

Letter from Teradomari



I HAVE received the string of coins that you sent. Those resolved to seek the way should gather and listen to the contents of this letter.

This month (the tenth month), on the tenth day, we left the village of Echi in Aiko District of the province of Sagami. Along the way we stopped at Kumegawa in the province of Musashi and, after traveling for twelve days, arrived here at the harbor of Teradomari in the province of Echigo. From here we are going to cross the sea to the island province of Sado, but at the moment the winds are not favorable, so I do not know when we will depart.

The hardships along the way were worse than I could have imagined, and indeed more than I can put down in writing. I will leave you to surmise what I endured. But I have been prepared for such difficulties from the outset, so there is no point in starting to complain about them now. I shall accordingly say no more of the matter.

The fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states, "Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?"¹ The fifth volume says, "It will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe."² And the thirty-eighth volume of the Nirvana

Sutra states: "At that time all the non-Buddhists spoke [to King Ajatashatru], saying: 'O Great King, at present there is a man of incomparable wickedness, a monk called Gautama. . . . All sorts of evil people, hoping to gain profit and alms, have flocked to him and become his followers. These people do not practice goodness, but instead use the power of spells and magic to win over men like Mahakashyapa, Shariputra, and Maudgalyayana.'"

This passage from the Nirvana Sutra recounts the evil words that the various non-Buddhists spoke against Shakyamuni Buddha because he refuted the scriptures preached by their original teachers, the two deities³ and the three ascetics.

In the above passages from the Lotus Sutra, however, it is not the Buddha himself who is being looked upon as an enemy. Rather, as T'ien-t'ai explains, it is [the Lotus Sutra that is being opposed by] "the various voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones and the bodhisattvas who seek only the Buddha of recent enlightenment."⁴ In other words, persons who show no desire to hear or believe in the Lotus Sutra or who say that it does not match their capacity, though they may not actually slander it in so many words, are all to be regarded as persons of hatred and jealousy.

Observing the situation when the Buddha was in the world and comparing it with the situation since his passing, we may say that the scholars of the various schools in the world today are like the non-Buddhists of the Buddha's time. They too speak of "a man of incomparable wickedness," by which they mean me, Nichiren. They speak of "all sorts of evil people who have flocked to him," by which they mean my disciples and followers. The non-Buddhists, having incorrectly received and transmitted the teachings of the earlier Buddhas, displayed hostility toward the later Buddha, Shakyamuni. The scholars of the various schools today are just the same. In effect, they have let their own way of understanding the Buddha's teachings lead them into erroneous views. They are like persons who, dizzy from drink, think that the huge mountain in front of them is spinning round and round. And so we now have these eight schools or ten schools all disputing with one another over their various doctrines.

The eighteenth volume of the Nirvana Sutra sets forth the doctrine of "the precious jewels that redeem life."⁵ The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, after studying and pondering this passage, concluded that "life" refers to the Lotus Sutra, and the "precious jewels," to the first three of the four teachings expounded in the Nirvana Sutra. But what then of the fourth or perfect teaching, which the Nirvana Sutra also expounds? This teaching represents a reiteration of the doctrine already expounded in the Lotus Sutra concerning the eternally inherent Buddha nature, and was preached to lead people to the Lotus Sutra from which it originated. The Nirvana Sutra's perfect teaching of the eternally inherent Buddha nature in fact belongs to the Lotus Sutra. The merits unique to the Nirvana Sutra are consequently limited to the first three of the four teachings.

The third volume of T'ien-t'ai's *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* states, "The Nirvana Sutra offers precious jewels to redeem the life [of the Lotus Sutra], and thus the hands are clapped and the bargain concluded."⁶ The third volume of *The Annotations on "The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra"* explains this by saying, "The T'ien-t'ai school cites this metaphor to indicate that the contents of the Nirvana Sutra are to be regarded as precious jewels."

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, in his work entitled *The Four Meditations*, cites the passage in the Lotus Sutra that reads, "Though they [the Buddhas] point out various different paths . . .,"⁷ and declares that the four flavors of teachings are also to be regarded as precious jewels. If so, then the sutras that were preached before and after the Lotus Sutra are all to be regarded as precious jewels offered for the sake of the Lotus Sutra.

