

On Prayer

Nichiren, the shramana of Japan



QUESTION: Of the types of prayer that one offers based upon the teachings of the Flower Garland school, the Dharma Characteristics school, the Three Treatises school, the three Hinayana schools,¹ the True Word school, or the Tendai school, which type is effective?

Answer: Since they represent the preaching of the Buddha, they can all in some sense be considered prayer. But prayer that is based upon the Lotus Sutra is a prayer that is certain to be fulfilled.

Question: What is the reason for that?

Answer: The persons of the two vehicles, though they spent kalpas numerous as the dust particles of the land practicing the sutras that correspond to the four flavors, could never attain Buddhahood. But, by listening to the Lotus Sutra for just an instant, they became Buddhas. For this reason, Shariputra, Mahakashyapa, and the others who make up the twelve hundred [arhats] and the twelve thousand [arhats],² and all the others of the two vehicles who attained Buddhahood, will certainly respond to the prayers of those who practice the Lotus Sutra. And they will take upon themselves the pains of such practitioners.

Therefore, it is stated in the “Belief and Understanding” chapter [of the

Lotus Sutra]: “The World-Honored One in his great mercy makes use of a rare thing, in pity and compassion teaching and converting, bringing benefit to us. In numberless millions of kalpas who could ever repay him? Though we offer him our hands and feet, bow our heads in respectful obeisance, and present all manner of offerings, none of us could repay him. Though we lift him on the crown of our heads, bear him on our two shoulders, for kalpas numerous as Ganges sands reverence him with all our hearts; though we come with delicate foods, with countless jeweled robes, with articles of bedding, various kinds of potions and medicines; with ox-head sandalwood and all kinds of rare gems, construct memorial towers and spread the ground with jeweled robes; though we were to do all this by way of offering for kalpas numerous as Ganges sands, still we could not repay him.”

In this passage from the sutra, the four great voice-hearers, having heard the message of the “Simile and Parable” chapter and learned how they can become Buddhas, are expounding on how difficult it is to repay one’s debt of gratitude to the Buddha and to the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, we can understand that, to persons of the two vehicles, the practitioners of this sutra are more important than a father or a

mother, than a beloved child, than their own two eyes or their body and life itself.

Though I do not think that the great voice-hearers such as Shariputra and Maudgalyayana would actually cast aside a practitioner who praised any of the teachings put forth by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime, still it is likely that they feel a small degree of resentment toward the various sutras that were preached previous to the Lotus Sutra. This is because in them a strong warning has been given that “within the Buddha’s teachings they [voice-hearers] are like seeds that have already been spoiled.”³ But now these voice-hearers have become Thus Come Ones such as Flower Glow, Rare Form, and Universal Brightness,⁴ a most unexpected stroke of good fortune. They must feel as though the K’un-lun Mountains had split open and they were able to enter those jewel-filled mountains. That is why the passage of appreciation says, “This cluster of unsurpassed jewels has come to us unsought.”⁵

So there can be no doubt that all persons of the two vehicles will protect the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra. Even lowly creatures know enough to repay a debt of gratitude. Thus the bird known as the wild goose will invariably carry out its filial duty to the mother bird when she is about to die. And the fox never forgets its old hillock.⁶ If even animals will do such things, then how much more so should this be true of human beings?

A man named Wang Shou was traveling along a road when he became hungry and weary. Beside the road was a plum tree that was loaded with fruit. Wang Shou ate the fruit and thereby satisfied his hunger. But he said to himself, “I have eaten the fruit of this plum tree and thus restored my strength and spirits. It would not be right if I failed to repay this debt of

gratitude.” So saying, he took off his robe and hung it on the plum tree before going on his way.

A man named Wang Yin was traveling along a road when he became thirsty. Crossing a river, he drank some of the water, and then he tossed a coin into the river as payment for the water he had drunk.

A dragon will invariably protect a monk who is wearing a Buddhist surplice. The reason is that a dragon once received a Buddhist surplice from the Buddha and, placing it around its beloved child in the dragon palace, was able to prevent the child from being eaten by garuda birds.

A garuda bird will invariably protect one who acts with filial duty toward one’s parents. Dragons would shake Mount Sumeru and eat the beloved chicks of the garuda bird after they fell from their nests. But the Buddha instructed the garuda bird to take the offerings of rice that Buddhist monks set aside from the alms given them by filial persons and to place these offerings on top of Mount Sumeru. In this way, the garuda bird was able to prevent its chicks from being eaten by dragons.

Heaven will invariably protect a person who observes the precepts and practices goodness. If people who are born into the human realm do not observe the precepts or practice goodness, then when they die, they will in most cases be reborn in the realm of the asura. And if those in the realm of the asura become very numerous, they will grow arrogant and will inevitably offend against heaven.

However, if people who are born into the human realm observe the precepts and practice goodness, when they die, they will invariably be reborn in the realm of heavenly beings. And if those in the realm of heavenly beings become very numerous, the asuras will be frightened and will not dare to

offend against heaven. That is the reason why heaven invariably protects people who observe the precepts and practice goodness.

Persons of the two vehicles are more excellent in the virtue gained from their observance of the precepts and more astute in wisdom than ordinary people in the six paths. Therefore, how could they possibly ever abandon those who practice the Lotus Sutra, since the Lotus Sutra is the means that has enabled them to attain Buddhahood?

Moreover, although the bodhisattvas and ordinary people had practiced the teachings of the various sutras preached in the forty and more years previous to the Lotus Sutra for a period of countless kalpas in order to become Buddhas, none ever succeeded in attaining Buddhahood. But they were able to attain Buddhahood by practicing the Lotus Sutra. And now these Buddhas of the worlds of the ten directions are endowed with the thirty-two features and eighty characteristics that distinguish a Buddha, and are looked up to by living beings in the other nine realms, just as stars cluster about the moon, as the eight mountains surround Mount Sumeru, as the people of the four continents look up to the sun, or as common people look up to a wheel-turning king. And is the fact that these Buddhas are looked up to in this manner not due to the benefit and blessing of the Lotus Sutra?

Therefore, in the Lotus Sutra the Buddha gives this warning: "There is no need to enshrine the relics of the Buddha there."⁷ And the Nirvana Sutra says, "What the Buddhas take as their teacher is the Law. Therefore, the Thus Come Ones honor, respect, and make offerings to it." In the passage from the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha is saying that his relics need not be enshrined in the stupa alongside the Lotus Sutra. And the passage from the Nirvana Sutra indicates that the Buddhas should

honor, respect, and make offerings to the Lotus Sutra.

