

## Letter to Horen



THE “Teacher of the Law” chapter in the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states: “If there should be an evil person who, his mind destitute of goodness, should for the space of a kalpa appear in the presence of the Buddha and constantly curse and revile the Buddha, that person’s offense would still be rather light. But if there were a person who spoke only one evil word to curse or defame the lay persons or monks or nuns who read and recite the Lotus Sutra, then his offense would be very grave.”

The Great Teacher Miao-lo commented on this: “The benefits conferred by this sutra are lofty, and its principles are the highest. Therefore, this statement is made with regard to it. Nothing like this is said about any other sutra.”<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the meaning of this sutra passage, the definition of a kalpa is as follows. Suppose that the span of human life is eighty thousand years, and that it decreases one year every hundred years, or ten years every thousand years. Let us suppose that it decreases at this rate until the life span has reached ten years.

At this point, a person ten years old would be like an eighty-year-old man of today. Then the process would reverse, and after a hundred years, the life span would increase to eleven years,

and after another hundred years, to twelve years. After a thousand years it would have increased to twenty years, and this would continue until it once more reached eighty thousand years. The time required to complete this combined process of decrease and increase is called a kalpa. There are various other definitions of a kalpa, but for the time being I will use the word kalpa in the sense defined above.

There are persons who, throughout this period of a kalpa, manifest hatred toward the Buddha by carrying out various activities in the three categories of body, mouth, and mind. Such a person was Devadatta.

The Buddha was the son and heir of King Shuddhodana, and Devadatta was a son of King Dronodana. These two kings were brothers, so Devadatta was a cousin of the Buddha.

In the present as in the past, among sages as among ordinary men, trouble arising over a woman has been one of the prime causes of enmity. When Shakyamuni Thus Come One was still known as Prince Siddhartha, and Devadatta had been designated prince and heir to his father, it happened that a high minister named Yasha had a daughter named Yashodhara. She was the most beautiful woman in all of the five regions of India, a veritable goddess whose fame was known throughout the four seas.

Siddhartha and Devadatta vied with each other to win her hand in marriage; hence discord arose between them.

Later, Siddhartha left his family and became a Buddha, and Devadatta, taking the monk Sudaya as his teacher, left his family to become a monk.

The Buddha observed the two hundred and fifty precepts and abided by the three thousand rules of conduct, so that all heavenly and human beings looked up to him with admiration, and the four kinds of believers honored and revered him. Devadatta, however, did not command such respect from others, so he began to consider whether there was not some way he could gain worldly fame that would surpass that of the Buddha. He came across five criteria by which he might surpass the Buddha and gain recognition from society. As noted in *The Fourfold Rules of Discipline*, they were: (1) to wear robes of rags; (2) to seek food only by begging; (3) to eat only one meal a day; (4) to sit out always in the open; and (5) to take neither salt nor the five flavors.<sup>2</sup> The Buddha would accept robes given to him by others, but Devadatta wore only robes made of rags. The Buddha would accept meals that were served to him, but Devadatta lived on alms alone. The Buddha would eat once, twice, or three times a day, but Devadatta would eat only once. The Buddha would take shelter in graveyards or under trees, but Devadatta sat out in the open all day long. The Buddha would on occasion consent to take salt or the five flavors, but Devadatta accepted none of them. And because Devadatta observed these rules, people came to believe that he was far superior to the Buddha, and that they were as far apart as clouds and mud.

In this way Devadatta sought to deprive the Buddha of his standing. The Buddha was supported by the lay believer King Bimbisara. Every day the king supplied five hundred cartloads of

alms to the Buddha as well as to his disciples, doing so over a period of years without missing a single day. Devadatta, jealous of such devotion and hoping to secure it for himself, won Prince Enemy Before Birth<sup>3</sup> over to his side and persuaded him to kill his father, King Bimbisara.

He himself set out to kill the Buddha, hurling a rock and striking the Buddha with it; such was the deed he carried out with his body. In addition, he slandered and cursed the Buddha, calling him a liar and a deceiver; such was the deed he committed with his mouth. And, in his heart, he thought of the Buddha as a foe from his previous lifetime; such was the deed he engaged in with his mind. The great evil of these three interacting deeds has never been surpassed.

Suppose that a terribly evil man like Devadatta were to engage in these three types of deeds, and for an entire medium kalpa, curse and revile Shakyamuni Buddha, striking him with staves and behaving toward him with jealousy and envy. The enormous guilt he would incur would be weighty indeed.

This great earth of ours is 168,000 yojanas thick, and therefore it is capable of supporting the waters of the four great seas, the dirt and stones of the nine mountains, every kind of plant and tree, and all living beings, without ever collapsing, tipping, or breaking apart. And yet, when Devadatta, a human being whose body measured five feet, committed no more than three cardinal sins, the great earth broke open and he fell into hell; the hole through which he fell still exists in India. The Tripitaka Master Hsüan-tsang stated in the text known as *The Record of the Western Regions* that when he journeyed from China to India for the sake of his practice he saw it there.

However, it is said that if one neither at heart thinks ill of the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the latter age nor in

one's bearing shows envy toward him, but merely reviles him in a joking manner, then the consequences will be even worse than those brought about by Devadatta when, by committing the three types of deeds, he cursed and reviled the Buddha for an entire medium kalpa. How much worse, then, would the consequences be if the people of the present age were to set about conducting themselves like Devadatta, carrying out these three types of deeds with truly evil hearts over a period of many years—cursing and reviling the votary of the Lotus Sutra, subjecting him to defamation and insult, envying and feeling jealous of him, beating and striking him, putting him to death under false charges and murdering him.

Question: When someone displays animosity toward the votary of the Lotus Sutra in this latter age, what hell will that person fall into?

Answer: The second volume of the Lotus Sutra states: "If this person [should slander a sutra such as this], or on seeing those who read, recite, copy, and uphold this sutra, should despise, hate, envy, or bear grudges against them . . . When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avichi hell, be confined there for a whole kalpa, and when the kalpa ends, die there again. He will keep repeating this cycle for a countless number of kalpas."<sup>4</sup>

Five hundred yojanas beneath the surface of the earth is the palace of King Yama. And fifteen hundred yojanas beneath the palace of King Yama are the eight great hells and the rest of the 136 hells. Of these 136 hells, 128 are for the consignment of persons who have committed minor offenses; the eight great hells are for those who have committed grave offenses. Of the eight great hells, seven are for people who have committed the ten evil acts. The eighth hell—the hell of incessant suffering—is for the consignment of three types of persons: those who have com-

mitted the five cardinal sins, those who have been unfilial,<sup>5</sup> and those who have slandered the Law. The passage I have just quoted makes it clear that people who curse, revile, or slander the votary of the Lotus Sutra in this latter age, even if they do so merely in jest, will fall into this hell.

The "Teacher of the Law" chapter in the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states: "If there is someone who seeks the Buddha way and for the space of a kalpa [presses palms together in my presence and recites numberless verses of praise, because of these praises of the Buddha he will gain immeasurable blessings]. And if one lauds and extols those who uphold this sutra, one's good fortune will be even greater."

The Great Teacher Miao-lo remarked: "Those who vex or trouble [the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra] will have their heads split into seven pieces, but those who give alms to them will enjoy good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles."<sup>6</sup>

Among human beings, the foremost is the ruler known as a wheel-turning king. When a wheel-turning king is about to appear in the world, an omen precedes him, a huge tree known as an udumbara growing up in the midst of the ocean, bearing flowers and fruit.

