

The Pure and Far-Reaching Voice



THE ruler known as Duke Huan¹ of Ch'i loved to wear purple garments [and as a result the people of his state all did likewise]. The ruler known as King Chuang² of Ch'u disliked women with thick waists; as a result, all the courtesans in the state strove to acquire slim waists, and many of them starved to death in the process. Thus, what pleased one man was followed by all the people in the country, even though it did not accord with their personal tastes. To give an analogy, the ruler is like a great wind that bends the grass and trees, or a great ocean that draws to itself all the rivers and streams. If the grass and trees do not bend before the wind, will they not be broken and toppled? And if the little streams do not flow into the great ocean, to where else will they flow?

The ruler of a state is someone who in his former existence far excelled others in keeping the great precepts,³ and as a result heaven and earth and the various deities permitted him to become a ruler. The degree of merit he has acquired through keeping the precepts determines what country he rules. Two or three persons are not chosen to be ruler [but only one], and the deity kings of earth and heaven, of the oceans and mountains, all gather around and protect him. How then could the peo-

ple of that state turn their backs on their sovereign?

Even if the ruler should commit evil or perverse deeds, the first, second, or third time he does so, the deities will refrain from punishing him. But if he carries out acts that are particularly displeasing to the heavenly gods and other deities, then they will at first cause unusual disturbances in the heavens and strange occurrences on earth in order to reprimand him. And if he goes too far in his misdeeds, the heavenly gods and benevolent deities will abandon his state. Or, if the merit that the ruler has acquired by observing the precepts should be entirely exhausted, then when the time comes, his state may simply perish. Or, again, if his crimes and evil deeds become exceedingly numerous, then his state may be overthrown by a neighboring kingdom. For better or worse, the people of the state will invariably share the same fate as the ruler.

Such is the way of the world. And such, too, is the way of Buddhism. The Buddha long ago entrusted the protection of his teachings to the ruler. Therefore, even though wise men who are sages or worthies may appear, if they do not abide by the authority of the ruler, they will not be able to carry out the propagation of Buddhism. And even if it should later be propagated, at

the beginning it will without fail meet with great obstacles.

King Kanishka lived some four hundred years or more after the passing of the Buddha and ruled according to his will in the kingdom of Gandhara. He gathered five hundred arhats around him and paid honor to them, and he caused *The Great Commentary on the Abhidharma* to be compiled in two hundred volumes. But all the people in the kingdom were followers of the Hinayana teachings, and it was very difficult for the Mahayana teachings to make any progress there. Moreover, King Pushyamitra led the five regions of India in wiping out the teachings of the Buddha and beheading Buddhist monks, and no one, no matter how wise, could oppose him.

Emperor T'ai-tsung was a very worthy ruler. He acknowledged the Tripitaka Master Hsüan-tsang as his teacher and embraced the teachings of the Dharma Characteristics school, and none of his subjects ventured to do otherwise. The Dharma Characteristics school is a branch of Mahayana, but it teaches the doctrine of five natures, which represents a grave offense within the realm of Buddhism. It is an evil doctrine, worse than any of the fallacious teachings expounded by non-Buddhist religions, and should never have gained approval in any of the three countries of India, China, and Japan. In the end, it was discredited in Japan by the Great Teacher Dengyo. And yet, though the Dharma Characteristics school was greatly in error, Emperor T'ai-tsung put faith in its teachings, and no one opposed his example.

The True Word school bases itself upon the Mahavairochana, Diamond Crown, and Susiddhikara sutras. These are known as the three basic True Word sutras. In the reign of Emperor Hsüan-tsung, the Tripitaka masters Shan-wu-wei and Chin-kang-chih

brought them to China from India. Emperor Hsüan-tsung respected these sutras more highly than the teachings of the T'ien-t'ai and Flower Garland schools. He regarded them as superior to the Dharma Characteristics and Three Treatises teachings. As a result, everyone in China came to believe that the Mahavairochana Sutra is superior to the Lotus Sutra. And in Japan, too, down to the present time, people have believed that the Tendai school is inferior to the True Word school. The eminent priests of To-ji temple and of the Tendai school, who pursue the True Word teachings, are guilty of arrogance and of regarding what is inferior as superior!

