

How Those Initially Aspiring to the Way Can Attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra



QUESTION: Of the eight schools, the nine schools, or the ten schools,¹ which is the true school founded by Shakyamuni Buddha?

Answer: The Lotus school is the school founded by Shakyamuni. We know this because of the statement that, of all the sutras "I [Shakyamuni] have preached, now preach, and will preach,"² the Lotus Sutra is foremost. These words were spoken by Shakyamuni Buddha himself. Therefore, [the school based on] the Lotus Sutra is known as the Buddha-founded school and is also called the Lotus school. It is also known as the Tendai school.

For this reason, the Great Teacher Dengyo states in his commentary, "The Lotus school, which T'ien-t'ai elucidated, represents the school founded by Shakyamuni, the World-Honored One."³ In none of the sutras other than the Lotus does one find a passage concerning [the relative superiority of] all the sutras that "I have preached, now preach, and will preach." Here, the sutras that the Buddha has preached refer to the various sutras expounded by the Buddha in the more than forty years before he preached the Lotus Sutra. Those he now preaches refer to the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra. Those he will preach refer to the Nirvana Sutra.

The Buddha thus firmly decreed that, transcending these three categories of sutras, the Lotus Sutra alone constitutes the school that assures the attainment of Buddhahood.

The various other schools were founded by bodhisattvas or teachers in the period after the Buddha had entered nirvana. Should we now turn our backs upon the Buddha's decree and follow the schools established by the bodhisattvas and teachers? Or should we ignore the words of the bodhisattvas and teachers and follow the school established by the Buddha? Or should we entrust ourselves to either course as the feeling strikes us, and uphold whatever sutra or doctrine suits our inclination? The Buddha knew long ago that we would have doubts of this kind, and therefore he clearly designated the sutra to be embraced by those who are truly aspiring to the way in this defiled and evil age of the Latter Day of the Law.

A sutra says: "Rely on the Law and not upon persons. Rely on the meaning of the teaching and not on the words. Rely on wisdom and not on discriminative thinking. Rely on sutras that are complete and final and not on those that are not complete and final."⁴ The meaning of this passage is that one should not rely upon the words of the

bodhisattvas and teachers, but should heed what was established by the Buddha. It further means that one should not rely upon the teachings of the True Word, Zen, and Nembutsu schools, which are based upon the sutras of the Flower Garland, Agama, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom periods,⁵ but should uphold the sutras that are complete and final. And by relying upon "sutras that are complete and final," it means upholding the Lotus Sutra.

Question: Observing Japan at the present time, we see that the obstacles presented by the five impurities are very grave, that quarrels and disputes occur incessantly,⁶ and that people's minds are consumed with anger and their thoughts filled with jealousy. In such a country and at such a time as this, what sutra ought to be propagated?

Answer: This is a country in which the Lotus Sutra should be propagated. Therefore, the Lotus Sutra itself says, "I will cause it to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvīpa and will see that it never comes to an end."⁷

The Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice states that there is a small country situated to the northeast where the Mahayana teachings of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law should be spread.⁸ And the Reverend Annen states, "This refers to our country of Japan."⁹ From the point of view of India, Japan is indeed situated to the northeast.

Moreover, the Supervisor of Priests Eshin states in his *Essentials of the One Vehicle Teaching*, "Throughout Japan, all people share the same capacity to attain Buddhahood through the perfect teaching. Whether at court or in the countryside, whether far or near, all alike turn to the single vehicle; and whether priests or lay believers, whether eminent or humble, all can hope to attain Buddhahood."

The meaning of this passage is that the people of Japan, whether they live

in Kyoto, Kamakura, Tsukushi, Chinzei, or Michinoku,¹⁰ whether they live nearby or far away, are endowed with the capacity to attain Buddhahood solely through the one vehicle teaching of the Lotus Sutra, and that Japan is therefore a country where high and low, eminent and humble, those who observe the precepts and those who break them, men and women alike, can all attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra. Just as there are no ordinary stones in the K'un-lun Mountains and no poisons on the mountain island of P'eng-lai, so Japan is purely and wholly a country of the Lotus Sutra.

And yet we find people who, while declaring with their mouths that the Lotus is inherently a wonderful sutra and that no one could therefore refuse to take faith in it, nevertheless spend night and day, morning and evening, reciting the name of Amida Buddha. They are like people who sing the praises of a particular medicine and yet morning and evening dose themselves on poison.

Or there are those who declare that the Nembutsu and the Lotus Sutra are essentially one. They are like persons who claim that ordinary stones are the same as gems, senior monks identical to junior monks, and poison equivalent to medicine.

In addition, there are many who hate, envy, resent, slander, despise, and look down on the Lotus Sutra. The sutra says, "It will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe."¹¹ It also says, "Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?"¹² These predictions of the sutra have come about without the slightest deviation.

Therefore, the Great Teacher Dengyo writes in his commentary: "Speaking of the age, [the propagation of the true teaching will begin] in the age

when the Middle Day of the Law ends and the Latter Day opens. Regarding the land, it will begin in a land to the east of T'ang and to the west of Katsu. As for the people, it will spread among people stained by the five impurities who live in a time of conflict. The sutra says, 'Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?' There is good reason for this statement."¹³

From these passages of the sutra and commentaries, one should know the following: In Japan, in one mountain monastery after another, in temple after temple, at court and in the countryside, in both near and distant regions, though scriptural teachings other than the Lotus Sutra, such as those of the True Word, Zen, Precepts, and Nembutsu schools, are being propagated, these are not teachings that suit the country, or that conform to the Buddha's true intention, nor can they free us from the sufferings of birth and death.

Question: The Flower Garland school propounds the doctrine of the five teachings¹⁴ and declares all the other sutras to be inferior, and the Flower Garland Sutra, superior. The True Word school puts forth the doctrine of the ten stages of the mind, declaring that all the other sutras, being exoteric teachings, are inferior, while the True Word school, because it represents the esoteric teachings, is superior. The Zen school rejects all the sutras as belonging to the realm of written teachings and asserts "a separate transmission outside the sutras, independent of words or writing." Because enlightenment, they say, is gained merely by sitting and facing the wall, the Zen school alone is superior. The Pure Land school sets forth two kinds of practices, correct and sundry.¹⁵ The Lotus Sutra and the various other sutras are rejected as

belonging to the category of sundry practices, and hence one is urged to "discard, close, ignore, and abandon"¹⁶ them. The three Pure Land sutras, on the other hand, they claim, are adapted to the people's capacity and are wonderful sutras belonging to the realm of correct practices. Thus each school in its conceit maintains its own biased attachment. But which one represents the true intention of Shakyamuni Buddha?