The Buddhas, because they were enlightened by the Lotus Sutra, were able to attain Buddhahood. Therefore, if they should fail to preach the sutra to others, they would be withholding from others the seeds of Buddhahood and would be committing a fault. For this reason, the Thus Come One Shakyamuni made his appearance in this saha world and prepared to preach it. But the devil king of the sixth heaven, otherwise known as the fundamental darkness, entered into the bodies of all the people and caused them to hate the Buddha and impede his preaching.

Thus the king known as Virudhaka killed five hundred people of the Shakya clan; Angulimala chased after the Buddha; Devadatta rolled a huge stone down on him; and Chinchā, the daughter of a Brahman, tied a bowl to her belly and claimed to be pregnant with the Buddha's child.

The lord of a Brahman city proclaimed that a fine of five hundred *ryo* of gold should be levied against anyone who invited the Buddha into the city. As a result, the people of the city blocked the road with thorns, threw filth into the wells, built a barricade of spikes at the gate, and put poison in the Buddha's food, all because of their hatred of him.

The nun Utpalavarna was murdered, Maudgalyayana was killed by Brahmans of the Bamboo Staff school, and Kalodayin was buried in horse dung, all because of animosity toward the Buddha.

Nevertheless, the Buddha managed to survive these various ordeals, and, at the age of seventy-two, forty-two years after he first began preaching the Buddhist teachings, at a mountain called Gridhrakuta northeast of the city of Rajagriha in central India, he began to preach the Lotus Sutra. He preached it for a period of eight years. Then, on

the bank of the Ajitavati River at the city of Kushinagara in eastern India, in the middle of the night on the fifteenth day of the second month, when he was eighty years of age, he entered nirvana.

But before that, he had revealed his enlightenment in the form of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, the words of this sutra are indeed the very soul of Shakyamuni Thus Come One. And since every single word constitutes the soul of the Buddha, Shakyamuni Thus Come One will protect those who practice this sutra as though he were protecting his very own eyes. He will accompany them just as a shadow accompanies a body. How then could the prayers of such persons not be answered?

During the first forty and more years of the Buddha's teaching life, the various bodhisattvas had tried to attain Buddhahood through the sutras beginning with the Flower Garland Sutra, but they were unable to do so. But when the "Expedient Means" chapter of the Lotus Sutra was preached, announcing the concise replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle,⁸ then "the bodhisattvas seeking to be Buddhas in a great force of eighty thousand, as well as the wheel-turning kings [who] come from ten thousands of millions of lands, all press their palms and with reverent minds wish to hear the teaching of perfect endowment." And when, as a result, they heard the expanded replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle, then it was as the sutra states, "When the bodhisattvas hear this Law, they will be released from all entanglements of doubt."⁹

After that, bodhisattvas from this world and from other regions assembled together like gathering clouds or so many stars. And when the "Treasure Tower" chapter was preached, the Buddhas of the ten directions gathered

round, each accompanied by countless numbers of bodhisattvas.

Manjushri appeared from the sea accompanied by countless bodhisattvas,¹⁰ and in addition there were the eight hundred thousand million nayutas of bodhisattvas¹¹ and the bodhisattvas more numerous than the sands of eight Ganges Rivers;¹² the bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds, who emerged from the earth;¹³ the bodhisattvas as numerous as the sands of six hundred and eighty ten thousands, millions, nayutas of Ganges Rivers who appear in the "Distinctions in Benefits" chapter; the bodhisattvas multiplied a thousand times; the bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust particles of a world; the bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust particles of a major world system; the bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust particles of an intermediate world system; the bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust particles of a minor world system; the bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust particles of four four-continent worlds, or the dust particles of three four-continent worlds, two four-continent worlds, or one four-continent world; and the people as numerous as the dust particles of eight worlds.

There were the eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas of the "Medicine King" chapter; the eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas and the forty-two thousand heavenly sons of the "Wonderful Sound" chapter; the eighty-four thousand people of the "Universal Gateway" chapter; the sixty-eight thousand people of the "Dharani" chapter; the eighty-four thousand people of the "King Wonderful Adornment" chapter; and the bodhisattvas as numerous as the Ganges sands and the bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust particles of a major world system of the "Encouragements" chapter.

If we were to count up all these

bodhisattvas, they would be as numerous as the dust particles of the worlds of the ten directions, as the plants and trees in the worlds of the ten directions, as the stars in the worlds of the ten directions, or as the raindrops in the worlds of the ten directions. All of these beings attained Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra and are dwelling on the earth, under the earth, or in the sky of this present major world system.

The Venerable Mahakashyapa lives on Mount Kukkutapada, Manjushri lives on Mount Clear and Cool, Bodhisattva Earth Repository lives on Mount Kharadiya, Perceiver of the World's Sounds lives on Mount Potalaka, Bodhisattva Maitreya lives in the Tushita heaven, Nanda and the countless other dragon kings and asura kings live at the bottom of the sea or at the seaside, Shakra lives in the heaven of the thirty-three gods, Brahma lives in the Summit of Being heaven, Maheshvara lives in the sixth heaven of Freely Enjoying Things Conjured by Others, the four heavenly kings live on the slopes of Mount Sumeru, and the sun, the moon, and the crowds of stars appear before our eyes and shine over our heads. The river gods, the stream gods, and the mountain gods were all among the honored ones present at the assembly when the Lotus Sutra was preached.

It has now been over twenty-two hundred years since the Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra. Human beings have a short life span, and therefore there are no persons alive today who have seen the Buddha with their own eyes. But in the heavenly realm the span of a day is long, and the beings there have long lives; as a result, there are countless heavenly beings still alive who have seen the Buddha and listened to him preach the Lotus Sutra.

Fifty years in the life of a human

being is equivalent to no more than one day and one night in the lives of beings in the heaven of the four heavenly kings. And these heavenly beings, passing such days and nights, with thirty such days to a month and twelve such months to a year, live to be five hundred years old. Therefore, twenty-two hundred or more years in the lives of human beings will be equivalent to only forty-four days in the lives of beings in the heaven of the four heavenly kings.

