

On Rebuking Slander of the Law and Eradicating Sins



I HAVE read your letter carefully. In the past as well, when I was exiled to the province of Izu on account of the Lotus Sutra, I rejoiced at heart, though, when I say so, I suppose people will think that I am speaking immodestly.

If, since the beginningless past, I had ever incurred blame for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, whether I was sincerely devoted to it or not, would I then have been born in this lifetime as a mere ordinary mortal? [Therefore, when I was condemned to exile,] though I felt downcast for a while, seeing that it was for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, I was also delighted, for I thought that I might thereby eradicate to some small extent the offenses of my previous existences. However, the various grave sins of the ten evil acts, the four major offenses, the six major offenses, the eight major offenses, the ten major offenses, the five sins¹ that condemn one to the hell of incessant suffering, the slander of the correct teaching, and the sin of incorrigible disbelief accumulated since the beginningless past must stand taller than a huge mountain, run deeper than the great sea.

When it comes to the five cardinal sins, the commission of even one of them will condemn one to the hell of incessant suffering for the space of an entire kalpa. A kalpa is the length of

time it takes for the life span of human beings to decrease from eighty thousand years to ten years, decreasing at the rate of one year every hundred years, and then to increase again to eighty thousand years at the same rate.² One who murders one's parent will fall into the hell of incessant suffering and undergo its terrible pain without a moment's respite for such a period of time.

As for the person who slanders the Lotus Sutra, though he may not be serious at heart, if he so much as manifests the outward appearance of animosity, disparages the sutra even in jest, or makes light, not of the sutra itself, but of those who act in its name, then, the sutra says, he will fall into the hell of incessant suffering for countless kalpas of the kind described above.

The people who cursed and struck Bodhisattva Never Disparaging at first behaved with such animosity, but later they took faith in him and became his followers, looking up to him and treating him with great respect, honoring him as the heavenly deities would the lord Shakra and standing in awe of him as we do the sun and moon. Despite this, the great offense of their initial slander was difficult to extinguish, so they were condemned to the great Avichi hell for a thousand kalpas and abandoned by the three treasures for two hundred million kalpas.

If one were to liken [the retribution for] the five cardinal sins and slander of the Law to illness, then the five cardinal sins would be comparable to sunstroke, the effects of which appear suddenly. Slander of the Law, on the other hand, is like white leprosy, which seems minor at first but bit by bit becomes very serious indeed. Those who commit slander of the Law are in most cases reborn in the hell of incessant suffering or, in a few cases, in one of the six lower paths. If they are reborn in the realm of human beings, then, the sutra tells us, they will suffer from poverty, low status, white leprosy, and so forth.

When I hold up the bright mirror of the Lotus Sutra before me, all is crystal-clear; there can be no doubt that in my previous existences I was guilty of slandering the Law. If in my present existence I do not wipe out that offense, then in the future how can I escape the pains of hell?

How could I gather together all the grave offenses that I have accumulated in age after age since the far distant past and eradicate them all in my present lifetime, so that I may be spared great pain in the future? When I pondered this question, it occurred to me that now, in the present age, slanderers of the Law fill every province of the nation. What is more, the ruler of the nation is himself the foremost perpetrator of such slander. If in such a time I do not expunge these heavy sins, then at what time can I expect to do so?

Now if I, Nichiren, insignificant person that I am, were to go here and there throughout the country of Japan denouncing these slanders, then innumerable persons among the four categories of Buddhists who follow erroneous doctrines would in one instant join their innumerable voices in reviling me. At that time the ruler of the nation, allying himself with those priests who slander the Law, would

come to hate me and try to have me beheaded or order me into exile. And if this sort of thing were to occur again and again, then the grave offenses that I have accumulated over countless kalpas would be wiped out within the space of a single lifetime. Such, then, was the great plan that I conceived, and it is now proceeding without the slightest deviation. So, when I find myself thus sentenced to exile, I can only feel that my wishes are being fulfilled.