Answer: Each school declares its own sutra to be superior, all other sutras being dismissed as inferior, and on this basis labels itself the correct school. But their arguments are based merely upon the words of the teachers and not upon the Buddha's teaching. Only the Lotus Sutra was proclaimed superior by the Buddha himself when he expounded the simile of the five flavors, likening them to the teachings of the five periods. He also declared that of all the various sutras that he "has preached, now preaches, and will preach," in terms of the path of attaining Buddhahood, none could rival the Lotus Sutra. These statements are in truth the Buddha's own golden words.

Therefore, when people declare that their own sutra surpasses the Lotus Sutra, or that their own school is superior to the Lotus school, they are like persons of inferior rank calling someone of high rank a commoner, or retainers whose families have for generations been in the service of a certain lord turning against him and declaring him to be their servant. How can they escape grave retribution?

On the other hand, the assertion that the various other sutras rank below the Lotus Sutra is not based upon the words of the teachers, but is plainly stated in the text of the sutra itself. In this respect, it is like a ruler asserting that he is superior to his subjects, or a samurai calling a commoner a person of low rank. What penalty could this

possibly bring? This sutra, the Lotus, represents the true intention of the Buddha and the prime concern of T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo.

Question: The teachings of the Buddha's lifetime were all intended to benefit the people. And because people differ from one another in their innate nature, he expounded the various teachings. Nevertheless, his basic intention in all cases was simply to enable everyone to attain the Buddha way. Therefore, [people reason that] the sutra that is pertinent to oneself may be quite irrelevant to others, while the sutra that is pertinent to them will be irrelevant to oneself. Thus, for example, for persons who can attain the way through the Nembutsu teachings of the sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, the Meditation and related sutras will be of greatest benefit while the Lotus Sutra will be of no help. Conversely, for those who can reach Buddhahood and achieve the way through the Lotus Sutra, the other sutras will be irrelevant while the Lotus Sutra will be of greatest benefit. When the Buddha said, "In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth";¹⁷ when he said, "Though they [the Buddhas] point out various different paths, in truth they do so for the sake of the Buddha vehicle";¹⁸ or when he said, "Honestly discarding expedient means, I will preach only the unsurpassed way,"¹⁹ he was addressing persons with the capacity to attain the way through the Lotus Sutra. Everyone in the world agrees that this argument is reasonable. How should we understand this? If this view is correct, then there is really no difference between the Mahayana and the Hinayana, and no dissimilarity between the provisional and true teachings. Thus I find myself in great doubt as to which sutra the Buddha defined as representing his true intention, and which in fact he proclaimed to be the teaching for attaining Buddhahood.

Answer: From the very beginning, the Buddha's intention in appearing in the world was to preach the wonderful Law. But because the people differed so greatly in their capacity and were not ripe to receive it, the Buddha first pondered for a period of three weeks, then spent the following forty years and more preparing and readying the people, and then finally preached this wonderful Law. The Buddha said: "If I merely praised the Buddha vehicle, then the living beings, sunk in their suffering, would be incapable of believing in this Law. And because they rejected the Law and failed to believe in it, they would fall into the three evil paths."²⁰ He also said, "The World-Honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth."²¹

The meaning of these passages is that the Buddha from the very beginning intended to preach this doctrine of the Buddha vehicle. But he knew that the people, having no inclination to hear the Buddha's Law, would not put their faith in it, but on the contrary would undoubtedly slander it. Therefore, in order to develop the people's capacities to the same level, he first spent a period of forty or more years preaching the Flower Garland, Agama, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom sutras, and then at the very last preached the Lotus Sutra. At that time, Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, and the others of the twelve thousand voice-hearers; Manjushri, Maitreya, and the others of the eighty thousand bodhisattvas; the ten thousands of millions of wheel-turning kings; as well as Brahma, Shakra, and the countless other heavenly beings, who had all been present during the Buddha's more than forty years of preaching, each exclaimed with regard to the teachings they had heard before, "We would never gain the immeasurable insight of the Thus Come One."²² But when they heard him preach the Lotus Sutra, they rejoiced,

exclaiming, "This cluster of unsurpassed jewels has come to us unsought."²³ Therefore, they said, "Since times past often we have heard the World-Honored One's preaching, but we have never heard this kind of profound, wonderful, and superior Law."²⁴ They also said, "The Buddha preaches a rarely encountered Law, one never heard from times past."²⁵

The intent of these passages is to praise the Lotus Sutra by saying that, though those present at the assembly had heard the Buddha preach a considerable number of times during the preceding forty years and more, they had never heard anything like the Law of the Lotus Sutra, and that the Buddha had never before preached a doctrine such as this.

The doctrines heard by the assembly in the preceding forty-two years cannot in any way be compared with those of this sutra they were now hearing. Therefore, it is a grave error to assert that this sutra was preached for the sake of persons who can attain the way through the Lotus Sutra, but that it is useless for persons who can gain the way through the sutras preached earlier. In the case of the sutras preached during the previous forty-two years, since they were provided as expedient means for individuals each with a particular capacity or relationship, one can perhaps speak of them as being relevant to some persons but not to others. But in the case of the Lotus Sutra, the different capacities that had enabled individuals to benefit from hearing one or another of the earlier sutras were all drawn together and readied so that they became identical and pure; the sutra was preached to such people. Therefore, there can be no question of it being relevant to some persons and irrelevant to others.

How lamentable that the distinctions between Mahayana and Hinayana, or between provisional and true teachings,

should become confused in this manner, so that the purpose of the Buddha's advent has been lost, and people go about declaring that the Lotus Sutra is useless for persons with the capacity to attain the way through the earlier sutras. One should guard against and fear such errors! In past times there was a man known as the Great Teacher Tokuitsu who taught just this sort of doctrine to others and fully believed it in his own mind, reading the Lotus Sutra in the light of such an interpretation. But the Great Teacher Dengyo attacked him, saying that though he praises the Lotus Sutra he destroys its heart.²⁶ After that, the Great Teacher Tokuitsu's tongue split into eight pieces and he died.