Hence from the point of view of the deities of the sun and moon and the heavenly king Vaishravana, it has been only forty-four days, or less than two months, since the Buddha passed away. And from the point of view of Shakra and Brahma, not even a month, not even an hour, has passed since the Buddha departed. In such a short time, how could these heavenly beings have forgotten the vow that they took in the presence of the Buddha, or the debt of gratitude they owe to the sutra that allowed them to attain Buddhahood, and thus abandon the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra? When we think of it in this way, we can feel greatly assured.

Therefore, we know that the prayers offered by a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra will be answered just as an echo answers a sound, as a shadow follows a form, as the reflection of the moon appears in clear water, as a mirror collects dewdrops,¹⁴ as a magnet attracts iron, as amber attracts particles of dust, or as a clear mirror reflects the color of an object.

Concerning the ways of the ordinary world, though a man may not be inclined to a certain act, if he is urged to it by his parents, his sovereign, his teachers, his wife and children, or his close friends, and if he is a person of conscience, he will overlook his own inclinations and will sacrifice his name and profit, and even his life, to perform that act. How much more earnest will

he be, then, if the act is something that springs from his own heart. In such a case, even the restraints of his parents, his sovereign, or his teachers cannot prevent him from carrying out the action.

Thus it was that a worthy man named Fan Yü-ch'i cut off his own head so that it could be presented to Ching K'o, and Chi-cha, having pledged to present his sword to the lord of Hsü, hung it on the lord's grave.

Similarly, at the gathering on Eagle Peak, the dragon king's daughter attained Buddhahood in her present form.¹⁵ In the Hinayana sutras, women were despised because they are hindered by the thick clouds of the five obstacles and bound by the strong cords of the three obediences; and in the Mahayana sutras expounded in the first forty and more years of the Buddha's preaching, women were rejected, since they were thought to be incapable of carrying out religious practice over many kalpas. Or though it had been stated that "the first time they conceive the desire to do so, they can attain enlightenment,"¹⁶ this was indicated as a possibility in name only, with no actual examples to support it. So, in effect, the attainment of Buddhahood by women was denied.

Thus, even a woman who was in the realm of human or heavenly beings had no hope of ever finding the way to become a Buddha. How much less hope was there for this woman [described in the Lotus Sutra], a humble being born among the creatures known as dragons, who had not yet reached maturity but was only eight years old. And yet, contrary to all expectations, through the instruction of Manjushri, in the short space of time between the "Teacher of the Law" and "Devadatta" chapters when the Buddha was preaching the "Treasure Tower" chapter, she attained Buddhahood in the midst of the ocean. This was a most wonderful

happening! If it had not been for the power of the Lotus Sutra, the foremost among all the teachings of the Buddha's lifetime, how could such a thing have come about?

Therefore, Miao-lo remarks of the event, "The sutra here demonstrates its power by revealing that practice is shallow but the benefit that results is profound indeed."¹⁷ And because the dragon girl was able to attain Buddhahood through this sutra, how could she ever abandon someone who is a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, even if she had not been admonished against it by the Buddha? Therefore, in the verse that she uttered in praise of the Buddha, she stated, "I unfold the doctrines of the great vehicle to rescue living beings from suffering."¹⁸

Her oath was the oath taken by her retinue, or all the creatures known as dragons, whose number is so vast that "the mouth cannot express it, the mind cannot fathom it."¹⁹ The dragon king Sagara, though a lowly creature, cared profoundly for his daughter. Therefore, he took the finest treasure in all the great ocean, a wish-granting jewel, and had his daughter present it as alms to the Buddha, in recognition of the fact that she had attained Buddhahood in her present form. This jewel was equivalent in value to a major world system.

Devadatta was the grandson of King Simhahanu, the son of Shakyamuni Buddha's uncle, King Dronodana, and an elder brother of the Venerable Ananda. His mother was a daughter of the rich man Suprabuddha. He was thus a member of the family of a wheel-turning king and held a high social position in the southern continent of Jambudvīpa.

While he was still an ordinary member of society, the woman he had intended to marry, Yashodhara, was taken away by Prince Siddhartha, and he thereafter looked upon Siddhartha

as he would an enemy from a past existence.

Later, he broke his ties with his family and joined the Buddhist Order, but when there were large gatherings of human and heavenly beings, the Buddha would censure him, calling him a fool or one who eats the spit of others. In addition, being a man who cared deeply about fame and personal profit, he envied the attention that was paid to the Buddha. He then began observing the five ascetic practices in an attempt to appear more admirable than the Buddha. He pounded iron to make a thousand-spoked wheel pattern [to imprint on the soles of his feet], gathered together fireflies to form a tuft of white hair between his eyebrows, and committed to memory sixty thousand and eighty thousand jeweled teachings.²⁰ He erected an ordination platform on Mount Gayashirsha and lured many of the Buddha's disciples over to his side. He smeared poison on his fingernails and thus attempted to poison the feet of the Buddha. He beat the nun Utpalavarna to death and rolled a huge rock down on the Buddha, injuring the latter on the toe. He was guilty of committing three cardinal sins and, in the end, gathered about him all the evil men of the five regions of India and strove to harm the Buddha and his disciples and lay supporters.

King Bimbisara was the foremost of the Buddha's lay supporters. Each day he dispatched five hundred carriages, day after day supplying alms to the Buddha and his disciples. But Devadatta, driven by his intense jealousy, talked to Prince Ajatashatru and in time persuaded him to attack his father, whereupon he pinned the king down with seven foot-long spikes.

In the end, the earth in front of the northern gate of the capital city of Rajagriha split open, and Devadatta fell into the great citadel of the Avichi hell. There was not a single being in the

entire major world system who did not witness the event.

One would suppose that, as a result, Devadatta would never be able to escape from the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering, even though as many kalpas should pass as there are the dust particles of the land. And yet, amazing as it is, and admirable as well, in the Lotus Sutra he became a Thus Come One called Heavenly King. And if Devadatta could become a Buddha, then all the countless other evil people who were enticed by him, since they shared with him the same karmic cause and effect, must surely have been able to escape from the pains of the hell of incessant suffering.

This is entirely due to the benefit and blessing of the Lotus Sutra. Thus Devadatta and all the countless persons who attended him can now dwell in the house of the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra [in order to protect them]. What a comforting thought!

The various bodhisattvas, who were as numerous as the dust particles of the land, had advanced to the level of near-perfect enlightenment, which means they had freed themselves of all but their fundamental darkness. When they were fortunate enough to encounter the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, they thought that they would be able to smash this great boulder of fundamental darkness. But in the first forty and more years of his preaching life, Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, said that, while he could explain the causes of enlightenment, he could not explain its effects. Therefore, he did not make clear to them the benefits of perfect enlightenment. Hence not a single one of them could advance to the stage of perfect enlightenment. This was contrary to their expectations.