Nevertheless, being no more than an ordinary person, I have at times been apt to regret having taken such a course. And if even I am troubled by such feelings, then how much more so in the case of a woman such as your wife, who is unaware of all the circumstances surrounding the matter. Persons like you and her do not have full knowledge of the Buddhist teachings, and it pains me to think how greatly you must regret that you ever chose to follow Nichiren. And yet, contrary to what might be expected, I hear that you two are even firmer and more dedicated in your faith than I myself, which is indeed no ordinary matter. I wonder if Shakyamuni Buddha himself may have entered your hearts, and it moves me so that I can barely restrain my tears.

The Great Teacher Miao-lo says in his commentary (*The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra,"* volume seven), "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." He also says (*The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight,"* volume two), "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."

During his first forty and more years of teaching, Shakyamuni Buddha kept secret the five characters of Myohorenge-kyo. Not only that, he still remained silent concerning them when he preached the first fourteen chapters of the Lotus Sutra, which comprise the theoretical teaching. It was only with the "Life Span" chapter that he spoke openly regarding the two characters of *rengé*, which [represent the five characters of Myohorenge-kyo and] indicate the true effect and the true cause.³ The Buddha did not entrust these five characters to Manjushri, Universal Worthy, Maitreya, Medicine King, or the others of their group. Instead he summoned forth the bodhisattvas Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, Pure Practices, and Firmly Established Practices and their followers from the great earth of Tranquil Light and transferred the five characters to them.

What took place then was no ordinary ceremony. The Thus Come One Many Treasures, who lives in the World of Treasure Purity, made his appearance, seated in a tower that emerged from the earth and was adorned with seven kinds of treasures. Shakyamuni purified four hundred ten thousand million nayutas of worlds in addition to this major world system, planted them with rows of jeweled trees measuring five hundred yojanas high at intervals of an arrow-shot length, placed a lion seat five yojanas in height beneath each jeweled tree, and seated on these seats all the Buddhas from the ten directions, who were his emanations.

Thereupon the Thus Come One Shakyamuni removed his soiled robe, opened the treasure tower, and took a seat beside the Thus Come One Many Treasures. It was as though the sun and moon had appeared side by side in the blue sky, or as though the heavenly king Shakra and the king Born from the Crown of the Head⁴ had been able to sit together in the Hall of the Good

Law. Manjushri and the other bodhisattvas of this world, and Perceiver of the World's Sounds and the other bodhisattvas of the other worlds were gathered together in open space throughout the ten directions like so many stars filling the sky.

At this time in this place the great bodhisattvas, such as Dharma Wisdom, Forest of Merits, Diamond Banner, and Diamond Storehouse, equal in number to the dust particles of the worlds of the ten directions, who had gathered at the seven places and eight assemblies of the Flower Garland Sutra⁵ and were disciples of Vairochana Buddha, who sits on the lotus pedestal of the worlds of the ten directions; the Buddhas and bodhisattvas who had gathered like clouds at the Great Treasure Chamber when the sutras of the Correct and Equal period were preached; Subhuti, Shakra, and the thousand Buddhas who had gathered to hear the Wisdom sutras; the four Buddhas and four bodhisattvas,⁶ included among the nine honored ones on the eight-petaled lotus of the Mahavairochana Sutra; the thirty-seven honored ones⁷ of the Diamond Crown Sutra; and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the realm of phenomena in the ten directions who are to gather at the city of Kushinagara to listen to the Nirvana Sutra—all these assembled. All these figures were recognized by Manjushri, Maitreya, and the others of their group, who talked together with them, so it appeared that the great bodhisattvas, such as Manjushri and Maitreya, were quite accustomed to their being in attendance.

It was under such circumstances that the four bodhisattvas emerged from the earth. When Bodhisattva Manjushri, whose teaching the Thus Come One Shakyamuni was the ninth to inherit⁸ and who is the mother of the Buddhas of the three existences,⁹ and Bodhisattva Maitreya, who will succeed Shakyamuni Buddha after his

next rebirth, stood beside these four bodhisattvas, they seemed to be of no significance whatsoever. They were like humble mountain folk mingling in the company of nobles and high ministers, or like apes and monkeys seating themselves beside lions.