Question: In a commentary by T'ien-t'ai, it is stated that the bodhisattvas had already gained entrance [to enlightenment] through the various sutras.²⁷ From this it must follow that the Lotus Sutra was preached merely for the sake of persons of the two vehicles and not for bodhisattvas, since the bodhisattvas had already gained enlightenment by the earlier sutras. If so, then one should understand that the words of the Buddha, "I have not yet revealed the truth," "Honestly discarding expedient means," and all the pronouncements found in the eight volumes of the Lotus Sutra, must have been spoken entirely for persons of the two vehicles and are not relevant to even a single bodhisattva. Is this correct?

Answer: The doctrine that the Lotus Sutra was preached solely for persons of the two vehicles and not for bodhisattvas was expounded in China before the time of T'ien-t'ai by the ten leading scholars representing the three schools of the south and seven schools of the north. But T'ien-t'ai refuted this doctrine and put an end to it, so that it is no longer propagated today. If you say that there are no bodhisattvas who profit from the Lotus Sutra, then how

do you account for the passage that says, "When the bodhisattvas hear this Law, they will be released from all entanglements of doubt"?²⁸ In view of this, can you possibly say that bodhisattvas derive no benefit from the sutra?

Or perhaps you will argue that the Lotus Sutra can benefit the bodhisattvas of dull faculties, as it does persons of the two vehicles, but that the bodhisattvas of keen faculties have already received sufficient benefit from the earlier sutras. If so, then how do you account for the passage in the sutra that says, "Those of keen capacity, of dull capacity—I cause the Dharma rain to rain on all equally,"²⁹ or the passage that says, "All bodhisattvas who attain supreme perfect enlightenment in all cases do so through this sutra"?³⁰ The meaning of these passages is that, regardless of whether their faculties are keen or dull, whether they abide by the precepts or break them, whether they are of exalted birth or humble, all bodhisattvas, all ordinary people, and all persons of the two vehicles shall become Buddhas and achieve the way through the Lotus Sutra.

If you say that those bodhisattvas who have received benefit from the Lotus Sutra are all persons of dull faculties, are you then prepared to say that Universal Worthy, Manjushri, Maitreya, Medicine King, and all the others of the eighty thousand bodhisattvas are of dull faculties? And if you maintain that the bodhisattvas of keen faculties had already attained the way through the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, then just who are those bodhisattvas?

Moreover, this enlightenment attained by bodhisattvas through the earlier sutras—is it the same as the enlightenment described in the Lotus Sutra? If so, then it is in fact the enlightenment of the Lotus Sutra and not the result of the earlier sutras. And if it is an enlightenment other than that of the Lotus Sutra, then in which of the

sutras that the Buddha "has preached, now preaches, and will preach" is it contained? In any event, if it is not the enlightenment of the Lotus Sutra, then it can only be a partial enlightenment and not true enlightenment.

Therefore, the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra states, "Therefore the way living beings gained was not uniform but differed in different cases." It also says, "[As for those living beings who are unable to hear this sutra . . .] they will in the end fail to gain unsurpassed enlightenment." In these passages the Buddha is saying that the people attained different degrees of enlightenment through the sutras expounded prior to the Lotus Sutra, but in the end they did not attain the way of supreme enlightenment of the Lotus Sutra itself.

Question: Some 2,230 years have now passed since Shakyamuni Buddha passed away. Among all the sutras, which sutra is fitted for an age like this and will spread and benefit all living beings?

The Great Collection Sutra speaks of five successive five-hundred-year periods, of which our present age corresponds to the fifth period. This fifth of the five-hundred-year periods is described as an age of conflict when the pure Law will become obscured and lost. The Buddha here is saying that at that time people's hearts will be contentious and wicked, and they will be overwhelmed with greed and anger; because of this, strife and warfare alone flourish, and, among the various Buddhist doctrines, those that had earlier spread widely such as the pure Law of the True Word, Zen, and Nembutsu schools and of the observers of the precepts will become obscured and lost.

On examining the first, second, third, and fourth of the five-hundred-year periods, we see that, although the Great Collection Sutra belongs to the teachings in which the truth had not yet been revealed concerning the way

of attaining Buddhahood, the state of affairs in the world did not differ in the slightest from the Buddha's predictions. Considered in this light, his golden words that our present time will be an age of conflict when the pure Law will become obscured and lost could not possibly be false.

Yet, if that is so, are we then to assume that, now in the Latter Day of the Law, none of the Buddhist doctrines are of any efficacy, or that none of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas can benefit the people? Are we then to do nothing and pay no homage to any Buddha or bodhisattva? Are we to practice no teaching whatsoever, to be left with no one at all to turn to? How are we to prepare our minds for the existences that are to come?

Answer: Now, the Latter Day of the Law, is the time when only the seven characters of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo—which is the heart of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra that Shakyamuni Buddha, who achieved enlightenment in the remote past, Bodhisattva Superior Practices, Bodhisattva Boundless Practices, and others must spread—will spread throughout this country; and there will be advantage and benefit for all people, and the blessings of Bodhisattva Superior Practices will flourish. This will happen because it is clearly stated in the sutra. Those who are firm in their aspiration for the way and sincere in their resolve should inquire about this matter in detail.

The people of the Pure Land school claim, "In the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law, all the other sutras will perish. Only this one teaching of Amida will remain."³¹ They also say, "This Latter Day of the Law we now face is an evil age stained by the five impurities. Only this doctrine of the Pure Land offers a road by which one can gain admittance."³² Though they falsely attribute these

statements to the Great Collection Sutra, no such passages appear in that sutra. Moreover, there is no reason why they should. It is logically apparent that while he was in the world the Buddha would have had no reason for declaring that, in the present, the Latter Day of the Law, an evil age stained by the five impurities, only the Pure Land teachings would offer a path to [rebirth in the Pure Land].

Their basic sutra states, "In the age to come, the scriptural path will perish . . . I [Shakyamuni] leave this one sutra, which shall endure a hundred years."³³ But nowhere does it state that those hundred years fall within the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law. Moreover, if we examine the Universal and Impartial Enlightenment Sutra and the Larger Amida Sutra, it appears that the hundred-year period referred to represents the hundred years that follow the first millennium after the Buddha's passing. But people all regard Shan-tao's mistaken interpretation³⁴ as quite reasonable, though in fact they are all biased in their thinking.