If one places the Mahavairochana and Lotus sutras side by side and examines them without partiality or prejudice, one will see that, while the Mahavairochana Sutra is like the light of a firefly, the Lotus Sutra is like the full moon; that, while the teachings of the True Word school are like clusters of tiny stars, those of the Tendai school are like the sun. A person who is biased in the matter will say, "You have not fully understood the profound principles of the True Word school, and so you go on endlessly speaking ill of it." But more than six hundred years have passed since the True Word school was brought to China, and more than four hundred years since it spread to Japan, and I have generally acquainted myself with the various attacks and rebuttals that have been made by Buddhist teachers during that time. The Great Teacher Dengyo was the only person who truly grasped the fundamental nature of this school's teachings. Nevertheless, this school today is the foremost offender in all of Japan. What is superior it takes to be inferior, and what is inferior it takes to be superior. That is the reason why now, when its prayers are being used in an attempt to ward off the Mongol

invaders, such prayers are on the contrary about to bring the invaders down upon us.

The Flower Garland school was founded by the Dharma Teacher Fa-tsang. Because Empress Wu had placed her faith in its teachings, it enjoyed such great favor that none of the other schools could compete with it. Thus it would seem that the relative superiority of the schools has been determined by the power and authority of the ruler, and not by the doctrines that they teach.

Even scholars and teachers who have realized the profound meaning of Buddhism cannot prevail over the ruler's authority. Those who on occasion attempted to do so met with great persecution. The Venerable Aryasimha was beheaded by King Dammira, Bodhisattva Aryadeva was murdered by a non-Buddhist, Chu Tao-sheng was forced to withdraw to a mountain in Su-chou, and the Tripitaka Master Fa-tao was branded on the face and banished to the region south of the Yangtze River.

I, Nichiren, am not worthy to be called a votary of the Lotus Sutra, nor to be counted among the Buddhist priesthood. Moreover, I once followed along with the other people of my time in calling on the name of the Buddha Amida. The Reverend Shan-tao, who was reputed to be a reincarnation of the Buddha Amida, said, "[If people practice the Nembutsu continuously until the end of their lives], then ten persons out of ten and a hundred persons out of a hundred will be reborn in the Pure Land. . . . However, not even one person in a thousand can be reborn there [through any other teaching]."⁴ The Honorable Honen, who was revered as a reincarnation of Bodhisattva Great Power, interpreted this statement, saying: "In the latter age, of those who chant the Nembutsu but mix it with other practices such as devotion to the Lotus Sutra, not even

one person in a thousand will be reborn [in the Pure Land]. But of those who call on the name of the Buddha Amida alone, ten persons out of ten will be reborn [there]."⁵

For the past fifty years or more, all people throughout this country of Japan, both wise and ignorant, have honored this doctrine and placed faith in it, and not a one has questioned it. Only I, Nichiren, differ from all the others in that I point out that the Buddha Amida, in his original vow, pledged to save everyone "excepting only those who commit the five cardinal sins and those who slander the correct teaching."⁶ And I also point out that, according to the Lotus Sutra, "If a person fails to have faith but instead slanders this sutra, immediately he will destroy all the seeds for becoming a Buddha in this world. . . . When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avichi hell."⁷ These statements show Shan-tao and Honen to be slanderers of the correct teaching, and therefore they have surely been abandoned by the Buddha Amida upon whom they rely. And since they themselves have already rejected all the other Buddhas and sutras, they cannot possibly look to them for salvation. Just as the passage from the Lotus Sutra states, there can be no doubt that they are destined to fall into the hell of incessant suffering.

But since all the people throughout Japan are disciples of Shan-tao and Honen, I naturally cannot escape suffering such a great hardship [when I make such statements]. People hate me and ceaselessly plot in secret to do me injury.

I will leave aside the various persecutions that I suffered earlier and merely mention that last year, on the twelfth day of the ninth month, I incurred the wrath of the government authorities and, on the night of the same day, was to have been beheaded.⁸ Somehow or other, I lived to see the morning and

came instead to this island province of Sado, where I have been residing ever since. I have been abandoned by the world, abandoned by the Law of the Buddha, and the heavenly gods show me no pity. I am one who has been cast aside by both secular and Buddhist realms.

And yet in your sincerity you have sent your messenger all the way here to me, along with offerings for the third annual memorial service⁹ for your beloved mother, a matter of the utmost importance in your life. For the past two or three days I have felt as if I were dreaming. I feel like the temple administrator of Hossho-ji¹⁰ who, in exile on the island of Iogashima, suddenly encountered the youth who had long served him. When Yang Kung,¹¹ the barbarian of the north, had been taken captive in China and was being brought south, he saw wild geese crossing the sky, and [thinking that they must have come from his homeland in the north] he sighed with emotion. Yet I believe that his feelings did not surpass mine.

