

Letter to the Brothers



THE Lotus Sutra is the heart of the eighty thousand teachings and the core of the twelve divisions of the scriptures. The Buddhas throughout the three existences attain enlightenment because they take this sutra as their teacher. The Buddhas of the ten directions guide living beings with the teaching of the one vehicle as their eyes.

Entering the sutra repository and examining the complete collection contained therein, I find that two versions exist of the sutras and treatises brought to China between the Yung-p'ing era of the Later Han and the end of the T'ang dynasty.¹ There are 5,048 volumes of the older translations² and 7,399 of the newer translations. Each sutra claims by virtue of its contents to be the highest teaching of all. Comparison reveals, however, that the Lotus Sutra is as superior to all the other sutras as heaven is to the earth. It rises above them like a cloud above the mud on the ground. If other sutras are compared to stars, the Lotus Sutra is like the moon; if they are as bright as torches, bonfires, stars, or the moon, the Lotus Sutra is then as bright as the sun. This is a general comparison.

More specifically, the Lotus Sutra contains twenty outstanding principles. The two most important are the teachings of major world system dust par-

ticle kalpas ago and numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago. The former is explained in the "Parable of the Phantom City" chapter in the third volume. Suppose someone grinds a major world system into dust. He then takes this dust with him and goes one thousand major world systems toward the east, where he drops one particle. He proceeds another thousand major world systems eastward and drops the second particle. He continues on in this manner, dropping another particle and then another until he has exhausted all the dust particles of the entire major world system. Then he gathers up all the major world systems along the route he has taken, whether they have received a particle or not, and reduces them all to dust. He places these dust particles in a row, allowing one entire kalpa to pass for the placement of each. When the first kalpa has passed, he places the second particle, and then the third, until as many kalpas have passed as there are particles of dust. The total length of time represented by the passage of all these kalpas is referred to as a period of major world system dust particle kalpas.

It was this long ago—in the remote past indicated by a span of major world system dust particle kalpas—that the three groups of voice-hearers, including Shariputra, Mahakashyapa, Ananda,

and Rahula, learned the Lotus Sutra from a bodhisattva who was the sixteenth son of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence. Deluded by evil influences, however, they eventually abandoned the Lotus Sutra. They fell back into the Flower Garland, Wisdom, Great Collection, or Nirvana Sutra, or further down to the Mahavairochana, Profound Secrets, or Meditation Sutra, or even backslid to the Hinayana teachings of the Agama sutras. Continuing this descent, they fell back through the practice of goodness in the human and heavenly worlds and finally into the paths of evil. During this period of major world system dust particle kalpas they were most often born in the hell of incessant suffering. Sometimes they were born in the seven great hells, or less frequently in the more than one hundred hells.³ On very rare occasions they were born into the world of hungry spirits, animals, or asuras, and only after kalpas as many as dust particles were they able to be born again in the human or heavenly world.

The second volume of the Lotus Sutra states, "He will constantly dwell in hell, strolling in it as though it were a garden, and the other evil paths of existence he will look on as his own home."⁴ Those who commit the ten evil acts fall into the hell of repeated rebirth for torture or the hell of black cords,⁵ where they must spend five hundred lifetimes or one thousand hell-years. Those who commit the five cardinal sins fall into the hell of incessant suffering and are born again in this world after remaining there for one medium kalpa.

Why is it, then, that those who abandon the Lotus Sutra fall into the hell of incessant suffering and have to stay there for such an unimaginably great number of kalpas? The offense of discarding one's faith in the sutra must at the time seem nowhere near as terrible as killing one's parents. Neverthe-

less, even if one killed one's parents in one, two, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand, a million, or even a hundred million lifetimes, one would not have to remain in hell for a period of major world system dust particle kalpas. Even if one were to kill one, two, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, or as many as a hundred million Buddhas, would one have to dwell in hell for a span of numberless major world system dust particle kalpas? The three groups of voice-hearers, however, had to suffer through a period of major world system dust particle kalpas, and the great bodhisattvas, through a period of numberless major world system dust particle kalpas, because of the offense they committed by discarding the Lotus Sutra. This shows what an unimaginably terrible offense it is.

