

Reply to Hakiri Saburo



IN Kamakura there are humble priests named Chikugo-bo, Acharya Ben, and Acharya Daishin.¹ Please send for them, show them respect, and hold discussions with them. I will explain in outline the important teachings. They are somewhat familiar with the great Law that has not yet been propagated in Japan, and therefore you should pursue your studies under them.

In your letter, you write as follows: “As soon as your letter reached me, the doubts that I had previously entertained were swept away, just as a strong wind blows away the layers of cloud and the bright moon comes into view. For people of the present age, however, whether high or low, these teachings are difficult to believe. That is because the Lotus Sutra promises that those who practice the Buddha’s teachings ‘will enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences.’² If this is so, then why is it that the priest Nichiren, though he calls himself a votary of the Lotus Sutra, should meet with so much persecution? People are saying that it must be because he is untrue to the Buddha’s will.”

With regard to these unjust criticisms, however, the persecutions I have encountered are due to my karma from past existences.³ There is no need to be surprised at my having incurred

the wrath of the government authorities.

By way of explanation, if you examine the text of the Lotus Sutra, you will find it stated that in the Latter Day of the Law, when people practice the Lotus Sutra just as it teaches, they are bound to meet with many persecutions. This is made perfectly clear in the text, and anyone who has eyes need only look to see what is there.

Thus, for example, the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra says, “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?”⁴ And the fifth volume reads, “It will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe.”⁵ It also says, “There will be many ignorant people who will curse and speak ill of us and will attack us with swords and staves, with rocks and tiles.”⁶ And it continues: “In that evil age there will be monks [with perverse wisdom] . . . Or there will be forest-dwelling monks wearing clothing of patched rags and living in retirement . . . they will preach the Law to white-robed laymen and will be respected and revered by the world as though they were arhats who possess the six transcendental powers. . . . Because in the midst of the great assembly they constantly try to defame us, they

will address the rulers, high ministers, Brahmans, and householders, as well as the other monks, slandering and speaking evil of us . . . Evil demons will take possession of others and through them curse, revile, and heap shame on us . . . again and again we will be banished.”⁷

The Nirvana Sutra says: “There are icchantikas, or persons of incorrigible disbelief. They pretend to be arhats, living in deserted places and speaking slanderously of the correct and equal sutras of the great vehicle. When ordinary people see them, they all suppose that they are true arhats and speak of them as great bodhisattvas.” It also says: “After the Former Day of the Law has ended and the Middle Day of the Law has begun, there will be monks who will give the appearance of abiding by the rules of monastic discipline. But they will scarcely ever read or recite the sutras, and instead will crave all kinds of food and drink to nourish their bodies. . . . Though they wear the clothes of a monk, they will go about searching for alms like so many huntsmen who, narrowing their eyes, stalk softly. They will be like a cat on the prowl for mice.” The Parinirvana Sutra states, “There are also icchantikas who resemble arhats but who commit evil deeds.”

Now when I hold up this bright mirror of the sutra texts and turn it toward the country of Japan, all is reflected there without the slightest obscurity. The “forest-dwelling monks wearing clothing of patched rags and living in retirement”—who are they? Those who are “respected and revered by the world as though they were arhats who possess the six transcendental powers”—who are they? “When ordinary people see them, they all suppose that they are true arhats and speak of them as great bodhisattvas”—to whom does this refer? Those who “give the appearance of abiding by the rules of monastic discipline but scarce-

ly ever read or recite the sutras”—who are they?

As we see from these passages of scripture, the Buddha Shakyamuni observed with his Buddha eye the situation that would prevail at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. If in the present age there were no persons of the type that he described, then the World-Honored One would be guilty of false and baseless talk. [And if that were the case,] who would put faith in the theoretical and essential teachings of the Lotus Sutra, and in the doctrine of the eternally inherent Buddha nature that was preached in the grove of sal trees?⁸

Now when, in order to prove the truth of the Buddha’s words, I read these sutra passages and apply them to this country of Japan, I interpret them as follows. The passage about “forest-dwelling monks” who are “living in deserted places” refers to [the priests of] Kencho-ji, Jufuku-ji, Gokuraku-ji, Kennin-ji, Tofuku-ji, and the other temples of the Zen, Precepts, and Nembutsu schools in Japan. These diabolical temples have appeared in the world in order to bring destruction upon the Buddhist temples of the Lotus, or Tendai, school on Mount Hiei and in other places.

Those who “wear clothing of patched rags” and “give the appearance of abiding by the rules of monastic discipline” are the present-day observers of the precepts with their surplices made from five, seven, or nine pieces of cloth.⁹ Those who are “respected and revered by the world” and “spoken of as great bodhisattvas” are men like Doryu, Ryokan, and Shoichi. The “world” that looks up to them refers to the ruler of the nation and others like him in our present age. And the “ignorant people” and “ordinary people” are all the people of Japan, both high and low.