The Lotus Sutra states: "If one of these good men or good women in the time after I have passed into extinction is able to secretly expound the Lotus Sutra to one person, even one phrase of it, then you should know that he or she is the envoy of the Thus Come One. He has been dispatched by the Thus Come One and carries out the Thus Come One's work."¹² One who recites even one word or phrase of the Lotus Sutra and who speaks about it to another person is the emissary of Shakyamuni Buddha, lord of the teachings. And I, Nichiren, humble person though I am, have received Shakyamuni Buddha's royal command and come to this country of Japan. Thus it is apparent from the sutra that anyone who speaks a word of slander against me will be committing a crime that will condemn him to the hell of incessant suffering, and anyone who offers

so much as a word or a phrase on my behalf will acquire greater blessings than if he had made offerings to countless Buddhas.

Shakyamuni Buddha is the lord of all the Buddhist teachings, the leader and teacher of all living beings. The eighty thousand teachings he expounded are all golden words; the twelve divisions of the scriptures are all true. The prohibition against the speaking of falsehoods that he observed over countless millions of kalpas has produced this entire body of sutras. Thus there can be no doubt about the truth of any of them.

This, however, represents the general view. If we inquire more specifically, we will find that the teachings that issued from the Thus Come One's golden mouth may be divided into the various categories of Hinayana and Mahayana, exoteric and esoteric teachings, and provisional and true sutras. The Lotus Sutra says, "Honestly discarding expedient means, [I will preach only the unsurpassed way]."¹³ It also says, "The World-Honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth."¹⁴ In view of these pronouncements, who could doubt [that the Lotus Sutra represents the ultimate truth]? And to this was added the testimony of the Thus Come One Many Treasures, and the Buddhas [of the ten directions] extended their tongues to the Brahma heaven as further proof.

Thus the entire text of this sutra is in fact three texts, each phrase is three phrases, and each word is three words, for the benefit of the Lotus Sutra is such that even a single word of it embodies the threefold blessings of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions.

To illustrate, it is like a wish-granting jewel. One such jewel is the same as a hundred such jewels. One wish-granting jewel can rain down countless

treasures, and a hundred jewels can likewise produce inexhaustible treasures. Or it is like grinding up a hundred medicinal plants to make a pill, or to make a hundred pills. Whether it be used for one pill or a hundred, the medicine will have the power to cure sickness. Or, again, it is like the great sea: each drop contains [the flavors of] all the multitude of streams that pour into the ocean, and the ocean itself contains the flavors of all the streams that flow into it.

The Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law is a general name, while the twenty-eight chapters each have their particular names. Similarly, the Land of the Moon¹⁵ is the general name for India, while, more specifically, India is divided into five regions. Or we speak of Japan, which is a general name, or name the sixty-six provinces¹⁶ when we wish to be more specific.

The wish-granting jewels are the relics of Shakyamuni Buddha. The dragon kings received them and carried them on their heads, and Shakra held them in his hand and caused treasures to rain down.¹⁷ The reason why the body and bones of the Buddha can become wish-granting jewels is because the great precept¹⁸ he observed over a period of innumerable kalpas imbued his body with its fragrance and permeated his bones, so that they became jewels capable of saving all beings.

People say that a dog's fangs will dissolve when they come in contact with the bones of a tiger, or that a fish's bones will melt in the breath of a cormorant.¹⁹ Or they say that if one uses the sinews of a lion to make strings for a koto and plucks them, then strings made from the sinews of other animals will automatically snap, even though no one cuts them. The Buddha's preaching of the Law is called the lion's roar, and the Lotus Sutra is the foremost roar of the lion.

A Buddha has thirty-two features.

Each of these features is endowed with the characteristics of hundredfold merit that that Buddha has acquired. The knot of flesh on the crown of his head, the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows, and the other features are like fruit, while the practices that the Buddha has carried out in the past are like flowers that produce so many blessings; in this way, the thirty-two features come to appear in the body of the Buddha.

