of thousands of ten thousands until they blanketed the ceiling of heaven; though we were to give him our tears as offerings of water and present him with flowers for the space of thousands, ten thousands, millions of kalpas; though we were to offer him our flesh and blood for innumerable kalpas until our flesh piled up like mountains and our blood overflowed like vast seas, we could never repay a fraction of the debt we owe to this Buddha.

But the scholars of our time cling to distorted views. Even though they may be wise men who have mastered all the eighty thousand doctrines of Buddhism and committed to memory the twelve divisions of the scriptures, and who strictly observe all the Mahayana and Hinayana precepts, if they turn their backs on this principle, then one should know that they cannot avoid falling into the evil paths.

As an example of what I mean, let us look at the Tripitaka Master Shan-

wu-wei, the founder of the True Word school in China. He was a son of King Buddha Seed,¹⁶ the monarch of the kingdom of Udyana in India. Shakyamuni Buddha left his father's palace at the age of nineteen to take up the religious life. But this Tripitaka master abdicated the throne at the age of thirteen, and thereafter traveled through the seventy states of India, journeying ninety thousand *ri* on foot and acquainting himself with all the various sutras, treatises, and schools of Buddhism. In a kingdom in northern India, he stood at the foot of the stupa erected by King Golden Grains,¹⁷ gazed up at the heavens, and uttered prayers, whereupon there appeared in mid-air the Womb Realm mandala, with the Thus Come One Mahavairochana seated in its center.

Shan-wu-wei, out of his compassion, determined to spread the knowledge of this teaching to remote regions, and thereupon traveled to China, where he transmitted his secret doctrines to Emperor Hsüan-tsung. At the time of a great drought, he offered up prayers for rain, and rain fell from the sky within three days. This Tripitaka master was thoroughly familiar with the seed characters¹⁸ representing the twelve hundred and more honored ones, their august forms, and their samayas.¹⁹ Today all the followers of the True Word school belonging to To-ji and the other True Word temples in Japan look upon themselves as disciples of the Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei.

But the time came when the Tripitaka master suddenly died. Thereupon a number of wardens of hell appeared, bound him with seven iron cords, and led him off to the palace of Yama, the lord of hell. This was a very strange thing to happen.

For what fault did he deserve to be censured in this way? In the life he had just lived, he might perhaps have committed some of the ten evil acts, but

surely he had not been guilty of any of the five cardinal sins. And as for his past existences, in view of the fact that he had become the ruler of a great kingdom, he must have strictly observed the ten good precepts and dutifully served five hundred Buddhas.²⁰ What fault, then, could he have committed?

Moreover, at the age of thirteen he had voluntarily relinquished his position as king and entered the religious life. His aspiration for enlightenment was unequalled throughout the entire land of Jambudvīpa. Surely such virtue should have canceled out any major or minor offenses that he might have committed in his present or previous lives. In addition, he had made a thorough study of all the various sutras, treatises, and schools that were propagated in India at that time, and that fact too should have served to atone for any possible faults.

In addition to all this, the esoteric True Word doctrines are different from the other teachings of Buddhism. They declare that, though one may make no more than a single mudra with the hands or utter no more than a single mantra with the mouth, even the gravest offenses accumulated throughout the three existences of past, present, and future will thereby without fail be eradicated. Moreover, they say that all the offenses and karmic hindrances that one may have created during the space of innumerable kotis of kalpas will all be extinguished the moment one looks upon the esoteric mandalas. How much more should this be true, therefore, in the case of the Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei, who had memorized all the mudras and mantras pertaining to the twelve hundred and more honored ones, who had understood as clearly as if it were reflected in a mirror the practice of contemplation for attaining Buddhahood in one's present form, and who, when he underwent the ceremony of anointment before the

Diamond Realm and Womb Realm mandalas, had become in effect Mahāvairocana, the King of Enlightenment, himself! Why, then, should such a man be summoned before King Yama and subjected to censure?