But during the eight years when he preached at Eagle Peak, the Buddha revealed the effects of enlightenment, which are called the one vehicle of

Buddhahood. All the bodhisattvas thus advanced to the stage of perfect enlightenment, so that their enlightenment was equal to that of Shakyamuni Thus Come One. It was as though they had climbed to the very top of Mount Sumeru and could see in all four directions. All became bright and clear, as though the sun had appeared in the midst of a long night. Even if the Buddha had not instructed them to do so, could they have failed to resolve to spread the teachings of the Lotus Sutra or to take upon themselves the sufferings of its practitioners?

Therefore, they made a vow, saying, "We care nothing for our bodies or lives but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way,"²¹ "Never begrudging our bodies or lives,"²² or "We will preach this sutra far and wide."²³

Furthermore, Shakyamuni Buddha, who is like a kind father, Many Treasures Buddha, who is like a loving mother, and the Buddhas of the ten directions, who had appeared in order to add their testimony and who are like affectionate parents, were assembled together, so that it was as though two moons had come together, or two suns had appeared side by side.

At that time the Buddha spoke three times in warning, saying: "So I say to the great assembly: After I have passed into extinction, who can guard and uphold, read and recite this sutra? Now in the presence of the Buddha let him come forward and speak his vow!"²⁴

Then the great bodhisattvas who filled four hundred ten thousand million nayutas of lands in each of the eight directions bent their bodies, bowed their heads, and pressed their palms together, and all raised their voices in unison, saying, "We will respectfully carry out all these things just as the World-Honored One has commanded."²⁵ Three times they cried out, not sparing their voices. How then could they fail to take upon themselves

the sufferings of the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra?

Fan Yü-ch'i gave his head to Ching K'o, and Chi-cha hung his sword on the grave of the lord of Hsü; in both cases they acted so as not to go back on promises they had made. If even these persons of China, a land far from the birthplace of Buddhism, could, because of a promise made to a friend, sacrifice their own lives or hang on a grave a sword that meant more to them than life itself, then how much more can one expect from the great bodhisattvas, who from the first have been beings of great compassion and have taken profound vows to undergo suffering on behalf of others? How could they ever cast aside the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, even if the Buddha had not admonished them against doing so?

What is more, it was through the Lotus Sutra that these bodhisattvas attained Buddhahood, and because the Buddha fervently admonished them concerning it, they took solemn vows in the presence of the Buddha. There can be no doubt, therefore, that they will aid its practitioner.

The Buddha is the sovereign of the human and heavenly realms and the parent of all living beings. Moreover, he is the teacher who leads and opens the way. Though one may be a parent, if of humble station, one cannot at the same time assume the role of sovereign. And though one may be a sovereign, if not also a parent, one may inspire fear. And though one may be both a parent and a sovereign, one cannot be a teacher as well.

The various Buddhas [other than Shakyamuni], since they are known as World-Honored Ones, may be regarded as sovereigns. But since they do not make their appearance in this saha world, they are not teachers. Nor do they declare that "the living beings in it [the threefold world] are all my children."²⁶ Thus Shakyamuni Buddha

alone fulfills the three functions of sovereign, teacher, and parent.

Nevertheless, during the first forty and more years of his preaching life, Shakyamuni cursed Devadatta, censured the various voice-hearers, and refused to teach the bodhisattvas the doctrines pertaining to the fruits of enlightenment. Though people did not actually say so to others, they sometimes wondered in their hearts whether this Buddha was not in fact Papiyas, the devil king of the sixth heaven, so greatly did he trouble them.

They continued to harbor these doubts for forty and more years, until the preaching of the Lotus Sutra began. But then, during the eight years at Eagle Peak, the treasure tower appeared in the air, and the two Buddhas²⁷ sat side by side in it like the sun and the moon. The various other Buddhas ranged themselves over the ground like so many great mountains gathered together, the bodhisattvas who had emerged from the earth, as numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds, ranged themselves in the air like so many stars, and the Buddha revealed the blessings that the various Buddhas enjoy as the result of their enlightenment. It was as though a storehouse of treasures had been unlocked and the contents presented to poor people, or as though the K'un-lun Mountains, with all their riches, had broken open.

During these eight years, the people who were present at the assembly became profoundly aware of the rarity and wonder of these events; it was as if they were gathering up nothing but gems. The bodhisattvas, unbegrudging of their lives, unstinting with their words, vowed to do as the Buddha had encouraged them. Then, in the "Entrustment" chapter, the Thus Come One Shakyamuni emerged from the treasure tower and closed its doors. The various other Buddhas thereupon

returned to their respective lands, and the bodhisattvas who had appeared with them followed along in company with the Buddhas.

The people were feeling increasingly lonely, when the Buddha announced, "Three months from now I will enter nirvana."²⁸ The announcement astounded them and made them feel even more forlorn.

Having heard the Lotus Sutra, the bodhisattvas, persons of the two vehicles, and the other human and heavenly beings were all imbued with a deep sense of gratitude for the Buddha's compassion, and wanted to show the Buddha how willing they were to sacrifice their bodies and lives for the sake of the Lotus Sutra. How terrible it would be, they thought, their hearts in a turmoil, if the Buddha were to really enter nirvana as he said he would!

At that time, on the fifteenth day of the second month, during the hour of the tiger and the hour of the hare (3:00 to 7:00 A.M.), when the Buddha was eighty years old, on the bank of the Ajitavati River at the city of Kushinagara in the country of Shravasti in eastern India, the Buddha's voice was heard announcing that he would pass into extinction. His voice radiated upward as far as the Summit of Being heaven and echoed abroad throughout the entire major world system.²⁹ Eyes grew dim, and hearts sank.

From throughout the five regions of India, its sixteen great states, its five hundred middle-sized states, its ten thousand small states, and its countless smaller states scattered about like grains of millet, the people gathered together, none having had time to prepare clothing or food, and without distinction as to class or status. Oxen and horses, wolves and dogs, eagles and vultures, gnats and gadflies, to the number of fifty-two different species, also gathered together. Those of any one species were more numerous than the dust

particles of the land, to say nothing of the number of all fifty-two species together.