To put this simply, when one strikes at air, one's fist will not hurt, but when one hits a rock, one feels pain. The offense of killing an evil person is minor compared with the offense of killing a good person, which is grave. If one kills someone who is not one's kin, it is like striking mud with one's fist, but if one kills one's own parents, it is like hitting a rock. A dog may bark at a deer without having its skull broken, but if it barks at a lion, its bowels will rot. An asura who tried to swallow the sun and moon had his head shattered into seven pieces. Because Devadatta harmed the Buddha, the earth split open and swallowed him alive. The seriousness of an offense depends on the person one harms.

The Lotus Sutra is the eye of all the Buddhas. It is the original teacher of Shakyamuni Buddha himself, the lord of teachings. If one discards one word or even one brushstroke of the sutra, the offense is graver than that of one who kills one's parents ten million times over, or even of one who sheds the blood of all the Buddhas in the ten

directions. This is why those who forsook the Lotus Sutra had to suffer for a period of major world system dust particle kalpas or numberless major world system dust particle kalpas. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to meet a person who expounds this sutra exactly as the sutra directs. It is even more difficult than for a one-eyed turtle to find a piece of floating sandalwood, or for someone to hang Mount Sumeru from the sky with the fiber from a lotus stem.

The Great Teacher Tz'u-en was the disciple of the Tripitaka Master Hsüan-tsang and the teacher of Emperor T'ai-tsung. He was a sage who not only was well versed in the Sanskrit and Chinese scriptures, but also had memorized all of the Buddha's sutras. The Buddha's ashes fell from the tip of his writing brush, and light shone forth from his teeth.⁶ His contemporaries respected him as though he were the sun and moon, and people in later ages earnestly sought out his teachings as guides for living. Even so, the Great Teacher Dengyo denounced him, stating that though he praises the Lotus Sutra he destroys its heart.⁷ This statement means that, though he intended to praise the Lotus Sutra, in the end, he destroyed it.

The Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei was once the king of Udyana in India. He abdicated the throne, became a monk, and in the course of his Buddhist practice, journeyed through more than fifty countries in India, finally mastering all the esoteric and exoteric teachings of Buddhism. Later he went to China and became the teacher of Emperor Hsüan-tsung. Every True Word priest in both China and Japan has since become his follower. In spite of his having been such a noble person, he died suddenly, tormented by Yama, the lord of hell, though no one knows why.

I, Nichiren, believe that this happened because, though Shan-wu-wei

was first a votary of the Lotus Sutra, when he read the Mahavairocana Sutra, he declared it superior to the Lotus Sutra. Similarly, it was not because they had committed the ten evil acts or five cardinal sins that Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, and the like were doomed to wander through the evil paths of existence for the period of major world system dust particle kalpas or numberless major world system dust particle kalpas. Nor was it because they had perpetrated rebellion or any other of the eight offenses.⁸ It was because they had met someone who was an evil influence and discarded the Lotus Sutra to take faith in the provisional sutras.

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai commented, "If they encounter an evil friend, they will lose their true mind."⁹ "True mind" means the mind that believes in the Lotus Sutra, while "lose" means to betray one's faith in the Lotus Sutra and transfer one's allegiance to other sutras. The sutra reads, "... but when they are given the medicine, they refuse to take it."¹⁰ T'ien-t'ai stated, "Those who have lost their minds refuse to take the good medicine, even though it is given to them. Lost in the sufferings of birth and death, they run away to another land."¹¹

Since this is so, believers in the Lotus Sutra should fear those who attempt to obstruct their practice more than they fear bandits, burglars, night raiders, tigers, wolves, or lions—even more than invasion now by the Mongols. This world is the domain of the devil king of the sixth heaven. All of its people have been under the rule of this devil king since time without beginning. Not only has he built the prison of the twenty-five realms of existence¹² within the six paths and confined all humankind within it, but also he has made wives and children into shackles, and parents and sovereigns into nets that block off the skies. To deceive the true mind of the Buddha nature, he

causes the people to drink the wine of greed, anger, and foolishness, and feeds them nothing but dishes of evil that leave them prostrate on the ground of the three evil paths. When he happens on persons who have turned their hearts to goodness, he acts to obstruct them. He is determined to make believers in the Lotus Sutra fall into evil, but if he is unsuccessful, he tries to deceive them gradually by luring them toward the Flower Garland Sutra, which resembles the Lotus Sutra.