I, Nichiren, had resolved to embrace the teaching that is supreme among the two divisions of Buddhism, the exoteric and the esoteric, and that allows us to free ourselves from the sufferings of birth and death with the greatest ease. Therefore, I acquainted myself with the esoteric True Word doctrines in general and made inquiries concerning this matter of Shan-wu-wei. But no one was able to give a satisfactory answer to the question I have posed above. If this man could not escape the evil paths, then how could any of the True Word teachers of our time, let alone the priests and lay believers who had performed no more than a single mudra or uttered no more than a single mantra, hope to avoid them?

Having examined the matter in detail, I concluded that there were two errors for which Shan-wu-wei was summoned before King Yama for censure.

First of all, the Mahāvairocana Sutra not only is inferior to the Lotus Sutra, but cannot even compare to the Nirvana, Flower Garland, or Wisdom Sutra. And yet Shan-wu-wei maintained that it was superior to the Lotus Sutra, thus committing the error of slandering the correct teaching.

Second, although the Thus Come One Mahāvairocana is an emanation of Shakyamuni Buddha, Shan-wu-wei held to the biased view that Mahāvairocana is in fact superior to Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings. The offense of such slanders is so grave that no one who commits them could avoid falling into the evil paths, even though he should practice the teachings of the twelve hundred and more

honored ones over a period of innumerable kalpas.

Shan-wu-wei committed these errors, the retribution for which is very difficult to escape, and therefore, although he performed the mudras and mantras of the various honored ones, it was to no avail. But when he merely recited those words from the "Simile and Parable" chapter in the second volume of the Lotus Sutra that read: "Now this threefold world is all my [Shakyamuni's] domain, and the living beings in it are all my children. Now this place is beset by many pains and trials. I am the only person who can rescue and protect others," he escaped from the iron cords that bound him.

Be that as it may, the True Word teachers who came after Shan-wu-wei have all maintained that the Mahavairochana Sutra not only is superior to the various other sutras, but surpasses even the Lotus Sutra. In addition, there were other persons who have declared that the Lotus Sutra is also inferior to the Flower Garland Sutra. Though these groups differ in what they maintain, they are alike in being guilty of slandering the correct teaching.

The Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei held the prejudiced opinion that both the Lotus Sutra and the Mahavairochana Sutra should be regarded with great respect, since they agree in the profound principles that they embody, but that, because the Lotus Sutra mentions nothing about mudras and mantras, it is inferior to the Mahavairochana Sutra. The True Word teachers who came after him, moreover, were of the opinion that, even with respect to the important principles expressed, the Lotus Sutra is inferior to the Mahavairochana Sutra, to say nothing of the matter of mudras and mantras. Thus they went much farther in their slander of the correct teaching, piling up offense upon offense. It is impossible to believe that they can long avoid

being censured by King Yama and consigned to the sufferings of hell. Indeed, they will immediately call down upon themselves the flames of the Avichi hell.

The Mahavairochana Sutra does not originally contain any mention of the profound principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. This principle is confined to the Lotus Sutra alone. But the Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei proceeded to steal and appropriate this profound principle that the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai had put forth on the basis of his reading of the Lotus Sutra, incorporating it into his own interpretation of the Mahavairochana Sutra. He then asserted that the mudras and mantras of the Mahavairochana Sutra, which were originally expounded merely to lend adornment to the Lotus Sutra, were the very elements that make the Mahavairochana Sutra superior to the Lotus. Shan-wu-wei was putting forth a distorted view when he stated that the Lotus and Mahavairochana sutras were equal in principle, and he was likewise stating an erroneous view when he claimed that the Mahavairochana Sutra was superior by reason of its mantras and mudras.

This is like the case of a foolish and lowly man who looks upon his six sense organs as his personal treasures, though in fact they belong to his lord.²¹ Consequently, he is led into all manner of erroneous conduct. We should keep this example in mind when interpreting the sutras, because the doctrines set forth in inferior sutras serve only to adorn the sutra that is truly superior.

I, Nichiren, was a resident of [Seicho-ji on] Mount Kiyosumi in Tojo Village in the province of Awa. From the time I was a small child, I prayed to Bodhisattva Space Treasury, asking that I might become the wisest person in all Japan. The bodhisattva transformed himself into a venerable priest before

my very eyes and bestowed upon me a jewel of wisdom as bright as the morning star. No doubt as a result, I was able to gain a general mastery of the principal teachings of the eight older schools of Buddhism in Japan, as well as of those of the Zen and Nembutsu schools.