All these different species of beings brought flowers, incense, clothing, and food as their last offerings to the Buddha. Their voices resounded, crying out that the jeweled bridge for all living beings was about to collapse, that the eye of all living beings was about to be put out, that the parent, sovereign, and teacher of all living beings was about to pass away. Not only did their hair stand on end, but their tears flowed. Not only did their tears flow, but they beat their heads, pressed their hands to their chests, and cried aloud, not sparing their voices. The blood of their tears and the blood of their sweat fell upon Kushinagara more heavily than a torrential rain and flowed more abundantly than a mighty river. All this they did solely because the Lotus Sutra had opened for them the way to Buddhahood, and they could never repay the debt of gratitude they owed the Buddha.

Even in this scene of grief, there were those who declared angrily that the enemies of the Lotus Sutra should have their tongues cut out, that they should never be allowed to sit with the others in the assembly. Bodhisattva Kashyapa vowed that he would appear in the form of frost and hail in the lands of the enemies of the Lotus Sutra. At that time the Buddha raised himself slightly from his reclining position and praised him, saying happily, "Well spoken! Well spoken!"

The other bodhisattvas, guessing where the Buddha's wishes lay, supposed that if they declared their intention to attack the enemies of the Lotus Sutra this might prolong the Buddha's life a little, and one by one they vowed to do so. In this way the bodhisattvas and the heavenly and human beings called upon the enemies of the Lotus Sutra to appear, hoping that if they

could fulfill the oath they had taken in the presence of the Buddha then Shakyamuni Buddha as well as Many Treasures and the other Buddhas and Thus Come Ones would understand that, faithful to the vow they had made before the Buddha, they would begrudge neither their reputations nor their lives in defense of the Lotus Sutra.

One may ask why the results of these vows should be so long in appearing. And yet, though one might point at the earth and miss it, though one might bind up the sky, though the tides might cease to ebb and flow and the sun rise in the west, it could never come about that the prayers of the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra would go unanswered. If the bodhisattvas, the human and heavenly beings, the eight kinds of nonhuman beings, the two sages,³⁰ the two heavenly deities,³¹ and the ten demon daughters would by some unlikely chance fail to appear and protect the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, then above them they would be showing disdain for Shakyamuni and the other Buddhas, and below they would be guilty of deceiving the beings of the nine realms.³²

It makes no difference if the practitioner himself is lacking in worth, defective in wisdom, impure in his person, and lacking in virtue derived from observing the precepts. So long as he chants Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, they will invariably protect him. One does not throw away gold because the bag that holds it is dirty; one does not ignore the sandalwood trees because of the foul odor of the eranda trees around them; and one does not refuse to gather lotuses because the pond in the valley where they grow is not clean. If they ignore the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, they will be going against their vow.

Now that the Former and Middle Days of the Law are over, persons who observe the precepts are as rare as tigers

in a marketplace, and persons of wisdom are harder to find than the horns of a ch'i-lin. While waiting for the moon to rise, one must rely upon a lantern, and when there are no true gems at hand, gold and silver must serve as jewels. The debt of gratitude one owes to a white crow may be repaid to a black crow,³³ and the debt one owes to a sage priest may be repaid to an ordinary priest.³⁴ So, if you earnestly pray that blessings be given to you without delay, how can your prayers fail to be answered?

Question: When I examine the reasoning and the textual proofs you have presented above, I would have to say that, if there are a sun and a moon in the sky, if there are plants and trees on the earth, if there are day and night in this country of ours, then so long as the earth fails to turn upside down and the tides of the ocean continue to ebb and flow, there can be no doubt that the prayers of those who put faith in the Lotus Sutra will be answered in this world, and that they will enjoy good circumstances in their next existence.

Nevertheless, during the past twenty years and more, the eminent leaders of the Tendai and True Word schools have in many cases offered prayers regarding important matters of state, but such prayers have by no means proved effective. Indeed, the prayers of these priests would seem to be even less effective than those of persons who support the teachings of non-Buddhist scriptures. This sets me to wondering if the pronouncements of the [Lotus] sutra are in some way false, if the actions of the practitioners of the sutra are to blame, or if the time or the people's capacity is not appropriate for such actions. And this puts me in doubt regarding my future existence.

But leaving that point aside for the moment, I am told that you were a disciple of the priests of Mount Hiei. They say that the offenses of the fathers

are visited upon the sons, and those of the teachers are visited upon the disciples. When the priests of Mount Hiei burned the halls and pagodas of Onjo-ji temple and of the mountain temple,³⁵ along with thousands and tens of thousands of Buddhist images and sutras, those were terrible deeds! They threw the people of the time into turmoil and turned them against Mount Hiei. What is your opinion? I have heard a little about these events in the past, but I would like now to hear you speak in greater detail. I am full of questions. When priests behave in such an evil manner, it seems to me that they are no longer acting in accord with the spirit of the three treasures, and that heaven and earth should no longer lend them shelter. I would suppose, therefore, that their prayers would not be answered. What is your opinion?

Answer: I have touched on this matter in the past, but this time I will summarize the issues. This is a matter of vital concern to the country of Japan, and because many people fail to understand it, they create negative karma through their words.

First of all, as to the origin of the temple on Mount Hiei, it was founded by the Great Teacher Dengyo in the reign of Emperor Kammu, some two hundred years after Buddhism was introduced to this country. Earlier, Prince Shotoku had declared that Kyoto, which was later to become the capital, appeared to be highly suitable for the royal residence. But the actual founding of the capital at that location was delayed until after the T'ien-t'ai, or Tendai, school had been introduced to Japan. According to the records of Prince Jogu, or Shotoku, the prince stated, "Two hundred or more years after my passing, the Buddhist Law will spread throughout Japan."³⁶ Later, in the Enryaku era (782-806), the Great Teacher Dengyo founded the temple

on Mount Hiei, and Emperor Kammu established the capital Heiankyo. Thus the prophecy of Prince Shotoku was fulfilled.

In this way the mountain temple and the royal house were like the pine and the cypress, and resembled the orchids and the grasses. When the pine withers, the cypress, too, is bound to wither, and when the orchids wilt, the grasses wilt as well. Thus it seemed that the prosperity of the royal reign brought joy to the mountain temple, and that the decline of royal power brought sadness to the mountain. And now that the world has changed, and power has passed to the government in the Kanto region,³⁷ what must be their thoughts?