This was done by Tu-shun, Chih-yen, Fa-tsang, and Ch'eng-kuan.¹³ Then Chia-hsiang and Seng-ch'üan were the evil companions who craftily deceived believers in the Lotus Sutra into falling back to the Wisdom sutras. Similarly, Hsüan-tsang and Tz'u-en led them toward the Profound Secrets Sutra, while Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, Pu-k'ung, Kobo, Jikaku, and Chisho deceived them into following the Mahavairochana Sutra. Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o caused them to stray into the Zen school, while Shan-tao and Honen tricked them into believing the Meditation Sutra. In each case, the devil king of the sixth heaven possessed these men of wisdom in order to deceive good people. This is what the Lotus Sutra means when it says in its fifth volume, "Evil demons will take possession of others."¹⁴

The great demon of fundamental darkness can even enter the bodies of bodhisattvas who have reached near-perfect enlightenment and prevent them from attaining the Lotus Sutra's blessing of perfect enlightenment. How easily can he then obstruct those in any lower stage of practice! The devil king of the sixth heaven takes possession of the bodies of wives and children, and causes them to lead their husbands or parents astray. He also possesses the sovereign in order to threaten the votary of the Lotus Sutra, or possesses fathers and mothers, and makes them

reproach their filially devoted children.

Prince Siddhartha sought to renounce his title, but his son, Rahula, had already been conceived. His father, King Shuddhodana, therefore admonished him to put off leaving to become a monk until after the child was born. The devil took advantage of the situation and delayed the childbirth for six years.

Shariputra began his bodhisattva practice in the distant past, in the latter age after the passing of Zentara Buddha. He had already practiced for sixty kalpas when the devil king of the sixth heaven became worried that in another forty kalpas Shariputra would complete his practice. The devil disguised himself as a Brahman and begged Shariputra for his eye. In response, Shariputra gave him one of his eyes, but from that moment, he lost his will to practice and then gave up, thereby falling into the hell of incessant suffering for countless kalpas.¹⁵ Six hundred and eighty million lay believers in the age after the passing of Great Adornment Buddha were deceived by the monk Shore of Suffering and three other monks so that they denounced the monk Universal Practice, and as a result fell into the same hell for as many kalpas as there are the dust particles of the land. The men and women in the latter age after the passing of Lion Sound King Buddha followed the monk Superior Intent who observed the precepts, but mocked the monk Root of Joy, and so fell into hell, where they remained for countless kalpas.

It is the same with Nichiren's disciples and lay supporters. The Lotus Sutra reads, "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?"¹⁶ It also reads, "It will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe."¹⁷ The Nirvana Sutra states, "By suffering an untimely death,

rebuke, curses or humiliation, beatings with a whip or rod, imprisonment, starvation, adversity, or other minor hardships in this lifetime, one can avoid falling into hell.” The Parinirvana Sutra says: “They may be poorly clad and poorly fed, seek wealth in vain, be born to an impoverished and lowly family or one with erroneous views, or be persecuted by their sovereign. They may be subjected to various other sufferings and retributions. It is due to the blessings obtained by protecting the Law that they can diminish in this lifetime their suffering and retribution.”

These passages mean that we, who now believe in the correct teaching, in the past once committed the offense of persecuting its practitioners, and therefore are destined to fall into a terrible hell in the future. The blessings gained by practicing the correct teaching, however, are so great that by meeting minor sufferings in this life we can change the karma that destines us to suffer terribly in the future. As the sutra says, one’s past slander may cause one to suffer various retributions, such as being born into a poor family or a family with erroneous views or being persecuted by one’s sovereign. A “family with erroneous views” means one that slanders the correct teaching, and “persecution by one’s sovereign” means to live under the reign of an evil ruler. These are the two sufferings confronting you now. In order to expiate the sin of your past slanders, you are opposed by your parents, who hold mistaken views, and must live in the age of a ruler who persecutes the votary of the Lotus Sutra. The sutra makes this absolutely clear. Never doubt that you slandered the correct teaching in the past. If you have doubt about this, you will be unable to withstand the minor sufferings of this life. Then you may give in to your father’s opposition and desert the Lotus Sutra against your will. Remember that, if this happens,

not only will you fall into hell, but also your precious parents will fall into the great Avichi hell, causing all of you indescribable grief. The essential thing is a great resolve to attain the way.