But the Buddhist scholars in the world today are of the opinion that this interpretation represents a doctrine put forward by the T'ien-t'ai school alone, and that none of the other schools accepts it. When I consider the matter, however, I have this to say: The eight or ten schools we are speaking of all came into existence after the passing of the Buddha and are the creation of the various scholars and teachers of the time. But we should not evaluate the sutras that the Buddha preached during his lifetime on the basis of the doctrines of schools established after his passing. The judgments put forward by T'ien-t'ai, however, completely accord with the teachings of all the sutras. It is wrong to discard them on the grounds that they represent no more than the opinions of a single school.

The scholars of the various schools continue to cling to the mistaken opinions of their respective teachers. Therefore, they declare that Buddhist practices must be accommodated to the

people's capacities, or they defer to the opinions of their founders or try to persuade the worthy rulers of the time to be their allies. The upshot of all this is that in the end they give themselves up wholly to evil intentions, engage in wrangling and doctrinal disputes, and take delight in inflicting injury upon people who are guilty of no fault.

Among the various schools, the opinions of the True Word school are particularly distorted. Its founders, Shan-wu-wei and Chin-kang-chieh, maintained: "The concept of three thousand realms in a single moment of life is the most important of all T'ien-t'ai's principles and the heart and core of the teachings put forward by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime. But setting aside this doctrine that the three thousand realms are encompassed by the mind, which constitutes the foundation of both the exoteric and the esoteric teachings, the mudras and mantras form the most crucial part of the Buddhist teachings." The teachers of the True Word school in later times have used this pronouncement as a pretext to declare that all sutras that do not mention mudras and mantras are to be regarded as inferior and, in fact, as no different from non-Buddhist teachings.

Some of the esoteric teachers assert that the Mahavairochana Sutra was preached by [the Thus Come One Mahavairochana], a Buddha other than the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, others declare that it is the highest of all the teachings put forth by the lord of teachings, Shakyamuni Buddha, while still others say that the same Buddha manifested himself once in the form of Shakyamuni Buddha to preach the exoteric sutras, and on another occasion, in the form of the Thus Come One Mahavairochana to preach the esoteric sutras. Thus, misunderstanding the underlying principles of Buddhism, they produce an endless

array of erroneous opinions. They are like a group of people who, unaware of the true color of milk, venture various speculations as to what the color might be, though none are able to surmise it correctly.⁸ Or they are like the blind men in the parable who try to guess the true shape of the elephant.⁹ In this connection, the scholars of the various schools should understand that the Mahavairochana Sutra, if preached before the Lotus Sutra, is on a level with the Flower Garland Sutra, and if preached after the Lotus Sutra, is on a level with the Nirvana Sutra.

Is it not possible that the Lotus Sutra in India contained descriptions of mudras and mantras, but that those who translated the text into Chinese omitted those sections—Kumarajiva calling his version the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law? And is it also not possible that Shan-wu-wei added mudras and mantras and called his version the Mahavairochana Sutra? For example, there were other versions of the Lotus Sutra, such as the Lotus Sutra of the Correct Law, the Supplemented Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, the Lotus Meditation Sutra, and the Saddharma-pundarika Sutra.¹⁰

In India after the Buddha's passing, Bodhisattva Nagarjuna was the one who truly understood the relationship between the Lotus Sutra and the other sutras, while in China the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-che was the first to grasp it correctly. Men like Shan-wu-wei of the True Word school, Ch'eng-kuan of the Flower Garland school, Chia-hsiang of the Three Treatises school, and Tz'u-en of the Dharma Characteristics school each publicly upheld the doctrines of the school they had established, but in their hearts they were all won over to the teachings of the T'ien-t'ai school. Yet their disciples were ignorant of this fact and hence developed erroneous opinions. How can they avoid being guilty

of slandering the correct teaching?