In the third year of the Jokyu era (1221), the year with the cyclical sign *kanoto-mi*, on the nineteenth day of the fourth month—around the time of the disturbance between the court and the barbarian warriors³⁸—by command of the Retired Emperor of Oki, altars were set up, and fifteen secret ceremonies were carried out for the first time by forty-one practitioners of such secret ceremonies in an attempt to overcome the Kanto government through the power of incantation.

These ceremonies included the one-character gold-wheel ceremony (carried out by the Administrator of Priests Jien, the Tendai chief priest, and twelve attendant priests at the command of Imperial Regent Motomichi); the ceremony of the four heavenly kings (carried out by the imperial administrator of priests of Joko-ji temple [Shinsho], with eight attendant priests at Hirose Palace, at the command of Lady Shumeimon'in); the ceremony of the wisdom king Immovable (carried out by the Administrator of Priests Joho and eight accompanying priests at the command of Lord Kazan'in Zemmon [Fujiwara Tadatsune]); the Great Awesome Virtue ceremony (carried out by the

Administrator of Priests Kangon with eight accompanying priests at the command of Lady Shichijoin); the ceremony of the wheel-turning king (carried out by the Administrator of Priests Joken with eight accompanying priests at the command of the same person as above); the ten-altar Great Awesome Virtue ceremony (carried out by ten priests—the Administrator of Priests Kakucho, the Dharma Seal Shunsho, the Dharma Seal Eishin, the Dharma Seal Goen, the Supervisor of Priests Yuen, the Administrator of Priests Jiken, the Supervisor of Priests Kenjo, the Supervisor of Priests Senson, the Supervisor of Priests Gyohen, and the Dharma Eye Jikkaku—along with six attendant priests each, carried out for the most part at the main temple-building); the ceremony of Wish-granting Wheel (carried out by the Administrator of Priests Myokoin with eight accompanying priests at the command of Lady Gishumon'in); and the ceremony of the heavenly king Vaishravana (carried out by the Administrator of Priests Jojuin [Ryoson] of Mii with six accompanying priests at the command of Shichin).

And there were also objects of devotion that were fashioned in a single day. The secret ceremonies based on them included the ceremony of the wisdom king Craving-Filled of the prescribed method (carried out by the head of Ninna-ji temple in Shishin-den Palace from the third day of the fifth month and for the following fourteen days); the ceremony of Buddha Eye (carried out by the Administrator of Priests Daijo for twenty-one days); the ceremony of the six characters (carried out by the Supervisor of Priests Kai-ga); the ceremony of the wisdom king Craving-Filled (carried out by the Administrator of Priests Kangon for seven days); the ceremony of Immovable (carried out by Kanju-ji temple's administrator of priests with eight

accompanying priests, all holding supervisory posts in the priesthood); the Great Awesome Virtue ceremony (carried out by the Administrator of Priests Aki); and the ceremony of the boy Diamond Pounder (carried out by the same person). This completes the list of the fifteen ceremonies performed before altars.

On the fifteenth day of the fifth month, Iga Taro Hogan Mitsusue³⁹ was attacked and defeated in the capital. On the nineteenth day of the same month, word of this reached Kamakura. When the news arrived in the capital that a large force of troops had been dispatched on the twenty-first day to attack the capital, the remainder of the ceremonies were performed, beginning on the eighth day of the sixth month. These consisted of the ceremony of the Honorable Star King (performed by the Administrator of Priests Kakucho), the ceremony of the wisdom king Great Commander (performed by the Supervisor of Priests Zou), the ceremony of the five altars (performed by the Administrator of Priests Daijo, the Dharma Seal Eishin, the Supervisor of Priests Zenson, the Supervisor of Priests Yuen, and the Supervisor of Priests Gyohen), and the ceremony of the Protection Sutra (presided over by the head of Ninna-ji; it was the second time this ceremony was performed in our country).

On the twenty-first day of the fifth month, the governor of Musashi⁴⁰ started for the capital on the Tokaido road, while the leader of the Genji clan of Kai⁴¹ set out on the Tosando road, and Lord Shikibu⁴² advanced via the Hokuriku road. On the fifth day of the sixth month the defending forces at Otsu were defeated by the Genji of Kai, and on the thirteenth and fourteenth days of the sixth month the two sides engaged in battle at the Uji Bridge. On the fourteenth, the defenders of the capital suffered defeat, and

on the fifteenth of the same month, the governor of Musashi entered the Rokujo headquarters along with his men.

On the eleventh day of the seventh month the Retired Emperor Gotoba was banished to the island province of Oki, the Retired Emperor Tsuchimikado was banished to the province of Awa, and the Retired Emperor Juntoku was banished to the island province of Sado. In addition, seven members of the court were put to death.

The great evil doctrine of these ceremonies over the years steadily made its way to the Kanto region, where it was embodied in the superintendents or attendant priests of various temples who repeatedly performed these ceremonies. The performers of these ceremonies from the beginning could not distinguish between correct and erroneous teachings, between superior and inferior doctrines, but assumed that it was sufficient merely to revere the three treasures. So, without a thought, they employed these ceremonies. And now not only the provinces of Kanto but the chief priests and superintendents of Mount Hiei, To-ji, and Onjo-ji have all come under the jurisdiction of the Kanto authorities, so that, as a result, the latter are in the position of supporting these ceremonies.

Question: Why do you insist upon referring to the True Word teaching as an incorrect doctrine?

Answer: The Great Teacher Kobo has stated, "The Mahavairochana Sutra is first, the Flower Garland Sutra is second, and the Lotus Sutra is third."⁴³ But one should examine this ranking carefully. In what sutra did the Buddha discuss the relative worth of these three sutras and deliver this judgment? If there is in fact a sutra that declares that the Mahavairochana Sutra ranks first, the Flower Garland second, and the Lotus third, then we should accept that statement as true. But if there is no

such passage, then it is not possible to accept this assertion.

The Lotus Sutra states, "Medicine King, now I say to you, I have preached various sutras, and among those sutras the Lotus is the foremost!"⁴⁴ Here the Buddha is referring to all the teachings that he has expounded and stating that among these the Lotus ranks in first place. The Buddha's preaching and the writings of the Great Teacher Kobo are as much at variance with each other as are fire and water. We should investigate and clarify this matter.

Over a period of several hundred years, ordinary priests and high-ranking priests have studied the writings of Kobo, and eminent and humble, high and low, have put their faith in them and honored the Mahavairochana Sutra as the foremost among all the sutras. This does not accord with the intention of the Buddha. Thoughtful persons should examine the matter with great care. For if we put faith in writings that do not accord with the intention of the Buddha, how can we hope to attain Buddhahood? And if we follow such writings in offering prayers for the nation, how can we fail to bring about misfortune?