Both of you have continued believing in the Lotus Sutra; thus you are now ridding yourselves of your grave offenses from the past. For example, the flaws in iron come to the surface when it is forged. Put into flames, a rock simply turns to ashes, but gold becomes pure gold. This trial, more than anything else, will prove your faith genuine, and the ten demon daughters of the Lotus Sutra will surely protect you. The demon who appeared to test the boy Snow Mountains was actually Shakra. The dove saved by King Shibi was the heavenly king Vaishravana.¹⁸ It is even possible that the ten demon daughters have possessed your parents and are tormenting you in order to test your faith. Any weakness in faith will be a cause for regret. The cart that overturns on the road ahead is a warning to the one behind.

In an age like this no one can help but thirst for the way. You may hate this world, but you cannot escape it. The people of Japan are certain to meet with terrible misfortune in the immediate future. The revolt¹⁹ that broke out on the eleventh day of the second month in the ninth year of Bun’ei (1272) was like blossoms being lashed by a gale, or like bolts of silk burning in an inferno. Who can help but abhor a world like ours?

In the tenth month of the eleventh year of Bun’ei, the people on Iki and Tsushima islands²⁰ were slaughtered at one stroke. How can we say that this is no concern of ours? The soldiers who went off to confront the invaders—how forlorn they must be! They had to leave behind their aged parents, small children, young wives, and cherished homes to go out and defend a sea to

no avail. If they see clouds on the horizon, they imagine them to be the enemy's banners. If they see fishing boats, they think them Mongol warships and are paralyzed with fear. Once or twice a day they climb the hills to look out over the sea. Three or four times in the middle of the night they saddle and unsaddle their horses. Though still alive, they feel as if they were in the world of asuras. All this and the hardships you have suffered as well can ultimately be blamed on the fact that this country's ruler has become an enemy of the Lotus Sutra. His opposition was instigated by the slanderers of the correct teaching, particularly the observers of the precepts and the Nembutsu and True Word priests. You must persevere through this trial and see for yourselves the blessings of the Lotus Sutra. I, Nichiren, will also emphatically call on the heavenly gods. Now more than ever, you must neither show nor feel any fear.

Women are fainthearted, and your wives have probably given up their belief. Yet you must grit your teeth and never slacken in your faith. Be as fearless as Nichiren when he acted and spoke out before Hei no Saemon-no-jo. Although theirs was not the path to Buddhahood, the sons of Lord Wada and of the governor of Wakasa,²¹ as well as the warriors under Masakado and Sadato, fought to the death to preserve their honor. Death comes to all, even should nothing untoward ever happen. Therefore, you must never be cowardly, or you will become the object of ridicule.

I am deeply concerned about you both. Therefore, I will relate a story that is important for you. Two princes named Po I and Shu Ch'i were the sons of the ruler of Ku-chu in China. Their father had willed his title to the younger brother, Shu Ch'i, yet after he passed away, Shu Ch'i refused to ascend the throne. Po I urged Shu Ch'i to

assume the title, but Shu Ch'i insisted that Po I, the elder brother, should do so instead. Po I persisted, asking how the younger brother could contradict their father's will. Shu Ch'i agreed that their father's will clearly named him, yet he still refused the throne, claiming that he could not bear to push his elder brother aside.

Both brothers then abandoned their parents' state and traveled to another where they entered the service of King Wen of Chou. Shortly thereafter, the state was attacked; King Wen was killed by King Chou of the Yin dynasty. Less than a hundred days after King Wen's death, his son, King Wu, was preparing to do battle with King Chou, but Po I and Shu Ch'i, holding fast to the reins of his horse, strove to dissuade him, saying, "You should be in mourning for three years after your father's death. If you start a war now, can this conduct be called filial?" King Wu grew furious at this and was about to kill them both, but T'ai-kung Wang, the king's counselor, restrained him.

The two were so loath to have anything more to do with this king that they went off to seclude themselves in Mount Shou-yang, where they lived solely on ferns. One day a person named Ma Tzu passed by and asked, "Why have you hidden yourselves in a place like this?" They told Ma Tzu the whole story, and he replied, "If that is so, don't these ferns also belong to the king?" Thus reproached, they immediately stopped eating the plants.