When a gold-wheel-turning king appears, the mountains and seas of the four continents become level, the great earth becomes soft as cotton, the seas become sweet as amrita, the mountains become mountains of gold, and the plants and trees turn into the seven kinds of treasures.

The wheel-turning king can travel throughout the entirety of the four continents in an instant; therefore, the heavenly gods guard and protect him, the spirits gather about and serve him, and the dragon kings cause rain to fall at the proper time. If ordinary people of inferior capacity follow such a ruler, then they, too, can travel throughout

the four continents in an instant. All of these things come about solely because the wheel-turning king abides by the ten good precepts; these are the rewards that result from that observance.

Incomparably superior to the wheel-turning kings are Vaishravana and the rest of the four heavenly kings. These are the great kings who preside freely over the four continents.

Shakra is the lord of the heaven of the thirty-three gods. The devil king of the sixth heaven dwells at the summit of the world of desire and rules over the threefold world. These beings were able to obtain their positions because they observed the highest class of the ten good precepts and carried out the highly virtuous act of making impartial offerings.

The great heavenly king Brahma is the most highly honored among the heavenly beings in the threefold world. He dwells at the summit of the world of form, is attended by the devil king of the sixth heaven and Shakra, and holds a major world system in his hand. In addition to having practiced the kind of meditation that is still accompanied by illusions, he has cultivated the four infinite virtues—pity, compassion, joy, and impartiality.

The voice-hearer is one like Shari-putra or Mahakashyapa who, in addition to observing the two hundred and fifty precepts and practicing meditation without illusions, has concentrated his attention on the concepts of suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and non-self. He has cut off all the illusions of thought and desire arising in the threefold world and can move entirely at liberty through water or fire. For these reasons, he has Brahma and Shakra as his attendants.

The cause-awakened one is one who is incomparably superior to the voice-hearer, one whose advent in the world rivals that of a Buddha. Long ago there was a hunter who lived in an age of

famine. At that time he gave a bowl of food consisting of millet as an offering to a pratyekabuddha named Rida. As a result, this hunter was reborn as a rich man in the human and heavenly realms for a period of ninety-one kalpas. In our present world, he was called Aniruddha, and was known as the foremost in divine insight among the Buddha's disciples.<sup>7</sup>

The Great Teacher Miao-lo commented on this as follows: "A meal of millet is a trifling thing. But because the donor gave all that he possessed, and because the recipient was a superior being, the donor was able to obtain marvelous recompense."<sup>8</sup>

The meaning of this passage of commentary is that, though a meal of millet may be insignificant, because it was given as an offering to a pratyekabuddha, a person of great worth, the donor was reborn again and again with wonderful rewards.

Next are those known as bodhisattvas, represented by Manjushri and Maitreya. These great bodhisattvas are remarkable beings who are incomparably superior to the pratyekabuddhas. Buddhas are beings who have completely dispelled the darkness associated with the forty-two levels of ignorance and have attained the stage of perfect enlightenment; they are like the full moon on the fifteenth night of the eighth month. These bodhisattvas have dispelled the darkness of forty-one levels of ignorance, thus reaching the mountain summit of near-perfect enlightenment, the next to the last stage; they are like the moon on the fourteenth night.

The Buddha is a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million times superior to the various beings described above. A Buddha is invariably distinguished by thirty-two features. Among these features are a pure and far-reaching voice, an unseen crown of the head, a knot of flesh on the head like a topknot, a tuft

of white hair between the eyebrows, and markings of the thousand-spoked wheel on the sole of each foot. Of these thirty-two features, each one was acquired as the result of a hundred blessings.

What do we mean by a hundred blessings? Let us suppose that all the people in Japan, in China, and in the sixteen great states, the five hundred middle-sized states, and the ten thousand small states that make up the five regions of India are blind, indeed, that all living beings throughout the continent of Jambudvīpa, the four continents, the six heavens of the world of desire, and throughout the entire major world system become blind. And let us suppose that there is a great physician who is capable of bestowing a splendid benefit by restoring sight to, in one instant, the eyes of all these beings. That act would count as the bestowal of a single blessing. When a hundred such blessings are accumulated, it leads to the appearance of one of the thirty-two features.

From this it is apparent that the benefits represented by merely one of these features are greater in number than all the plants and trees within a major world system, or all the drops of rain that fall upon the four continents.

In the time of the kalpa of decline, a great wind known as samghata arises, uprooting Mount Sumeru, lifting it to the highest heaven in the world of form,<sup>9</sup> and then reducing it to particles of dust. But despite all that, not a single hair on the body of the Buddha so much as stirs.

In the breast of the Buddha is a great fire, made up of the great wisdom of equality, the shining light of great knowledge, and the fire pit of meditation.<sup>10</sup> When the Buddha enters nirvana, this great fire blazes forth from his breast and consumes his body. Though the heavenly deities and the dragons and other beings of the six

heavens of the world of desire and the four seas, distressed at the thought of losing the Buddha, gather round and cause torrential rains to fall, until the earth of the entire major world system is under water and Mount Sumeru is about to be washed away, still they cannot put out this huge fire.

The Buddha is thus a person of great virtue. But King Ajatashatru, gathering together evil men from the sixteen great states of India, plotting with non-Buddhists from all around, and acknowledging Devadatta as his teacher, turned numberless hordes of evil people loose, causing them to curse, attack, and kill the Buddha's disciples. Not only that, but he turned against his father, a worthy ruler who was guilty of no fault, pinning him down in seven places with foot-long spikes. He also approached the queen consort—the mother who gave him birth—snatched away her jeweled hairpins, and held a sword to her head. Because of these terrible crimes, his body broke out in virulent sores in seven places.

It was fated that, when twenty-one days had passed, on the seventh day of the third month, the earth would break open, and he would fall into the hell of incessant suffering, to remain there for an entire kalpa. But because he sought out the Buddha, not only did his sores heal, but he was able to escape from the pains of the hell of incessant suffering and to live forty years longer.

The high minister Jivaka was an emissary of the Buddha, and as a result he was able to step into the flames and rescue the son of the rich man of Champa.<sup>11</sup> From this it would appear that once one has made offerings and paid homage to the Buddha, regardless of whether one is an evildoer or a woman, one will be able without fail to attain Buddhahood and achieve the way.

Devadatta had thirty of the distinctive features, but lacked the tuft of

white hair and the markings of the thousand-spoked wheel. Because he lacked two of the features that distinguish the Buddha, he was afraid that his disciples would belittle him. So he gathered fireflies and stuck them between his eyebrows to resemble the tuft of white hair. And for the markings of the thousand-spoked wheel, he had a blacksmith make pieces of iron in the shape of chrysanthemum blossoms and tried to brand them on the soles of his feet, but he succeeded only in burning his feet. As he walked on them, the injury grew worse until he was at the point of death, when he confessed to the Buddha what he had done. The Buddha then stroked the burns with his hand, and all the pain went away.

One might suppose that Devadatta would then repent and reform his ways, but instead he went about telling people that Gautama practiced petty healing tricks and that he resorted to magic.

And yet the Buddha harbored no grudges even against such enemies. How, then, could he ever cast aside anyone who had even once put faith in him?

This is how great the Buddha was. Therefore, when he was depicted in wooden statues or in paintings, his image walked about like the wooden statue carved by King Udayana, or preached the various sutras like the painted image fashioned by Matanga.

