

Reply to the Lay Priest Takahashi



Reply respectfully sent to the lay priest Takahashi.

Nichiren

OUR compassionate father Shakyamuni Buddha, the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment, made his appearance in central India at a time when the human life span measured a hundred years,¹ and set forth a lifetime of sacred teachings for the sake of all living beings. The people living at the same time as Shakyamuni Buddha had already formed profound karmic ties with him in the past; hence they were able to attain the way. Shakyamuni, however, was so concerned about how to save those who would live after his passing that he put his eighty thousand sacred teachings into written form. Then, among his lifetime of sacred teachings, he entrusted the Hinayana sutras to the Venerable Mahakashyapa, and both the Mahayana sutras and the Lotus and Nirvana sutras to Bodhisattva Manjushri.

But the five characters of Myohorenge-kyo, the heart of the eighty thousand sacred teachings and the core of the Lotus Sutra, he neither entrusted to Mahakashyapa or Ananda, nor transferred to great bodhisattvas such as Manjushri, Universal Worthy, Perceiver of the World's Sounds, Maitreya, Earth Repository, or Nagarjuna. Even

though these great bodhisattvas hoped that he would do so and requested it of him, the Buddha would not consent. He summoned forth a venerable old man called Bodhisattva Superior Practices from the depths of the earth,² and then, in the presence of the Buddha Many Treasures and the Buddhas of the ten directions, from within the tower adorned with the seven kinds of treasures, the Thus Come One Shakyamuni entrusted the five characters of Myohorenge-kyo to him.

The reason for this was as follows. All the beings who would live after the Buddha's passing would be the children of the Buddha, and he felt compassion for all of them equally. But, just as it is customary for a physician to prescribe medicine according to the particular ailment he is treating, so for the first five hundred years after his passing, the Buddha decreed that Mahakashyapa, Ananda, and others should give all living beings the medicine of the Hinayana sutras. For the following five-hundred-year period, he decreed that the bodhisattvas Manjushri, Maitreya, Nagarjuna, and Vasubandhu should bestow upon all living beings the medicine of Mahayana sutras such as the Flower Garland, Mahavairochana, and Wisdom sutras. And for the period of the Middle Day of the Law, a thousand years after his passing, he decreed that Bodhisattva

Medicine King, Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, and others should bestow upon all living beings the medicine of the remaining teachings, with the exception of the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra.

Once the Latter Day of the Law has begun, however, with regard to the Hinayana sutras, the Mahayana sutras, and the Lotus Sutra that were entrusted to Mahakashyapa, Ananda, and others; to the bodhisattvas Manjushri, Maitreya, and others; and to Medicine King, Perceiver of the World's Sounds, and others, though the words of these sutras will remain, they will no longer serve as medicine for the illnesses of living beings. That is to say, the illnesses will be grave, and the medicine, weak. At that time, Bodhisattva Superior Practices will make his appearance in the world and bestow the five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo upon all the living beings of Jambudvipa.

Then the people will all look upon this bodhisattva as an enemy. They will be like so many monkeys faced with a dog, or like demons eyeing human beings with spite. They will treat him as if he were Bodhisattva Never Disparaging of the past, who was not only cursed and hated by all people but was attacked with staves, rocks, and tiles, or as if he were the monk Realization of Virtue, who was nearly put to death.

At that time, Mahakashyapa and Ananda will hide on Eagle Peak³ or disappear into the Ganges River,⁴ and Maitreya and Manjushri will withdraw to the inner court of the Tushita heaven⁵ or retire to Mount Fragrant.⁶ Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds will return to the western region,⁷ and Bodhisattva Universal Worthy, to the eastern region.⁸ Although there will be persons who practice the various sutras, since no one will be there to guard or protect them, they will be unable to benefit themselves or others. Although there will be persons who chant the

names of the various Buddhas, the heavenly gods will be unable to protect them. Instead they will be as helpless as calves separated from their mothers, or pheasants sighted by hawks.