It is not the way of heaven to forsake worthy men. Therefore, a god appeared to them as a white deer and provided them with milk. After the deer had gone, Shu Ch'i said, "Since the white deer's milk is so sweet to drink, its meat must taste even better!" Po I tried to silence him, but heaven had already heard his words, and the brothers were abandoned at once. Thus they eventually starved to death. Even

though one acts virtuously throughout one's life, a single word can ruin one. Not knowing what thoughts you have in your hearts, I worry about you a great deal.

When the Thus Come One Shakyamuni was a prince, his father, King Shuddhodana, could not bear losing his only heir and so would not allow him to renounce his royal station. The king kept two thousand soldiers posted at the palace's four gates to prevent him from leaving. Nevertheless, the prince eventually left the palace against his father's will. In all worldly affairs, it is the son's duty to obey his parents, yet on the path to Buddhahood, disobeying one's parents ultimately constitutes filial piety. The Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra explains the essence of filial piety: "By renouncing one's obligations and entering the Buddhist life one can truly repay those obligations in full."²² That is, in order to enter the true way, one leaves one's home against one's parents' wishes and attains Buddhahood. Then one can truly repay one's debt of gratitude to them.

In worldly affairs as well, if one's parents foment a rebellion, it is one's filial duty not to follow them. This is mentioned in *The Classic of Filial Piety*. When the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai engaged in meditation on the Lotus Sutra, he saw his deceased parents seated on his lap to obstruct his practice of Buddhism. This was the work of the heavenly devil, who took the form of his father and mother in order to oppose him.

I have just cited the story of Po I and Shu Ch'i. There is one more lesson you should learn from history. Emperor Ojin, who is now Great Bodhisattva Hachiman, was the sixteenth sovereign of Japan. Emperor Ojin had two sons: the first was Prince Nintoku, and the second, Prince Uji. The emperor transferred his throne to the younger brother,

Uji. After their father passed away, Uji asked his elder brother to take the throne, but the elder brother reproached him, saying, "How can you refuse to comply with our father's will?"

They argued back and forth, and for three full years no one claimed the throne. As a result, the people suffered indescribable grief. It was like a curse on the nation, and Prince Uji finally thought, "As long as I am alive, my brother will not assume the throne." So he committed suicide. At this Prince Nintoku was racked with sorrow and fell into despair. Seeing this, Prince Uji came back to life in order to give words of encouragement to his brother; then he passed away again. It is recorded that, when Nintoku at last ascended the throne, the nation became peaceful and received eighty boatloads of tribute yearly from the three Korean kingdoms of Silla, Paekche, and Koguryō.²³

Other cases exist where the relationship between the sons of worthy rulers was not harmonious. What bonds have enabled you two brothers to continue on such good terms? Could you be princes Pure Storehouse and Pure Eye reborn, or the embodiments of the bodhisattvas Medicine King and Medicine Superior?²⁴ When your father disowned Tayu no Sakan, I expected that Hyoe no Sakan would refuse to side with his brother, thereby making it even more difficult to clear up your father's doubt and have him rescind his disownment. If what the boy Tsuruo told me is true, you two were alike in your resolve. So overjoyed was I at this unbelievable news that I wrote another letter. Could there ever be a more wonderful story than your own?

The Record of the Western Regions tells about a hermit who lived in Deer Park at Varanasi, India, in the hopes that he could master occult powers. He learned to turn tiles and pebbles into jewels and change the forms of humans

and animals, but he could not yet ride on winds and clouds or travel to the Palace of the Immortals. In order to accomplish these goals, he took as his assistant a man of integrity. Giving him a long sword, the hermit instructed him to stand in one corner of a practice platform, and told him to hold his breath and utter not a word. If the man remained silent through the whole night until dawn, the hermit was certain to master the occult. Determined, the hermit sat in the center of the platform with another long sword in hand and chanted incantations. Making his assistant take a vow, he said, "Even at the cost of your life, say nothing!" The man answered, "Though I die, not a word will leave these lips."