Having summoned the four bodhisattvas, Shakyamuni Buddha entrusted them with the five characters of Myoho-*renge-kyo*. And this entrustment, too, was no ordinary affair, for the Buddha first manifested ten supernatural powers. When he extended his long broad tongue upward as far as the limit of the world of form, all the other Buddhas did likewise, so that the tongues of the Buddhas extended up into the air above the four hundred ten thousand million nayutas of worlds like a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, or a million red rainbows filling the sky. Marvelous indeed was the sight!

In this manner the Buddha displayed the wonders of his ten supernatural powers, and in what is termed the transfer of the essence of the sutra, he extracted the core of the Lotus Sutra and transferred it to the four bodhisattvas. He fervently enjoined them to bestow it after his passing upon all living beings of the ten directions. After that, he again manifested yet another supernatural power¹⁰ and entrusted this sutra and the other sacred teachings preached during his lifetime to Manjushri and the other bodhisattvas of this and other worlds, to the people of the two vehicles, and to the heavenly and human beings, dragon deities, and others.

These five characters Myoho-*renge-kyo* were not entrusted even to Mahakashyapa, Shariputra, or the other disciples, though these men had from the outset attended the Buddha as closely as a shadow follows the body. But, even setting that aside, why did the Buddha refuse to entrust them to the bodhisattvas such as Manjushri and

Maitreya? Even though they may have been lacking in capability, it would seem unlikely that he should reject them. There are in truth many puzzling aspects about the matter. But the fact was that the bodhisattvas from other worlds were rejected because their connection with this world was slight; or in other cases, although the bodhisattvas were of this saha world, they had only recently established connections with this world; or in still other cases, some were rejected because, although they were disciples of the Buddha, they had not been among his disciples when he first aroused the aspiration for and attained enlightenment in the remote past. Thus, among those who had been his disciples during the forty and more years preceding the preaching of the Lotus Sutra or during the preaching of the theoretical teaching, the first fourteen chapters of the Lotus Sutra, there was not one who could be called an original disciple. We see from the sutra that only these four bodhisattvas had been the disciples of Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, since numberless major world system dust particle kalpas in the past; from the time he had first aroused the aspiration for and attained enlightenment, they had never followed any other Buddha, nor had they required the instruction of the theoretical and essential teachings.

Thus T'ien-t'ai says, "The great assembly witnessed the Bodhisattvas of the Earth alone making this pledge."¹¹ He also states, "[The Buddha said of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth,] 'These are my disciples, destined to propagate my Law.'¹² Miao-lo says, "The children propagate the Law of the father."¹³ And Tao-hsien states, "The Law embodied therein [in the Lotus Sutra] is the Law that was realized countless kalpas in the past, and therefore it was entrusted to persons who had been the Buddha's disciples from countless kalpas

in the past.”¹⁴ Thus these five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo were entrusted to these four bodhisattvas.

Nevertheless, after the Buddha’s passing, during the thousand years of the Former Day of the Law, the thousand years of the Middle Day of the Law, and the two hundred and twenty or more years that have elapsed since the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, nowhere in India, China, Japan, or any other place throughout Jambudvīpa have these four bodhisattvas so much as once made their appearance. Why is that?

Bodhisattva Manjushri, though he was not specifically entrusted with the teaching of Myoho-enge-kyo, remained in this world for four hundred and fifty years following the passing of the Buddha to spread the Mahayana sutras, and even in the ages thereafter he from time to time descended from Mount Fragrant or Mount Clear and Cool, assuming the form of an eminent monk in order to propagate the Buddhist teachings.¹⁵ Bodhisattva Medicine King took on the form of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai, Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds became the Great Teacher Nan-yüeh,¹⁶ and Bodhisattva Maitreya became Fu Ta-shih.¹⁷ Moreover, Mahakashyapa and Ananda worked to spread the teachings of the Buddha after his passing for twenty and forty years, respectively. And yet in all this time, the Buddha’s legitimate heirs, to whom the teaching of Myoho-enge-kyo had been entrusted, failed to make their appearance.