Some people criticize me, saying, "Nichiren does not understand the capacities of the people of the time, but goes around preaching in a harsh manner—that is why he meets with difficulties." Other people say, "The practices described in the 'Encouraging Devotion' chapter¹¹ are for bodhisattvas who are far advanced in practice; [Nichiren ought to follow the practices of] the 'Peaceful Practices' chapter, yet he fails to do so." Others say, "I, too, know the Lotus Sutra is supreme, but I say nothing about it." Still others complain that I give all my attention to doctrinal teachings.¹²

I am well aware of all these criticisms against me. But I recall the case of Pien Ho,¹³ who had his legs cut off at the knee, and of Kiyomaro¹⁴ (Pure Man), who was dubbed Kegaremaro (Filthy Man) and almost put to death. All the people of the time laughed at them with scorn, but unlike those two men, those who laughed left no good name behind them. And all the people who level unjust criticisms at me will meet with a similar fate.

The "Encouraging Devotion" chapter says, "There will be many ignorant people who will curse and speak ill of us." I observe my own situation in this passage. Why should it not apply to all of you as well? "They will attack us with swords and staves," the passage continues. I have experienced this passage from the sutra with my own body. Why do you, my disciples, not do likewise? Further on, the passage says, "In the midst of the great assembly they constantly try to defame us," and "they will address the rulers, high ministers, Brahmans, and householders, [slandering and speaking evil of us]." And they "will confront us with foul language and angry frowns; again and again we will be banished." "Again and again" means time after time. And I, Nichiren, have been repeatedly driven away,

and have twice been condemned to exile.

The Lotus Sutra accords with the fashion of the preaching employed by all Buddhas of the three existences.¹⁵ The past events described in the "Never Disparaging" chapter¹⁶ I am now experiencing as predicted in the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter; thus the present foretold in the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter corresponds to the past of the "Never Disparaging" chapter. The "Encouraging Devotion" chapter of the present will be the "Never Disparaging" chapter of the future, and at that time, I, Nichiren, will be its Bodhisattva Never Disparaging.

The Lotus Sutra consists of a single work in eight volumes and twenty-eight chapters, but I have heard that the sutra as it existed in India was long enough to stretch over a whole yojana. In other words, there must have been many more chapters to it. The twenty-eight-chapter version used today in China and Japan represents the most essential portion of an abbreviated version.

Let us set aside for now the revelation section¹⁷ of the sutra. In the following transmission section, the three pronouncements¹⁸ of the "Treasure Tower" chapter are delivered to the assembly gathered at Eagle Peak and present at the Ceremony in the Air. As to the vow made in the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter by the twenty thousand, eighty thousand, and eight hundred thousand million nayutas of great bodhisattvas, a man of shallow wisdom like myself cannot comprehend it. But the phrase "in an age of fear and evil" that appears in this chapter nevertheless indicates the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. The following "Peaceful Practices" chapter refers to this "age of fear and evil" with the words "in the latter age." And looking at other translations of the sutra, we find that in the Lotus Sutra of the Correct Law it

appears as “in the latter age hereafter” or “in the latter age to come,” while in the Supplemented Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law it appears as “in an age of fear and evil.”

In this latter age, which corresponds to our own time, the three types of enemies have appeared, but not a single one of the eight hundred thousand million nayutas of bodhisattvas is anywhere to be seen. It is like a lake that has dried and is missing its full share of water, or a waning moon that is far from full. If the water is clear, it will reflect the moon’s image, and if trees are planted, then birds can nest in them. Therefore, I, Nichiren, propagate this sutra in place of the eight hundred thousand million nayutas of bodhisattvas. I ask that those bodhisattvas grant me their aid and protection.

The lay priest who bears this letter tells me that you instructed him to accompany me to the province of Sado. But in view of the expenses of the trip and other difficulties, I am sending him back to you. I already know the depths of your consideration. Please explain to the others what I have written here. I am very much concerned about the priests who are in prison,¹⁹ and I hope you will inform me of their situation at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully,
Nichiren

The hour of the cock (5:00–7:00 P.M.), the twenty-second day of the tenth month

To Toki



Background

After his unsuccessful attempt to execute Nichiren Daishonin at Tatsunokuchi on the twelfth day of the ninth month, 1271, Hei no Saemon, deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs, had no choice other than to follow the government’s original instructions to deliver the Daishonin into the custody of Homma Rokuro Saemon Shigetsura, the deputy constable of Sado. The Daishonin was confined for nearly a month at Homma’s residence in Echi, Sagami Province, awaiting word of his fate from the government.