Perceptive people should consider the matter in the light of everyday reason. In a time of severe drought, is it the great ocean that dries up first, or is it the little streams? The Buddha himself explained this, likening the Lotus Sutra to the great ocean, and the Meditation Sutra, Amida Sutra, and similar texts to little streams.³⁵ Therefore, the pure Law of the little streams that are the Nembutsu and similar teachings will surely disappear first, as a sutra passage³⁶ states. When the Great Collection Sutra says that, in the fifth five-hundred-year period, the pure Law will become obscured and lost, and when the Two-Volumed Sutra says that "the scriptural path will perish . . .," they are simply stating the same thing.³⁷ Therefore, we are to understand that, from the very beginning of the Latter Day of the

Law, the scriptural path that includes the Two-Volumed Sutra and sutras of that type will perish. "The scriptural path will perish" means that the sutras will lose their power to benefit living beings. It does not mean that the actual scrolls of the sutras will cease to exist. At present, more than two hundred years have passed since the time began when the scriptural path is to perish. In this period, the Lotus Sutra alone can benefit people and lead them to enlightenment.

This being the case, it becomes obvious that one ought to embrace this sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. In the "Medicine King" chapter, the Buddha states, "In the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off." The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai comments on this by saying, "In the last five-hundred-year period, the mystic way will spread and benefit humankind far into the future."³⁸ And the Great Teacher Miao-lo further says, "It is the time when the great teaching will be propagated."³⁹ All these passages indicate that, during the last five-hundred-year period, the Lotus Sutra will be propagated, and thereafter will continue to exist throughout Jambudvīpa and never disappear.

The "Peaceful Practices" chapter refers to those who, "in the latter age hereafter, when the Law is about to perish, should accept and embrace, read and recite this sutra." And the "Supernatural Powers" chapter says: "At that time the Buddha spoke to Superior Practices and the others in the great assembly of bodhisattvas, saying: 'If in the process of entrusting this sutra to others I were [to employ these supernatural powers for immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of asamkhya kalpas] to describe the benefits of the sutra, I could never finish doing so. To put it

briefly, all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One, all the freely exercised supernatural powers of the Thus Come One, the storehouse of all the secret essentials of the Thus Come One, all the most profound matters of the Thus Come One—all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra.'"

The meaning of these various passages is that, whether one speaks of it as the fifth five-hundred-year period following Shakyamuni Buddha's passing, or calls it the future age, or the defiled and evil age, it is apparent that at the present time, when the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law have ended and we are more than two hundred years into the Latter Day, only the Lotus Sutra should be propagated. The reason for this is that in this age the people's minds have become twisted, and the teachings produce no actual effect. The Buddhas and gods no longer manifest their awesome powers, and prayers for this life and for future existences go unanswered. At such a time the heavenly devil, or Papiyas, will take advantage of the situation and come rampaging, and the nation will be troubled by constant famine and drought. Disease and plague will rage everywhere, and we will suffer the disasters of foreign invasion and internal strife, our nation being constantly at war within, and later assaulted by invading warriors from another country. In such an age of conflict, when the pure Law of the other sutras ceases to be effective, the wonderfully efficacious medicine of the Lotus Sutra will provide the cure for all these grave disasters.

If one uses the Lotus Sutra to pray for the welfare of the land, it will prove to be a great pure Law that will secure and protect the nation, insuring joy and prosperity to everyone from the ruler on down to the common people. King Ajatashatru and King Ashoka

started out as evil rulers. But the former heeded the counsel of his high minister Jivaka, while the latter put faith in the guidance of the Venerable Yasha,⁴⁰ and as a result each left behind a reputation as a worthy ruler. Likewise, the emperor of the Ch'en dynasty [in China], who cast aside the three schools of the south and seven schools of the north and relied on the Dharma Teacher Chih-i, and Emperor Kammu [of Japan], who spurned the eminent priests of the six schools and instead heeded the Dharma Teacher Saicho, are known to this day as worthy rulers. Chih-i is the man who was later honored with the title of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, while Saicho later became known as the Great Teacher Dengyo.

The present ruler of Japan is in a position to do the same. If he will put his faith in this great pure Law, which assures its believers of "peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences,"⁴¹ and propagate it throughout the nation, then he will be looked up to by the people of all the provinces, and his name will be handed down in later ages as that of a worthy man. Indeed, he may come to be regarded as a manifestation of Bodhisattva Boundless Practices. And the wise man who works to propagate the five characters of the Mystic Law, no matter how lowly his station, should be looked upon as a manifestation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, or perhaps as an envoy of Shakyamuni Thus Come One.

The bodhisattvas Medicine King, Medicine Superior, Perceiver of the World's Sounds, and Great Power, on the other hand, were envoys of the Buddha during the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law. Because their turn has already passed, they can no longer benefit people as they did in those ancient times. Just observe what happens when

prayers are offered to them at present! All such prayers go unanswered. Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, it is the turn of the bodhisattvas Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, and the others.

Only when one understands all this clearly and believes in it can the Law manifest its power and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas bring benefit to the people. To illustrate, in kindling a fire, three things are needed: a good piece of steel, a good flint, and good tinder. The same is true of prayer. Three things are required—a good teacher, a good believer, and a good teaching—before prayers can be effective and disasters banished from the land.

A good teacher is a priest who is free from any fault in secular affairs, who never fawns upon others even in the slightest, who desires and is satisfied with little, and who is compassionate; a priest who reads and upholds the Lotus Sutra precisely as it teaches and also encourages and leads others to embrace it. Such a priest the Buddha has praised among all priests as the finest teacher of the Law.

A good believer is one who does not depend upon persons of eminence or despise those of humble station; who does not rely on the backing of superiors or look down on inferiors; who, not relying upon the opinions of others, upholds the Lotus Sutra among all the sutras. Such a person the Buddha has called the best of all people.

As for a good teaching, the Buddha has told us that this sutra, the Lotus, represents the foremost among all doctrines. Among all the sutras the Buddha "has preached," among those he "now preaches," and among those he "will preach," this sutra is designated as foremost, and therefore it is a good teaching.