Moreover, Kobo writes, "The Buddhist teachers of China vied with one another to steal the ghee."⁴⁵ The meaning of this statement is that the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai and others stole the ghee of the True Word teachings and called it the ghee of the Lotus Sutra. This statement is the most important point.

When the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai applied the simile of ghee to the Lotus Sutra, basing himself on a passage in the Nirvana Sutra,⁴⁶ he declared that among all the sutras the Lotus Sutra is worthy to be compared to ghee. The True Word teaching was introduced to China from India two hundred years or more after the time of T'ien-t'ai. How then could T'ien-t'ai possibly

have stolen the ghee of the True Word teaching and called it the ghee of the Lotus Sutra? Of all strange events, this would be the strangest!

What evidence is there then for calling persons who lived two hundred years or more before the True Word teaching was even introduced to China thieves? Are we to put faith in these writings of the Great Teacher Kobo? Or are we to put faith in the Nirvana Sutra where the Buddha likens the Lotus Sutra to ghee?

If we are to regard the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai as a thief, then how are we to interpret this passage in the Nirvana Sutra? And if we accept the passage in the Nirvana Sutra as reliable and conclude that the writings of Kobo are incorrect, then what are we to think of people who put faith in such erroneous teachings? All I can say is that one should compare the writings of the Great Teacher Kobo and the pronouncements of the Buddha, and then put one's faith in the one that proves to be correct.

Question: I am still in doubt. The Mahavairochana Sutra represents the teaching expounded by the Thus Come One Mahavairochana. And if that is so, then to use the teaching expounded by Shakyamuni Buddha to attempt to controvert the teaching expounded by the Thus Come One Mahavairochana is surely not at all in accord with reason, is it?

Answer: Who were the parents of the Thus Come One Mahavairochana, and in what country did he appear when he expounded the Mahavairochana Sutra? Even if he had simply appeared in the world without parents, then in what sutra is it mentioned that such a Buddha would appear in the world to expound his teaching during the 5,670 million years between the passing of Shakyamuni Buddha and the appearance of Maitreya, the Compassionate Honored One? If there are

no passages of proof, then who would put faith in such an assertion? The True Word doctrines are full of mistaken assertions of this kind, which is why I spoke of them as an erroneous teaching.

The list of errors is all but inexhaustible. I have done no more than give one or two examples. In addition to the True Word, the authorities rely on the Zen and Nembutsu schools. These doctrines all represent provisional teachings of the type set forth before the truth had been fully revealed. They are not the tenets that lead to the attainment of Buddhahood, but rather will create karma that condemns one to the hell of incessant suffering. Persons who practice them are guilty of slandering the Law, so how could their prayers possibly be answered?

One who is a ruler of a nation has become so because in the past he upheld the correct teaching and served the Buddha. It is through the calculations of the heavenly kings Brahma and Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, the four heavenly kings, and others that all rulers, great and small, succeed in acquiring their districts and domains. Thus the sutra says, "Now when I use the five types of vision to clearly perceive the three existences, I see that in their past existences all the rulers served five hundred Buddhas, and that is the reason that they were able to become emperors and sovereigns."⁴⁷

But if one turns one's back on the Lotus Sutra and follows the erroneous teachers of the True Word, Zen, and

Nembutsu schools, then although one may carry out all kinds of good deeds, these will never accord with the will of the Buddha and will go against the intention of the gods. One should give very careful thought to this matter.

It is a rare thing to be born as a human being. And if, having been born as such, you do not do your best to distinguish between the correct doctrine and the incorrect so that in the future you may attain Buddhahood, then you are certainly not fulfilling your true worth as a human being.

Moreover, after the Great Teacher Jikaku had visited China, he turned against the doctrines of his original teacher, the Great Teacher Dengyo, and worked to spread the True Word doctrines on Mount Hiei. In order to do so, he offered up prayers and claimed that as a result he had had a dream in which he shot an arrow at the sun and caused the sun to roll over and over. For more than four hundred years now, the people have all looked upon this as an auspicious dream. But in a country such as Japan, it is in fact a dream of particularly ill omen. King Chou of the Yin dynasty shot an arrow at the sun, and as a result he perished. Even though this dream is a matter associated with the reincarnation [of a Buddha], you should ponder it very carefully.

In response to your questions, what I have touched on here is like a mere hair from the hides of nine head of cattle.



Background

Prayers based upon the Lotus Sutra will definitely be answered, writes Nichiren Daishonin. In contrast, he emphasizes, prayers based upon mistaken teachings

not only will go unanswered, but will create suffering both for those who offer them and for those on whose behalf they do so.

This is the theme of *On Prayer*, written by Nichiren Daishonin in the ninth year of Bun'ei (1272), when he was in exile on Sado Island. The writing is thought to be a reply to questions raised by Sairen-bo, a disciple of the Daishonin and former priest of the Mountain [Jikaku] branch of the Tendai school, who at the time was also living in exile on Sado Island.

Sairen-bo and the Daishonin exchanged a number of letters concerning various important Buddhist doctrines. In this letter, the Daishonin distinguishes between the efficacy of prayer based on schools that prevailed in Japanese society of the day—including the Flower Garland, Dharma Characteristics, Precepts, True Word, and Tendai schools—and prayer based upon the Lotus Sutra. The authorities of the contemporary imperial court and shogunate relied to a great degree upon the teachings and prayers of the True Word, Tendai, Zen, and Nembutsu schools.

It was because the prayers offered by priests of the True Word and Tendai schools were ineffectual, the Daishonin declares, that the imperial forces were defeated in the Jokyu Disturbance—a struggle for power between the imperial court and the Kamakura shogunate in 1221. Placing their trust in these schools, the court had requested that prayers be offered for its protection and victory.

Ultimately, however, despite such prayers, not only were the imperial forces defeated in battle, but three retired emperors were exiled to distant islands. Thus, concludes the Daishonin, such prayers do not simply go unanswered; they actually bring about misfortune.

On the other hand, prayers based on the Lotus Sutra are true prayers, the Daishonin says. He then states the reasons: all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, people of the two vehicles (voice-hearers and

cause-awakened ones), and human and heavenly beings present in the assembly of the Lotus Sutra feel a great sense of gratitude because they attained Buddhahood through the sutra. To repay these debts of gratitude, they will certainly protect those who uphold the Lotus Sutra.