One feature of the Buddha is the unseen crown of his head.²⁰ Shakyamuni Buddha's body was sixteen feet in height, but a Brahman of the Bamboo Staff school was unable to measure it. When he attempted to see the top of Shakyamuni's head, he was unable to do so. Bodhisattva Worthy of Upholding²¹ likewise was unable to see the top of the Buddha's head, and so was the heavenly king Brahma. Inquiring as to the reason, we will find that in the past the Buddha bowed his head to the ground in order to pay reverence to his parents, his teacher, and his sovereign, and he acquired this feature as a result.

The foremost among the Buddha's thirty-two features is his pure and far-reaching voice.²² Lesser kings, great kings, and wheel-turning kings all possess this feature in some degree. Therefore, a single word from one of these kings can destroy the kingdom or insure order within it. The edicts handed down by rulers represent a type of pure and far-reaching voice. Ten thousand words spoken by ten thousand ordinary subjects cannot equal one word spoken by a king. The works known as the *Three Records* and the *Five Canons* represent the words of lesser kings.

What brings order to this small kingdom of Japan, what enables the heavenly king Brahma to command the inhabitants of the threefold world, and what enables the Buddha to command Brahma, Shakra, and the other deities, is none other than this pure and

far-reaching voice. The Buddha's utterances have become the works that compose the entire body of sutras and bring benefit to all living beings. And among the sutras, the Lotus Sutra is a manifestation in writing of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni's intent; it is his voice set down in written words. Thus the Buddha's heart is embodied in these written words. To illustrate, it is like seeds that sprout, grow into plants, and produce rice. Though the form of the rice changes, its essence remains the same.

Shakyamuni Buddha and the written words of the Lotus Sutra are two different things, but their heart is one.

Therefore, when you cast your eyes upon the words of the Lotus Sutra, you should consider that you are beholding the living body of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni.

Shakyamuni Buddha is already aware that you have sent offerings all the way here to the province of Sado. It was in truth a most loyal and devoted thing for you to do.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The ninth year of Bun'ei (1272)

Reply to Shijo Saburo Saemon-no-jo



Background

This letter was written at Ichinosawa on Sado Island in 1272 and addressed to Shijo Saburo Saemon-no-jo, commonly known as Shijo Kingo, a samurai and one of Nichiren Daishonin's followers who lived in Kamakura. It was prompted by the Daishonin's gratitude for offerings that Shijo Kingo had sent via messenger for his mother's third annual memorial service (held on the second anniversary of her death).

Soon after the Daishonin was exiled to Sado Island, Kingo sent a messenger to him with various offerings. Through this messenger the Daishonin entrusted Kingo with his treatise *The Opening of the Eyes*, which he had completed in the second month of 1272. A few months later, Kingo himself made the journey to Sado to visit the Daishonin. He again visited the Daishonin in the fifth month of 1273.

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin first discusses the power of one person, the ruler, to influence an entire nation. This is especially evident in the propagation of Buddhist teachings, where

the ruler's support can ensure that Buddhism will prosper, while his opposition will greatly hinder its spread. Citing historical examples, the Daishonin points out that the merits of the various Buddhist schools, which ought to be determined on the basis of their respective teachings, have all too often been judged according to the preferences of those in power. His own tribulations, he adds, arise from the very fact that he has dared to criticize the doctrines in which both the ruler and his subjects believe.

Nevertheless, the Daishonin declares, in light of the Lotus Sutra he is the Buddha's envoy and has made his advent in Japan in accordance with the Buddha's mandate. Moreover, the Lotus Sutra, whose essence he is propagating, has been affirmed by all Buddhas and encompasses all truths. Each word or phrase of the sutra contains the merit of all Buddhas and is therefore comparable to a wish-granting jewel that is said to possess the power to produce inexhaustible treasures.

In the concluding section, from

which the letter takes its name, the Daishonin explains the significance of the Buddha's "pure and far-reaching voice." He designates this voice as foremost among the Buddha's thirty-two distinguishing physical features because it expresses the Buddha's mind or intent. This pure and far-reaching voice has been preserved in the written words of the Lotus Sutra; thus the sutra is itself the living body of Shakyamuni Buddha.

In feudal times, when Nichiren Daishonin lived, as well as earlier in India and China, the ruler and his ministers wielded a power over their subjects that was virtually absolute. As this let-

ter indicates, without the sovereign's consent it was extremely difficult to propagate the Buddhist teachings, and monks were obliged to obtain the support of powerful patrons in order to protect the teachings. Now, however, in those countries where sovereignty rests with the people and freedom of religion is guaranteed, citizens carry out the mission to protect and propagate Buddhism.