So venerable is this personage known as Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings. And yet the blessings to be obtained by honoring him not for an hour or two, not for a day or two, but for the entire space of a kalpa—pressing one's palms together, raising one's eyes to the face of the Buddha, bowing one's head, abandoning all other concerns, going about it as though attempting to put out the fire in one's own head, as though thirsty and seeking water, as though hungry and seeking a meal—

the blessings to be obtained by incessantly making offerings and paying homage to the Buddha in this way cannot match those to be obtained by praising and making offerings to the votary of the Lotus Sutra in this latter age, even though it be only one word spoken in jest, the sort of unenthusiastic praise a stepmother might offer to her stepchild.

The blessings to be obtained from the latter act, it is stated, are a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million times greater than those to be obtained by conducting oneself with a believing heart in the three categories of body, mouth, and mind, and offering alms to the living body of the Buddha for an entire kalpa. This is what the Great Teacher Miao-lo meant when he wrote that one would "enjoy good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles."

The ten honorable titles are ten epithets that are applied to the Buddha. Miao-lo is saying that the blessings to be obtained by making offerings to the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the latter age are greater than those to be obtained by making offerings to the Buddha of the ten honorable titles. This is one of the twenty ways<sup>12</sup> cited by the Great Teacher Miao-lo in which the Lotus Sutra surpasses all other sutras.

The two doctrines<sup>13</sup> outlined above were preached by the Buddha himself, and yet they may be difficult to believe. How, you may ask, could one possibly acquire greater blessings by making offerings to an ordinary person than by making offerings to a Buddha?

However, if you declare that these doctrines are mere lies, then you call into doubt the golden words spoken by the Thus Come One Shakyamuni himself, you make light of the testimony to their truth given by Many Treasures Buddha, and you disregard the sign manifested by the Buddhas of the ten directions when they extended their tongues.<sup>14</sup> And if you do these things, you will fall into the Avichi hell alive.

You will be as nervous and uneasy at heart as a person who tries to ride an unruly horse over a rocky slope.

On the other hand, if you believe these doctrines, you will become a Buddha of perfect enlightenment. How, then, are you to go about nurturing faith in the Lotus Sutra? For if you try to practice the teachings of the sutra without faith, it would be like trying to enter a jeweled mountain without hands [to pick up its treasures], or like trying to make a thousand-mile journey without feet. The answer is simply to examine the proof that is close at hand, and thus to take hold of faith that is far off.

On the first day of the first month of the Buddha's eightieth year, when he had finished preaching the Lotus Sutra, he made this announcement: "Ananda, Maitreya, Mahakashyapa—I came into the world in order to preach the Lotus Sutra. I have accomplished my original intention, and now there is no further reason for me to remain in the world. Three months from now, on the fifteenth day of the second month, I will enter nirvana."<sup>15</sup>

Everyone, both those among the Buddha's followers and outsiders, doubted this pronouncement. But since the Buddha's words are never spoken in vain, when the fifteenth day of the second month at last came, he did in fact enter nirvana. As a result, people recognized that the golden words of the Buddha were true, and they began to have a certain amount of faith in his words.

The Buddha made another prediction, saying: "A hundred years after I pass away, a ruler named Ashoka the Great will appear. He will rule over one-third of the continent of Jambudvīpa, and will erect eighty-four thousand stupas and pay honor to my relics." People doubted this statement as well, but just as the Buddha had predicted, the king appeared; and from

this time onward, people believed.

The Buddha also said, "Four hundred years after I pass away, there will be a great ruler named King Kanishka. He will gather together a group of five hundred arhats, and they will compile the work known as *The Great Commentary on the Abhidharma*." This prediction also came about just as the Buddha had stated.

As a result of these proofs, people came to believe the predictions of the Buddha. If, therefore, the two doctrines I cited earlier are nothing but lies, then everything that is in the Lotus Sutra must be a lie.

In the "Life Span" chapter the Buddha says that he became a Buddha numberless major world system dust particle kalpas in the past. We are ordinary human beings; we can hardly remember what has happened to us since our birth in this present existence, much less what happened one or two lifetimes back. How, then, can we be expected to have faith in what happened numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago?

Moreover, the Buddha made a prediction to Shariputra, saying, "In ages to come, after a countless, boundless, inconceivable number of kalpas have passed, . . . you will be able to become a Buddha with the name Flower Glow Thus Come One."<sup>16</sup> He also made a prediction concerning Mahakashyapa, saying, "In future existences . . . And in his final incarnation he will be able to become a Buddha named Light Bright Thus Come One."<sup>17</sup>

But these passages in the sutra concern events in the distant future, and so it is difficult to expect ordinary people like ourselves to have faith in them. It is thus difficult for ordinary people, who have no knowledge of the distant past or future, to have faith in this sutra. That being the case, even if we were to carry out its practice, what meaning could it have for us?

In light of all this, it would seem that, when one who is able to show clearly visible proof in the present expounds the Lotus Sutra, there also will be persons who will believe.

In the declaration concerning sutra readings that you, the Honorable Horen, have sent to me, you state, "To mark the thirteenth year of the departure of my late beloved father I have performed a five-time recitation of the one vehicle sutra, the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law."

Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, is known by the title World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment. The character that signifies "honored" can be interpreted as "lofty," and the character for "lofty" can be interpreted as "filial piety." Shakyamuni Buddha is honored with the title World-Honored One because, among all the persons noted for their filial devotion, he is the most outstanding.

The body of Shakyamuni Thus Come One was golden-hued and endowed with thirty-two features. Among these thirty-two was an unseen crown of the head, which means that, although the Buddha was sixteen feet tall, the Brahman of the Bamboo Staff school was unable to measure his height,<sup>18</sup> and the deity Brahma was unable to see the top of his head. Hence the name "an unseen crown of the head." And he gained this characteristic because he was a great man who was foremost in filial devotion.

There are two classics on filial piety. One is a non-Buddhist work *The Classic of Filial Piety* by the sage known as Confucius. The other is a Buddhist text, the work known now as the Lotus Sutra. Though one text is Buddhist and the other not, with regard to this point, their import is the same.

What inspired Shakyamuni to devote himself to religious practice over kalpas equal in number to dust particles in an effort to attain Buddhahood? It was

nothing other than the ideal of filial devotion. All the living beings of the six paths and the four forms of birth are our fathers and mothers. Therefore, as long as Shakyamuni was unable to treat them all with filial devotion, he refrained from becoming a Buddha.

The Lotus Sutra offers a secret means for leading all living beings to Buddhahood. It leads one person in the realm of hell, one person in the realm of hungry spirits, and thus one person in each of the nine realms of existence to Buddhahood, and thereby the way is opened for all living beings to attain Buddhahood. The situation is like the joints in a piece of bamboo: if one joint is ruptured, then all the joints will split. Or it is like the move known as *shicho*<sup>19</sup> in the game of go: if one stone is declared "dead," then many stones will "die." The Lotus Sutra also is like these.

Metal has the power to cut down trees and plants, and water has the power to extinguish any kind of fire. In like manner, the Lotus Sutra has the power to bring all living beings to the state of Buddhahood.

Among the living beings of the six paths and the four forms of birth there are both men and women. And these men and women all were our parents at some point in our past existences. Therefore, as long as even one of these fails to attain Buddhahood, then we ourselves cannot become Buddhas.

Hence people of the two vehicles are referred to as those who do not know how to repay their debt of gratitude, and it is taught that they will never be able to attain Buddhahood. This is because they do not universally manifest their sense of filial devotion.