During this period of twenty-two hundred and more years, worthy rulers and sage rulers have honored painted images or wooden images of Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, as their principal object of devotion. But although they have made depictions of the Buddhas of the Hinayana and the Mahayana teachings; of the Flower Garland, Nirvana, and Meditation su-

tras; of the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra and of the Universal Worthy Sutra; of the Mahavairochana and the other True Word sutras; and of the Buddhas Shakyamuni and Many Treasures of the “Treasure Tower” chapter, the Shakyamuni Buddha of the “Life Span” chapter has never been depicted in any mountain temple or monastery anywhere. It is very difficult to fathom why this should be.

The Thus Come One Shakyamuni made specific reference to the last five-hundred-year period and never designated the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law as the time for propagating the Lotus Sutra. The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai said, “In the last five-hundred-year period, the mystic way will spread and benefit humankind far into the future,”¹⁸ indicating that its propagation should be left to the future. The Great Teacher Dengyo wrote, “The Former and Middle Days are almost over, and the Latter Day is near at hand.”¹⁹ In this way, he rejected the end of the Middle Day of the Law as not being the time to propagate the Lotus Sutra.

Are we to assume, then, that the great bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds who sprang up from the earth intend to remain silent and unmoving and to go back on the promise that they made when the teaching was entrusted to them by Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions?

Yet even the worthy men described in the non-Buddhist scriptures know that one must await the right time. The cuckoo always waits until the fourth or fifth month to sing its song. Similarly, we read in the sutra that these great bodhisattvas must likewise wait until the Latter Day of the Law to appear.

Why do I say this? Both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist writings make clear that omens will always appear before a certain destined event actually

occurs. Thus, when the spider spins its web, it means that some happy event will take place, and when the magpie calls, it means that a visitor will arrive. Even such minor occurrences have their portents. How much more so do major events! Thus the six auspicious happenings described in the "Introduction" chapter of the Lotus Sutra are great omens exceeding in magnitude any other major signs appearing in the entire life of Shakyamuni Buddha. And the omens described in the "Emerging from the Earth" chapter²⁰ are immeasurably greater in magnitude than these.

Therefore, T'ien-t'ai says, "By observing the fury of the rain, we can tell the greatness of the dragon that caused it, and by observing the flourishing of the lotus flowers, we can tell the depth of the pond they grow in."²¹ And Miaolo states, "Wise men can perceive the cause of things, as snakes know the way of snakes."²²

Now I, too, in discerning the significance of omens, will be included among the wise. The great earthquake that struck in the first year of the Shoka era (1257), with the cyclical sign *hinoto-mi*, on the twenty-third day of the eighth month, at the time when the hour of the dog gives way to the hour of the boar (around 9:00 P.M.), and also the great comet that appeared in the first year of the Bun'ei era (1264), with the cyclical sign *kinoe-ne*, on the fourth day of the seventh month²³—these are major portents such as have never before occurred during the more than twenty-two hundred years since the Buddha's passing. I wonder if they are not major signs indicating that those great bodhisattvas are now about to make their appearance in this world, bearing the great Law.

Ten-foot-high waves do not rise up in a foot-wide pond, and the braying of a donkey cannot cause the winds to

blow. Though the government of Japan today is in chaos and the common people cry out in distress, such conditions alone could scarcely cause the appearance of such major omens. No one else understands that these are great signs foretelling that though the Lotus Sutra has perished it is in fact eternal.²⁴

During the more than two thousand years [since the Buddha's passing], there have been evil rulers who were cursed by their subjects and traitorous persons who were hated by all. But Nichiren, though guilty of no fault, has without respite for the past twenty years and more been cursed and abused, assaulted with swords and staves, and pelted with rocks and tiles by people both high and low. This is no ordinary occurrence.

Mine is like the case of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who, toward the end of the Law of the Buddha Awesome Sound King, was cursed and reviled over a period of many years. Moreover, Shakyamuni Buddha cited the example of this bodhisattva and predicted that, after his own passing, in the Latter Day of the Law, events would unfold in the same manner as in Never Disparaging's time. And yet, whether here close at hand in Japan or in the distant land of China, such a thing has never been known to happen on account of the Lotus Sutra.

Because people hate me, no one mentions the significance of these things. If I mention it myself, it may seem to be self-praise. If I fail to mention it, however, I will commit the offense of making lies of the Buddha's words. I speak of it because to hold one's own life lightly but to value the Law is the way of a worthy person.