At that time, the great demons from the worlds of the ten directions will come crowding into the continent of Jambudvipa and will take possession of the four categories of Buddhists, causing them to inflict injury on their parents or to do away with their brothers and sisters. In particular, these demons will enter into the hearts of those monks and nuns throughout the nation who appear to be wise or seem to be diligent in observing the precepts, and through them will practice deception upon the ruler of the nation and his ministers.

At that time, when under the protection of Bodhisattva Superior Practices a person bestows just the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, the five characters of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, upon all the people, those four categories of Buddhists and other prominent monks will hate him as if he were their parents' enemy, a foe from a previous existence, a sworn enemy of the imperial house, or a person bent on revenge.

At that time, great changes will take place in the heavens. Eclipses of the sun and moon will occur, great comets will streak across the sky, and the earth will quiver and shake as if it were a waterwheel. After this will come the disaster of domestic rebellion, in which the ruler of the nation, his brothers, and the other great men of the nation will be attacked and killed. Next will come the disaster of invasion from abroad, in which the land will be attacked by a neighboring nation, the people will be taken prisoner or commit suicide, and all the people throughout the country, whether high or low, will suffer great tribulation.

All of this will come about solely because the person who is propagating

the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra under the protection of Bodhisattva Superior Practices is abused, struck, exiled, and threatened with execution. We read in the sutra that Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings inscribed an oath in the presence of the Buddha at the assembly where the Lotus Sutra was being preached, vowing that if anyone should show enmity toward the votary of the Lotus Sutra they would chastise that person with even greater vehemence than if he were the sworn enemy of their own father and mother.

Now when I, Nichiren, having been born in this country of Japan, hold up the bright mirror of both the Lotus Sutra and all the other sutras to the faces of all the persons in Japan, I see that matters differ not in the slightest from what the sutras predict. Just as the Buddha foretold, great changes are taking place in the heavens and disasters are occurring on earth.

For some time now I have known that this nation is destined for destruction. I knew that, if I reported this to the ruler, and if it were still possible that the nation might be preserved in peace and safety, then he would surely ask me to clarify the meaning of my words; but if the nation were indeed doomed, then the ruler would refuse to heed my advice. And if he refused to heed my advice, I knew that I would most likely be condemned to exile or execution. Yet the Buddha has warned us, "If, while understanding this matter, you still hesitate to risk your life and therefore do not declare it to the people, then you are not only my enemy but the deadly enemy of all living beings and are bound to fall into the great citadel of the Avichi hell."⁹

At this point I became troubled as to how to proceed. If I spoke out with regard to this matter, there was no telling what might become of me. My own safety was of little concern, but

suppose that my parents, siblings, and perhaps even one other person out of a thousand or ten thousand should follow me. They, too, would surely be hated by both the ruler and the common people. And if they were so hated, then, not having a full understanding of the Buddhist teachings, they would find it difficult to endure the attacks of others. Though they had supposed that, by practicing the Buddha's teachings, they would gain peace and security, in fact they would find that, because they had embraced this teaching, they were beset by great hardships. In that case they would then slander this teaching as a distorted one and therefore fall into the evil paths. How pitiful that would be!

But if, on the other hand, I failed to speak out on this matter, then I would not only be going against the vow I made to the Buddha, but I would become the deadly enemy of all living beings and be condemned without fail to the great Avichi hell. Thus, though I had pondered which course of action to take, I made up my mind to speak out.

