

The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra



ON the eighteenth day of the intercalary first month of the fifth year of Bun'ei (1268), an official letter arrived from the great Mongol empire in which those barbarians of the west¹ declared their intention to attack Japan. My prediction in *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, which I wrote in the first year of Bunno (1260), cyclical sign *kanoe-saru*, has been fulfilled to the letter. My admonitions have surpassed even those set forth in the *yüeh-fu* poems of Po Chü-i,² and my prophecies are not inferior to those of the Buddha. Can there be anything more wondrous in this latter age? If our land were governed by a worthy ruler or sage sovereign, then the highest honors in Japan would be bestowed upon me, and I would be awarded the title of Great Teacher while still alive. I had expected to be consulted about the Mongols, invited to the war council, and asked to defeat them through the power of prayer. Since that did not happen, however, I sent letters of warning to eleven of our country's leaders in the tenth month of the same year.

If there were a worthy person in this country, he would immediately think, "What a wonder! This is surely no ordinary matter. The Sun Goddess and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman must be offering a way to save Japan through

this priest." In actuality, however, priests of the other schools cursed and deceived my messengers. The government officials ignored or refused to reply to my letters, and even when they did reply, they deliberately neglected to report the content of my letters to the regent. Their behavior was highly irregular. Even if the letters concerned only some personal matter of mine, the government officials should nevertheless pass them on to the ruler for his due attention, this being the proper way of government. But in this case, the letters were a warning of dire things to come that would affect the destiny not only of the regent's government but of every other official as well. Even if the officials did not heed my warning, to slander my messengers was going too far. This came about because all Japanese, high and low, have for a long time now shown hostility toward the Lotus Sutra. Thus they have piled up great offenses and become possessed by demons. The official letter from the Mongols has deprived them of the last remnants of sanity. In ancient China, King Chou of the Yin dynasty refused to heed the admonitions of his loyal minister Pi Kan and instead cut out Pi Kan's heart. Later his dynasty was overthrown by the kings Wen and Wu of the Chou. King Fu-ch'a of the state of Wu, in-

stead of listening to the remonstrances of his minister Wu Tzu-hsü, forced the latter to commit suicide.³ Eventually Fu-ch'a was killed by King Kou-chien of the state of Yüeh.

Thinking how tragic it would be if our country were to meet with a similar fate, I risked my reputation and life to remonstrate with the authorities. But just as a high wind creates great waves, or a powerful dragon brings forth torrential rains, so my admonitions called forth increasing animosity. The regent's supreme council met to discuss whether to behead me or banish me from Kamakura, and whether to confiscate the estates of or execute my disciples and lay supporters, or to imprison or exile them to distant places.

Hearing this, I rejoiced, saying that I had long expected it to come to this. In the past, the boy Snow Mountains offered his body for the sake of half a verse, Bodhisattva Ever Wailing sold his body, the boy Good Treasures threw himself into a fire, the ascetic Aspiration for the Law peeled off his own skin, Bodhisattva Medicine King burned his own arms, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was beaten with sticks and staves, the Venerable Aryasimha was beheaded, and Bodhisattva Aryadeva was killed by a non-Buddhist, [all because of their devotion to Buddhism].

These events should be considered in terms of the time in which they occurred. The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai declared that practice "should be that which accords with the time."⁴ The Great Teacher Chang-an states, "You should let your choices be fitting and never adhere solely to one or the other."⁵ The Lotus Sutra represents a single truth, but the way of its practice varies greatly according to the people's capacity and the time.

The Buddha made a prophecy, saying: "After my death, during the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law

that follows the two millennia of the Former and Middle Days, a person will appear who will propagate only the heart of the Lotus Sutra, the five characters of the daimoku. At that time an evil ruler will be in power, and evil monks, more numerous than the dust particles of the land, will argue with one another over the various Mahayana and Hinayana sutras. When the votary of the daimoku challenges the monks, they will incite their lay supporters to abuse, beat, or imprison him, to confiscate his lands, to exile or behead him. In spite of such persecutions, he will continue his propagation without ceasing. Meanwhile the ruler who persecutes him will be beset by rebellion, and his subjects will devour each other like hungry spirits. Finally the land will be attacked by a foreign country, for Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings have ordained that other countries shall assault a land that is hostile to the Lotus Sutra."⁶

None of you who declare yourselves to be my disciples should ever give way to cowardice. Neither should you allow concern for your parents, wife, or children to hold you back, or be worried about your property. Since countless kalpas in the past you have thrown away your life more times than the number of dust particles of the land for the sake of your parents, your children, or your lands. But not once have you given up your life for the Lotus Sutra. You may have tried to practice its teachings to some extent, but whenever you were persecuted, you backslid and ceased to live by the sutra. That is like boiling water only to pour it into cold water, or like trying to strike fire but giving up halfway. Each and every one of you should be certain deep in your heart that sacrificing your life for the Lotus Sutra is like exchanging rocks for gold or dung for rice.

Now, at the beginning of the Latter

Day of the Law, I, Nichiren, am the first to embark on propagating, throughout Jambudvipa, the five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo, which are the heart of the Lotus Sutra and the eye of all Buddhas. During the 2,220 or more years since the Buddha's passing, not even Mahakashyapa, Ananda, Ashvaghosha, Nagarjuna, Nan-yüeh, T'ien-t'ai, Miao-lo, or Dengyo has propagated them. My disciples, form your ranks and follow me, and surpass even Mahakashyapa or Ananda, T'ien-t'ai or Dengyo! If you quail before the threats of the ruler of this little island country [and abandon your faith], how will you face the even more terrible anger of Yama, the lord of hell? If, while calling yourselves the Buddha's messengers, you give way to fear, you will be the most despicable of persons!

[While the regent's government could not come to any conclusion,] the priests of the Nembutsu, the observers of the precepts, and the True Word priests, who realized they could not rival me in wisdom, sent petitions to the government. Finding their petitions were not accepted, they approached the wives and widows of high-ranking officials and slandered me in various ways. [The women reported the slander to the officials, saying:] "According to what some priests told us, Nichiren declared that the late lay priests of Saimyo-ji and Gokuraku-ji have fallen into the hell of incessant suffering. He said that the temples Kencho-ji, Jufuku-ji, Gokuraku-ji, Choraku-ji, and Dai-butsu-ji should be burned down and the honorable priests Doryu and Ryokan beheaded." Under these circumstances, at the regent's supreme council my guilt could scarcely be denied. To confirm whether I had or had not made those statements, I was summoned to the court.

At the court the magistrate said, "You have heard what the regent stated. Did you say these things or not?" I

answered, "Every word is mine. However, the statement about the lay priests of Saimyo-ji and Gokuraku-ji falling into hell is a fabrication. I have been declaring this doctrine [that the schools they belonged to lead to hell] since before their deaths.

"Everything I said was with the future of our country in mind. If you wish to maintain this land in peace and security, it is imperative that you summon the priests of the other schools for a debate in your presence. If you ignore this advice and punish me unreasonably on their behalf, the entire country will have cause to regret your decision. If you condemn me, you will be rejecting the Buddha's envoy. Then you will have to face the punishment of Brahma and Shakra, of the gods of the sun and moon, and of the four heavenly kings. Within one hundred days after my exile or execution, or within one, three, or seven years, there will occur what is called the calamity of internal strife, rebellion within the ruling clan. This will be followed by the calamity of foreign invasion, attack from all sides, particularly from the west. Then you will regret what you have done!" Hearing this, the magistrate Hei no Saemon, forgetting all the dignity of his rank, became wild with rage like the grand minister of state and lay priest [Taira no Kiyomori].