I, Nichiren, resemble Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. Whether the ruler of a nation murders his parents, or a lowly subject does away with his father and mother, though the murderers differ greatly in social position, because

the cause is identical, both will fall into the hell of incessant suffering. Similarly, though Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and I stand on different levels, we perform the same action. Therefore, if Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is destined to attain Buddhahood, can there be any doubt that I will gain the fruit of Buddhahood as well?

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was cursed by arrogant monks who observed all the two hundred and fifty precepts. I, Nichiren, am slandered and reviled by Ryokan, who is known as the foremost observer of the precepts. The monks who cursed Never Disparaging, though they followed him in the end, still had to suffer in the Avichi hell for one thousand kalpas. But Ryokan has yet to seek my teachings. Hence I do not know what will become of him. He may be destined to suffer in hell for countless kalpas. How truly pitiful!

Question: With regard to the great earthquake of the Shoka era, in your remonstrative letter *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, which you entrusted to the lay priest Yadoya for submission to His Lordship, the late lay priest of Saimyo-ji, on the sixteenth day of the seventh month in the first year of the Bunno era (1260), with the cyclical sign *kanoe-saru*, you stated your opinion that heaven and earth had become angered because the people of Japan were destroying Buddhism by their reliance on Honen's *Nembutsu Chosen above All*, and that this error would bring about rebellion within the country and invasion from countries abroad. But now you say that the earthquake was an auspicious omen of the propagation of the Lotus Sutra. How do you explain the discrepancy between these two views?

Answer: That is a very good question. 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?"²⁵ And in the seventh volume, referring again to the time "after his passing" when things will be much worse, the Buddha says, "After I have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvipa."²⁶ So we see that the hatred that abounds after the passing of the Buddha will come about in the last five-hundred-year period when Myohorenge-kyo will spread. And immediately following the above passage, the Buddha warns of dangers from "evil devils, the devils' people, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, and kumbhanda demons."

When the chief priest Hsing-man laid eyes on the Great Teacher Dengyo, he exclaimed, "The sacred words will not become extinct. Now I have encountered this man! All the doctrines that I have learned I will transfer to this acharya from the country of Japan."²⁷ And the situation today is just the same. Now, in the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, the time has come to propagate the five characters of Myohorenge-kyo so that all people throughout the country of Japan may receive the seeds of Buddhahood.

When a maidservant becomes pregnant with the ruler's child, the other women grow resentful. And when a person of humble birth is presented with a jewel from the king's crown, then great troubles are bound to arise. Thus the sutra says, "It will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe."²⁸

The Nirvana Sutra declares, "If troubles are inflicted upon a sage, then the country where he dwells will be attacked by other countries." And the Benevolent Kings Sutra states essentially the same thing. If I, Nichiren, am attacked, then from heaven and earth and the four directions, great calamities will pour down like rain, jet up like

fountains, or come surging forward like waves. If the many priests, those hordes of locusts who afflict the nation, and the ministers in power in the government persist in their ever-increasing slanders and accusations against me, then great disasters will occur in growing magnitude.

When an asura demon tried to shoot at the god Shakra, his arrow rebounded and pierced him in the eye. And when the garuda birds attempted to attack the dragon king Anavatapta, flames erupted from their own bodies and consumed them. Is the votary who upholds the Lotus Sutra inferior to Shakra or the dragon king Anavatapta?

The Great Teacher Chang-an says, "One who destroys or brings confusion to the Buddha's teachings is betraying them. If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy."²⁹ He also says, "One who rids the offender of evil is acting as his parent."³⁰

All the people throughout Japan have been led astray by the wild assertions of Honen, who tells them to "discard, close, ignore, and abandon" [the Lotus Sutra], or of the Zen school, which declares its teaching to be "a separate transmission outside the sutras," so that there is not a single one who is not destined to fall into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. So believing, over the past more than twenty years I have never ceased to cry out in a loud voice against these errors, fearing neither the ruler of the nation nor the common people. I am in no way inferior to the outspoken ministers Kuan Lung-feng and Pi Kan of old. I am like the thousand-armed Perceiver of the World's Sounds, the bodhisattva of great compassion, who strives to rescue at once all the beings confined to the hell of incessant suffering.