The Buddha became enlightened to the Lotus Sutra, and as a result of the filial devotion that he showed to the mothers and fathers of the six paths and the four forms of birth, his person was endowed with blessings.

And these blessings enjoyed by the Buddha can be transferred by him to people who put their faith in the Lotus Sutra. It is like the food eaten by a loving mother, which turns into milk for the nourishment of her baby. For the Buddha has said, "Now this threefold world is all my domain, and the living beings in it are all my children."<sup>20</sup>

Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, takes these blessings and, in the form of the words that make up the Lotus Sutra, brings them to the mouths of all living beings for them to taste. A baby does not know the difference between water and fire, and cannot distinguish medicine from poison. But when the baby sucks milk, its life is nourished and sustained. Although one may not be versed in the Agama sutras the way Shariputra was, although one does not have the understanding of the Flower Garland Sutra that Bodhisattva Moon of Deliverance had, and although one has not committed to memory all the sacred teachings set forth by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime, as had Bodhisattva Manjushri, if one listens to even one character or one phrase of the Lotus Sutra, one cannot fail to attain Buddhahood.

The five thousand people<sup>21</sup> of overweening pride lacked faith, having listened to the Lotus Sutra but failed to understand it. But because they did not slander it, after three months had passed, they were able to attain Buddhahood. These are the people referred to when the Nirvana Sutra says, "Whether they have faith or do not have faith, all shall be reborn in the immovable land of Buddhahood."

In the case of the Lotus Sutra, even though people may not have faith in it, so long as they do not slander it, then once they have heard it, they will attain Buddhahood, strange as it may seem. It is like a person bitten by the reptile known as the seven-step snake. He may go one step, or as many as seven steps,

but by that time the poison will have had its mysterious effect upon him, and he will be unable to take an eighth step.<sup>22</sup> Or it is like the seven-day embryo in the womb. Within seven days' time, the embryo will invariably change shape. It will never retain the same shape for eight days.

And you, the Honorable Horen, are at present in a similar situation. The blessings of Shakyamuni Buddha have already been transferred to your person. And your person is a continuation of the face and form of your departed father.

It is like a seed that puts forth sprouts, or a flower that produces fruit. Though the flower falls, the fruit remains; though the seed is hidden from sight, the sprout is visible to us.

Thus the blessings that you yourself enjoy are in fact treasures belonging to your late father. When the pine flourishes, the cypress will rejoice; when the grasses wither, the orchids weep. And if even feelingless beings such as plants and trees can behave in this way, then how much more so those who have feelings, let alone those who are bound together as father and son?

In your declaration regarding sutra readings, you state: "From the morning when my compassionate father closed his eyes to the thirteenth anniversary of his passing, I have recited the verse section of the 'Life Span' chapter before Shakyamuni Thus Come One and have transferred the merits to the departed."

At present it would appear that the people of Japan put faith in the teachings of the Buddha. But in ancient times, before the Buddhist teachings were introduced to this country, people knew nothing about either the Buddha or his teachings. It was only after the battle between Moriya and Prince Jōgu that some people took faith in Buddhism, though others did not.

The situation was similar in China.

After Matanga had introduced Buddhism to China, he held a debate with the Taoists. When the Taoists were defeated in debate, then for the first time there were people who put their faith in Buddhism, though there were many more who did not.

In China there was a man named Wu-lung who was highly skilled at calligraphy and was often requested to write things for other people. But regardless of where the request came from, he absolutely refused to write out any passages from the Buddhist sutras. When he was on his deathbed, he summoned his son I-lung to his side and said: "You have been born into our family and have inherited talent in the art of calligraphy. Out of filial devotion to me, you must never transcribe the Buddhist sutras. In particular, do not transcribe the Lotus Sutra! Lao Tzu, whom I honor as my teacher, bears the title Honorable One of Heaven. Heaven cannot have two suns in it; and yet, in the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha declares that 'I am the only person [who can rescue and protect others].'<sup>23</sup> I find such a claim suspicious in the extreme. If you fail to heed my dying words and transcribe any of the Buddhist texts, I will instantly change into an evil spirit and put an end to your life."

After he said this, his tongue split into eight pieces, his head broke into seven parts, blood spurted from his five sense organs, and his life came to an end. But his son, unable to judge good from bad, was unaware that his father had manifested these evil signs and had fallen into the Avichi hell because he had slandered the correct teaching. Therefore, the son abided by the dying words of his father, never transcribing Buddhist sutras, much less allowing himself to recite such texts.

And so he continued awhile in this manner. The ruler of that time was called Ssu-ma. This ruler, wishing to have some sutra texts transcribed in

connection with a Buddhist celebration, inquired as to who was the most skilled calligrapher in all of China, and was informed that it was I-lung. He summoned I-lung and explained his wishes, but I-lung repeatedly refused the work. The ruler, unable to prevail upon him, resigned himself to employing someone else to write out the sutra text, but he was dissatisfied with the results. Summoning I-lung once more, he said: "You inform me that it is out of respect for your father's dying wishes that you refuse to undertake the sutra transcriptions I have requested. Though I hardly regard that as a valid excuse, I will accept it for the time being. I therefore ask only that you write out the title of the sutra."

Three times the ruler issued his command, but I-lung continued to decline. The ruler, his countenance clouded over with anger, said: "All of heaven and earth are within the jurisdiction of the ruler! And if that is so, then your late father, too, is a subject of mine, is he not? You have no right to slight an official undertaking simply because of private reasons. You must transcribe at least the title of the sutra. If you refuse, even though the place may be the site of a Buddhist celebration, I will have you beheaded at once!"

Therefore, I-lung transcribed just the title of the sutra. He wrote "Myohorenge-kyo, Volume One," and so on for each volume, down to Volume Eight.

When evening came, he returned to his home and said to himself with a sigh: "I have violated my father's dying words and, because the ruler's command left me no choice, have transcribed a Buddhist sutra and behaved in an unfilial way. The gods of heaven and the deities of earth must surely be looking upon me with anger and regarding me as an unfilial son."

So saying, he retired for the night. In

that night's dream a brilliant light appeared, shining like the morning sun, and a heavenly being stood in his courtyard, accompanied by countless followers. In the air above the head of the heavenly being there were sixty-four Buddhas. I-lung pressed his palms together and said, "Who may this heavenly being be?"

The being replied: "I am your father, Wu-lung. Because I slandered the teachings of the Buddha, my tongue split into eight pieces, blood spurted from my five sense organs, my head broke into seven parts, and I fell into the hell of incessant suffering. The terrible torments I endured at the time of my death were hardly bearable, but the sufferings that followed while I was in the hell of incessant suffering were a hundred, thousand, million times worse. The pains a person would feel in the human realm if he were to have his fingernails pried off with a dull knife or his head cut off with a saw, if he were forced to walk over live coals or were confined in a cage of thorns, would be as nothing compared with my pains. I longed for some way to tell you of my plight but could think of none. How inexpressible was my regret at the fact that, at the time of my death, I warned you never to transcribe the words of the Buddhist sutras, and that I left that as my last instruction. But it was too late for regrets, and no matter how I despised myself for what I had done, or cursed my tongue, it was to no avail.

"Then yesterday morning the single character *myo*, which begins the title of the Lotus Sutra, came flying through the air above the cauldron that is the hell of incessant suffering, and there changed into a golden-hued Shakyamuni Buddha. This Buddha possessed the thirty-two features, and his face was like the full moon. He spoke in a thunderous voice, saying, 'Even those who have destroyed enough good

causes to fill the entire realm of phenomena, if they hear the Lotus Sutra just once, will never fail to attain enlightenment.'