On the twelfth day of the ninth month in the eighth year of Bun'ei (1271), cyclical sign *kanoto-hitsuji*, I was arrested in a manner that was extraordinary and unlawful, even more outrageous than the arrest of the priest Ryoko, who was actually guilty of treason, and the Discipline Master Ryoken, who sought to destroy the government.⁷ Hei no Saemon led several hundreds of armor-clad warriors to take me. Wearing the headgear of a court noble, he glared in anger and spoke in a rough voice. These actions were in essence no different from those of the grand min-

ister of state and lay priest, who seized power only to lead the country to destruction.

Observing this, I realized it was no ordinary event and thought to myself, "Over the past months I have expected something like this to happen sooner or later. How fortunate that I can give my life for the Lotus Sutra! If I am to lose this worthless head [for Buddhahood], it will be like trading sand for gold or rocks for jewels."

Sho-bo, Hei no Saemon's chief retainer, rushed up, snatched the scroll of the fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra⁸ from inside my robes, and struck me in the face with it three times. Then he threw it open on the floor. Warriors seized the nine other scrolls of the sutra, unrolled them, and trampled on them or wound them about their bodies, scattering the scrolls all over the matting and wooden floors until every corner of the house was strewn with them.

I, Nichiren, said in a loud voice, "How amusing! Look at Hei no Saemon gone mad! You gentlemen have just toppled the pillar of Japan." Hearing this, the assembled troops were taken aback. When they saw me standing before the fierce arm of the law unafraid, they must have realized that they were in the wrong, for the color drained from their faces.

Both on the tenth [when I was summoned], and on the twelfth, I fully described to Hei no Saemon the errors of the True Word, Zen, and Nembutsu schools, as well as Ryokan's failure in his prayers for rain. As his warriors listened, they would burst into laughter, and at other times become furious. But I will not go into the details here.

Ryokan prayed for rain from the eighteenth day of the sixth month to the fourth day of the following month, but I blocked his prayers so that no rain came. Ryokan prayed himself into a sweat, but nothing fell except his own

tears. There was no rain in Kamakura, but on the contrary, strong gales blew continually.

At this news I sent a messenger to him three times, saying: "If a person cannot manage to cross a moat ten feet wide, how can he cross one that is a hundred or two hundred feet? Izumi Shikibu,⁹ a licentious woman, violated one of the eight precepts by writing poetry, but still she made it rain with a poem. The priest Noin, although he broke the precepts, was successful in bringing rainfall with a poem. How is it possible then that hundreds and thousands of priests, all of whom observe the two hundred and fifty precepts, gather to pray for rain and can do no more than raise a gale, even after one or two weeks of prayer? It should be clear from this that none of you will be able to attain rebirth in the Pure Land." Ryokan read the message and wept in vexation, and to others he reviled me.

When I reported what had happened with Ryokan, Hei no Saemon attempted to defend him, but it was hopeless. In the end he was unable to utter a word. I will not record all of our conversation as it was too detailed.

That night of the twelfth, I was placed under the custody of the lord of the province of Musashi¹⁰ and around midnight was taken out of Kamakura to be executed. As we set out on Wakamiya Avenue,¹¹ I looked at the crowd of warriors surrounding me and said, "Don't make a fuss. I won't cause any trouble. I merely wish to say my last words to Great Bodhisattva Hachiman." I got down from my horse and called out in a loud voice, "Great Bodhisattva Hachiman, are you truly a god? When Wake no Kiyomaro¹² was about to be beheaded, you appeared as a moon ten feet wide. When the Great Teacher Dengyo lectured on the Lotus Sutra, you bestowed upon him a purple surplice as an offering. Now I,

Nichiren, am the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra in all of Japan, and am entirely without guilt. I have expounded the doctrine to save all the people of Japan from falling into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering for slandering the Lotus Sutra. Moreover, if the forces of the great Mongol empire attack this country, can even the Sun Goddess and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman remain safe and unharmed? When Shakyamuni Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra, Many Treasures Buddha and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions gathered, shining like so many suns and moons, stars and mirrors. In the presence of the countless heavenly gods as well as the benevolent deities and sages of India, China, and Japan, Shakyamuni Buddha urged each one to submit a written pledge to protect the votary of the Lotus Sutra at all times. Each and every one of you gods made this pledge. I should not have to remind you. Why do you not appear at once to fulfill your solemn oath?" Finally I called out: "If I am executed tonight and go to the pure land of Eagle Peak, I will dare to report to Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, that the Sun Goddess and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman are the deities who have broken their oath to him. If you feel this will go hard with you, you had better do something about it right away!" Then I remounted my horse.

Out on Yui Beach as the party passed the shrine there, I spoke again. "Stop a minute, gentlemen. I have a message for someone living near here," I said. I sent a boy called Kumao to Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo [Shijo Kingo], who rushed to meet me. I told him, "Tonight, I will be beheaded. This is something I have wished for many years. In this saha world, I have been born as a pheasant only to be caught by hawks, born a mouse only to be eaten by cats, and born human

only to be killed attempting to defend my wife and children from enemies. Such things have befallen me more times than the dust particles of the land. But until now, I have never given up my life for the sake of the Lotus Sutra. In this life, I was born to become a humble priest, unable to adequately discharge my filial duty to my parents or fully repay the debt of gratitude I owe to my country. Now is the time when I will offer my head to the Lotus Sutra and share the blessings therefrom with my deceased parents, and with my disciples and lay supporters, just as I have promised you." Then the four men, Saemon-no-jo and his brothers, holding on to my horse's reins, went with me to Tatsunokuchi at Koshigoe.

Finally we came to a place that I knew must be the site of my execution. Indeed, the soldiers stopped and began to mill around in excitement. Saemon-no-jo, in tears, said, "These are your last moments!" I replied, "You don't understand! What greater joy could there be? Don't you remember what you have promised?" I had no sooner said this when a brilliant orb as bright as the moon burst forth from the direction of Enoshima, shooting across the sky from southeast to northwest. It was shortly before dawn and still too dark to see anyone's face, but the radiant object clearly illuminated everyone like bright moonlight. The executioner fell on his face, his eyes blinded. The soldiers were filled with panic. Some ran off into the distance, some jumped down from their horses and huddled on the ground, while others crouched in their saddles. I called out, "Here, why do you shrink from this vile prisoner? Come closer! Come closer!" But no one would approach me. "What if the dawn should come? You must hurry up and execute me—once the day breaks, it will be too ugly a job." I urged them on, but they made no response.

They waited a short while, and then I was told to proceed to Echi in the same province of Sagami. I replied that, since none of us knew the way, someone would have to guide us there. No one was willing to take the lead, but after we had waited for some time, one soldier finally said, "That's the road you should take."