When several children are caught in a fire, though the parents wish to save

them all at the same time, having only two arms, they must decide which child to save first and which to leave until after. The Lotus Sutra is a parent with a thousand arms, ten thousand arms, or a million arms. The sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra have only one or two arms, as it were. But the Lotus Sutra, through which the Buddha has "converted all living beings and caused them all to enter the Buddha way,"³¹ is a bodhisattva with innumerable arms.

If we go by the Lotus Sutra and the commentary of Chang-an, then Nichiren is a compassionate father and mother to all the people of Japan. Heaven may be lofty, but it has keen ears with which to hear. Earth may be thick, but it has sharp eyes with which to observe. Heaven and earth by now know [how the situation stands]. And yet I, who am father and mother to all people, am cursed and reviled and sent into exile. The abuses of government that have taken place in this country in the past two or three years are such as have never been heard of in former ages, and exceed all bounds of reason.

In your letter you mentioned your filial devotion to your deceased mother. Reading it, I was so moved that I could barely hold back my tears.

Long ago in China there were five young men, one of whom was Yüan-chung.³² They had originally been strangers from different districts and had different surnames, but they took a vow to be brothers and never turned against one another, and in time they amassed three thousand treasures.

All the young men were orphans, and, grieved over this fact, when they met an old woman along the road, they decided to honor her as their mother. They did so for twenty-four years, never going against her wishes in the slightest.

Then the mother suddenly fell ill and was unable to speak. The five sons

gazed up at the sky and said: "Our efforts to care for our mother have not been appreciated, and she has been seized by an illness that prevents her from speaking. If heaven will grant our filial feelings any recognition, we pray that it will restore to her the power of speech."

At that time the mother spoke, saying to her five sons: "In past times I was the daughter of a man named Yang Meng of the district of T'ai-yüan. I was married to Chang Wen-chien of the same district, who has since died. We had a son named Wu-i. When he was seven, rebellion broke out in the area, and I do not know what became of him. You, my five sons, have taken care of me for twenty-four years, but I have never told you of this. My son Wu-i had markings like the seven stars of the Big Dipper on his chest, and on the sole of his right foot he had a black mole." When she had finished saying this, she died.

As the five sons were accompanying her body to the burial ground, they encountered the magistrate of the district along the road. The magistrate had happened to drop a bag containing important documents, and the five young men were accused of stealing it, arrested, and bound. When the magistrate confronted them, he demanded, "Who are you?" whereupon the five young men told him all they had learned from their mother.

When he heard this, the magistrate almost toppled from his seat, gazing up at the heavens, then bowing to the earth in tears. He freed the five men from their bonds, led them to his seat, and said, "I am Wu-i, and it was my mother you cared for! For these past twenty-four years I have known many pleasures, but because I could never stop thinking about my beloved mother, they were never real pleasures to me." In time he presented the five men to the ruler of the country, and each

was appointed to be the head of a prefecture.

In this way, even strangers were rewarded when they came together and treated someone as a parent. How much more so will be the case with actual brothers and sisters when they kindly take care of their own father and mother! How could heaven possibly fail to approve?

Pure Storehouse and Pure Eye used the Lotus Sutra to lead their father, who held erroneous views, to enlightenment. Devadatta was an enemy of the Buddha and was condemned by the sutras preached during the first forty and more years of the Buddha's teaching life. The moment of his death was terrifying: the earth split open, and he fell into the hell of incessant suffering. But in the Lotus Sutra he was summoned back and received the prediction that he would become the Thus Come One Heavenly King. King Ajatashatru killed his father, but just before the Buddha entered nirvana, he heard the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and was able to escape the great sufferings of the Avichi hell.

This province of Sado is like a realm of beasts. Moreover, it is filled with Honen's disciples, who hate me a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million times more than did the people of Kamakura. I am never certain whether I am going to survive the day. But thanks to the warm support of both of you, I have managed to sustain my life thus far. When I consider this, I suppose that, since Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas and great bodhisattvas of the ten directions all make offerings and pay reverence to the Lotus Sutra, these Buddhas and bodhisattvas must be informing your parents each hour of the night and day that you are assisting me. And the fact that you now enjoy your lord's favor must also be due to your parents' merciful protection.