The scriptural doctrines of the Zen, True Word, and other schools stand in second or third place by comparison,

and indeed, the doctrines of the True Word school in particular deserve to be put in seventh place. And yet in Japan, these second-rate, third-rate, or even seventh-rate doctrines are used as the basis for prayers, though any proof of their efficacy has yet to be seen.

This wonderful Law, which is foremost and unexcelled, should in fact be the basis of prayers. The Buddha himself has declared that "honestly discarding expedient means, I will preach only the unsurpassed way," and that "[the Buddhas appear in the world] solely for this one reason, which is true."⁴² Who, then, could have doubts in the matter?

Question: If ignorant persons should come and ask what path leads to emancipation from the sufferings of birth and death, what teachings of which sutras should one explain for them? What has the Buddha taught concerning this point?

Answer: You should teach them the Lotus Sutra. For example, the "Teacher of the Law" chapter says: "If someone should ask what living beings will be able to attain Buddhahood in a latter-day existence, then you should show him that all these people⁴³ in a latter-day existence are certain to attain Buddhahood." And the "Peaceful Practices" chapter says, "If he is asked difficult questions, he should not reply in terms of the teachings of the lesser vehicle. He should explain things solely in terms of the great vehicle." The meaning of these passages is that, if someone should ask what kind of persons are capable of attaining Buddhahood, you should reply that persons who embrace the Lotus Sutra are certain to attain Buddhahood. This represents the Buddha's true intention.

Here a question may arise: "People differ widely in their capacity and inclination. Some will want to hear the Nembutsu teachings, while others will want to hear the Lotus Sutra. If one expounds the Lotus Sutra to those who

want to hear about the Nembutsu, what benefit will they derive from it? If someone has come and specifically asked to hear about the Nembutsu, should one insist on teaching that person the Lotus Sutra? The true intention of the Buddha was to preach the Law in accordance with people's capacities so that they could gain benefit thereby, was it not?"

If someone should raise objections of this kind, you should explain as follows. As a matter of principle, in the world of the Latter Day of the Law, without considering whether or not it conforms to the capacity of ignorant people, one should go ahead and teach them the five characters that compose the title of the Lotus Sutra and enable them to embrace it.

As for the reason, when Shakyamuni Buddha spread the Lotus Sutra long ago as a bodhisattva named Never Disparaging, the laymen and laywomen, the nuns and monks, all refused to heed his words. On the contrary, he was cursed and reviled, beaten and driven away, being subjected to numerous types of persecution. But though he was hated and envied, he did not allow it to daunt him in the slightest, but kept on assertively preaching the Lotus Sutra, and for that reason he appeared in our present world as Shakyamuni Buddha. The people who had cursed Bodhisattva Never Disparaging did not find their mouths twisting out of shape, and those who had beaten him likewise suffered no stiffening of their arms.⁴⁴

The Venerable Aryasimha, who inherited Shakyamuni's teachings, was murdered by a non-Buddhist, and the Tri-pitaka Master Fa-tao was branded on the face and exiled to the region south of the Yangtze River. How much more so, in the Latter Day of the Law, will an insignificant monk who attempts to propagate the Lotus Sutra encounter such difficulties! Indeed, the sutra makes this very clear. Therefore, although the

people may not heed it or may say that it does not suit their capacity, one should nevertheless persist in expounding to them the five-character title of the Lotus Sutra, because there is no other way than this to attain Buddhahood.

Again, someone might object, saying: "Rather than insisting on preaching the Lotus Sutra when it does not accord with the people's capacity, and thus causing them to slander it so that they fall into the evil paths, it would be better to preach the Nembutsu, which does suit their capacity, and thus awaken in them the aspiration for enlightenment. If someone not only fails to bring benefit to others, but on the contrary causes them to commit slander and fall into hell, he is no votary of the Lotus Sutra but rather a person of false views."

In reply to such objections, you should point out that in the Lotus Sutra the Buddha states that, whatever the people's capacity may be, in the Latter Day of the Law one should persist in preaching the Lotus Sutra. Ask the questioner how he interprets that injunction. Does he claim that Shakyamuni Buddha, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, T'ien-t'ai, Miao-lo, and Dengyo are persons of false views or non-Buddhists?

Then again, with regard to persons of the two vehicles, who have not fallen into the evil paths and have also escaped from rebirth in the threefold world, the Buddha declares that it is better to arouse in oneself the mind of a dog or a fox than to have the mind of the two vehicles. He also warns that it is better to commit the five cardinal sins or the ten evil acts and fall into hell than to have the mind of the two vehicles. Not falling into the evil paths might appear to be a considerable benefit, but the Buddha did not regard this as his true intention. Even if one should fall into hell, because one has heard the Lotus Sutra, which leads to

Buddhahood, with this as the seed, one will invariably become a Buddha.

Thus, T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo, following this principle, state in their commentaries that one should persist in preaching the Lotus Sutra. For instance, a person who stumbles and falls to the ground pushes himself up from the ground and rises to his feet again. In the same way, though persons [who slander the Lotus Sutra] may fall into hell, they will quickly rise up again and become Buddhas.

The people of today in any event already turn their backs on the Lotus Sutra, and because of that error they will undoubtedly fall into hell. Therefore, one should by all means persist in preaching the Lotus Sutra and causing them to hear it. Those who put their faith in it will surely attain Buddhahood, while those who slander it will establish a "poison-drum relationship" with it and will likewise attain Buddhahood.

In any event, the seeds of Buddhahood exist nowhere apart from the Lotus Sutra. If it were possible to attain Buddhahood through the provisional teachings, then why would the Buddha have said that one should insist on preaching the Lotus Sutra, and that both those who slander it and those who believe in it will benefit? Or why would he say, "We care nothing for our bodies or lives [but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way]"?⁴⁵ Persons who have set their minds upon the way should clearly understand these matters.

Question: If ignorant persons put faith in the Lotus Sutra, can even they attain Buddhahood in their present form? And in what pure land will they be reborn?