Because I am an ordinary person, I

am unable to believe in the Buddha's teaching. But with regard to what I am saying here, I know the situation as well as one knows fire or water when one touches one's hand to it.

According to the scripture,¹⁰ if a votary of the Lotus Sutra should appear, he will be cursed and reviled, attacked with swords and staves, and banished. But if one applies this passage of the sutra to the world today, not a single person is found whom it fits. Who then should be looked upon as the votary of the Lotus Sutra?

Could it be that the enemies of the Lotus Sutra have made their appearance, but that no one exists who upholds the sutra? But that would be like saying that there is an east, but no west, or that heaven exists, but earth does not. Were this the case, the words of the Buddha would be no more than lies, would they not?

It may seem like self-praise on my part, but having pondered this, I will give credence to the words of the Buddha. I, the priest Nichiren, am the votary referred to in the scripture.

Moreover, the Buddha, speaking of the events of a past lifetime, says in the "Never Disparaging" chapter, "At this time there was a bodhisattva named Never Disparaging. . . they spoke ill of him and cursed him . . . some among the group would take sticks of wood or tiles and stones and beat and pelt him." In this way, Shakyamuni Buddha cited his own practice as a bodhisattva in the past to encourage and hearten [the votary of the Lotus Sutra] in the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law.

In the past, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was beaten with sticks and staves for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, and was at once able to attain the supreme stage of perfect enlightenment. Now I, Nichiren, for the sake of the same sutra, have in this lifetime been attacked with swords and staves,

and have twice been banished to distant places. Can there be any doubt therefore that in the future I will attain the wonderful fruit of Buddhahood?

After the passing of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, the four ranks of bodhisattvas appeared in the Former and Middle Days of the Law and worked to propagate the Lotus Sutra, but even at those times they encountered numerous persecutions. The twentieth of Shakyamuni's successors, Bodhisattva Aryadeva, was killed, and the twenty-fifth, the Venerable Aryasimha, had his head cut off. The eighth successor, Buddhmitra, and the thirteenth, Bodhisattva Nagarjuna, each carried a red flag and stood before the entrance to the ruler's palace [in hopes of attracting his notice], the former for twelve years and the latter for seven.

Chu Tao-sheng was banished to a mountain in Su-chou, the priest Fa-tsu was murdered, the Tripitaka Master Fa-tao was branded on the face, and the Dharma Teacher Hui-yüan was berated and accused. The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai confronted in debate the leaders of the ten schools of northern and southern China, and the Great Teacher Dengyo refuted the erroneous views of the six schools of Nara.

Depending upon whether these men lived in the time of a wise ruler or a foolish one, their views were accepted or rejected, but in no case were they untrue to the Buddha's will. Even during the Former and Middle Days of the Law, they encountered such persecutions. How much more likely then is one to meet persecutions in the Latter Day! For the sake of the Lotus Sutra, I have already met with the wrath of the authorities, but I count that as the greatest good fortune. It is like exchanging tiles and rubble for gold and silver.

And yet I cannot help but grieve at the words of the Benevolent Kings Sutra that "Once the sages have de-

parted, then the seven disasters are certain to arise." The seven disasters include major droughts and great military uprisings.

The Sovereign Kings Sutra states, "Because evil people are respected and favored and good people are subjected to punishment, the stars and constellations, along with the winds and rains, all fail to move in their proper seasons."

Now who is meant by "evil people [who] are respected and favored"? It is men such as I spoke of earlier. And who is meant by "good people [who] are subjected to punishment"? It is the one whom I mentioned above, who has "again and again been banished." And the passage on the "stars and constellations" refers to the strange and portentous occurrences that have taken place in the skies and on the earth during the past twenty years or so.

If these passages from the sutras are true, then the banishment of Nichiren is a portent that foretells the downfall of the nation. Even before I incurred the wrath of the authorities, I foresaw that this would happen and stated the reason in *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*. Who can doubt that what I say is true? And that is why I grieve.

It has now been 2,222 years since the passing of the Buddha. During the thousand years of the Former Day of the Law, Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, and others acted as the Buddha's envoys, propagating his teachings. However, they propagated only the two teachings of Hinayana and provisional Mahayana and did not propagate the teachings of true Mahayana.

Some five hundred years after the beginning of the Middle Day of the Law, the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai appeared in China, refuted the erroneous views of the schools of the north and south, and established the correct teaching. In the area of doctrinal study, he propounded the theory of the five

periods, and in the area of meditative practices,¹¹ he set forth the concept of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. All of China joined in praising him as a Little Shakyamuni. However, though he propounded perfect meditation and perfect wisdom,¹² he did not spread the perfect precepts.