On the tenth day of the tenth month, Nichiren Daishonin left Echi, escorted by Homma’s warriors. When the group reached the coast of the Sea of Japan on the twenty-first, snow covered the ground and the sea was very rough. They were forced to stop for several days at a harbor called Terado-

mari in Echigo and wait for the winds to abate before crossing to Sado Island. Teradomari is said to have prospered from the early ninth century on as a port for shipping traffic between the island of Sado and the Japanese mainland. The day after arriving at Teradomari, the Daishonin wrote this letter and entrusted it to a lay priest whom Toki Jonin had sent to accompany him.

The community of believers in Kamakura had been badly shaken by the events of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution and the Sado Exile, and many among the Daishonin’s disciples and lay supporters succumbed to government pressures and gave up their faith, or began to have doubts when they saw the Daishonin persecuted. In order to help his followers dispel their doubts and persevere in faith, the Daishonin during his exile produced a number of writings. This letter is the first of these

writings, which include *The Opening of the Eyes*, *Letter from Sado*, and *On Practicing the Buddha's Teachings*.

At the beginning of this letter, the Daishonin mentions in passing the hardships and difficulties he experienced during the twelve-day journey to Teradomari. He then quotes scriptural passages to show that, in the Latter Day of the Law, hatred and jealousy of the Lotus Sutra will be worse than during the Buddha's lifetime. He himself is actually confronting such opposition, he says. Next, citing T'ien-t'ai's view of the Nirvana Sutra as precious jewels to redeem the life of the Lotus, the Daishonin declares the superiority of the Lotus over all other sutras and points out the mistaken views of the scholars of the various schools who fail to recognize this. In particular, he mentions the erroneous

opinions of the True Word school deriving from Shan-wu-wei and others. He warns that the followers of the various schools are committing the offense of slandering the Lotus Sutra, unaware that their patriarchs inwardly concurred with the teachings of the T'ien-t'ai school, which are based on the Lotus Sutra.

The Daishonin next enumerates four frequent criticisms of his method of propagation, raised not only by his enemies but by some of his own followers as well, and declares that the hardships he has encountered perfectly match the prophecies of the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In light of the sutra, he makes clear that he himself is the votary who propagates the sutra in the Latter Day of the Law.

Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.
2. Ibid., chap. 14.
3. Shiva and Vishnu.
4. A rephrasing of a passage in *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra."* The "Buddha of recent enlightenment" refers to Shakyamuni in his provisional capacity as the Buddha who first attained enlightenment in India.
5. This quotation actually appears in *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*. The Nirvana Sutra states that the store of seven gems can redeem one's life when threatened by famine, bandits, or an evil king. On the basis of this passage, *Profound Meaning* uses the expression "precious jewels that redeem life" to indicate that the Nirvana Sutra functions to protect and support the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra, which is reiterated in the Nirvana Sutra.
6. The statement "The hands are clapped and the bargain concluded" indicates that after Shakyamuni expounded the perfect teaching in the Lotus Sutra he reiterated it in the Nirvana Sutra.
7. *The Four Meditations* cites not this passage but another from the same "Expedient Means" chapter that reads, "I used the power of expedient means to preach to

the five ascetics." Because both passages agree in principle, the Daishonin may have cited the one rather than the other.

8. The Nirvana Sutra states that Brahmans, being ignorant of Shakyamuni's teachings of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity, fall into erroneous views, like blind men who do not know the true color of milk.