Answer: In upholding the Lotus Sutra, of those who profoundly grasp the sutra's meaning, practice the seated meditation described in *Great Concentration and Insight*, and concentrate on

the meditative disciplines pertaining to the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, the ten objects, and the ten meditations, there may be some who indeed attain Buddhahood in their present form and achieve enlightenment. As for other types of people, it would appear that, even if they do not understand the meaning of the Lotus Sutra and are ignorant but have earnest faith, then they will invariably be reborn in a pure land. For it says in the Lotus Sutra, "They will be born in the presence of the Buddhas of the ten directions,"⁴⁶ and "She will immediately go to the World of Peace and Delight."⁴⁷ These passages give clear proof that one who has faith in the Lotus Sutra will be reborn in a pure land.

Someone may raise objections, saying: "Since I am only one person, I do not understand how I can be reborn in the presence of the Buddhas of the ten directions. Surely I am limited to one direction. Therefore, in which direction should I trust and be reborn?"

To reply, there is a very good reason why the sutra speaks of ten directions and does not specify which one. This is because, when the life of one who believes in the Lotus Sutra comes to an end, among all the worlds of the ten directions, that person will be reborn in the land of a Buddha who is preaching the Lotus Sutra, and will never be reborn in a pure land where the other sutras, such as the Flower Garland, Agama, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom sutras, are being preached.

There are many pure lands in the ten directions. There are pure lands where the way of the voice-hearers is preached, pure lands where the way of the pratyekabuddhas is preached, and pure lands where the way of the bodhisattvas is preached. Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra will never be reborn in any of these, but will at once be reborn in a pure land where the Lotus Sutra is being preached. They will take their

seats among the assembly, listen to the Lotus Sutra, and as a result become Buddhas.

Yet in spite of this, there are those who urge others to set aside the Lotus Sutra in this lifetime, saying that it is not suited to their capacity, and that they will master its teachings when they are reborn in the western pure land. It is obvious, however, that such people will never master the Lotus Sutra even in Amida's Pure Land, nor will they be reborn in any of the other pure lands of the ten directions. Rather, because the offense of turning one's back upon the Lotus Sutra is grave, they will fall into hell and remain there for a long time. The sutra is referring to such a person when it says, "When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avichi hell."⁴⁸

Question: The sutra states, "She will immediately go to the World of Peace and Delight where the Buddha Amida dwells." The meaning of this passage is that a woman who embraces the Lotus Sutra will be reborn in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha. It is also said that by reciting the Nembutsu one will be reborn in Amida's Pure Land. Since one is reborn in the Pure Land in either case, may we not assume that the Nembutsu and the Lotus Sutra are equivalent?

Answer: The Meditation Sutra belongs to the provisional teachings, while the Lotus Sutra represents the true teaching. In no way are they equivalent. The reason is that when the Buddha appeared in the world, though he spent forty years and more preaching various doctrines, he had a great aversion to persons of the two vehicles, to evil persons, and to women, and said not a single word about the possibility of their attaining Buddhahood. In this one [Lotus] sutra, however, he stated that even those of the two vehicles, for whom the seeds of Buddhahood had rotted; Devadatta, who had committed three cardinal sins;

and women, who are ordinarily hindered by the five obstacles, could all become Buddhas. This is clearly stated in the text of the sutra.

The Flower Garland Sutra states, "Women are messengers of hell who can destroy the seeds of Buddhahood. They may look like bodhisattvas, but at heart they are like yaksha demons."⁴⁹ The Silver-Colored Woman Sutra says that, even though the eyes of the Buddhas of the three existences should come out and fall to the ground, no woman in the entire realm of phenomena could ever attain Buddhahood. Another sutra says, "Women are great evil spirits who devour all people."⁵⁰ Bodhisattva Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* says that just looking upon a woman once forms the karma to fall into hell for a long time. Thus, although I do not know if it is true or not, it is said that the Reverend Shan-tao, though he was a slanderer of the Law, spent his entire lifetime without ever looking at a woman.⁵¹ And Narihira⁵² was comparing women to demons in his poem:

My horror of that ruined,
Creeper-grown house
Is because, even briefly,
It swarms with demons!

Moreover, women are burdened with the five obstacles and the three obediences, and so their sins are said to be profound. The five obstacles mean that, first, a woman cannot become a Brahma; second, she cannot become a Shakra; third, she cannot become a devil king; fourth, she cannot become a wheel-turning king; and fifth, she cannot become a Buddha. The three obediences mean that, when a woman is young, she cannot follow her own mind, but must obey her parents. When she reaches maturity, she cannot do as she desires, but must obey her husband. And when she is old, she cannot do as she desires, but must obey

her sons. Thus, from the time she is a child until she becomes an old woman, she cannot do as she pleases, but must obey these three categories of persons. She cannot say what she thinks, she cannot see what she wants to see, she cannot hear what she wants to hear. This is what is meant by the three obediences.

For this reason, Jung Ch'i-ch'i⁵³ numbered among his three pleasures the fact that he had not been born a woman. Women are thus despised in both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist scriptures. And yet, in the case of the Lotus Sutra, even though they neither read nor copy the text, women who receive and uphold it in body, mouth, and mind, and in particular chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with their mouths, will be able to attain Buddhahood readily, as did the dragon king's daughter, Gautami, and Yashodhara, who lived at the same time as the Buddha. This is the meaning of the passage you have cited from the sutra.

Moreover, concerning the phrase "the World of Peace and Delight," all the various pure lands are indicated by the words "Peace and Delight." And again, the Amida Buddha spoken of here is not the Amida Buddha of the Meditation Sutra. The Amida Buddha of the Meditation Sutra was originally a monk named Dharma Treasury, the master of forty-eight vows and a Buddha who attained the way ten kalpas in the past. In the Lotus Sutra, the Amida mentioned in the theoretical teaching was the ninth son among the sixteen princes who were sons of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence, an Amida Buddha who made a great vow to propagate the Lotus Sutra. The Amida who appears in the essential teaching is an emanation of Shakyamuni Buddha. Therefore, a commentary says, "One should understand that this does not refer to [the Amida of] the Meditation and other sutras."⁵⁴

Question: The Lotus Sutra says, “[The door to this wisdom is] difficult to understand and difficult to enter.”⁵⁵ The persons of our time cite this passage to argue that the Lotus Sutra is not fitted to the capacities of the people, and this seems to me very reasonable. What is your opinion?

Answer: Such an assertion is quite unfounded. The reason is because it is put forward by persons who have not grasped the true meaning of this sutra.