Do not think of your siblings as siblings. Just think of them as your own children. It is true that among children there are those like the young of the owl, which are said to eat their own mother, or like the offspring of the hakei beast, which watch for a chance to devour their own father. Though your own son, Shiro,³³ takes care of his parents, if he is a bad person, perhaps there is nothing to be done. However, even a stranger, if you open up your heart to him, may be willing to lay down his life for you. So, if you treat your younger brothers as though they were your own sons, they may become your allies for life, and of course it will make a favorable impression on others as well. And if you likewise think of your younger sisters as daughters, then why would they not respond with filial devotion?

When I was exiled to this place, I assumed that no one would come to visit me. But I have no fewer than seven or eight persons with me here, and if it were not for your consideration, I do not know how we could manage to keep the whole group in provisions. I am certain that this is all because the characters of the Lotus Sutra have entered into your bodies in order to give us aid. I am praying that, no matter how troubled the times may become, the Lotus Sutra and the ten demon daughters will protect all of you, praying as earnestly as though to produce fire from damp wood, or to obtain water from parched ground. There are many other matters to discuss, but I will close here.

Nichiren

Reply to Shijo Kingo



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter on Sado Island in 1273 to his devoted follower Shijo Kingo, who lived in Kamakura. Though in exile, the Daishonin says in this letter that his overriding emotion is one of joy. He has been banished precisely because he denounced the errors of those who slander the Lotus Sutra. Because he has met this great trial for the sutra's sake, the Daishonin explains, he is certain to thereby eradicate in this lifetime his evil karma accumulated since the distant past. This is the principle of "rebuking slander of the Law and eradicating sins" referred to in the letter's title.

The Daishonin goes on to explain that when Shakyamuni Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra he transferred the five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo, the essence of his teaching, only to the

Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Though the Daishonin does not state so here directly, he implies that he is the very one carrying out the task of these Bodhisattvas of the Earth in propagating the essence of the Lotus Sutra.

The Daishonin subsequently likens himself to Never Disparaging, a bodhisattva appearing in the Lotus Sutra who revered all people as future Buddhas and met with abuse as a result. The fact that the Daishonin meets persecution just as Bodhisattva Never Disparaging did for the sake of the Lotus Sutra indicates that he is the sutra's votary in the Latter Day of the Law.

The text then raises a question: In *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, the Daishonin interpreted the disasters befalling the country as the effect of widespread belief in misleading teachings. Now he

interprets them as omens of the spread of the Lotus Sutra. How are these two views to be reconciled? The Daishonin makes clear that no fundamental contradiction exists. On the one hand, when the time comes for the propagation of the Lotus Sutra, disasters arise when people persist in clinging to provisional teachings that no longer suit the times. On the other hand, when the votary of the Lotus Sutra who is to propagate its teaching points out such errors and is persecuted as a consequence, great calamities are sure to result. The Daishonin adds that in de-

nouncing the errors of other schools he has acted solely out of the bodhisattva spirit of compassion, as expressed by Chang-an: "One who rids the offender of evil is acting as his parent."

In the final part of the letter, the Daishonin praises Shijo Kingo's devotion to his deceased mother, and explains that such filial conduct will never fail to be rewarded. He concludes with expressions of gratitude to Shijo Kingo and his family, whose offerings have helped the Daishonin and his companions survive under the harsh conditions of banishment on Sado.

Notes

1. The five cardinal sins: killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an arhat, injuring a Buddha, and causing disunity in the Buddhist Order.

2. According to ancient Indian cosmology, the human life span undergoes repeated cyclic periods of increase and decrease. The calculation here brings the length of a kalpa to 15,998,000 years.

3. The true effect refers to the enlightenment attained by the Buddha in the remote past, and the true cause, the cause of that enlightenment. "True effect" and "true cause" also indicate, respectively, the world of Buddhahood (effect) and the nine worlds (cause), which are both eternally inherent in life. Myoho-rence-kyo is the Law that simultaneously contains both cause and effect.