Setting off, we followed the road and around noon reached Echi. We then proceeded to the residence of Homma Rokuro Saemon. There I ordered sake for the soldiers. When the time came for them to leave, some bowed their heads, joined their palms, and said in a most respectful manner: "We did not realize what kind of a man you are. We hated you because we had been told that you slandered Amida Buddha, the one we worship. But now that we have seen with our own eyes what has happened to you, we understand how worthy a person you are, and will discard the Nembutsu that we have practiced for so long." Some of them even took their prayer beads out of their tinder bags and flung them away. Others pledged that they would never again chant the Nembutsu. After they left, Rokuro Saemon's retainers took over the guard. Then Saemon-no-jo and his brothers took their leave.

That evening, at the hour of the dog (7:00-9:00 P.M.), a messenger from Kamakura arrived with an order from the regent. The soldiers were sure that it would be an official letter to behead me, but Uma-no-jo, Homma's deputy, came running with the letter, knelt, and said: "We were afraid that you would be executed tonight, but now the letter has brought wonderful news. The messenger said that, since the lord of Musashi had left for a spa in Atami this morning at the hour of the hare (5:00-7:00 A.M.), he set off at once and rode for four hours to get here because he feared that something might happen to you. The messenger has left im-

mediately to take news to the lord in Atami tonight." The accompanying letter read, "This person is not really guilty. He will shortly be pardoned. If you execute him you will have cause to regret."

Now it was the night of the thirteenth. There were scores of warriors stationed around my lodging and in the main garden. Because it was the middle of the ninth month, the moon was very round and full. I went out into the garden and there, turning toward the moon, recited the verse portion of the "Life Span" chapter. Then I spoke briefly about the faults of the various schools, citing passages from the Lotus Sutra. I said: "You, the god of the moon, are Rare Moon, the son of a god, who participated in the ceremony of the Lotus Sutra. When the Buddha expounded the 'Treasure Tower' chapter, you received his order, and in the 'Entrustment' chapter, when the Buddha patted your head with his hand, in your vow you said, 'We will respectfully carry out all these things just as the World-Honored One has commanded.' You are that very god. Would you have an opportunity to fulfill the vow you made in the Buddha's presence if it were not for me? Now that you see me in this situation, you should rush forward joyfully to receive the sufferings of the votary of the Lotus Sutra in his stead, thereby carrying out the Buddha's command and also fulfilling your vow. It is strange indeed that you have not yet done anything. If nothing is done to set this country to rights, I will never return to Kamakura. Even if you do not intend to do anything for me, how can you go on shining with such a complacent face? The Great Collection Sutra says, 'The sun and moon no longer shed their light.' The Benevolent Kings Sutra says, 'The sun and moon depart from their regular courses.' The Sovereign Kings Sutra says, 'The thirty-three heavenly gods

become furious.' What about these passages, moon god? What is your answer?"

Then, as though in reply, a large star bright as the Morning Star fell from the sky and hung in a branch of the plum tree in front of me. The soldiers, astounded, jumped down from the veranda, fell on their faces in the garden, or ran behind the house. Immediately the sky clouded over, and a fierce wind started up, raging so violently that the whole island of Enoshima seemed to roar. The sky shook, echoing with a sound like pounding drums.

The day dawned, and on the fourteenth day, at the hour of the hare, a man called the lay priest Juro came and said to me: "Last night there was a huge commotion in the regent's residence at the hour of the dog. They summoned a diviner, who said, 'The country is going to erupt in turmoil because you punished that priest. If you do not call him back to Kamakura immediately, there is no telling what will happen to this land.' At that some said, 'Let's pardon him!' Others said, 'Since he predicted that war would break out within a hundred days, why don't we wait and see what happens.'"

I was kept at Echi for more than twenty days. During that period seven or eight cases of arson and an endless succession of murders took place in Kamakura. Slanderers went around saying that Nichiren's disciples were setting the fires. The government officials thought this might be true and made up a list of over 260 of my followers who they believed should be expelled from Kamakura. Word spread that these persons were all to be exiled to remote islands, and that those disciples already in prison would be beheaded. It turned out, however, that the fires were set by the observers of the precepts and the Nembutsu believers in an attempt to implicate my disciples. There were other things that happened, but they are too numerous to mention here.

I left Echi on the tenth day of the tenth month (1271) and arrived in the province of Sado on the twenty-eighth day of the same month. On the first day of the eleventh month, I was taken to a small hut that stood in a field called Tsukahara behind Homma Rokuro Saemon's residence in Sado. One room with four posts, it stood on some land where corpses were abandoned, a place like Rendaino in Kyoto. Not a single statue of the Buddha was enshrined there; the boards of the roof did not meet, and the walls were full of holes. The snow fell and piled up, never melting away. I spent my days there, sitting in a straw coat or lying on a fur skin. At night it hailed and snowed, and there were continual flashes of lightning. Even in the daytime the sun hardly shone. It was a wretched place to live.

I felt like Li Ling,¹³ who was imprisoned in a rocky cave in the land of the northern barbarians, or the Tripitaka Master Fa-tao, who was branded on the face and exiled to the area south of the Yangtze by Emperor Hui-tsung. Nevertheless, King Suzudan received severe training under the seer Asita to obtain the blessings of the Lotus Sutra, and even though Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was beaten by the staves of arrogant monks and others, he achieved honor as votary of the one vehicle.¹⁴ Therefore, nothing is more joyful to me than to have been born in the Latter Day of the Law and to suffer persecutions because I propagate the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo. For more than twenty-two hundred years after the passing of the Buddha, no one, not even the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-che, experienced the truth of the passage in the sutra that says, "It [the Lotus Sutra] will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe."¹⁵ Only I have fulfilled the prophecy from the sutra, "again and again we will be banished."¹⁶ The Bud-

dha says, in reference to those who “listen to one verse or one phrase [of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law],” that “I will bestow on all of them a prophecy [that they will attain supreme perfect enlightenment].”¹⁷ Thus there can be no doubt that I will reach supreme perfect enlightenment. It is the lord of Sagami above all who has been a good friend to me. Hei no Saemon is to me what Devadatta was to Shakyamuni Buddha. The Nembutsu priests are comparable to the Venerable Kokalika, and the observers of the precepts to the monk Sunakshatra. The age of the Buddha is none other than today, and our present age is none other than that of the Buddha. This is what the Lotus Sutra describes as the “true aspect of all phenomena” and as “consistency from beginning to end.”¹⁸

The fifth volume of *Great Concentration and Insight* states, “As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge in confusing form, vying with one another to interfere.” It also states, “It will only be like a boar rubbing against the golden mountain; like the various rivers flowing into the sea; like logs making a fire burn more briskly; or like the wind swelling the body of the kalakula insect.” These passages mean that, if one understands and practices the Lotus Sutra just as it teaches, in accordance with the people’s capacity and at the right time, then these seven obstacles and devils will confront one. Among them, the devil king of the sixth heaven [is the most powerful. He] will possess one’s sovereign, parents, wife or children, lay supporters, or evil persons, and through them will attempt in a friendly manner to divert one from one’s practice of the Lotus Sutra, or will oppose one outright. The practice of Buddhism is always accompanied by persecutions and difficulties corresponding in severity to whichever sutra one may uphold. To practice the Lotus Sutra will provoke

particularly harsh persecutions. To practice as it teaches, and in accordance with the time and the people’s capacity, will incite truly agonizing ordeals.