I felt that, once I had begun to speak out, it would not do to falter or desist along the way, and so I spoke out with ever increasing vigor. Then, just as the Buddha's words in the sutra predict, the ruler grew hostile and the common people began to attack me. And because they treated me with enmity, heaven grew enraged, the sun and moon displayed great changes in their behavior, and huge comets appeared. The earth shook as though it would turn over, internecine strife broke out, and they were attacked by a foreign country. All happened just as the Buddha had predicted, and there is no doubt that I, Nichiren, am the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

Last year, when I left Kamakura and took refuge here, I had intended to stop and speak with you and the oth-

ers, since it was on my way, but in the end I did not do so. In addition, I also failed to reply earlier, though I certainly had no particular intention of neglect. How could I ever feel distantly toward any of you? Even in the case of the Nembutsu priests, the Zen priests, and the True Word teachers, and the ruler of the nation and other men of authority, all of whom bear me such hatred—I admonish them because I want to help them, and their hatred for me makes me pity them all the more. How could I, then, think lightly of those who, even for a day, have acted as allies and extended their sympathy to me?

Actually I am relieved when those who have wives and children to worry about keep their distance from me out of fear of the world's reaction. I have no power to save those who ally themselves with me, and in addition, they may risk having what small estates they possess taken away from them. It pains me to think how this must distress their wives and children and their followers, who have no real understanding of the situation.

In the second month of last year I was granted a pardon, and on the thirteenth day of the third month I left the province of Sado, arriving in Kamakura on the twenty-sixth day of the same month. When I met with Hei no Saemon on the eighth day of the fourth month, he questioned me about various matters and, in the course of the discussion, asked when the Mongols would launch their invasion.

"They will come this year," I replied. "And with regard to that, there is no one who can save Japan but Nichiren! If you want to save the nation, you should cut off the heads of the Nembutsu, Zen, and Precepts priests in Japan and expose them to view on Yui Beach.¹⁰ But I suppose it is too late for that now.

"Everyone thinks that I am simply

intent upon speaking ill of the Nembutsu teachers and the Zen and Precepts priests. But these people are of little consequence. It is the True Word school with its evil doctrines that is putting a terrible curse upon this fair country of Japan! The Great Teacher Kobo and the Great Teacher Jikaku were misled by these teachings and have brought this country to the brink of ruin. Though a country may be destined to be destroyed in two or three years anyway, if the ruler has the True Word priests offer up prayers for its safety, it will be attacked before a year or even half a year is out!" These are the things I told him.

Being so fiercely hated merely for trying to give advice that would save the country, I suppose that, when I was pardoned from exile, I should have left Sado and hidden myself somewhere far off amidst the mountains or by the seashore. But instead I went to Kamakura, because I hoped to explain the situation one last time to Hei no Saemon, and thereby save those people who might manage to survive an attack on Japan. After offering my admonition, I knew I should remain no longer in Kamakura, and so I set off, letting my feet carry me where they would. And since you were on the way, I thought how much I would like to see all of you once more, even though it might be an imposition. But though the thought came to me a thousand times, I struggled with my own feelings, and in the end I passed you by.

The reason is this. The province of Suruga is the domain of the lord of Sagami, and the Fuji area in particular is full of those related to the widows of high-ranking officials. These people feel great rancor toward me because they look upon me as an enemy of the late lay priests of Saimyo-ji and Gokuraku-ji. I was afraid that, if they heard that I had visited you, it would bring grief to you all. Until now, I

have feared causing trouble for you, and so I did not even reply to you. I have repeatedly warned the priests to avoid under any circumstances going anywhere near the area of Kajima in Fuji, and yet still I am apprehensive about what may happen.

As to this matter of the True Word school, you may have doubts. No matter how I explain it in terms of doctrine, it will be difficult to comprehend. Simply understand from the facts before your eyes.

The Retired Emperor of Oki was the eighty-second sovereign. He reigned more than two thousand years after the time of Emperor Jimmu; he was the Sun Goddess manifested in human form. Who would venture to oppose such a ruler?

Moreover, from the time of Emperor Kimmie to that of the Retired Emperor of Oki, the various great doctrines and secret doctrines of Buddhism, introduced from China, Paekche, Silla, and Koguryō,¹¹ were revered and preserved at Mount Hiei, To-ji, Onjo-ji, the seven major temples of Nara, and elsewhere throughout Japan. All this was done to protect the nation and to guard the safety of its ruler.