Then, eighteen hundred years after the passing of the Buddha, the Great Teacher Dengyo appeared in Japan and refuted the erroneous views that had been held by the six schools of Buddhism during the two hundred or more years since the time of Emperor Kimmei. In addition, he propounded the precepts of perfect and immediate enlightenment that T'ien-t'ai had not yet spread. These are the great precepts of perfect and immediate enlightenment administered at the ordination platform on Mount Hiei.

Nevertheless, in the more than two thousand years since the Buddha's passing, though there have been tens of thousands of temples built in the three lands of India, China, and Japan, there have been no temples or pagodas dedicated to the lord of the essential teaching, nor has anyone yet propagated the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo that were specifically entrusted to the bodhisattvas who emerged from beneath the earth as numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds. Although scriptural passages exist saying that they should be propagated, they can be found nowhere in the land. Is this because the time and the people's capacity are not yet ripe?

The Buddha, speaking of the future, said, "After I have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off."¹³ The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai predicted, "In the last five-hundred-year period, the mystic way will spread and benefit humankind far into the future."¹⁴ And the Great

Teacher Dengyo wrote, "The Former and Middle Days are almost over, and the Latter Day is near at hand. Now indeed is the time when the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra will prove how perfectly it fits the capacities of all people."¹⁵ These passages from the sutra and its commentaries all point to the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law.

Moreover, a non-Buddhist [of India] once said, "One hundred years after I pass away, the Buddha will appear in the world."¹⁶ And a Confucian scholar predicted, "One thousand years from now, the Buddha's teaching will be transmitted to China."¹⁷ Thus even such predictions by ordinary persons are found to tally with the truth. How much more trustworthy, therefore, should be the pronouncements of such persons as Dengyo and T'ien-t'ai, to say nothing of the explicit predictions that came from the golden mouths of the Buddhas Shakyamuni and Many Treasures!

You must understand this. The time has come for the lord of the essential teaching, who has not yet appeared, to make his advent, and for the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo, which have never before been propagated, to be spread throughout Jambudvīpa. Can any doubt exist?

However, there are persons who have repeatedly heard about these matters from the priest Nichiren and yet, now that I have met with these great difficulties, have abandoned their faith. You, on the other hand, have heard my teachings only once or twice, and then only for an hour or two. Even so, I have been told that you have not yet abandoned your faith but continue to practice it. This cannot be due solely to causes formed in your present existence. The Great Teacher Miao-lo stated, "Therefore we know it is because of seeds planted in previous existences that in the latter age one is able to hear the Law even for an instant, and having

heard it, take faith in it."¹⁸ He also said, "Having been born at the end of the Middle Day of the Law, I have been able to behold these true words of the sutra. Unless one has planted the mystic cause in a previous existence, they are truly difficult to encounter."¹⁹

The Lotus Sutra says in essence that persons who in past existences have made offerings to a hundred thousand million Buddhas will be reborn in the human world and take faith in this Lotus.²⁰ The Nirvana Sutra states in essence that persons who give alms to as many Buddhas as there are sands in the Hiranyavati and Ganges rivers will be reborn in a later evil age and take faith in this sutra.

King Ajatashatru was an evil man who killed his father and imprisoned his mother. Nevertheless, when he came to the assembly where the Buddha was preaching the Nirvana Sutra and heard the teachings of the Lotus Sutra,²¹ not only did he recover from the sores that had broken out in his present existence [as a result of his evil deeds], but his life was prolonged by forty years; and even though he did not originally possess roots of faith, in the end he reached the first stage of security and was given the Buddha's prediction that he would attain Buddhahood.

Devadatta was a man of incorrigible disbelief, the worst in the entire land of Jambudvīpa. In all the earlier sutras preached during the lifetime of the Buddha, he was cast aside as hopeless. But he encountered the Lotus Sutra, and was granted a prediction that he would become a Buddha called the Thus Come One Heavenly King.

Judging from these examples, we may conclude that for evil people living in the latter age the attainment of Buddhahood depends not upon whether their offenses are slight or grave, but solely upon whether or not they have faith in this sutra.

In your case, you are a member of a warrior family, an evil man who day and night is involved in the business of killing. Since you have not left your household [to become a priest], but have remained a warrior to the present, by what means can you escape the three evil paths? Should you not think about this very carefully?