In this manner they passed the night until, just as dawn was about to break, the man cried out suddenly, and the hermit immediately failed in his attempt. He reproached the man, saying, "How could you have broken your vow? This is deplorable!" Repenting deeply, the man said: "I dozed off for a little while, and in a dream, my previous master appeared and rebuked me. Yet I endured this, not uttering a word, for my debt of gratitude to you is much greater. My former master grew furious and threatened to behead me, but I still said nothing. Finally I was beheaded, and when I saw my own corpse proceeding on its journey from death to the next life, my sorrow was indescribable. Still, I did not speak. Eventually I was reborn in a Brahman family in southern India. The pain I felt on entering and leaving the womb was unbearable, yet I held my breath without crying. I grew up to be a young man and took a wife. My parents died; my child was born; I felt sorrow and joy, but said not a word. Living on like this, I reached my sixty-fifth year. Then my wife said to me, 'If you still refuse to say anything, I will kill your beloved child.' The thought

flashed through my mind that I was already in the last years of my life, and that if my child were killed I could not beget another. Feeling that I must shout . . . I suddenly awoke."

The hermit said, "We were not strong enough. You and I have been deceived by a devil. Our task has ended in failure." Lamenting, the man of integrity said, "Because I was so weak-willed, you have failed to master the occult." The hermit regretfully replied, "It is my fault for not having admonished you enough beforehand." Nonetheless, as the record states, the man was so grieved he could not fulfill his obligation to the hermit that he brooded over it and died miserably.

In China the occult evolved from Confucianism, and in India it is found among the non-Buddhist teachings. Yet it does not even approach the Hinayana teachings of the Agama sutras, much less the connecting teaching, the specific teaching, or the perfect teaching. Therefore, how could it measure up to the Lotus Sutra? The four devils fiercely oppose the mastery of even such a shallow art as the occult. How much greater, then, are the tribulations that will confront the disciples and lay supporters of the person who is the first to embrace and the first to propagate in Japan the seven characters of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the ultimate principle of the Lotus Sutra. It is impossible to imagine, let alone describe in words.

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai's *Great Concentration and Insight* is the essence of his lifetime teachings and the heart of the whole spectrum of the Buddha's sacred teachings. During the more than five hundred years after Buddhism was introduced to China, ten teachers appeared—seven in the north, three in the south. Their wisdom was as brilliant as the sun and moon, and their virtue was extolled throughout the country, yet they were confused as to

which sutras were shallow or deep, inferior or superior, and as to the order in which they had been taught. It was the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-che who not only clarified the Buddha's teachings, but also brought forth the wish-granting jewel of a single moment of life comprising three thousand realms from the repository of the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo and bestowed it on all people in the three countries.²⁵ This teaching originated in China. Not even the scholars of India could put forward such a concept. So the Great Teacher Chang-an commented, "There has never been anything to compare to the brightness and serenity of concentration and insight,"²⁶ and "Even the great scholars of India were not in a class with him."²⁷

The doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life revealed in the fifth volume of *Great Concentration and Insight* is especially profound. If you propagate it, devils will arise without fail. If they did not, there would be no way of knowing that this is the correct teaching. One passage from the same volume reads: "As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge in confusing form, vying with one another to interfere. . . . One should be neither influenced nor frightened by them. If one falls under their influence, one will be led into the paths of evil. If one is frightened by them, one will be prevented from practicing the correct teaching." This statement not only applies to me, but also is a guide for my followers. Reverently make this teaching your own, and transmit it as an axiom of faith for future generations.

The three obstacles in this passage are the obstacle of earthly desires, the obstacle of karma, and the obstacle of retribution. The obstacle of earthly desires is the impediments to one's practice that arise from greed, anger, foolishness, and the like; the obstacle of karma is the

hindrances presented by one's wife or children; and the obstacle of retribution is the hindrances caused by one's sovereign or parents. Of the four devils, the workings of the devil king of the sixth heaven are of this last kind.

In Japan today, many people claim they have mastered the practice of concentration and insight. But is there anyone who has actually encountered the three obstacles and four devils? The statement "If one falls under their influence, one will be led into the paths of evil" indicates not only the three evil paths but also the worlds of human and heavenly beings, and in general, all of the nine worlds. Therefore, with the exception of the Lotus Sutra, all of the sutras—those of the Flower Garland, Agama, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom periods, and the Nirvana and Mahavairochana sutras—will lead people toward the paths of evil. Also, with the exception of the Tendai school, the adherents of the seven other schools²⁸ are in reality wardens of hell who drive others toward the evil paths. Even in the Tendai school are found those who profess faith in the Lotus Sutra, yet actually lead others toward the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. They, too, are wardens of hell who cause people to fall into the evil paths.