During the sixteen or seventeen years since the fifth year (1253) or so of the Kencho era until the present, the seventh year of the Bun'ei era (1270), I have leveled many criticisms against the Zen and Nembutsu schools. For this reason, the scholars of those schools have risen up like hornets and flocked together like clouds, though as a matter of fact their arguments can be demolished with hardly more than a word or two.

Even the scholars of the Tendai and True Word schools, losing sight of the principles laid down by their own schools concerning which teachings are to be adopted and which discarded, have come to hold opinions identical to those of the Zen or Nembutsu school. Because their lay followers hold to such beliefs, they have thought it best to lend support to these schools and their erroneous views by declaring that the Tendai and True Word teachings are the same as those of the Nembutsu and Zen schools. As a result, they join the others in attempting to refute me. But although they might appear to refute me, in fact they are simply destroying their own Tendai and True Word teachings. It is a shameful, shameful thing they are doing!

The fact that I have in this way been able to discern the errors of the various sutras, treatises, and schools is due to the benefit of Bodhisattva Space Treasury, and is owed to my former teacher Dozen-bo.

Even a turtle, we are told, knows how to repay a debt of gratitude,²² so how much more so should human beings? To repay the debt that I owe to

my former teacher Dozen-bo, I desired to spread the teachings of the Buddha on Mount Kiyosumi and lead my teacher to enlightenment. But he is a rather ignorant man, and in addition he is a believer in the Nembutsu, so I did not see how he could escape the three evil paths. Moreover, he is not the kind of person who would listen to my words of instruction.

Nevertheless, in the first year of the Bun'ei era (1264), on the fourteenth day of the eleventh month, I met with him at the priests' lodgings²³ of Hanabusa in Saijo. At that time, he said to me: "I have neither wisdom nor any hope for advancement to important position. I am an old man with no desire for fame, and I claim no eminent priest of Nembutsu as my teacher. But because this practice has become so widespread in our time, I simply repeat like others the words *Namu Amida Butsu*. In addition, though it was not my idea originally, I have had occasion to fashion five images of Amida Buddha. This perhaps is due to some karmic habit that I formed in a past existence. Do you suppose that as a result of these faults I will fall into hell?"

At that time I certainly had no thought of quarreling with him. But because of the earlier incident with the lay priest Tojo Saemon Renchi,²⁴ I had not seen my teacher for more than ten years, and thus it was in a way as though we had become estranged and were at odds. I thought that the proper and courteous thing would be to reason with him in mild terms and to speak in a gentle manner. On the other hand, when it comes to the realm of birth and death, neither young nor old know what fate awaits them, and it occurred to me that I might never again have another opportunity to meet with him. I had already warned Dozen-bo's elder brother, the priest Dogi-bo Gisho,²⁵ that he was destined to fall into the hell of incessant suffering if he did

not change his ways, and they say that his death was far worse than what he had hoped. When I considered that my teacher Dozen-bo might meet a similar fate, I was filled with pity for him and therefore made up my mind to speak to him in very strong terms.

I explained to him that, by making five images of Amida Buddha, he was condemning himself to fall five times into the hell of incessant suffering. The reason for this, I told him, was that the Lotus Sutra—wherein the Buddha says that he is now “honestly discarding expedient means”²⁶—states that the Thus Come One Shakyamuni is our father, while Amida Buddha is our uncle. Anyone who would fashion no less than five images of his uncle and make offerings to them, and yet not fashion a single image of his own father—how could he be regarded as anything but unfilial? Even hunters in the mountains or fishermen, who cannot tell east from west and do not perform a single pious act, are guilty of less offenses than such a person.