"Then from this one character *myo* a heavy rain began to fall that extinguished the flames of the hell of incessant suffering. King Yama tipped his crown in a gesture of respect, the wardens of hell put aside their staffs and stood at attention, and all the transgressors in hell looked around in astonishment and asked what had happened.

"Then the character *ho* appeared in the air and underwent the same kind of transformation, followed by the character *ren*, the character *ge*, and the character *kyo*. In this way sixty-four characters<sup>24</sup> appeared and became sixty-four Buddhas. Sixty-four Buddhas appearing in the hell of incessant suffering were like sixty-four suns and moons coming out in the sky. Amrita, or sweet dew, then descended from the sky and fell upon the transgressors.

"The transgressors asked the Buddhas why these wonderful things were happening. The sixty-four Buddhas answered, saying: 'Our golden-hued bodies do not come either from sandalwood or from jeweled mountains. They come from the eight times eight characters, the sixty-four characters that make up the titles of the eight volumes of the Lotus Sutra, which were transcribed by I-lung, the son of Wu-lung, who is here in the hell of incessant suffering. The hand of I-lung is part of the body fathered by Wu-lung, and the characters written by that hand are as though written by Wu-lung himself.'

"When the Buddhas had spoken in this way, the transgressors in the hell of incessant suffering said: 'When we were in the saha world, we, too, had sons and wives and followers. We have wondered why none of them performed religious acts for our repose, and thought that perhaps, although they were performing acts of goodness,

the effect was too weak to reach us here. We sighed and sighed, but to no purpose. One day, two days, one year, two years, half a kalpa, a whole kalpa went by, and then at last we met with a good friend who was able to save us.’

“So all of us have become followers and are about to ascend to the heaven of the thirty-three gods. I have come to pay my respects to you before we go.” Thus spoke the heavenly being.

In his dream I-lung was filled with joy. After he and his father had parted, he had wondered in what world he would see him again. But now he could see the figure of his father and encounter the Buddhas as well. The sixty-four Buddhas then announced: “We are serving no particular master. You shall be our patron. From today on, we will guard and protect you as though you were our parent. You must continue to be diligent. When your life ends, we will without fail come and lead you to the inner court of the Tushita heaven.” Such was the promise they made.

I-lung, filled with awe, swore an oath, saying, “From this day forth, I will never transcribe so much as a single character of the non-Buddhist scriptures.” It was similar to the oath taken when Bodhisattva Vasubandhu vowed never again to recite Hinayana sutras, or when Nichiren pledged that he would never recite the name of Amida Buddha.

After I-lung awakened from his dream, he reported to the ruler what had happened. The ruler then issued a proclamation, saying, “The Buddhist ceremony that I undertook is hereby completed. You will write a prayer describing the events that have taken place.” I-lung did as he was instructed. As a result, people in China and Japan came to take faith in the Lotus Sutra. These events are described in the Chinese work entitled *The Lotus Sutra and Its Traditions*.

What I have said here pertains to the blessings that derive from transcribing the sutra. For those who carry out one or another of the five practices, the act of transcribing the sutra produces the lowest grade of blessings. How much more immeasurable, then, are the blessings to be won by reading or reciting the sutra.

As to the blessings derived by you, who as chief mourner have recited the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter every morning for a period of thirteen years, they “can only be understood and shared between Buddhas.”<sup>25</sup>

The Lotus Sutra represents the bone and marrow of all the sacred teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime, and the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter represents the soul of the twenty-eight chapters of the sutra. The various Buddhas of the three existences look upon the “Life Span” chapter as their very life, and the bodhisattvas of the ten directions likewise regard the chapter’s verse section as their eye.

But it is not for me to describe the blessings deriving from the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter. Rather I refer to the subsequent “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter, which elaborates on them. It says that those people who became Buddhas after hearing the above verse section are equal in number to the particles of dust in a minor world system or a major world system. Moreover, those who attained enlightenment by listening to the six chapters from the “Medicine King” chapter on are merely those who had remained unenlightened after gaining blessings from the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter. And in the forty volumes of the Nirvana Sutra the Buddha once more explained the blessings to be derived from the verse section to the fifty-two types of beings who were gathered there.

So it becomes clear that the great

bodhisattvas, heavenly beings, and others, numerous as the dust particles of the lands of the ten directions, who gathered together like clouds on the occasion of the Buddha's preaching [of the Flower Garland Sutra] at the place of enlightenment; the various sages who attended on the occasion of his preaching of the Great Collection and Larger Wisdom sutras; and the twelve hundred and more honored ones who listened to the Mahavairocana Sutra and the Diamond Crown Sutra—it becomes clear that at some time in the past these people listened to the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. But because their faith was weak, they failed to attain enlightenment, even though incalculably long periods—major world system dust particle kalpas and numberless major world system dust particle kalpas—passed by. However, when they encountered Shakyamuni Buddha, the blessings of the Lotus Sutra began to work for them, so that they were able to gain enlightenment through the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, and did not have to wait until the assembly at Eagle Peak to do so.

Consequently, the Buddhas throughout the ten directions looked up to the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter as their teacher and attained Buddhahood. This verse section is like a father and a mother to the people of the world.

A person who embraces the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra is sustaining the life of the Buddhas. Would any Buddha, then, abandon a person who embraces the very sutra through which that Buddha attained enlightenment? If any Buddha should abandon such a person, it would be as though he were abandoning himself.

Suppose there was a woman who had given birth to three thousand outstanding warriors of the caliber of Tamura or Toshihito.<sup>26</sup> Would one

choose to make an enemy of such a woman? To do so would be like handing three thousand generals over to the side of one's opponent, would it not? In the same way, anyone who would treat a person who embraces the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter as an enemy would be making an enemy of all the Buddhas of the three existences.

All the characters in which the Lotus Sutra is written represent living Buddhas. But because we have the eyes of common mortals, we see them as characters. It is like the example of the Ganges River. Hungry spirits see the waters of the river as fire, human beings see them as water, and heavenly beings see them as amrita. The waters are the same in all cases, but each type of being sees them differently, according to the effects of its karma.

As for the characters of the Lotus Sutra, a blind person cannot see them at all. A person with the eyes of a common mortal sees them as black in color. Persons of the two vehicles see them as the void. Bodhisattvas see various different colors in them, while a person whose seeds of Buddhahood have reached full maturity sees them as Buddhas. So the sutra states, “If one can uphold this [sutra], one will be upholding the Buddha's body.”<sup>27</sup> And T'ien-t'ai said: “The Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, before which I bow my head, in its single case, with its eight scrolls, twenty-eight chapters, and 69,384 characters, is in each and every one of its characters the true Buddha who preaches the Law for the benefit of living beings.”<sup>28</sup>

In light of all this, we can say that each morning [when he recites the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter] the priest Horen is sending forth golden-hued characters from his mouth. These characters are 510 in number, and each character changes into a sun, and each sun changes into

a Thus Come One Shakyamuni. They emit great beams of light that penetrate the earth and shine upon the three evil paths and the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. They also shine toward the east, west, north, and south, and upward, ascending to the realm where there is neither thought nor no thought.<sup>29</sup> They visit the realm where your departed father is dwelling, wherever it may be, and there hold discourse with him.