Now you two brothers are like the hermit and the man of integrity. If either of you gives up halfway, you will both fail to achieve Buddhahood. You are like the two wings of a bird, or the two eyes of a person. And your wives are your support. Women support others and thereby cause others to support them. When a husband is happy, his wife will be fulfilled. If a husband is a thief, his wife will become one, too. This is not a matter of this life alone. A husband and wife are as close as a form and shadow, flowers and fruit, or roots and leaves, in every existence of life. Insects eat the trees they live in, and fish drink the water in which they

swim. If grasses wither, orchids grieve; if pine trees flourish, cypresses rejoice.²⁹ Even trees and plants are so closely related. The *hiyoku* is a bird with one body and two heads. Both of its mouths nourish the same body. *Himoku* are fish with only one eye each, so the male and female remain together for life. A husband and wife should be like them.

You two wives should have no regrets even if your husbands do you harm because of your faith in this teaching. If both of you unite in encouraging your husbands' faith, you will follow the path of the dragon king's daughter and become a model for women attaining Buddhahood in the evil latter age. Insofar as you can act this way, no matter what may happen, Nichiren will tell the two sages, the two heavenly kings,³⁰ the ten demon daughters, Shakyamuni, and Many Treasures to make you Buddhas in every future existence. A passage in the Six Paramitas Sutra says to become the master of your mind rather than let your mind master you.

Whatever trouble occurs, regard it as no more than a dream, and think only

of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren's teaching was especially difficult to believe at first, but now that my prophecies have been fulfilled, those who slandered without reason have come to repent. Even if in the future other men and women become my believers, they will not replace you in my heart. Among those who believed at first, many later discarded their faith, fearing that society would reject them. Among these are some who oppose me more furiously than those who slandered from the beginning.

In Shakyamuni Buddha's lifetime, the monk Sunakshatra believed the Buddha at first, then later not only backslid, but also slandered so viciously that even the Buddha could not save him from falling into the hell of incessant suffering. This letter was written particularly for Hyoe no Sakan. It should also be read to his wife and to Tayu no Sakan's. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

Nichiren

The sixteenth day of the fourth month in the twelfth year of Bun'ei (1275)



Background

The two brothers to whom this letter is addressed were the sons of Ikegami Saemon no Tayu Yasumitsu, who held an important post in Kamakura in the government's Office of Construction and Repairs. The older brother, Munenaka (Ikegami Uemon no Tayu Munenaka; d. 1293), was probably converted to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1256, and the younger brother, Munenaga (Ikegami Hyoe no Sakan Munenaga; d. 1283), shortly thereafter.

The father, Yasumitsu, was a loyal follower of Ryokan, chief priest of

Gokuraku-ji temple of the True Word Precepts school, and vehemently opposed the beliefs of his two sons for over twenty years. In fact, he went so far as to disown his elder son on two occasions, in 1275 and 1277. Primogeniture, the right of the eldest son to succeed to the wealth and social prestige of the family, was a vitally important aspect of Japanese society. The individual scarcely existed outside a family context, and centuries of intra-family rivalry, feuding, and even murder attested to the importance of being first

in line for inheritance. Virtually insurmountable social and economic sanctions existed against disowned persons.

By disowning Munenaka, their father in effect was provoking rivalry between the two sons by tempting Munenaga to trade his beliefs for the right to his father's estate. The Daishonin sent letters of encouragement to the two brothers and their wives, urging them all to unite and maintain their faith. In 1278 the brothers finally succeeded in converting their father to the Daishonin's teachings.

When the Daishonin's health began to fail in 1282, at the urging of his disciples he set out for the hot springs of Hitachi. Sensing that death was immi-

nent, however, he shunned the hot springs in favor of a trip to Munenaka's residence in Ikegami in what is present-day Tokyo. There, after having taken measures to ensure the perpetuity of his teachings, he passed away on the thirteenth day of the tenth month, 1282.

Letter to the Brothers mentions three ways in which obstacles should be viewed in the light of Buddhism: (1) as an opportunity to use strong faith to purge oneself of bad karma from the past; (2) as an instance of evil friends attempting to obstruct one's practice; and (3) as an example of the negative function of the devil king of the sixth heaven possessing one's parents or others in order to destroy one's faith.

Notes

1. The Yung-p'ing era began in C.E. 58. The T'ang dynasty ended in C.E. 907.

2. "The older translations" refers to the sutras translated into Chinese primarily by Kumarajiva (344-413) and Paramartha (499-569), who emphasized conveying the true meaning. "The newer translations" refers to those made by Hsüan-tsang (602-664) and by later translators, who placed greater stress on literal translation.