Nowadays, those who seek the way no doubt hope for a better existence in their future lives. Yet they cast aside the Lotus Sutra and Shakyamuni Buddha, while never failing even for an instant to revere Amida Buddha and call upon his name. What kind of behavior is this? Though they may appear to the eye to be pious people, I do not see how they can escape the charge of rejecting their own parent and devoting themselves to a stranger. A completely evil person, on the other hand, has never given his allegiance to any Buddhist teaching at all, and so has not committed the fault of rejecting Shakyamuni Buddha. Therefore, if the proper circumstances should arise, he might very well in time come to take faith in Shakyamuni.

Those who follow the erroneous doctrines of Shan-tao, Honen, and the Buddhist scholars of our time, making

Amida Buddha their object of devotion and dedicating themselves entirely to the practice of calling upon his name—I do not believe that they will ever renounce their erroneous views and give their allegiance to Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra, even though lifetime after lifetime throughout countless kalpas should pass. Accordingly, the Nirvana Sutra, which was preached in the grove of sal trees just before Shakyamuni Buddha's passing, states that there will appear frightful persons whose offenses are graver than the ten evil acts or the five cardinal sins—icchantikas, or persons of incorrigible disbelief, and those who slander the correct teaching. We also read there that such persons will be found nowhere else but among the company of wise men who observe the two hundred and fifty precepts, wrap their bodies in the three robes of a Buddhist monk, and carry a begging bowl.

I explained all this in detail to Dozen-bo at the time of our meeting, though it did not appear that he completely understood. Nor did the other persons present on that occasion seem to understand. Later, however, I received word that Dozen-bo had come to take faith in the Lotus Sutra. I concluded that he must have renounced his earlier distorted views and had hence become a person of sound belief, a thought that filled me with joy. When I also heard that he had fashioned an image of Shakyamuni Buddha, I could not find words to express my emotion. It may seem as though I spoke to him very harshly at the time of our meeting. But I simply explained things as they are set forth in the Lotus Sutra, and that is no doubt why he has now taken such action. It is said that good advice grates on the ear, just as good medicine tastes bitter.

Now I, Nichiren, have repaid the debt of gratitude that I owe to my

teacher, and I am quite certain that both the Buddhas and the gods will approve of what I have done. I would like to ask that all I have said here be reported to Dozen-bo.

Even though one may resort to harsh words, if such words help the person to whom they are addressed, then they are worthy to be regarded as truthful words and gentle words. Similarly, though one may use gentle words, if they harm the person to whom they are addressed, they are in fact deceptive words, harsh words.

The Buddhist doctrines preached by scholars these days are regarded by most people as gentle words, truthful words, but in fact they are all harsh words and deceptive words. I say this because they are at variance with the Lotus Sutra, which embodies the Buddha's true intention.

On the other hand, when I proclaim that the practitioners of the Nembutsu will fall into the hell of incessant suffering or declare that the Zen and True Word schools are likewise in error, people may think I am uttering harsh words, but in fact I am speaking truthful and gentle words. As an example, I may point to the fact that Dozen-bo has embraced the Lotus Sutra and fashioned an image of Shakyamuni Buddha, actions that came about because I

spoke harshly to him. And the same thing holds true for all the people of Japan. Ten or more years ago, virtually everyone was reciting the Nembutsu. But now, out of ten persons, you will find that one or two chant only Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, while two or three recite it along with the Nembutsu. And even among those who recite the Nembutsu exclusively, there are those who have begun to have doubts and so in their hearts believe in the Lotus Sutra; some have even begun to paint or carve images of Shakyamuni Buddha. All this, too, has come about because I have spoken harsh words.

This response is like the fragrant sandalwood trees that grow among the groves of foul-smelling eranda trees, or lotus blossoms that rise from the mud. Thus, when I proclaim that the followers of the Nembutsu will fall into the hell of incessant suffering, the "wise men" of our day, who are in fact no wiser than cattle or horses, may venture to attack my doctrines. But in truth they are like scavenger dogs barking at the lion king, or foolish monkeys laughing at the god Shakra.