The Retired Emperor of Oki, vexed that power had been seized by Kamakura, enlisted the aid of the high-ranking priests of Mount Hiei, To-ji, and other temples, and set them to performing rituals for the death of Yoshi-toki. This continued not for just a year or two, but for years on end, the priests praying and casting their spells. Yet the acting administrator [Yoshitoki] never so much as dreamed of what was happening, and did not for his part have a single prayer ritual conducted. Perhaps he thought that, even if such a ritual was to be performed, it would prove ineffective. In any event, the Son of Heaven was defeated in battle and exiled to the island province of Oki.

One who becomes the sovereign of Japan embodies the living spirit of the Sun Goddess; he becomes ruler by virtue of the power of the ten good precepts he has observed in previous existences. How then could anyone among the common people of the country possibly overthrow him? Suppose a father is at fault, and his son, who is blameless, hates his guilty father. Even if the father is guilty of some grave error, would heaven ever permit the son to punish him?

Then what grave error caused the Retired Emperor of Oki to meet with this shame? It came about solely because he allied himself with the True Word teachers of Japan, who are the deadly enemies of the Lotus Sutra.

All the True Word priests go through a secret ceremony of anointment,¹² in which pictures of Shakyamuni Buddha and others are painted on an eight-petaled lotus and the participants tread on them with their feet. And because those who took part in this bizarre ritual were revered and treated as the supervisors of various temples by the Retired Emperor of Oki, power passed into the hands of his common subjects, and he met with disgrace in this life.

Now this great evil True Word doctrine has spread to Kamakura, deceiving the members of the ruling clan and threatening to bring about the destruction of Japan. This is a matter of the gravest import, and I have not discussed it even with my disciples. Instead I have dissembled, pretending ignorance and filling their ears only with attacks upon Nembutsu and Zen. But since my admonitions continue to go unheeded, without begrudging even my life, I will also tell my disciples what the true situation is.

When I do so, they will be even more perplexed, saying that, no matter how admirable or worthy of respect Nichiren may be, he can scarcely surpass Jikaku and Kobo. I fear I will

never succeed in banishing all their doubts. How can I dispel them?

When all others hate me, the fact that you have placed even a bit of trust in me and, moreover, have come all the way here to visit me, cannot be ascribed to the karma of your present life alone. Surely we must share some bond from a previous existence!

I am much distressed to hear that your illness has become so serious. Swords exist to cut down enemies, however, and medicine exists to cure sickness. King Ajatashatru murdered his father and made himself an enemy of the Buddha. But after foul sores broke out on his body, he converted to the Buddha's teachings and embraced the Lotus Sutra, whereupon his sores healed and he prolonged his life by forty years.

Moreover, the Lotus Sutra states that it is "good medicine for the ills of the people of Jambudvīpa."¹³ The people of this world of Jambudvīpa are suffering from illness, but they have the medicine of the Lotus Sutra. Now in your case, the three requirements¹⁴ are already present, so how could you fail to recover? But if you have doubts, I am powerless to help you. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

Please have Kakujo-bo and Hoki-bo¹⁵ read this to you from time to time and listen well, listen well!

Nichiren

The twelfth day of the seventh month

Reply respectfully sent to the lay priest Takahashi Rokuro Hyoe.



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in the first year of Kenji (1275) at Minobu to the lay priest Takahashi Rokuro Hyoe, who lived in Kajima, in Fuji District of Suruga Province. Takahashi's wife was the aunt of Nikko Shonin, and it was through this connection that he had been converted to the Daishonin's teaching. He appears to have been a leading figure among the lay believers in the Fuji area. Another letter thought to have been written to Takahashi, *Many in Body, One in Mind*, mentions that he had served the Lotus Sutra with devotion for many years. Nevertheless, the Daishonin had for a time avoided communication with Takahashi and other followers in the same area, for fear of placing them in jeopardy. It is possible that he wrote this letter in response to news of Takahashi's illness, which he refers to in the concluding paragraphs.