“Who do you think we are?” they say. “We are the characters of the verse section of the ‘Life Span’ chapter of the Lotus Sutra that your son Horen recites each morning. These characters will be your eyes, your ears, your feet, your hands!” Thus do they earnestly converse with him.

And at that time your departed father will say, “Horen is not my son. Rather he is a good friend to me.” And he will turn and pay respects in the direction of the saha world. For what you are doing is an act of true filial devotion.

We speak of upholding the Lotus Sutra. But although there is only one sutra, the manner in which we uphold it may vary from one period to the next. There may be times when a person literally rends his flesh and offers it to his teacher, and in this way attains Buddhahood. Or at other times a person may offer his body as a couch to his teacher, or as so much firewood. At yet other times a person may bear the blows of sticks and staves for the sake of the sutra, or may practice religious austerities or observe various precepts. And there may be times when, even though a person does the things described above, he still does not attain Buddhahood. It depends upon the time and is not something fixed.

Therefore, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai declared, “The method chosen should be that which accords with the time.”<sup>30</sup> And the Great Teacher Chang-

an said, “You should let your choices be fitting and never adhere solely to one or the other.”<sup>31</sup>

Question: At what times should one offer one’s body, and at what times should one observe the precepts?

Answer: A person of wisdom is one who, understanding the time, spreads the teachings of the Lotus Sutra accordingly; this is his most important task. If a person’s throat is dry, what he needs is water; he has no use for bows and arrows, weapons and sticks. If a person is naked, he wants a suit of clothes but has no need for water. From one or two examples you can guess the principle that applies in general.

Suppose there is a great demon who is working to spread the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. In such a case one should offer one’s own body as alms to the demon; there is no need to offer any other food or clothing.

Or suppose there is an evil ruler who is bent upon destroying the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. In such a case, even at the cost of one’s life one must not obey him. And if there should be eminent priests who keep the precepts and practice religious austerities, and who appear to be spreading the teachings of the Lotus Sutra but are, in fact, subverting them, you should perceive the truth of the matter and reprimand them.

The Lotus Sutra says, “We care nothing for our bodies or lives but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way.”<sup>32</sup> And the Nirvana Sutra states, “It is like a royal envoy who . . . would rather, even though it costs him his life, in the end conceal none of the words of his ruler.” The Great Teacher Chang-an commented on this: “[A royal envoy . . . would rather], even though it costs him his life, in the end conceal none of the words of his ruler’ means that one’s body is insignificant while the Law is supreme. One should

give one's life in order to propagate the Law."<sup>33</sup>

Judging from outward appearances, at present I, Nichiren, am the most perverse man in all of Japan. Among a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, or a million people of the four categories of believers in the sixty-six provinces and two outlying islands<sup>34</sup> of our country, I am detested by the entire populace of both high and low station. In the seven hundred or more years since the teachings of the Buddha were first introduced to Japan, there has never been anyone who was hated to such a degree because of the Lotus Sutra. I have never heard that such persons existed in India or China, nor do I believe that they could have existed. Thus, I am the most perverse man in the entire land of Jambudvīpa.

Because of this, even my own kindred dare not visit me, to say nothing of those who are not related to me. They fear the authority of the government officials and regard with apprehension the sneers of the populace. Persons who have been helped by me, not only in religious matters but in secular affairs as well, fearful of the eyes of others and hoping thereby to put an end to talk, make a show of condemning me, though I do not think they do so in their hearts.

Several times I have met with difficulties, and twice I have incurred the wrath of the government authorities. Not only have I myself suffered punishment, but some of those who are associated with me have had to suffer official punishment, have had their lands confiscated, have been dismissed from service by their lords, or have been abandoned by their parents and brothers. As a result of all this, I have been cast aside by those who followed me in the past, and at present am without followers.

In particular, in the case of the most recent instance of punishment from the

government, it was certain that I would be executed, but instead, for some unknown reason, the government authorities banished me to the island province of Sado. Among those sent to Sado, most die; few live. And after I had finally managed to reach my place of exile, I was looked upon as someone who had committed a crime worse than murder or treason.

After leaving Kamakura for Sado, each day I seemed to face growing numbers of powerful enemies. The people I encountered were all advocates of the Nembutsu, and as I made my way through the fields and over the mountains, the sound of the grasses and trees by the wayside rustling in the wind I supposed to be the attacks of my enemies.

At last I reached the province of Sado. There, true to the nature of that northern land, I found the wind particularly strong in winter, the snows deep, the clothing thin, and the food scarce. I well understood then how the mandarin orange tree, uprooted and transplanted to a different locale, can quite naturally turn into a triple-leaved orange tree.<sup>35</sup>

My dwelling was a dilapidated grass-roof hut in the midst of a field thick with eulalia and pampas grass where corpses were buried. Rain leaked in, and the walls did not keep out the wind. Day and night the only sound reaching my ears was the sighing of the wind by my pillow; each morning the sight that met my eyes was the snow that buried the roads far and near. I felt as though I had passed through the realm of hungry spirits and fallen alive into one of the cold hells.<sup>36</sup> I experienced the same thing as Su Wu, who was detained for nineteen years in the land of the northern barbarians and ate snow to keep himself alive, or Li Ling, who dwelled for six years in a rocky cave, clothed in a coat of straw.

Now, as it happens, the sentence of

exile has been lifted. But I found that there was no safety for me in Kama-kura, nor could I remain there for any length of time. And so, beneath the pines and among these mountain rocks, I have hidden my body and set my mind at peace. But except for having the earth itself to eat and the grass and trees to wear, I am cut off from all provisions of food and clothing. What feelings prompted you, I wonder, to come pushing through the wilderness to visit me in such a place?

Have my departed father and mother perhaps taken possession of you? Or is this some blessing brought about by the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment? I cannot hold back my tears.

Question: You pointed to the great earthquake of the Shoka era and the great comet of the Bun'ei era,<sup>37</sup> and said that our country would face danger from revolt within and invasion from abroad because it failed to heed the Lotus Sutra. May I ask your reasons?

Answer: Heavenly calamities and strange occurrences on earth such as these two are not to be found anywhere in the three thousand or more volumes of non-Buddhist writings. The major comets or major earthquakes described in the *Three Records*, *Five Canons*, and *Records of the Historian* are comets with tails one or two feet in length, ten or twenty feet, or perhaps fifty or sixty feet, but not one with a tail that stretches across the whole sky. The same applies for the magnitude of the earthquakes described therein. And if we examine the Buddhist scriptures, we find that during the entire period since the Buddha passed away no such major portents as these have ever appeared.

Even in India, when King Pushyamiitra wiped out the teachings of Buddhism in the five regions of India, burned the temples and stupas in the sixteen great states, and cut off the

heads of monks and nuns, no such portents as these appeared. Likewise in China, when the emperor of the Hui-ch'ang era<sup>38</sup> abolished over forty-six hundred temples and monasteries and forced 260,500 monks and nuns to return to secular life, there were no manifestations of this kind. In our own country, when the Buddhist teachings were introduced during the reign of Emperor Kimmei, Moriya showed enmity toward Buddhism, and later Priest Kiyomori burned the seven major temples of Nara, and the priests of Mount Hiei burned and destroyed Onjo-ji temple, but even then no such comet of such great size appeared.