The heart of the Lotus Sutra is the revelation that one may attain supreme enlightenment in one's present form without altering one's status as an ordinary person. This means that without casting aside one's karmic impediments one can still attain the Buddha way. Thus T'ien-t'ai said, "The other sutras only predict Buddhahood . . . for the good, but not for the evil; . . . This [Lotus] sutra predicts Buddhahood for all."²² And Miao-lo said, "The meaning of the perfect teaching lies solely in the fact that those who oppose can be saved as well as those who follow. In

the other three teachings,²³ the fate of these two types of people is fixed."²⁴

Although I should write something about whether or not the Buddha way can be gained in various degrees depending on the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, this is a matter to be discussed with someone thoroughly familiar with Buddhist terms and categories. However, there are disciples to whom I have taught the essentials on this point. You should summon them and hear the gist of the matter from them. At that time I will write you further on the subject.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The third day of the eighth month
in the tenth year of Bun'ei (1273),
with the cyclical sign *mizunoto-tori*

Reply to Nambu Rokuro Saburo of
Kai Province



Background

This letter was written in the eighth month of 1273, at Ichinosawa, Sado, in response to doubts raised by Hakiri Rokuro Saburo, also known as Nambu Rokuro Saburo. Hakiri Saburo is thought to have been a son of Hakiri Sanenaga, the steward of Minobu, the district where the Daishonin lived in his later years.

Saburo had asked why the Daishonin, who called himself a votary of the Lotus Sutra, had been undergoing so many difficulties when he should have been enjoying peace and security as promised in the Lotus Sutra. He was by no means the only one to entertain this doubt; a number of the Daishonin's disciples had been badly shaken by the Tatsunokuchi Persecution and Sado Exile. Saburo also asked whether one

could not to a certain extent attain the Buddha way through the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings.

The Daishonin answers the first question by citing passages from the Lotus and Nirvana sutras predicting how difficult it will be to propagate the correct teaching, and by referring to historical examples of people who met with persecution for the sake of Buddhism. The Buddha himself foretold that the votaries of the Lotus Sutra are bound to encounter opposition and hostility. The Daishonin declares that his trials demonstrate that he is in fact the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law. He then briefly reviews the sequence of propagation of the Buddhist teachings in the Former, Middle, and Latter Days of the Law,

and declares that the time has come for Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the supreme Law implied in the depths of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, to spread throughout the world.

Notes

1. Chikugo-bo is another name for Nichiro (1245–1320), one of Nichiren Daishonin's six senior disciples, and Acharya Ben, for Nissho (1221–1323), also one of the six senior disciples and the Daishonin's first convert among priests. Acharya Daishin was a priest-disciple of the Daishonin.

2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 5.

3. Another copy of the manuscript reads: "With regard to these unjust criticisms, however, I have been prepared for them from the very beginning." This variation in meaning arises from a difference of two Chinese characters in a four-character phrase.

4. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

5. *Ibid.*, chap. 14.

6. *Ibid.*, chap. 13. In the Lotus Sutra, however, the phrase "with rocks and tiles" appears not in this chapter. It is an interpolation from the "Never Disparaging" chapter.

7. *Ibid.*, chap. 13.

8. This refers to the Nirvana Sutra, which Shakyamuni is said to have expounded in a grove of sal trees immediately before his entry into nirvana.

9. The "surplices made from five, seven, or nine pieces of cloth" is another expression for the "three robes" that were among the few belongings that the precepts allowed priests to possess.

10. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

11. "Meditative practice" refers to the observation of the mind, a form of meditation developed by T'ien-t'ai, in which one focuses on the true nature of the mind rather than on an exterior object. In *Great Concentration and Insight*, T'ien-t'ai taught a meditation to perceive the principle of the unification of the three truths in a single mind and of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

12. "Perfect meditation" indicates a meditation to perceive the three thousand

Concerning the second question, he says that familiarity with Buddhist terms is necessary and encourages Saburo to ask the Daishonin's priest-disciples to help resolve his doubts.

realms in a single moment of life, and "perfect wisdom" is the wisdom gained from understanding the three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

13. Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.

14. *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*.

15. *An Essay on the Protection of the Nation*.

16. Source unknown.

17. According to a passage in *The Record of the Lineage of the Buddha and the Patriarchs* attributed to *The Record of Wonders in the Book of Chou*, on the eighth day of the fourth month in the twenty-fourth year (trad. date 1029 B.C.E.) of the reign of King Chao, the fourth ruler of the Chou dynasty, five-colored rays of light spread across the sky; the earth shook; and the rivers, streams, wells, and ponds overflowed with water. The Grand Historian Su Yu said, "A sage has been born in the western region. One thousand years from now, the words of this sage will be brought to this country." According to tradition, Buddhism was introduced to China just as he had predicted, 1,015 years after the Buddha's passing, during the reign of Emperor Ming in the tenth year of the Yung-p'ing era (C.E. 67).

18. *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra."*

19. *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight."*

20. A rephrasing of a passage in chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra.

21. The Nirvana Sutra restates such essential principles of the Lotus Sutra as the eternally inherent Buddha nature.

22. *Words and Phrases*.

23. The other three teachings are the Tripitaka, connecting, and specific teachings and refer collectively to the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings.

24. *On "The Words and Phrases."*