The eighth volume of *The Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight”* states, “So long as a person does not try to depart from the sufferings of birth and death and aspire to the Buddha vehicle, the devil will watch over him like a parent.” This passage means that, even though a person may cultivate roots of goodness, so long as he practices Nembutsu, True Word, Zen, Precepts, or any teaching other than the Lotus Sutra, he will have the devil king for a parent. The devil king will possess and cause other persons to respect him and give him alms, and people will be deluded into believing that he is a truly enlightened priest. If he is honored by the sovereign, for instance, the people are sure to offer him alms. On the other hand, a priest who incurs the enmity of the ruler and others [because of the Lotus Sutra] is surely practicing the correct teaching.

Devadatta was the foremost good friend to the Thus Come One Shakyamuni. In this age as well, it is not one’s allies but one’s powerful enemies who assist one’s progress. We find examples before our very eyes. The Hojo clan in Kamakura could not have firmly established itself as the ruler of Japan had it not been for the challenges posed by Yoshimori and the Retired Emperor of Oki.¹⁹ In this sense these men were the best allies the ruling clan could have. For me, Nichiren, my best allies in attaining Buddhahood are Kagenobu, the priests Ryokan, Doryu, and Doamidabutsu, and Hei no Saemon and the lord of Sagami. I am grateful when I think that without them I could not have proved myself to be the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

In the yard around the hut the snow piled deeper and deeper. No one came to see me; my only visitor was the

piercing wind. *Great Concentration and Insight* and the Lotus Sutra lay open before my eyes, and Nam-myoho-renge-kyo flowed from my lips. My evenings passed in discourse to the moon and stars on the fallacies of the various schools and the profound meaning of the Lotus Sutra. Thus, one year gave way to the next.

One finds people of mean spirit wherever one goes. The rumor reached me that the observers of the precepts and the Nembutsu priests on the island of Sado, including Yuiamidabutsu, Shoyu-bo, Insho-bo, Jido-bo, and their followers—several hundred of them—had met to decide what to do about me. One said: “Nichiren, the notorious enemy of Amida Buddha and an evil teacher to all people, has been exiled to our province. As we all know, exiles to this island seldom manage to survive. Even if they do, they never return home. So no one is going to be punished for killing an exile. Nichiren lives all alone at a place called Tsukahara. No matter how strong and powerful he is, if there’s no one around, what can he do? Let’s go together and shoot him with arrows!” Another said, “He was supposed to be beheaded, but his execution has been postponed for a while because the wife of the lord of Sagami is about to have a child. The postponement is merely temporary, though. I hear he is eventually going to be executed.” A third said, “Let’s ask Lord Rokuro Saemon to behead him. If he refuses, we can plan something ourselves.” There were many proposals about what to do with me, but the third proposal [mentioned above] was decided on. Eventually several hundred people gathered at the constable’s office.²⁰

Rokuro Saemon addressed them, saying: “An official letter from the regent directs that the priest shall not be executed. This is no ordinary, contemptible criminal, and if anything happens to him, I, Shigetura, will be guilty

of grave dereliction. Instead of killing him, why don’t you confront him in religious debate?” Following this suggestion, the Nembutsu and other priests, accompanied by apprentice priests carrying the three Pure Land sutras, *Great Concentration and Insight*, the True Word sutras, and other literature under their arms or hanging from their necks, gathered at Tsukahara on the sixteenth day of the first month [in 1272]. They came not only from the province of Sado but also from the provinces of Echigo, Etchu, Dewa, Mutsu, and Shinano. Several hundred priests and others gathered in the spacious yard of the hut and in the adjacent field. Rokuro Saemon, his brothers, and his entire clan came, as well as lay priest farmers,²¹ all in great numbers. The Nembutsu priests uttered streams of abuse, the True Word priests turned pale, and the Tendai priests called loudly to vanquish the opponent. The lay believers cried out in hatred, “There he is—the notorious enemy of our Amida Buddha!” The uproar and jeering resounded like thunder and seemed to shake the earth. I let them clamor for a while and then said, “Silence, all of you! You are here for a religious debate. This is no time for abuse.” At this, Rokuro Saemon and others voiced their accord, and some of them grabbed the abusive Nembutsu followers by the neck and pushed them back.

The priests proceeded to cite the doctrines of *Great Concentration and Insight* and the True Word and the Nembutsu teachings. I responded to each, establishing the exact meaning of what had been said, then coming back with questions. However, I needed to ask only one or two at most before they were completely silenced. They were far inferior even to the True Word, Zen, Nembutsu, and Tendai priests in Kamakura, so you can imagine how the debate went. I overturned them as easily as a sharp sword cutting through

a melon or a gale bending the grass. They not only were poorly versed in the Buddhist teachings but contradicted themselves. They confused sutras with treatises or commentaries with treatises. I discredited the Nembutsu by telling how Shan-tao fell out of the willow tree, and refuted the story about the Great Teacher Kobo's three-pronged diamond-pounder and of how he transformed himself into the Thus Come One Mahavairochana.²² As I demonstrated each falsity and aberration, some of the priests swore, some were struck dumb, while others turned pale. There were Nembutsu adherents who admitted the error of their school; some threw away their robes and beads on the spot and pledged never to chant the Nembutsu again.

The members of the group all began to leave, as did Rokuro Saemon and his men. As they were walking across the yard, I called the lord back to make a prophecy. I first asked him when he was departing for Kamakura, and he answered that it would be around the seventh month, after his farmers had finished their work in his fields. Then I said: "For a warrior, 'work in the fields' means assisting his lord in times of peril and receiving fiefs in recognition of his service. Fighting is about to break out in Kamakura. You should hasten there to distinguish yourself in battle, and then you will be rewarded with fiefs. Since your warriors are renowned throughout the province of Sagami, if you remain here in the countryside tending to your farms and arrive too late for the battle, your name will be disgraced." I do not know what he thought of this, but Homma, dumbfounded, did not utter a word. The Nembutsu priests and the observers of the precepts and lay believers looked bewildered, not comprehending what I had said.

After everyone had gone, I began to put into shape a work in two volumes

called *The Opening of the Eyes*, which I had been working on since the eleventh month of the previous year. I wanted to record the wonder of Nichiren, in case I should be beheaded. The essential message in this work is that the destiny of Japan depends solely upon Nichiren. A house without pillars collapses, and a person without a soul is dead. Nichiren is the soul of the people of this country. Hei no Saemon has already toppled the pillar of Japan, and the country grows turbulent as unfounded rumors and speculation rise up like phantoms to cause dissension in the ruling clan. Further, Japan is about to be attacked by a foreign country, as I described in my *On Establishing the Correct Teaching*. Having written to this effect, I entrusted the manuscript to Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo's messenger. The disciples around me thought that what I had written was too provocative, but they could not stop me.

Just then a ship arrived at the island on the eighteenth day of the second month. It carried the news that fighting had broken out in Kamakura and then in Kyoto, causing indescribable suffering. Rokuro Saemon, leading his men, left on fast ships that night for Kamakura. Before departing, he humbly begged for my assistance with palms joined.

He said: "I have been doubting the truth of the words you spoke on the sixteenth day of last month, but they have come true in less than thirty days. I see now that the Mongols will surely attack us, and it is equally certain that believers in Nembutsu are doomed to the hell of incessant suffering. I will never chant the Nembutsu again."