It seemed to me that it was essential for people to know that an even more portentous event was about to occur in this world of Jambudvīpa. Therefore, I composed a work entitled *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* and presented it to His Lordship, the lay priest of Saimyo-ji. In that document I stated (and here I summarize): "This great portent [great earthquake] is a sign that our country is about to be destroyed by some other country. This will happen because the priests of the Zen, Nembutsu, and other schools are attempting to destroy the Lotus Sutra. Unless the heads of these priests are cut off and cast away at Yui Beach in Kamakura,<sup>39</sup> the nation will surely be destroyed."

Later, when the great comet of the Bun'ei era appeared, I had the proof of disaster in my very hand, and I became more convinced than ever of what was about to take place.

On the twelfth day of the ninth month in the eighth year of the Bun'ei era (1271), when I incurred the wrath of the authorities, I repeated my warning, saying, "I am the pillar of Japan. If you lose me, you lose the country!" I knew that my advice was unlikely to be heeded at that time, but I wanted to give it anyway for future reference.

Again, on the eighth day of the fourth month of last year (1274), when I had a meeting with Hei no Saemon-no-jo, he asked when the Mongol forces would invade Japan. I replied that the sutra texts gave no clear indication of the month and day, but that, since the eyes of heaven were so filled with anger these days, it would surely be no later than the present year.

People may wonder how I happen to know such things. I am a person of little worth, but I am working to spread the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. When the ruler and the ministers and the common people of a country show animosity toward the votary who propagates the Lotus Sutra, then the gods of earth and the gods of heaven, who were present when the Lotus Sutra was preached and who took a vow to protect its votary, will respectively begin to tremble with anger and emit beams of light as a threat to the nation. And if, in spite of all remonstrance, the ruler and his ministers fail to heed the warnings, then in the end the gods will take possession of human beings and will cause revolt within the nation and attack from abroad.

Question: What proof can you offer for these assertions?

Answer: A sutra says, "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."<sup>40</sup>

In effect, heaven and earth are a mirror of the nation. In our state now there are heavenly calamities and strange occurrences on earth. One should realize that the ruler of the state must be committing some error. The situation is revealed as though in a mirror, so there is no disputing it. If the ruler is guilty of minor errors only, then only minor calamities will be revealed in the heavenly mirror. But the fact that we are now witnessing major calamities must mean

that the ruler is committing major errors.

The Benevolent Kings Sutra speaks of innumerable types of minor disasters, twenty-nine types of medium disasters, and seven types of major disasters. One name for this sutra is Benevolent Kings, but another name is the Mirror of Heaven and Earth. And this sutra can be used as a "mirror of heaven and earth" in which to catch a clear reflection of the nation's ruler. Moreover, the sutra states, "Once the sages have departed, then the seven disasters are certain to arise."

One should understand from this that there is a great sage in this country of ours. And one should also understand that the ruler of the nation does not put faith in the sage.

Question: In earlier times, when Buddhist temples were destroyed, why were there no omens such as we see at present?

Answer: Omens are large or small depending upon whether the errors that cause them are grave or minor. The omens that have appeared this time are greatly to be wondered at. They have appeared not just once or twice, not on merely one or two occasions. Rather they have become more and more frequent with the passing of time. From this you should understand that the errors being committed by the ruler of the nation are more serious than those committed by rulers in earlier times, and that it is a graver error for a ruler to persecute a sage than it is for him to kill many common people, or to kill many of his ministers, or to kill his parents.

In Japan at present, the ruler, his ministers, and the common people are committing major offenses such as have not been known in India, China, or anywhere in all of Jambudvīpa in the 2,220 years or more since the passing of the Buddha. It is as though all the people throughout the worlds of the ten

directions who are guilty of committing any of the five cardinal sins were to be gathered together in a single spot.

The priests of this country have all become possessed by the spirits of Devadatta and Kokalika; the ruler of the nation has become a reincarnation of King Ajatashatru or King Virudhaka. And in the case of the ministers and the common people, it is as though someone gathered together evil people like the ministers Varshakara and Chandrakirti, or like Sunakshatra and Girika, and had them constitute the people of Japan.

In ancient times, when there were two or three persons guilty of any of the five cardinal sins or of unfilial conduct, the ground where those people were standing split apart, and they were swallowed up. But now the whole country is filled with such people. Therefore, the entire earth under Japan would have to split apart in one instant and the whole country fall into the hell of incessant suffering. There would be no point in its simply opening up to swallow one or two persons.

It is like the case of an aging person who pulls out a white hair here and there. When he becomes truly old, his whole head turns white, and it is no longer any use trying to pull out the hairs one by one. The only thing to do then is to shave off all the hair in one stroke.

Question: Your argument is that, though you are a votary of the Lotus Sutra, your advice is not heeded, and therefore these heavenly calamities and strange occurrences on earth arise. But the eighth volume of the Lotus Sutra states, "Their heads will split into seven pieces."<sup>41</sup> And the fifth volume states, "If people speak ill of and revile him, their mouths will be closed and stopped up."<sup>42</sup> Why is it that though you have been cursed and treated with

animosity for many years now these latter things have not occurred?

Answer: By way of answer, let me ask in turn if the people who cursed and reviled and beat Bodhisattva Never Disparaging had their mouths stopped or their heads split apart?

Question: [They did not.] But in that case, the text of the sutra is not consistent with itself, is it?

Answer: There are two types of people who show animosity toward the Lotus Sutra. The first are people who cultivated the roots of goodness in former existences, who in their present existence are searching for some connection with Buddhism, who conceive a desire for enlightenment and are capable of attaining Buddhahood. It is these people whose mouths are stopped or whose heads split apart.

The other type are people who have slandered the correct teaching in their previous existences, slander it in their present existence, and for existence after existence go on creating karma that will condemn them to the hell of incessant suffering. These people, even though they may curse, will not have their mouths stopped. They are like men who have already been sentenced to execution and are awaiting their turn in prison. While they are in prison, regardless of what evil acts they may commit, they will receive no further punishment other than the death sentence already passed upon them. However, with regard to people who are eventually to be released, if they commit evil acts in prison, then they will receive warnings.

Question: Since this is a very important point, may I ask you to explain it in detail?

Answer: It is explained in the Nirvana Sutra and in the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren

## Background

Soya Kyoshin, to whom this letter was addressed, lived in Soya Village in Katsushika District of Shimosa Province. Sometime around 1260 he converted to the Daishonin's teachings. Then, around 1271, he became a lay priest, whereupon Nichiren Daishonin bestowed upon him the Buddhist name Horen (Law Lotus). At the time he received this letter, Kyoshin had been practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism as one of the leading believers in the area for about fifteen years.

This somewhat lengthy letter was written at Minobu in the fourth month of the first year of Kenji (1275), when the Daishonin was fifty-four years old. It is one among nine extant writings that the Daishonin sent to Kyoshin, two of which were written in classical Chinese, their contents clearly indicating that he was highly educated.

The Daishonin had just received from Kyoshin a written declaration of the sort commonly read aloud at a memorial service, in which he explained that he had recited the Lotus Sutra to commemorate the thirteenth anniversary of his father's death. In addition, Kyoshin mentioned that he had been performing a recitation of the verse section of the sutra's "Life Span" chapter daily since the time of his father's passing. In response, the Daishonin tells him that his devotion to the sutra is the truest form of filial piety, since only the Lotus Sutra can lead one's parents, and all other living beings, to Buddhahood.

Here the Daishonin introduces the ancient Chinese story of the calligrapher Wu-lung and his son I-lung in order to illustrate how immeasurable the merit is that Kyoshin has been transferring to his deceased father through his continued recitation of the verse section of the "Life Span" chapter.