The latter part of the letter contains

a harsh indictment of the teachings of the True Word school, which the Daishonin felt represented a serious distortion of Buddhist teachings. Realizing that Takahashi would perhaps not readily grasp a doctrinal explanation of its errors, the Daishonin suggests that he consider the impact of the True Word teachings on the course of recent developments in society. He refers to the Jokyu Disturbance of 1221, in which the Retired Emperor Gotoba rallied support in an attempt to overthrow the recently established military government in Kamakura. He points out that the emperor was believed to be descended from the Sun Goddess and to hold the throne by divine mandate, and that Hojo Yoshitoki, the Kamakura regent, was a mere samurai upstart; thus it seemed inconceivable to people that the imperial forces would fail to win. Nonetheless, Gotoba was defeated and exiled to the

island of Oki—a result, the Daishonin says, that came about because he placed his trust in the prayers and rituals of the fundamentally flawed True Word teaching. Around the time this letter was written, warrior leaders in Kamakura, like their imperial predecessors, were soliciting the prayers of True Word priests in an attempt to avert

the impending Mongol invasion. This course, the Daishonin warns, can only end in disaster.

The Daishonin concludes by expressing his gratitude for Takahashi's sympathy and support. He also urges him to maintain strong faith so that he can recover from his illness.

Notes

1. According to ancient Indian cosmology, once every medium kalpa (15,998,000 years), the human life span undergoes a cycle of gradual decrease and increase, declining to ten years and then increasing again to eighty thousand years. Shakyamuni is said to have been born during a period of decrease, when the natural life span was a hundred years long.

2. In chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are described as being like venerable hundred-year olds.

3. According to *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, Mahakashyapa passed away at Eagle Peak.

4. According to *The Record of the Western Regions*, Ananda passed away on the Ganges River.

5. Bodhisattva Maitreya was believed to reside in the inner court of the Tushita heaven.

6. According to one tradition, having already entered nirvana, Manjushri dwells eternally on Mount Fragrant, where he has obtained an indestructible body.

7. Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds attends Amida Buddha, whose Pure Land of Perfect Bliss is said to be located in the western quarter of the universe.

8. According to the Universal Worthy Sutra, Bodhisattva Universal Worthy was born in the eastern quarter of the universe in a land called Pure and Wonderful.

9. Perhaps a summary of a passage in the Nirvana Sutra, which states, "If even a good monk sees someone destroying the teaching and disregards him, failing to reproach him, to oust him, or to punish him for his offense, then you should realize that

that monk is betraying the Buddha's teaching. But if he ousts the destroyer of the Law, reproaches him, or punishes him, then he is my disciple and a true voice-hearer."

10. 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 clear that such statements are not meant to be taken literally; it is the slander itself, rather than the person who commits it, that must be eradicated. Located in Kamakura facing the Bay of Sagami, Yui Beach was evidently used as an execution ground.

11. Three ancient kingdoms on the Korean Peninsula.

12. Here, a ceremony of initiation into the esoteric teachings. The Daishonin refers to the use of horizontal mandalas depicting the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, which were spread out on a platform and used as the focus of the ritual.

13. Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.

14. The three requirements refer to the elements necessary for the fulfillment of one's prayer, namely, the sutra, the Buddha, and the practitioner. Here the practitioner is the votary of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin.

15. Kakujo-bo was a priest-disciple of Nichiren Daishonin who lived near the area of Kajima in Fuji. One view identifies him with the priest Gakujo-bo who lived on Sado. Hoki-bo was the name Nikko Shonin, the Daishonin's closest disciple and successor, had received from the Daishonin on becoming his disciple at age thirteen.