Nichiren

The seventh year of Bun'ei (1270)

To Gijo-bo and Joken-bo



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in 1270 at Matsubagayatsu in Kamakura to Joken-bo and Gijo-bo, priests who had been his seniors at Seicho-ji temple in Awa, where he had entered Buddhism. While his reasons for writing it are not certain, quite possibly it was motivated by his joy in learning, as mentioned at the close of this letter, that Dozen-bo had expressed his belief

in the Lotus Sutra and carved a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. From the Daishonin's remarks, it can be surmised that, although Dozen-bo did not entirely recant his belief in the Nembutsu, he came to revere Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra sometime in 1270.

Seicho-ji was originally a temple of the Tendai school, but later had fallen

under True Word and Pure Land influences. Dozen-bo, one of the senior priests of Seicho-ji, had been the Daishonin's teacher, one to whom he felt a sincere obligation. It is possible that, because Dozen-bo had begun to embrace the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin wished to express his gratitude.

Broadly speaking, this letter consists of five sections. In the first section, Nichiren Daishonin proclaims that the Lotus Sutra is supreme among the vast number of Buddhist sutras and is the sutra that perfectly accords with the Buddha's true intention. Nevertheless, most of the Buddhist scholars and teachers of India, China, and Japan have slighted the Lotus Sutra and set forth various erroneous doctrines, turning against the intention of the Buddha. Following the examples of the great teachers T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo, the Daishonin has refuted their mistaken doctrines, relying not upon people's opinions but solely upon the sutras themselves.

In the second section, he points out the errors of several major schools of Buddhism in Japan, particularly those of the True Word and Pure Land schools. He may have focused on these two not only because they represented major errors, but because Dozen-bo had professed faith in their doctrines. The Daishonin then defines the daimoku of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the practice

for the universal attainment of Buddhahood in the Latter Day of the Law. In the third section, the Daishonin identifies Shakyamuni as the Buddha karmically connected with all people living in this saha or mundane world, explaining that Shakyamuni possesses the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent with respect to them. Therefore, the Daishonin says, all the people in the saha world should recognize their debt to Shakyamuni.

In the fourth section, from which this letter takes its title, the Daishonin refers to Shan-wu-wei, who first brought the esoteric True Word teachings from India to China. The story of Shan-wu-wei serves to demonstrate that even a person of wisdom who has mastered all the Buddhist teachings will fall into the evil paths as a result of disparaging Shakyamuni and slighting the Lotus Sutra. By citing the example of Shan-wu-wei, the Daishonin also indirectly criticizes Seicho-ji temple, which had fallen under the influence of the True Word school. In the fifth section, he expresses his gratitude to Bodhisattva Space Treasury, the original object of devotion at Seicho-ji, and to his teacher Dozen-bo, and expresses his joy at hearing that the latter has embraced the Lotus Sutra. Finally, he stresses the importance of speaking frankly to those who have been led astray by teachings that distort the Buddha's intention.

Notes

1. Here, the Daishonin refers to himself.
2. *The Teaching on Meditation Sutra* is a work on the practice of meditation on Amida Buddha and the benefits that accrue from it. Though the title contains the word "sutra," it is not.
3. The "end of the kalpa of formation and the beginning of the kalpa of continuance" refers to the time of transition between the first two stages of the four-stage cycle, described as the four kalpas of for-

mation, continuance, decline, and disintegration, which a world is said to undergo repeatedly. During these first two stages, a world takes shape, and living beings appear and continue to exist.

4. Shiva and Vishnu.

5. The Dharma Analysis Treasury and Establishment of Truth schools were studied in conjunction, respectively, with the Dharma Characteristics and Three Treatises schools; thus presumably the Daishonin did

not regard them as independent religious schools.

6. The sovereigns and emperors refer to the Three Sovereigns, Fu Hsi, Shen Nung, and Huang Ti, legendary rulers said to have established model governments, and the Five Emperors, Shao Hao, Chuan Hsü, Ti Kao, T'ang Yao, and Yü Shun, said to have reigned after them.

7. Originally the palace that enshrined the mirror, one of the three sacred treasures of the imperial court, and that was guarded by court ladies of honor called *naishi*. Later, *naishidokoro* became another name for the sacred mirror itself.