In the story, the calligrapher I-lung

transcribes the title of each volume of the Lotus Sutra. As a result, he is able to save his father from his terrible distress in the hell of incessant suffering. But even such benefits as these, the Daishonin encourages Kyoshin, cannot compare to the benefits to be obtained from reciting the sutra. The Daishonin tells him that the verse section of the "Life Span" chapter represents the very heart of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra, and that the benefits to be gained from reciting it can only be calculated and expressed by a Buddha.

The Daishonin also gives his disciple instructions in various other teachings. He discusses the wonderful rewards to be gained by one who praises and makes offerings to the votary of the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day of the Law. He also discusses the great gravity of the offense incurred by one who slanders the votary.

With regard to specific details about the practice of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin points out that the way to practice its teachings will necessarily vary with the times, and that a person of wisdom is one who perceives the times correctly and spreads the teachings accordingly. And he declares that practice in the Latter Day means spreading the Lotus Sutra without begrudging one's life. Because he himself has carried out precisely this sort of practice, the Daishonin says, he has been persecuted by the authorities and is detested by all the people of Japan. And, he notes, he was earlier forced to live under bitter conditions at a bleak and desolate location in exile on Sado Island and is now dwelling where there are no provisions at all, in an isolated mountain valley called Minobu. The Daishonin mentions how moved he is that Kyoshin has come all the way to see him in such a forsaken place.

Commenting upon his three remon-

strations with the Kamakura authorities, the Daishonin proclaims that it is their disregard for his warnings and persecution of him that have brought down upon the country a string of major calamities.

And at the very end of this letter, the Daishonin explains why some people who slander the Lotus Sutra seem not to receive any punishment at all. Those who slander the correct teach-

ing in existence after existence, he says, are condemned to the hell of incessant suffering and will receive no further warnings in this lifetime for their slanderous deeds.

For further details regarding this matter, the Daishonin asks Horen to refer to the Lotus Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra. It is also discussed in *The Opening of the Eyes* (pp. 279–80).

## Notes

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

2. Sour, bitter, sweet, pungent, and salty.

3. Prince Enemy Before Birth refers to Ajatashatru, king of the state of Magadha in India. According to the Nirvana Sutra, King Bimbisara, who was impatient for the birth of an heir, ordered that the hermit who was destined to be reborn as his son be killed. It was subsequently foretold that the child would grow up to be the king's enemy. Hence the child was called Prince Enemy Before Birth.

4. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3. In this quotation, the Daishonin paraphrases the sutra passage "be born there again" as "die there again."

5. According to the Meditation on the Buddha Sutra and the Causality of Past and Present Sutra, those who are unfilial will, after their death, fall into the hell of incessant suffering.

6. On *"The Words and Phrases."* The ten honorable titles are epithets applied to the Buddha expressing his virtue, wisdom, and compassion.

7. This story, which appears in the Storehouse of Various Treasures Sutra, is related in greater detail in *Reply to Tokimitsu* (p. 925).

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

9. "The highest heaven in the world of form" refers to the Akanishtha heaven, or Summit of Being heaven, where living beings are said to possess pure bodies free from all suffering and illness.

10. These virtues represent the state and nature of Buddhahood: The great wisdom of equality indicates the Buddha wisdom that benefits all beings impartially; the shining light of great knowledge refers to the

Buddha wisdom that shines universally and eliminates the darkness of illusions; and the fire pit of meditation describes a state of concentration that is free of delusions.

11. This story appears in the Nirvana Sutra. The rich man's wife died during pregnancy, but Shakyamuni nevertheless assured him that he would receive a male child. When his wife was cremated, a baby boy emerged from her body and sat up in the flames. At the Buddha's command, Jivaka entered the fire and bore the child to safety.

12. The twenty outstanding points enumerated in *On "The Words and Phrases."* One of them, for example, is the revelation in the "Life Span" chapter that Shakyamuni in fact attained Buddhahood in the remote past.

13. The two doctrines refer to the doctrines explaining the offense incurred by those who oppose the votaries of the Lotus Sutra and the blessings obtained by those who support them.

14. In the "Treasure Tower" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Many Treasures Buddha appears to bear witness to the truth of the sutra. In the "Supernatural Powers" chapter, the Buddhas of the ten directions, testifying to the truth of the sutra, extend their long broad tongues until they reach the Brahma heaven.

15. In the Universal Worthy Sutra, the epilogue to the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha says, "Three months from now I will enter nirvana." He makes the same announcement in a Pali scripture called the *Mahaparinnibbana-suttanta* (Sutra of the Great Nirvana). The Daishonin may have added the information about the date of the Buddha's passing because Buddhist tradition re-

lated that the Buddha passed away on this particular day.

16. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

17. *Ibid.*, chap. 6. In this passage the expression “final incarnation” indicates the existence in which one frees oneself from illusions, thus liberating oneself from the sufferings of birth and death.

18. When a Brahman attempted to measure Shakyamuni’s height with his bamboo staff, he discovered that his staff was too short to take the measurement.

19. A move in the game of go. It occurs when a particular stone and all the stones that have been set in place to protect it are rendered immobile by the move of one’s opponent. At this point, the stones are said to be “dead.”

20. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

21. As described in the “Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, those who left the assembly, thinking that they had understood what they had not.

22. This story of the seven-step snake appears in *The Great Commentary on the Abhidharma*.

23. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

24. Sixty-four represents the total number of characters that I-lung transcribed, eight for each of the sutra’s eight volumes. “Myoho-rence-kyo” comprises five characters, and the volume number, three characters.

25. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

26. Tamura is Sakanoue no Tamuramaro (758–811), a military leader who was designated “Great General Who Subdues the Barbarians” for his successful campaign against the Ezo people of northern Japan, through which he established the authority of the imperial court in that region. Toshihito is Fujiwara no Toshihito (n.d.), a distinguished Fujiwara warrior who lived during the Heian period (794–1185). In 915 he became the chief of the military headquarters in northern Japan.

27. Lotus Sutra, chap. 11.

28. Source unknown.

29. The world of formlessness being divided into four realms, this refers to the uppermost. See also threefold world in Glossary.

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

31. *The Annotations on the Nirvana Sutra*.

32. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

33. *Annotations on the Nirvana Sutra*.

34. The two outlying islands refer to Iki and Tsushima, islands off the coast of Kyushu.

35. This saying appears in several Chinese classics such as *The Records of Yen Tzu*. According to these, a mandarin orange tree south of the Yangtze River becomes a triple-leaved orange tree if it is transplanted to the north of the Huai River. It symbolizes the changes people can undergo in response to their environment.

36. The cold hells refer to the eight cold hells said to lie under the continent of Jambudvīpa.

37. Reference is to the major earthquake that devastated the Kamakura area in the eighth month of 1257 and the great comet that appeared in the seventh month of 1264.

38. The emperor of the Hui-ch’ang era refers to Wu-tsung (814–846), the fifteenth emperor of the T’ang dynasty, who was an adherent of Taoism. In 845 he initiated a nationwide drive to destroy Buddhism.

39. Similar statements from the Nirvana Sutra, suggesting that slanderers of the Law should be put to death, are cited in *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*. In that treatise the Daishonin makes it plain that such statements are not meant to be taken literally; the slander itself, rather than the person who commits it, is what must be eradicated.

40. Sovereign Kings Sutra.

41. Lotus Sutra, chap. 26.

42. *Ibid.*, chap. 14.