The sutras that were preached prior to the Lotus Sutra were indeed difficult to understand and difficult to enter. But when we come to the assembly where the Lotus Sutra was preached, then we can say that the Buddha’s teaching became easy to understand and easy to enter. For this reason, the Great Teacher Miao-lo says in his commentary, “The sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra are incomplete teachings, and therefore it is said that they are difficult to understand. But in this present teaching, it is indicated that all persons whosever can in fact enter the realm of truth. Hence the teaching is easy to understand.”⁵⁶

This passage means that in the case of the sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra, because the people’s capacity was inferior, these sutras were difficult to understand and difficult to enter. But by the time the Buddha preached the present sutra [the Lotus], the people’s capacity had become sharper, and therefore the teaching was easy to understand and easy to enter.

In addition, if those sutras that declare themselves to be difficult to understand and difficult to enter do not fit the people’s capacity, then you ought first of all to abandon the Nembutsu teaching. I say this because in the Two-Volumed Sutra we read, “[To embrace this sutra is] the most difficult of difficult things. Nothing is more difficult than this.” And the Amida Sutra speaks of itself as a doctrine that is “difficult to

believe.” The meaning of these passages is that to accept and uphold these sutras is the most difficult of difficult things, that nothing could in fact be more difficult, and that their doctrines are difficult to believe.

Question: The sutra reads, “In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth.” It also reads, “[As for those living beings who are unable to hear this sutra . . .] though immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable asamkha kalpas may pass, they will in the end fail to gain unsurpassed enlightenment.”⁵⁷ Just what are these passages saying?

Answer: The meaning of these passages is that, among the various doctrines that Shakyamuni Buddha expounded in the fifty years of his preaching life, he did not expound the truth in the Flower Garland Sutra, which represents his first teaching, nor did he expound the truth in the Correct and Equal and the Wisdom sutras, which he preached later on. For this reason, people who carry out the practice taught by the Zen and Nembutsu schools or who uphold the precepts will never attain Buddhahood, even though immeasurable and boundless kalpas may pass.

After the Buddha had spent forty-two years preaching, he then expounded the Lotus Sutra, and in that sutra he said, “The World-Honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth.” When they heard and understood these words of the Buddha, Shariputra and the others of the twelve hundred arhats; the twelve thousand voice-hearers; Maitreya and the others of the eighty thousand bodhisattvas; Brahma, Shakra, and the others of the ten thousands of millions of heavenly beings; and King Ajatashatru and the countless and innumerable other rulers said, “Since times past often we have heard the World-Honored One’s preaching, but we have never heard this kind of profound,

wonderful, and superior Law.” Thus they declared that, although they had constantly attended the Buddha and heard him preach various doctrines over forty-two years, they had never heard anything like this precious Lotus Sutra.

How can the people of the world so misunderstand such clear passages as to think that the Lotus Sutra and the other sutras are equal? Not only that, but they say that the Lotus Sutra, because it does not suit the people’s capacity, is like brocade worn in the dark of night, or like last year’s calendar. When they happen to encounter someone who upholds the sutra, they look on that person with scorn and contempt, hate and envy, and purse their lips in disapproval. This is nothing less than slander of the Law. How, then, could they be reborn in the pure land or attain Buddhahood? It appears that such people will surely fall into the hell of incessant suffering.

Question: Generally speaking, people who have a correct understanding of the Buddhist teachings and who act in accordance with the Buddha’s will are looked up to by the world and respected by all. And yet in our present age, in the case of those who uphold the Lotus Sutra, the world joins in hating and envying them, treats them with contempt and scorn, sometimes driving them away, sometimes condemning them to exile, never dreaming of giving them alms but rather hating them as though they were deadly enemies. It would almost seem as though the followers of the Lotus Sutra were evil-minded people who were going against the Buddha’s will and interpreting the Buddhist teachings in a distorted manner. How do the sutras explain this?

Answer: According to the sutra text, the votaries of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law, who are so faithful in upholding the sutra that they are hated by others, are the true priests

of Mahayana. They are the teachers of the Law who will propagate the Lotus Sutra and bring people benefit. As for priests who are thought well of by others, who go along with other people’s desires and so come to be revered, one should regard them as the enemies of the Lotus Sutra and as evil influences to the world. A sutra passage likens persons of this type to a hunter who spies sharply about him as he stalks a deer, or to a cat who hides its claws as it creeps up on a mouse. In just such a way, we are told, do they flatter, deceive, and mislead the lay men and women.

In addition, the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter mentions three groups of people who are enemies of the Lotus Sutra. The first group consists of laymen and laywomen. These lay men and women will hate and curse the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, beat them, put them to the sword, drive them from their dwellings, or slander them to the authorities so that they are exiled to distant places. They behave toward them with pitiless enmity.

The second group consists of monks. These men are arrogant at heart, and though they have little true understanding, they pretend to be very wise and are looked upon by the people of the world as great authorities. When these men see the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, they hate and envy them, treat them with contempt and scorn, and speak evil of them to others as if they were inferior to dogs or foxes. In their opinion, they alone have truly understood the Lotus Sutra.

The third group is made up of monks living in secluded places. These monks have all the outward signs of being holy men. They possess only the prescribed three robes and one begging bowl, and live in seclusion in a quiet spot in a mountain forest, so that everyone looks up to them as though they were the arhats living at the time of

Shakyamuni Buddha, and all people revere them as though they were Buddhas. When these men see the monks who read and uphold the Lotus Sutra in accordance with its teachings, they hate and envy them, calling them great fools or holders of grave erroneous views, claiming that they are completely lacking in compassion, and that they preach non-Buddhist doctrines. And because the ruler looks up to such men and believes what they say, everyone down to the common people gives alms to them as though they were Buddhas. Thus the Buddha taught that persons who read and uphold the Lotus Sutra in accordance with its teachings will invariably be hated by these three types of enemies.

Question: Is there any evidence to indicate that one should embrace in particular the name of the Lotus Sutra in the same way that people embrace the name of a particular Buddha?