4. Born from the Crown of the Head, or Murdhagata in Sanskrit, appears in several sutras. He is said to have been born from the top of King Upasatha's head and grew up to become a gold-wheel-turning king. He ruled the four continents surrounding Mount Sumeru and finally ascended to the heaven of the thirty-three gods on the summit of Mount Sumeru. According to the Nirvana Sutra, he was welcomed there by the god Shakra, who seated him by his side in the Hall of the Good Law, a hall located in the southwest outside Shakra's palace Joyful to See in the heaven of the thirty-three gods.

5. The preaching of the Flower Garland Sutra is described as occurring in eight suc-

cessive assemblies in seven different locations, beginning at the place of Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment and then shifting to various heavens.

6. Buddhas and bodhisattvas who are pictured in the court of the eight-petaled lotus appearing in the center of the Womb Realm mandala. In this mandala, Mahavairochana Buddha sits in the center of the lotus.

7. Five Buddhas, centering around Mahavairochana, and thirty-two bodhisattvas described in the Diamond Crown Sutra.

8. This story appears in the "Introduction" chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In the distant past, Manjushri appeared as Bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright, a disciple of Sun Moon Bright Buddha. After the Buddha's demise, Wonderfully Bright continued to embrace the Lotus Sutra that his teacher had expounded. The Buddha had fathered eight sons before renouncing the world. Bodhisattva Wonderfully Bright led these sons to enlightenment. The last of them to attain Buddhahood was called Burning Torch Buddha, under whom Shakyamuni practiced the sutra for enlightenment in a previous existence. In this sense, Shakyamuni was "the ninth to inherit" Manjushri's teachings.

9. The Contemplation on the Mind-Ground and other sutras refer to Manjushri as the mother of all Buddhas. He is so called because he represents the supreme wisdom essential to attaining enlightenment.

10. At the beginning of the "Entrustment" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha pats with his right hand the heads of the immeasurable bodhisattvas present and then transfers the Lotus Sutra to all of them.

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

12. *Ibid.*

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

14. *The Supplement to "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra."*

15. According to the Nirvana of Manjushri Sutra, 450 years following the Buddha's passing, Bodhisattva Manjushri went to the Snow Mountains, where he expounded the Buddhist teachings for five hundred hermits. Thereafter, he assumed the form of a monk and, descending from the mountains, led many people to salvation. He later lived in a stupa on Mount Fragrant (Skt Gandha-madana), said to lie to the north of the Snow Mountains. According to the Flower Garland Sutra, Manjushri lives on Mount Clear and Cool (Chin Ch'ing-liang) in the east, which later came to be identified with Mount Wu-t'ai in China.

16. The reappearance of Medicine King and Perceiver of the World's Sounds as T'ien-t'ai and Nan-yüeh, respectively, is mentioned in *The Lotus Sutra and Its Traditions*.

17. Fu Ta-shih (497-569) was a lay Buddhist in China. Fu Ta-shih's biography states that he descended from the Tushita heaven, which is the abode of Bodhisattva Maitreya, to expound the teaching of supreme enlightenment.

18. *Words and Phrases.*

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

20. This refers to the ground splitting open and the countless bodhisattvas emerging from the earth.

21. *Words and Phrases.*

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

23. This comet first appeared on the twenty-sixth day of the sixth month, began to shine with renewed brilliance on the fourth day of the seventh month, and continued to shine into the eighth month.

24. This indicates that in the Latter Day of the Law, although the Lotus Sutra has become ineffectual, the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo implied in the depths of the sutra's "Life Span" chapter will spread to benefit all people.

25. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

26. *Ibid.*, chap. 23.

27. *The Biography of the Great Teacher of Mount Hiei.*

28. Lotus Sutra, chap. 14.

29. *The Annotations on the Nirvana Sutra.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

32. Yüan-chung was a person from the state of Wei during the Chou dynasty (c. 1100-256 B.C.E.), China. The story of these five persons appears in Miao-lo's *Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight."*

33. Details are unknown about Shiro. No other of the Daishonin's letters indicates that Shijo Kingo had a son. One of his younger brothers was named Shiro, but it is not certain if this is the person to whom the Daishonin was referring.