To this I replied: "Whatever I may say, unless the lord of Sagami heeds my words, the people of Japan will not heed them either, and in that case our country will surely be ruined. Although I myself may be insignificant, I

propagate the Lotus Sutra and therefore am the envoy of Shakyamuni Buddha. The Sun Goddess and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman, who are insignificant, are treated with great respect in this country, but they are only petty gods as compared with Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings. It is said, however, that to kill someone who serves these two gods is equal to the sin of killing seven and a half ordinary persons. The grand minister of state and lay priest and the Retired Emperor of Oki perished because they did so. Thus, persecuting me is incomparably worse than molesting the servants of those two gods. As I am the envoy of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, the Sun Goddess and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman should bow their heads before me, press their palms together, and prostrate themselves. The votary of the Lotus Sutra is attended by Brahma and Shakra on either side, and the gods of the sun and moon light his path before and behind. Even if my counsel is heeded, if I am not given due respect as the votary of the Lotus Sutra, then the country will perish. How ominous that the authorities have turned hundreds of persons against me and have even banished me twice! This country is surely doomed, but since I have asked the gods to withhold their punishment on our land, it has survived until now. However, that punishment has finally descended because these unreasonable actions continued. And if my counsel is not heeded on this occasion, the gods will cause the Mongol empire to send its forces to destroy Japan. That would seem to be the kind of disaster that Hei no Saemon is intent upon calling forth. When it happens, I doubt that you and your followers can find any safety even on this island." After I had finished speaking, Homma, looking deeply perplexed, set off on his way.

The lay believers, hearing of this,

said to one another, "Perhaps this priest has some kind of transcendental powers. How terrifying! From now on, we had better cease giving any alms or support to the Nembutsu priests and the observers of the precepts." The observers of the precepts, who were followers of Ryokan, and the Nembutsu priests said, "[Since this priest predicted the outbreak of rebellion in our country,] perhaps he is one of the conspirators." After this things grew somewhat quieter.

Then the Nembutsu priests gathered again in council. "If things go on this way," they said, "we will die of starvation. By all means, let's rid ourselves of this priest! Already more than half the people in the province have gone over to his side. What are we to do?"

Yuiamidabutsu, the leader of the Nembutsu priests, along with Dokan, a disciple of Ryokan, and Shoyu-bo, who were leaders of the observers of the precepts, journeyed in haste to Kamakura. There they reported to the lord of the province of Musashi: "If this priest remains on the island of Sado, there will soon be not a single Buddhist hall left standing or a single priest remaining. He takes the statues of Amida Buddha and throws them in the fire or casts them into the river. Day and night he climbs the high mountains, bellows to the sun and moon, and curses the regent. The sound of his voice can be heard throughout the entire province."

When the former governor of Musashi heard this, he decided there was no need to report it to the regent. Instead he sent private orders that any followers of Nichiren in the province of Sado should be driven out of the province or imprisoned. He also sent official letters containing similar instructions. He did so three times. I will not attempt to describe what happened during this period—you can probably imagine. Some people were thrown into

prison because they were said to have walked past my hut, others were exiled because they were reported to have given me donations, or their wives and children were taken into custody. The former governor of Musashi then reported what he had done to the regent. But quite contrary to his expectations, the regent issued a letter of pardon on the fourteenth day of the second month in the eleventh year of Bun'ei (1274), which reached Sado on the eighth day of the third month.

The Nembutsu priests held another council. "This man, the archenemy of the Buddha Amida and slanderer of the Reverend Shan-tao and the Honorable Honen, has incurred the wrath of the authorities and happened to be banished to this island. How can we bear to see him pardoned and allowed to return home alive!"

While they were engaged in various plots, for some reason there was an unexpected change in the weather. A favorable wind began to blow, and I was able to leave the island. The strait can be crossed in three days with a favorable wind, but not even in fifty or a hundred days when the weather is bad. I crossed over in no time at all.

Thereupon the Nembutsu priests, observers of the precepts, and True Word priests of the provincial capital of Echigo and Zenko-ji temple in Shinano gathered from all directions to hold a meeting. "What a shame that the Sado priests should have allowed Nichiren to return alive! Whatever we do, we must not let this priest make his way past the living body of the Buddha Amida."²³

But in spite of their machinations, a number of warriors from the provincial government office in Echigo were dispatched to escort me. Thus I was able to pass safely by Zenko-ji, and the Nembutsu priests were powerless to stop me. I left the island of Sado on the thirteenth day of the third month, and

arrived in Kamakura on the twenty-sixth day of the same month.

On the eighth day of the fourth month, I met with Hei no Saemon. In contrast to his behavior on previous occasions, his manner was quite mild, and he treated me with courtesy. An accompanying lay priest asked me about the Nembutsu, a layman asked about the True Word school, and another person asked about Zen, while Hei no Saemon himself inquired whether it was possible to attain the way through any of the sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra. I replied to each of these questions by citing passages from the sutras.

Then Hei no Saemon, apparently acting on behalf of the regent, asked when the Mongol forces would invade Japan. I replied: "They will surely come within this year. I have already expressed my opinion on this matter, but it has not been heeded. If you try to treat someone's illness without knowing its cause, you will only make the person sicker than before. In the same way, if the True Word priests are permitted to try to overcome the Mongols with their prayers and imprecations, they will only bring about the country's military defeat. Under no circumstances whatever should the True Word priests, or the priests of any other schools for that matter, be allowed to offer up prayers. If each of you has a real understanding of Buddhism, you will understand this matter on hearing me explain it to you.

"Also, I notice that, although advice from others is heeded, when I offer advice, it is for some strange reason invariably ignored. Nevertheless, I would like to state certain facts here so that you may think them over later. The Retired Emperor of Oki was the sovereign of the nation, and the acting administrator [Hojo Yoshitoki] was his subject, [and yet the latter attacked and defeated the retired emperor]. Why

would the Sun Goddess permit a subject to attack a sovereign, who should be like a father to him? Why would Great Bodhisattva Hachiman allow a vassal to attack the lord with impunity? And yet, as we know, the sovereign and the courtiers supporting him were defeated by Hojo Yoshitoki. That defeat was no mere accident. It came about because they put their faith in the misleading teachings of the Great Teacher Kobo and the biased views of the great teachers Jikaku and Chisho, and because the priests of Mount Hiei, To-ji, and Onjo-ji, in their opposition to the Kamakura shogunate, offered prayers for its defeat. Thus their curses 'rebounded upon the originator,'²⁴ and as a consequence the sovereign and his courtiers were forced to suffer defeat. The military leaders in Kamakura knew nothing of such rituals, so no prayers to subdue the enemy were offered; thus they were able to win. But if they now depend on such prayers, they will meet the same fate as the courtiers.

"The Ezo people of northern Japan have no understanding of the principles of birth and death. Ando Goro²⁵ was a pious man who knew the law of cause and effect and erected many Buddhist halls and pagodas. How could it happen, then, that the Ezo beheaded him? In view of these events, I have no doubt that, if these priests are allowed to go on offering prayers for victory, Your Lordship will meet with some untoward event. And when that happens, you must not under any circumstances say that I failed to warn you." Such was the stern manner in which I addressed him.