The Daishonin is ultimately emphasizing in this letter that the greatness of true Buddhism far surpasses such things as the authority of a ruler.

Notes

1. Duke Huan (r. 685–643 B.C.E.) was the fifteenth ruler of the state of Ch'i in China. He reformed the military system and made efforts to increase the wealth and military strength of his state. When feudal lords assembled to form a league in 651 B.C.E., he made himself their leader. The story of his purple garments is found in *Han Fei Tzu*.

2. Chuang (r. 613–591 B.C.E.) was the twenty-second ruler of the state of Ch'u. The more common version of the story, found in many early philosophical works, cites King Ling (r. 541–529 B.C.E.) as the ruler who liked slim waists.

3. The great precepts refer here to the ten good precepts for lay believers, prohibitions against the ten evil acts.

4. These views are expressed in Shantao's *Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land*, which advocates the Nembutsu, the practice of calling on the name of Amida Buddha, as the way of salvation.

5. *The Nembutsu Chosen above All*.

6. This refers to the eighteenth of the forty-eight vows that Amida Buddha is said to have made while still engaged in bodhisattva practice as Bodhisattva Dharma Treasury.

7. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

8. This refers to the Tatsunokuchi Persecution of 1271.

9. The third annual memorial service in Japan is actually held on the second anniversary of a person's death. In Japanese tradi-

tion, the second year following a person's death is commemorated as the third. Japanese tradition also places importance on the 7th, 49th, and 100th days after the death, and on the 1st, 3rd, 7th, 13th, 17th, 23rd, 27th, 33rd, and 50th anniversaries of the death, and at such times people observe special memorial services for the deceased.

10. The temple administrator of Hossho-ji refers to Shunkan (d. 1179), an administrative director of Hossho-ji, a Tendai temple, in Kyoto. In 1177 he met with several other intimates of the Retired Emperor Goshirakawa at a villa at Shishigatani to plan an uprising against Taira no Kiyomori, who, as grand minister of state, held military control of the capital. The plot was discovered, and the conspirators were arrested. Together with Fujiwara no Naritsune and Taira no Yasuyori, Shunkan was banished to the island of Iogashima, about fifty kilometers south of Kyushu. The following year a pardon was granted for Naritsune and Yasuyori, but Shunkan remained in exile until his death. According to *The Tale of the Heike*, in the third year of Shunkan's exile, a youth called Ario who had served him since childhood went to the island to visit him with his daughter's letter.

11. Yang Kung: Source uncertain.

12. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

13. *Ibid.*, chap. 2.

14. *Ibid.*

15. The Land of the Moon (Chin Yüeh-chih) was a name for India used in

China and Japan. In the latter part of the third century B.C.E., a central Asian tribe called the Yüeh-chih ruled a part of India. Since Buddhism was brought to China via this territory, the Chinese seem to have regarded the land of the Yüeh-chih (moon tribe) as India itself.

16. The sixty-six provinces refer to the entire country of ancient Japan. This division of the country was in force from 813 until the Meiji Restoration in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

17. According to *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, the god Shakra caused treasures to rain down throughout the land of Jambudvipa in a battle with asuras.

18. The great precept refers here to the truth of the Lotus Sutra.

19. Source unknown. The first analogy indicates the hardness of a tiger's bones, implying the superiority of the tiger over other beasts, and the latter probably means that a fish swallowed by a cormorant seems to be digested completely, leaving no bones.

20. "The unseen crown of his head" is one of a Buddha's eighty characteristics.

This feature is generally identified with a protuberant knot of flesh—one of a Buddha's thirty-two features—on the crown of a Buddha's head. It is said that the crown of a Buddha's head cannot be seen by either human or heavenly beings; this represents the boundlessness of a Buddha's wisdom and his enlightened life.

21. A bodhisattva appearing in the *Accumulated Treasures* and other sutras. In his *Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight,"* Miao-lo says that Bodhisattva Worthy of Upholding failed in an attempt to measure the Buddha's body. This represents the greatness of the Buddha's body and wisdom. This part of *On "Great Concentration and Insight"* is a comment on a passage of T'ien-t'ai's *Great Concentration and Insight*, which says that the great heavenly king Brahma was unable to see the top of the Buddha's head.

22. Also called the voice that reaches to the Brahma heaven. According to *Great Perfection of Wisdom*, the voice of a Buddha delights those who hear it; it touches the depths of people's hearts and arouses a feeling of reverence.