9. This parable appears in the Nirvana Sutra. A king had his high minister bring an elephant to a group of blind men, let them touch it, and then asked them to describe it to him. One blind man who pressed his hands against the elephant's stomach said that it was like a pot; another who touched the elephant's tail said that it resembled a rope; still another who stroked the elephant's trunk insisted that the animal resembled a pestle; and so on. In this parable, Shakyamuni likened the king who knows the truth to the Buddha's wisdom, the high minister to the Nirvana Sutra, the elephant to the Buddha nature, and the blind men to ordinary mortals who are ignorant of the Buddha nature.

10. The Lotus Sutra of the Correct Law and the Supplemented Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law are two of the three extant

Chinese translations of the Lotus Sutra, done by Dharmaraksha in 286 and by Jnanagupta and Dharmagupta in 601, respectively. The Lotus Meditation Sutra has been lost. The Saddharmapundarika Sutra here does not indicate the Sanskrit text but a Chinese translation. This version has also been lost.

11. The "Encouraging Devotion" chapter describes how the eight hundred thousand million nayutas of bodhisattvas vow to teach the sutra far and wide in an age of fear and evil after the Buddha's passing. They express their determination to meet the various persecutions that will result from their propagation. The practice of shakubuku is what calls forth such persecution and is what the Daishonin is referring to here. In contrast, the "Peaceful Practices" chapter details the four peaceful means of practice, by peaceful deeds, words, thoughts, and vows.

12. In contrast to "the observation of the mind," or the perception through meditation of the ultimate reality inherent in one's life. This, along with the doctrinal study of the sutras, is one of the two integral aspects of practice taught in the Tendai school. The Daishonin gives emphasis to the meditational aspect (the invocation of the daimoku), but expresses here that he is criticized for not doing so. This was because he also emphasized scriptural comparison to establish the superiority of the Lotus Sutra.

13. Pien Ho was a native of the state of Ch'u in China during the Spring and Autumn period (770-403 B.C.E.). According to *Han Fei Tzu*, Pien Ho found a precious stone at Mount Ch'u and presented it to King Li. When the king had it appraised, it was identified as a mere stone. So the king had Pien Ho's left leg cut off at the knee. After the king's death, Pien Ho again presented the precious stone, this time to King Wu, only to have his right leg cut off at the knee on a second charge of deception. Later, after King Wen had ascended the throne, Pien Ho wept for three days at the foot of Mount Ch'u, holding the precious stone and shedding tears of blood at the kings' ignorance. Hearing of this, King Wen asked for Pien Ho's stone and had it polished. It was then recognized as being genuine and, in consequence, is said to

have been widely treasured by the populace.

14. Kiyomaro is Wake no Kiyomaro (733-799). A high-ranking court official who thwarted the attempts of the priest Dokyo, Empress Shotoku's favorite, to ascend the throne and was persecuted as a result. After the death of the empress, however, Dokyo was stripped of power, and Kiyomaro was pardoned from his sentence of exile and recalled to service at court.

15. This statement derives from a passage in the "Expedient Means" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, which reads: "Following the same fashion that the Buddhas of the three existences employ in preaching the Law, I now will do likewise, preaching a Law that is without distinctions." The five categories of Buddhas—all Buddhas in general, past Buddhas, present Buddhas, future Buddhas, and Shakyamuni Buddha—invariably follow the same method of preaching, first expounding various provisional teachings over a relatively long period to lead people to the one Buddha vehicle, or the Lotus Sutra, which they reveal later.

16. The "Never Disparaging" chapter describes the practices of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who lived in the Middle Day of the Law of the Buddha Awesome Sound King, persevered in the face of persecution for the sake of the correct teaching, and finally attained Buddhahood.

17. The revelation section is one of the three divisions of a sutra—preparation, revelation, and transmission—used in interpreting the Buddhist teachings. Here the Daishonin applies these divisions solely to the theoretical teaching (former half) of the Lotus Sutra. From this viewpoint, preparation consists of the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra and the "Introduction" chapter; revelation, the "Expedient Means" through "Prophecies" chapters; and transmission, the "Teacher of the Law" through "Peaceful Practices" chapters.

18. The three pronouncements are exhortations by Shakyamuni, three times urging the assembly before him to propagate the Lotus Sutra after his passing.

19. After the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, five of the Daishonin's disciples, including Nichiro, were confined in a dungeon.