When I returned home, I heard that the Dharma Seal of the Amida Hall²⁶ had been asked to pray for rain from the tenth day of the fourth month. This Dharma Seal is the most learned priest of To-ji and the teacher of the prelate of Omuro.²⁷ He has mastered

the True Word esoteric teachings of the great teachers Kobo, Jikaku, and Chisho, and has memorized all the doctrines of the various schools such as Tendai and Flower Garland. He began praying for rain on the tenth day, and on the eleventh a heavy rain fell. There was no wind, but only a gentle rain that fell for a day and a night. The regent, the lord of Sagami, was said to have been so deeply impressed that he presented the Dharma Seal with thirty *ryo* in gold, a horse, and other gifts as a reward.

When the people of Kamakura heard this, eminent and humble alike clapped their hands, pursed their lips, and laughed with derision, saying: "That Nichiren preached a false kind of Buddhism and came near to getting his head cut off. He was finally pardoned, but instead of learning his lesson, he goes on slandering the Nembutsu and Zen schools, and even dares to speak ill of the esoteric teachings of True Word. How fortunate that we have had this rain to serve as proof of the power of True Word prayers!"

Faced with such criticisms, my disciples became quite downcast and complained that I had been too provocative in my attacks on the True Word school. But I said to them, "Just wait a while. If the evil teachings of the Great Teacher Kobo could be correct and in fact produce effective prayers for the welfare of the nation, then the Retired Emperor of Oki would surely have been victorious in his struggle with the Kamakura shogunate, and Setaka,²⁸ the favorite boy attendant of the prelate of Omuro, would not have had his head cut off. Kobo in his *Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind* states that the Lotus Sutra is inferior to the Flower Garland Sutra. In his *Precious Key to the Secret Treasury* he claims that the Shakyamuni Buddha of the 'Life Span' chapter of the Lotus Sutra is an ordinary person, and in his *Comparison of Exoteric and Esoteric*

Buddhism he calls the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai a thief. Moreover, Shokaku-bo²⁹ in his *Rules of Rites for Revering the Buddha's Relics* states that the Buddha who preached the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra is not even worthy to tend the sandals of a True Word master. The Dharma Seal of the Amida Hall is a follower of the men who taught these perverse doctrines. If such a man could show himself superior to me, then the dragon kings who send down the rain must be the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, and they will surely be chastised by the gods Brahma and Shakra and the four heavenly kings. There must be more to this than meets the eye!"

"What do you mean by 'more than meets the eye'?" my disciples asked with a scornful smile.

I replied: "Shan-wu-wei and Pu-k'ung both caused rain to fall in answer to their prayers, but it is recorded that they also brought about high winds. When Kobo prayed for rain, it fell after twenty-one days had passed. But under such circumstances, it is the same as though he had not caused it to rain at all, since some rain is naturally bound to fall in the course of a twenty-one-day interval. The fact that it happened to rain while he was praying for it is in no way remarkable. What is really impressive is to cause it to fall through a single ceremony, the way T'ien-t'ai and Senkan³⁰ did. That is why I say there must be something peculiar about this rain."

I had not even finished speaking when a great gale began to blow. Houses of every size, Buddhist halls and pagodas, old trees, and government buildings all were swept up into the air or toppled to the ground. A huge shining object flew through the sky, and the earth was strewn with beams and rafters. Men and women were blown to their death, and many cattle and horses were struck down. One might have excused such an evil wind if it

had come in autumn, the typhoon season, but this was only the fourth month, the beginning of summer. Moreover, this wind did not blow throughout the country, but struck only the eight provinces of the Kanto region, and in fact only the two provinces of Musashi and Sagami. It blew strongest in Sagami; and within Sagami, it blew strongest in Kamakura; and within Kamakura, it blew strongest at the government headquarters, Wakamiya, and the temples Kencho-ji and Gokuraku-ji. It was apparent that it was no ordinary wind, but rather the result of the Dharma Seal's prayers alone. The people who had earlier pursed their lips and laughed at me suddenly turned sober, and my disciples too were astonished and expressed their wonder.

I had been determined all along that, if after three attempts to warn the rulers of the nation my advice still went unheeded, I would leave the country. With that thought in mind, I accordingly left Kamakura on the twelfth day of the fifth month and came here to Mount Minobu.

In the tenth month of the same year (1274), the Mongols launched their attack. Not only were the islands of Iki and Tsushima³¹ assaulted and captured, but the forces of the Dazaifu government office in Kyushu were defeated as well. When the military leaders, the lay priest Shoni and Otomo,³² received word of this, they fled, and the remaining warriors were struck down without difficulty. [Though the Mongol forces withdrew,] it was apparent just how weak Japan's defenses would be if they should launch another attack in the future.

The Benevolent Kings Sutra says, "Once the sages have departed, then the seven disasters are certain to arise." The Sovereign Kings Sutra states, "Because evil people are respected and favored and good people are subjected to punishment, marauders will appear

from other regions, and the people of the country will meet with death and disorder." If these pronouncements of the Buddha are true, then evil men certainly exist in our country, and the ruler favors and respects such men while treating good men with enmity.

The Great Collection Sutra states, "The sun and moon no longer shed their light. All the four directions will be afflicted by drought. . . . The wicked rulers and monks who perform these ten evil acts will curse and destroy my correct teaching." In the Benevolent Kings Sutra we read, "Evil monks, hoping to gain fame and profit, in many cases appear before the ruler, the crown prince, or the other princes, and take it upon themselves to preach doctrines that lead to the violation of the Buddhist Law and the destruction of the nation. The ruler, failing to perceive the truth of the situation, listens to and puts faith in such doctrines. . . . In this way he brings about the destruction of Buddhism and of the nation." And the Lotus Sutra speaks of the "evil monks of that muddied age."³³ If these passages in the sutras are true, then there must unquestionably be evil monks in this country. The crooked trees are destined to be cut down on a treasure mountain, and dead bodies are rejected by the great sea. Though the great sea of the Buddhist Law and the treasure mountain of the one vehicle may admit the shards and rubble of the five cardinal sins or the dirty water of the four major offenses,³⁴ they have no room for the "dead bodies" of those who slander the Law, or for the "crooked trees" who are icchantikas, persons of incorrigible disbelief. Therefore, those who endeavor to practice the Buddhist Law and who care about what happens to them in future lives should know what a fearful thing it is to slander the Lotus Sutra.

Many people wonder why anyone should pay heed to a person like myself

who speaks ill of Kobo, Jikaku, and others of their group. I do not know about other regions, but I know that the people everywhere in the province of Awa have good reason to believe what I say. They have seen the proof right before their eyes. Endon-bo of Inomori, Saigyo-bo and Dogi-bo of Kiyosumi, and Jitchi-bo of Kataumi were all eminent priests; but one should inquire what kind of deaths they met with. However, I will say no more of them. Enchi-bo spent three years in the great hall of Seicho-ji copying the text of the Lotus Sutra in a laborious fashion, bowing three times as he copied each character. He had memorized all ten volumes, and every day and night recited the entire sutra twice for a period of fifty years. Everyone said that he would surely become a Buddha. But I alone said that he, along with Dogi-bo, was even more certain to fall into the depths of the hell of incessant suffering than were the Nembutsu priests. You would do well to inquire carefully just how these men met death. If it had not been for me, people would have believed that these priests had attained Buddhahood.