8. Shun was one of the Five Emperors. Although his father, a commoner, treated him cruelly, being partial to his younger half brother Hsiang, Shun practiced filial piety toward his parent. The story of Shun restoring his father's eyesight is found in *The Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Law*.

9. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

10. Here, the relics of the Dharma body, namely, the teachings that Shakyamuni Buddha expounded.

11. Pilindavatsa was one of Shakyamuni Buddha's disciples. Born to a Brahman family in Shravasti, India, he was arrogant and held others in contempt. He had won renown for the practice of magic, but lost his powers when he met Shakyamuni and instead became the Buddha's disciple. Shakyamuni's prediction of his future enlightenment appears in chapter 8 of the Lotus Sutra.

12. For example, Amida Buddha lives in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss, located a hundred thousand million worlds away in the west, and Medicine Master Buddha lives in the Pure Emerald World said to lie in the eastern part of the universe. As these names suggest, the living beings in these lands experience only pleasure; consequently, there is no one there to be freed from suffering. For this reason, the Daisshonin says, the Buddhas of those worlds, though embarrassed to appear in another Buddha's realm, came down to this saha world, which is full of suffering, in order to fulfill their vows of compassion.

13. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

14. The sacred way refers to one of the five types of practices for bodhisattvas that are mentioned in the Nirvana Sutra. The sacred way here indicates actions undertaken in order to master the three types of

learning—precepts, meditation, and wisdom.

15. Probably King Rudrayana in ancient India who is mentioned in *The Monastic Rules of the Sarvastivada School*. According to this work, Rudrayana gave five treasures to Bimbisara, the king of Magadha, but King Bimbisara had no gifts to offer him in return and was at a loss. At the suggestion of his chief minister, however, he had an image of Shakyamuni Buddha painted, and presented it to King Rudrayana as the most precious of all treasures in the world. King Rudrayana at first became angry, but on realizing that it was an image of the Buddha, he came to have deep faith and converted to Buddhism.

16. A king of Udyana who lived around the seventh century and was a descendant of King Amritodana, Shakyamuni's uncle.

17. A king who built a great stupa in Gandhara. Little else is known about him. It is said that at the beginning of the eighth century Shan-wu-wei offered prayers at the foot of this stupa and achieved sudden understanding of the Mahavairochana Sutra. Some sources suggest that King Golden Grains in this passage may actually refer to King Kanishka.

18. The seed characters were characters written in Siddham, a style of Sanskrit orthography, which were used as symbols to represent various Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the esoteric teaching.

19. Samayas here refer to the mudras (sacred hand gestures) of and to the objects held by the various figures depicted in the mandalas. The term is also used to signify the vows these beings have taken.

20. According to the Benevolent Kings Sutra, kings are born to their position as the karmic reward of having served five hundred Buddhas in prior lifetimes.

21. In feudal Japan, a vassal was regarded as so heavily indebted to his lord for providing him with his sole means of livelihood that he was expected to dedicate his entire being to loyal service in return. The six sense organs are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—that is, the physical and mental components of a human being. This is another way of saying that a retainer's life belongs to his lord, and that all his faculties must be dedicated to the latter's service.

22. This story appears in *A Collection of Stories and Poems* and other sources. When

the young Mao Pao, who later became a general of the Chin dynasty, was walking along the Yangtze River, he saw a fisherman catch a turtle and prepare to kill it. Moved to pity, he gave the fisherman his clothes in exchange for the turtle and thus saved its life. Later, Mao Pao was attacked by enemies. When he fled in retreat to the Yangtze River, the turtle he had saved in his childhood appeared and carried him on its back to the opposite shore.

23. The priests' lodgings are probably part of the compound of Renge-ji temple located in Hanabusa, Saijo, Awa Province.

Renge-ji is said to have been a branch temple of Seicho-ji.

24. Tojo Kagenobu, the steward of Tojo Village in Awa Province. A strong Nembutsu believer, Tojo had attempted to have the Daishonin killed after the latter refuted the Nembutsu and declared the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in 1253.

25. Dogi-bo Gisho was a priest at Seicho-ji temple, thought to have been either Dozen-bo's elder brother or a priest senior to him. He opposed the Daishonin's teaching.

26. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.