The Daishonin mentions the dragon king's daughter and the evil Devadatta in particular, noting that because their attainment of Buddhahood was considered an especially remarkable achievement their debt of gratitude is correspondingly great; thus, he assures Sairen-bo, they, too, will never fail to guard the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

The Daishonin also firmly refutes the statement made by Kobo, the founder of the True Word school in Japan, who claimed in his work *The Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind* that the Mahavairochana Sutra ranks first, the Flower Garland Sutra second, and the Lotus Sutra third. To support his contention that True Word doctrines are misleading, the Daishonin cites this statement made by the Buddha in the Lotus Sutra, "I have preached various sutras, and among those sutras the Lotus is the foremost!"

The letter's heading, "Nichiren, the shramana of Japan," expresses his conviction that he is truly a shramana, or seeker of the way, and that he is the votary of the Lotus Sutra. Shakyamuni achieved enlightenment as a seeker of the way in India. In this sense this designation can also be said to convey the Daishonin's conviction that he is the true shramana of Japan, and that he is the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

In conclusion, the Daishonin urges Sairen-bo to offer prayers based upon the correct doctrines of the Lotus Sutra and to fulfill his true potential as a human being by aspiring to attain Buddhahood.

Notes

1. The three Hinayana schools refer to the Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, and Precepts schools.

2. The “twelve hundred [arhats]” refers to the Buddha’s disciples who received a prophecy of attaining Buddhahood in the “Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Each of them was given the title of the Thus Come One Universal Brightness. The “twelve thousand [arhats]” indicates those who assembled at the ceremony of the preaching of the Lotus Sutra.

3. A rephrasing of a passage in the Vimalakirti Sutra: “With regard to the Law of the Buddha, they have become like rotten seeds.”

4. Flower Glow and Rare Form are the names that Shariputra and Subhuti will acquire on attaining Buddhahood, as prophesied by the Buddha in the “Simile and Parable” chapter and the “Bestowal of Prophecy” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, respectively. With regard to the title of Universal Brightness, *see* n. 2.

5. Lotus Sutra, chap. 4.

6. This appears in the “Nine Pieces” of *Elegies of Ch’u*. A commentary on *Elegies of Ch’u* by Chu Hsi of the Sung dynasty states, “The old fox dies, invariably turning its head toward the hillock. This is because it never forgets the place of its birth.” The source of the story of the wild goose is unknown.

7. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

8. Shakyamuni expressed the idea of “the replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle” concisely in the form of the revelation of the true aspect of all phenomena, that is, the ten factors of life. Hence the expression “concise.” In the “Expedient Means” chapter and in subsequent chapters Shakyamuni elaborates on this idea, and this more detailed explanation corresponds to the “expanded” replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle.

9. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

10. *Ibid.*, chap. 12.

11. *Ibid.*, chap. 13. This number of bodhisattvas made a vow before Shakyamuni Buddha to propagate the sutra in the worlds of the ten directions after his passing.

12. *Ibid.*, chap. 15. These bodhisattvas from other worlds vowed to spread the sutra in the saha world after the Buddha’s passing.

13. *Ibid.* This refers to the numerous bodhisattvas known as the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

14. Vapor condenses on a mirror placed outside at night. It was said that the mirror drew this water down from the moon.

15. Lotus Sutra, chap. 12.

16. Flower Garland Sutra.

17. *The Annotations on “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra.”*

18. Lotus Sutra, chap. 12.

19. *Ibid.*

20. The “thousand-spoked wheel pattern” is one of the thirty-two features that a Buddha is said to possess, appearing as a mark on the sole of each foot. The “tuft of white hair” is another of a Buddha’s thirty-two features. It is said to radiate light. The “sixty thousand and eighty thousand jeweled teachings” refers to the teachings of Brahmanism and the teachings of Buddhism, respectively.

21. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, chap. 21.

24. *Ibid.*, chap. 11.

25. *Ibid.*, chap. 22.

26. *Ibid.*, chap. 3. This is Shakyamuni Buddha’s own statement.

27. The two Buddhas refer to Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Treasures Buddha. This event occurred in the “Treasure Tower” chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

28. Universal Worthy Sutra, an epilogue to the Lotus Sutra.

29. This event is described in the Nirvana Sutra.

30. The bodhisattvas Medicine King and Brave Donor, who vowed to protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra in the “Dharani” chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

31. Vaishravana and Upholder of the Nation, two of the four heavenly kings.

32. The nine realms refer to the first nine of the Ten Worlds, which indicate transient and deluded states of life.

33. This story is found in Chang-an’s *Annotations on “The Treatise on the Observation of the Mind.”* When a snake was about to bite the king, who was lying on the grass

resting, a white crow flew down to alert the king. Saved from the danger, the king ordered his vassals to find the bird, but they were unable to do so. Determined to express his appreciation, the king then bestowed his favor on a black crow.

34. "An ordinary priest" refers here to the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law. The "sage priest" indicates Shakyamuni Buddha.

35. The mountain temple refers to Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei.

36. *Gleanings from the Records on Prince Jōgu.*

37. The government in the Kanto region is the Kamakura government that made Kanto (eastern Japan) its base. The imperial court was located in Kyoto in the western part of the country.

38. Reference is to the Jōkyū Disturbance, in which the Retired Emperor Gotoba, along with two other retired emperors, attempted to overthrow the Kamakura shogunate. The imperial forces were defeated, and as a result, Gotoba was exiled to the island of Oki. Hence he was called the Retired Emperor of Oki.

39. Iga Taro Hogan Mitsusue (d. 1221) was a magistrate who was stationed in Kyoto.

40. The governor of Musashi refers here to Hojo Yasutoki (1183–1242), who later became the third regent of the Kamakura government.

41. Here, Takeda Nobumitsu. The Genji clan of Kai refers to a powerful family descended from the Genji clan whose influence extended throughout Kai and Shinano provinces.

42. Lord Shikibu is another name for Hojo Tomotoki (1193–1245), a younger brother of Hojo Yasutoki.

43. A rephrasing of a statement found in *The Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind.*

44. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

45. *A Comparison of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism.* Kobo likened the True Word teachings to ghee, the finest of the five flavors.

46. The Nirvana Sutra mentions the process of converting milk into ghee and concludes that ghee is supreme among the five flavors.

47. Benevolent Kings Sutra.