You should realize from this that the manner of the death of Kobo, Jikaku, and the others indicated that a truly miserable fate was in store for them. But their disciples contrived to keep the matter secret, so that even the members of the imperial court never learned of it. Hence these men have been looked up to with increasing reverence in later times. And if there had been no one like me to reveal the truth, they would have gone on being honored in that manner for endless ages to come. The non-Buddhist teacher Uluka [turned to stone at his death], but eight hundred years later [his errors were brought to light and] the stone melted and turned to water. And in the case of another non-Buddhist teacher Kapila, a thousand years

passed before his faults were brought to light.³⁵

People are able to be born in human form because they have observed the five precepts in a previous existence. And if they continue to observe the five precepts in this life, then the twenty-five benevolent deities will protect them, and Same Birth and Same Name, the two heavenly messengers who have been with each of them since birth on their shoulders, will guard them. So long as they commit no fault, the demons will have no chance to do them harm. And yet in this country of Japan, there are countless people who cry out in misery. We know, too, that the people on the islands of Iki and Tsushima had to suffer at the hands of the Mongols, and what befell the defenders of the Dazaifu in Kyushu. What fault were the people of this country guilty of that they should meet with such a fate? One would surely like to know the answer. One or two of the persons there may have been guilty of evil, but is it possible that all of them could have been?

The blame lies entirely in the fact that this country is filled with the disciples of those who despised the Lotus Sutra—True Word priests who follow the doctrines handed down from Kobo, Jikaku, and Chisho; Nembutsu priests who are latter-day disciples of Shan-tao and Honen; and the followers of Bodhidharma and the other patriarchs of the Zen school. That is why Brahma, Shakra, the four heavenly kings, and the other deities, true to the vows they took when the Lotus Sutra was expounded to split into seven pieces the head [of anyone who troubles a preacher of the sutra],³⁶ have sent down this punishment.

Some people may be perplexed at this point and object that, although those who do harm to the votary of the Lotus Sutra are supposed to have their heads split into seven pieces, there

are people who slander the priest Nichiren and yet do not have broken heads. Are we to conclude, they may ask, that the priest Nichiren is not a true votary of the Lotus Sutra?

I would reply by saying that, if Nichiren is not a votary of the Lotus Sutra, then who is? Is Honen a votary, who in his writings ordered people to throw the Lotus Sutra away? Is the Great Teacher Kobo a votary, who said that Shakyamuni Buddha was still in the region of darkness? Or are Shan-wu-wei and Jikaku votaries, who taught that, although the Lotus Sutra and the Mahavairochana Sutra are equal in terms of principle, the latter is superior in practice?

Again, this matter of the head being split into seven pieces—one need not imagine the kind of split made by a sharp sword. On the contrary, the Lotus Sutra says that the split is like that of the “branches of the arjaka tree.”³⁷ In a person’s head there are seven drops of liquid, and outside there are seven demons. If the demons drink one drop, the person’s head begins to ache. If they drink three drops, his life will be endangered, and if they drink all seven drops, he will die. People in the world today all have heads that have split apart like the branches of the arjaka tree, but they are so steeped in evil karma that they are not even aware of the fact. They are like persons who have been injured while they were asleep or in a state of drunkenness, and have not yet become conscious of their injury.

Rather than saying that the head is split into seven pieces, we sometimes say that the mind is split into seven pieces. The skull bone under the scalp cracks or even breaks apart at the time of death. Many people of our own period had their heads split open in the great earthquake of the Shoka era (1257) or at the time of the appearance of the great comet in the Bun’ei era (1264). At the time their heads split

open, they had a severe coughing condition, and when their five solid internal organs³⁸ failed to function correctly, they suffered from dysentery. How could they have failed to realize that they were being punished because they slandered the votary of the Lotus Sutra!

Because venison is tasty, the deer is hunted and killed; because oil can be obtained from the turtle, the turtle loses its life. If a woman is beautiful, there will be many who envy her. The ruler of a nation has much to fear from other nations, and the life of a man with great wealth is constantly in danger. One who abides by the Lotus Sutra will inevitably attain Buddhahood. Therefore, the devil king of the sixth heaven, the lord of this threefold world, will become intensely jealous of anyone who abides by the sutra. This devil king, we are told, attaches himself like a plague demon to people in a way that cannot be detected by the eye. Thereafter, like persons who gradually become drunk on fine old wine, rulers, fathers and mothers, wives and children gradually become possessed by him and are filled with jealousy toward the votary of the Lotus Sutra. And that is precisely the situation we face today in the world around us. Because I

chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, I have for over twenty years been driven from place to place. Twice I have incurred the wrath of the authorities, and in the end I have retired to this mountain.

Here I am surrounded by four mountains, Shichimen to the west, Tenshi to the east, Minobu to the north, and Takatori to the south. Each is high enough to touch the sky, and so steep that even flying birds have trouble crossing them. In their midst are four rivers called Fuji, Haya, Oshira, and Minobu. In the middle, in a ravine some hundred yards or so across, I have built my hut. I cannot see the sun in the daytime or the moon at night. In winter there is deep snow, and in summer the grass grows thick. Because so few people come to see me, the trail is very hard to travel. This year, especially, the snow is so deep that I have no visitors at all. Knowing that my life may end at any time, I put all my trust in the Lotus Sutra. In these circumstances, your letter was particularly welcome. It seemed almost like a message from Shakyamuni Buddha or from my departed parents, and I cannot tell you how grateful I was. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.



Background

This work is an autobiographical account covering the events of an important period in Nichiren Daishonin's life—from the time shortly before the Tatsunokuchi Persecution through his two-and-a-half-year exile on Sado Island to his eventual retirement to Mount Minobu. In the course of his struggles over this period of nine years, the Daishonin fulfilled the predictions in the Lotus Sutra concerning its votary and established himself in both

word and deed as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

This letter was written in the second year of Kenji (1276) and addressed to the lay nun Konichi, a widow who lived in Awa, the Daishonin's native province. Her son had earlier converted to the Daishonin's teachings, and through him she herself became a convert. Some time after her conversion, her son died. But she overcame her deep sorrow and remained a sincere

believer in the Daishonin's Buddhism to the end of her life.

The chronicle of events begins in 1268 when the Mongol empire sent a delegate to Japan to demand that the nation acknowledge fealty to the Mongols. The predictions of foreign invasion made in *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* had started to come true. The Daishonin once more remonstrated with the Kamakura authorities and religious leaders, but they ignored his repeated warnings and instead struck out against him and his followers. At this point the Daishonin urges his disciples never to yield to persecution but to devote their whole lives to propagating the Mystic Law.

His undaunted struggle incurred further wrath from the regime and from the other religious schools and finally led to the Tatsunokuchi Persecution. Later in his work *The Opening of the*

Eyes, the Daishonin points to that attempt on his life as the immediate cause for him to reveal himself as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. In the passage that follows, the Daishonin speaks of his life on Sado. He expresses joy in the knowledge that he was the only one who fulfilled the prophecy in the Lotus Sutra concerning the votary who is exiled more than once.

After he returned to Kamakura in 1274, he remonstrated with the regime for yet a third time. When the government again spurned his counsel, he left Kamakura to live in the recesses of Mount Minobu, where this letter was written. Just five months later, the Mongol forces attacked Japan. The cause for this, he states, was the nation's slander of the Lotus Sutra. In conclusion, the Daishonin expresses appreciation to the lay nun Konichi for having sent a letter to him at his lonely retreat on Mount Minobu.