3. In his *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, T'ien-t'ai delineates 136 kinds of hell—eight great hells, each with sixteen subsidiary hells. The last and worst of the eight great hells is the hell of incessant suffering. The point is that one's suffering differs in accord with the nature and degree of one's offense.

4. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

5. The hell of repeated rebirth for torture is the first of the eight great hells, where victims are slashed with swords and pounded with iron staves, but their bodies immediately regenerate, and they undergo the same torment again and again. The hell of black cords is the second of the eight great hells, where the denizens are either sawed in half or cut apart by red-hot axes. Suffering here is said to be ten times greater than in the hell of repeated rebirth for torture.

6. Based on a passage in *The Sung Dynasty Biographies of Eminent Priests*.

7. *The Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra*.

8. Crimes as defined by the Taiho code (effective 702) and the Yoro code (757). They are: (1) rebellion against the emperor, (2) damage to imperial tombs or palaces, (3) treason against the nation, (4) killing of one's relatives, (5) killing of one's wife or more than three people belonging to another family, (6) theft or damage of imperial or religious property, (7) unfilial conduct toward one's parents or senior relatives, and (8) killing of one's teacher or other superior.

9. *Profound Meaning*.

10. Lotus Sutra, chap. 16.

11. *Profound Meaning*.

12. Subdivisions of the threefold world—fourteen realms in the world of desire, seven in the world of form, and four in the world of formlessness. All twenty-five fall into the category of the six paths or lower worlds.

13. Tu-shun (557-640), Chih-yen (602-668), Fa-tsang (643-712), and Ch'eng-kuan (738-839) were the founder and successive patriarchs of the Flower Garland school. Chia-hsiang (549-623), who is referred to in the next sentence, is sometimes regarded as the founder of the Three Treatises school, and Seng-ch'üan was an early practitioner of the same school.

14. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

15. This story is found in *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*. Once when Shariputra was practicing the bodhisattva way, a Brahman begged him for his eye. Shariputra gave it to him, but the Brahman was so revolted by its smell that he dropped and crushed it. Seeing this, Shariputra discontinued his bodhisattva practice, fell back to the Hinayana practice, and therefore was unable to attain Buddhahood.

16. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

17. *Ibid.*, chap. 14.

18. According to *Great Perfection of Wisdom* and *The Garland of Birth Stories*, the dove saved by King Shibi was the god Vishvakarman. For Shibi, see Glossary.

19. This refers to fighting that broke out in Kamakura and Kyoto as a result of a power struggle within the ruling Hojo family.

20. Reference is to the invasion of Iki and Tsushima, islands off Kyushu, by Mongol troops.

21. Lord Wada is Wada Yoshimori (1147–1213), a military official of the Kamakura regime, who was tricked into fighting against the Hojo clan and whose entire family was wiped out. The governor of Wakasa is Miura Yasumura (d. 1247), who was related to the Hojo by marriage, but was accused of treason; he and his entire family lost their lives in battle.

22. This passage is not found in the *Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra*, but it is cited in *The Forest of Gems in*

the Garden of the Law as a passage from the *Salvation by Men of Pure Faith Sutra*. “The Buddhist life” in the sutra’s context means a monastic life, but here the Daishonin interprets it as a life based on faith in the Mystic Law.

23. This story appears in *The Chronicles of Japan* in the section on Emperor Nintoku.

24. Bodhisattvas who cure physical and mental diseases. According to the “King Wonderful Adornment” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, in a previous life they were the brothers Pure Storehouse and Pure Eye, who converted their father, the king Wonderful Adornment, to the correct teaching.

25. India, China, and Japan.

26. Introduction to *Great Concentration and Insight*.

27. *Profound Meaning*, T’ien-t’ai’s major work, recorded by Chang-an.

28. The seven other schools are the three Hinayana schools of Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, and Precepts, and the four Mahayana schools of Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, Flower Garland, and True Word.

29. This passage alludes to the “Lamentation on Passing Away” by Lu Chi (261–303), contained in *Literary Anthology*.

30. The two sages are the bodhisattvas Medicine King and Brave Donor, and the two heavenly kings are Vaishravana and Upholder of the Nation.