Notes

1. The "barbarians of the west" is the set phrase that the Chinese invented to describe the tribes in the west, and the Daishonin applied it to the Mongols.

2. Po Chü-i (772-846) was a Chinese poet-official noted for his *Hsin Yüeh-fu*, "New Yüeh-fu," a series of poems in *yüeh-fu* or ballad form criticizing social and political ills of the time.

3. Fu-ch'a (d. 473 B.C.E.) was the twenty-fifth ruler of the state of Wu. His father was killed by Kou-chien, king of the state of Yüeh, and Fu-ch'a took revenge two years later by defeating him in battle. Kou-chien proposed a peaceful settlement with Fu-ch'a, but really planned to attack the state of Wu again. Wu Tzu-hsü, a loyal minister of Fu-ch'a, discovered the plot and urged the king to kill Kou-chien, but the king would not listen. Instead, he compelled Wu Tzu-hsü to commit suicide in 485 B.C.E.

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

5. *The Annotations on the Nirvana Sutra*.

6. This is not an actual quotation, but

Nichiren Daishonin's view of what Shakyamuni must have believed, based on various passages in the Lotus Sutra and other sutras.

7. Ryoko and Ryoken plotted against the Kamakura government; their plots were discovered, and they were put to death. Ryoko was executed in 1251, and Ryoken in 1261.

8. The fifth volume includes chapters twelve to fifteen; the thirteenth, or "Encouraging Devotion," chapter says the votary of the Lotus Sutra will be attacked with swords and staves. The "nine other scrolls of the sutra" that appears in the sentence after next indicates those of the other seven volumes of the Lotus Sutra, plus the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra in one volume and the Universal Worthy Sutra in one volume. These two sutras are regarded as, respectively, the prologue and epilogue to the Lotus Sutra.

9. Izumi Shikibu (b. c. 976) was a poet of the Heian period, noted for her passionate love affairs. Noin (b. 988), who appears in the following sentence, was a poet-priest

who lived in Kyoto. The works of Izumi Shikibu and Noin both include poems praying for rain.

10. The lord of the province of Musashi refers to Hojo Nobutoki, the governor of Musashi Province (1267–1273) and concurrently the constable of Sado Province. He is also referred to as “the former governor of Musashi” in this letter.

11. The main street in Kamakura, running from north to south. Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine stands along the street, where Nichiren Daishonin reprimanded Great Bodhisattva Hachiman.

12. Wake no Kiyomaro (733–799) was a high-ranking court official who thwarted the attempt of the priest Dokyo to usurp the throne and suffered persecution as a result.

13. Li Ling (d. 74 B.C.E.) was a military commander who led the Chinese forces in an attack on the nomadic Hsiung-nu tribes living north of China and was taken prisoner by them.

14. The one vehicle here means the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

15. Lotus Sutra, chap. 14.

16. *Ibid.*, chap. 13.

17. *Ibid.*, chap. 10.

18. Here “the true aspect” refers to the principle that the votaries of the Lotus Sutra meet with persecutions, and “all phenomena” to the fact that persecutions befall both Shakyamuni and Nichiren Daishonin. In the phrase “consistency from beginning to end,” “beginning” refers to Shakyamuni’s age and “end” to the Daishonin’s age.

19. Wada Yoshimori (1147–1213) and the Retired Emperor Gotoba (1180–1239). Yoshimori was the chief of military police under Minamoto no Yoritomo, the founder of the Kamakura regime, but in 1213 turned against the Hojo clan only to be defeated and killed. Gotoba attempted to overthrow the Kamakura regime in 1221, but was defeated and exiled to Oki (the Jokyu Disturbance). Hence he was called the Retired Emperor of Oki. Clashes such as these established the power of the Hojo regents.

20. The constable of Sado Province was Hojo Nobutoki, the lord of Musashi Province, who lived in Kamakura. Homma Rokuro Saemon, the steward of Niiho in Sado, served in the office as the deputy constable of the province.

21. Lay priest farmers were individuals

who, though they take religious vows, do not enter a temple but continue to farm and live in their own homes.

22. The Chinese Pure Land leader Shantao (613–681) was said to have so earnestly desired rebirth in the Pure Land that he attempted to hang himself on a willow tree, but instead fell out of the tree and mortally injured himself. According to legend, when Kobo was about to leave China to return to Japan, he threw his three-pronged diamond-pounder in the air; it was later found on top of Mount Koya in Japan. On another occasion, when he was debating with eminent Buddhist leaders at court, he is said to have transformed himself into Mahavairochana Buddha, the Buddha revered by the True Word school.

23. The living body of the Buddha Amida indicates the statue of Amida Buddha enshrined at Zenko-ji temple in the province of Shinano (present-day Nagano Prefecture).

24. Lotus Sutra, chap. 25. In the sutra, the sentence reads in the future tense. It was changed here to fit the context of this letter.

25. Ando Goro (n.d.) was a magistrate who exercised jurisdiction over the northern part of Japan in the time of the regent Hojo Yoshitoki (1163–1224).

26. The Dharma Seal of the Amida Hall refers to the True Word priest Kaga Josho, who was the superintendent of the Amida Hall in Kamakura.

27. The prelate of Omuro refers to Prince Dojo (n.d.), a son of Emperor Gotoba who had entered the priesthood. This generally means the title of a retired emperor or prince who entered the priesthood and lived at Ninna-ji, a True Word temple in Kyoto. Omuro is another name for Ninna-ji.

28. Setaka (d. 1221) was the sixth son of Sasaki Hirotsuna, a warrior who supported Emperor Gotoba. He was the cherished favorite of the prince-priest Dojo at Ninna-ji, and was beheaded in 1221 at the time of the Jokyu Disturbance.

29. Shokaku-bo (1095–1143), also called Kakuban, was the precursor of the New Doctrine branch of the True Word school.

30. Senkan (918–983) was a priest of the Tendai school. In the summer of 962, when Japan was suffering from drought, the emperor ordered him to offer prayers for rain. It is said that, immediately after the impe-

rial envoy reached him, he caused rain to fall.

31. Iki and Tsushima are islands off the coast of Kyushu in southern Japan. The Dazaifu office was the administrative center of Kyushu, Iki, and Tsushima, and served as a foreign affairs conduit as well as a rallying point in the case of foreign invasion. During the Mongol attack of 1274, it was a focal point of defense against the Mongols.

32. Shoni is Shoni Sukeyoshi (1198–1281), the constable of Chikuzen. Otomo is Otomo Yoriyasu (1222–1300), the constable of Bungo.

33. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

34. The four major offenses are precepts for monks, dealing with killing, theft, sexual misconduct, and lying.

35. Kapila was the founder of the Samkhya school, one of the six main schools of

Brahmanism in India. According to *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight,"* he transformed himself into a stone because he was afraid of death. But when Bodhisattva Dignaga wrote a verse of admiration on the stone, it cracked into pieces, thereby revealing the falsity of Kapila's teachings a thousand years after his death.

36. Lotus Sutra, chap. 26. It states, "If there are those who fail to heed our spells and trouble and disrupt the preachers of the Law, their heads will split into seven pieces."

37. *Ibid.* The arjaka tree grows in India and other tropical places. It is said that, when a branch of this tree falls to the ground, it splits into seven pieces.

38. The lungs, heart, spleen, liver, and kidneys.