Answer: The sutra states, "The Buddha said to the demon daughters, 'Excellent, excellent! If you can shield and guard those who accept and uphold the mere name of the Lotus Sutra, your merit will be immeasurable.'"⁵⁸ The meaning of this passage is that, when the ten demon daughters made a vow to protect those who embrace the title of the Lotus Sutra, the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment praised them, saying, "Excellent! Excellent! The blessings you will enjoy for protecting those who accept and uphold Nam-myoho-enge-kyo will be impossible to fathom! They will be splendid blessings! Truly wonderful!" This passage implies that we ordinary people, whether we are walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, should chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

As for the meaning of Myoho-enge-kyo: The Buddha nature inherent in us, ordinary people; the Buddha nature of Brahma, Shakra, and the other deities; the Buddha nature of

Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, and the other voice-hearers; the Buddha nature of Manjushri, Maitreya, and the other bodhisattvas; and the Mystic Law that is the enlightenment of the Buddhas of the three existences, are one and identical. This principle is called Myoho-enge-kyo. Therefore, when once we chant Myoho-enge-kyo, with just that single sound we summon forth and manifest the Buddha nature of all Buddhas; all existences; all bodhisattvas; all voice-hearers; all the deities such as Brahma, Shakra, and King Yama; the sun and moon, and the myriad stars; the heavenly gods and earthly deities, on down to hell-dwellers, hungry spirits, animals, asuras, human and heavenly beings, and all other living beings. This blessing is immeasurable and boundless.

When we revere Myoho-enge-kyo inherent in our own life as the object of devotion, the Buddha nature within us is summoned forth and manifested by our chanting of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. This is what is meant by "Buddha." To illustrate, when a caged bird sings, birds who are flying in the sky are thereby summoned and gather around, and when the birds flying in the sky gather around, the bird in the cage strives to get out. When with our mouths we chant the Mystic Law, our Buddha nature, being summoned, will invariably emerge. The Buddha nature of Brahma and Shakra, being called, will protect us, and the Buddha nature of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, being summoned, will rejoice. This is what the Buddha meant when he said, "If one can uphold it [the Mystic Law] even for a short while I will surely rejoice and so will the other Buddhas."⁵⁹

All Buddhas of the three existences, too, attain Buddhahood by virtue of the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo. These five characters are the reason why the Buddhas of the three existences appear in the world; they

are the Mystic Law whereby all living beings can attain the Buddha way. You should understand these matters thoroughly and, on the path of attaining Buddhahood, chant Nam-myoho-

renge-kyo without arrogance or attachment to biased views.

Nichiren



Background

This letter is generally thought to have been written in the third year of Kenji (1277), though differing opinions assign it to as early as 1271 or even as late as 1282. Its recipient was a woman called the lay nun Myoho who lived at Okamiya in Suruga Province. Little is known about her, other than that she was widowed in 1278 and also lost an elder brother. She appears to have maintained steadfast faith throughout her life. She is the same lay nun who received *The One Essential Phrase* from Nichiren Daishonin in 1278.

“Those initially aspiring to the way” in the letter’s title refers to the people of this latter age, who were generally considered to have planted few roots of merit in prior lifetimes. Written in question-and-answer form, it first establishes that, among the various schools of Buddhism, only that based upon the Lotus Sutra represents the school founded by Shakyamuni Buddha himself, for this sutra alone expresses the Buddha’s true intention.

Through the first few sets of questions and answers, the Daishonin explains that, whether viewed in terms of the teaching, the people’s capacity, the time, or the country, the Lotus is the only sutra to be propagated in Japan during the Latter Day of the Law. Unlike the provisional teachings, which are suited to some people but not to others, the Lotus Sutra is unique in enabling all people to attain Buddhahood.

In Nichiren Daishonin’s time, the idea prevailed that the Lotus Sutra, be-

ing extremely profound, was far beyond the capacity of people born in the Latter Day of the Law, and that only the relatively easy Nembutsu teachings could save them by leading them to rebirth in Amida’s Pure Land. The Daishonin counters by asserting that, in this age, the seven characters of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which represent the heart and core of the Lotus Sutra, can benefit all people. This is the Law to be propagated by Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

Referring to the many disasters then besetting Japan, Nichiren Daishonin points out that prayers for the nation’s welfare based on the provisional teachings no longer produce results. To make fire, he says, three things are needed: a good piece of steel, a good flint, and good tinder. Similarly, one needs three elements—a good teacher, a good believer, and a good teaching—before prayers can be answered and the nation restored to peace. The Lotus Sutra, being foremost among the Buddha’s teachings, is just such a “good teaching” that can answer prayers and end disasters.

A theme running through this writing is the Lotus Sutra’s universal power of salvation. The Daishonin says that, regardless of whether people do or do not possess the power of understanding, the most important thing is to let them form a bond with the Mystic Law. Thus he emphasizes that in the evil age of the Latter Day one should assertively teach Nam-myoho-renge-

kyo, the heart of the Lotus Sutra, rather than some lesser, provisional teaching, for even those who slander the Lotus Sutra will eventually attain Buddhahood by virtue of the “poison-drum relationship,” or the reverse connection that they thereby form with it. He also makes clear for the lay nun Myoho’s benefit that the Lotus Sutra, unlike the earlier teachings, guarantees Buddhahood for women as well as for men.

Notes

1. The eight schools are the Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, Precepts, Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, Flower Garland, Tendai, and True Word schools. The nine schools comprise these eight plus the Zen school, and the ten schools are those nine plus the Pure Land school.

2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

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

4. Nirvana Sutra. These injunctions are termed the “four reliances,” but they are also known as the “four standards.”

5. Collectively, the provisional teachings preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, according to T’ien-t’ai’s classification of sutras. See five periods in Glossary.

6. The Great Collection Sutra describes the last five-hundred-year period, corresponding to the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, as a time when quarrels and disputes will occur among rival schools and the pure Law, or Shakyamuni’s Buddhism, will be lost. This period is termed the “age of conflict.”

7. Lotus Sutra, chap. 28.

8. No such passage appears in the extant version of *The Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice*. However, Annen’s *Extensive Commentary on the Universally Bestowed Bodhisattva Precepts* attributes a similar statement to this work.

9. *On the Universally Bestowed Bodhisattva Precepts*.

10. Tsukushi is an ancient name for what is presently Fukuoka Prefecture or the entire island of Kyushu. Chinzei is also an ancient name for Kyushu. Michinoku is an ancient name for northeastern Japan. Also called Mutsu.

The conclusion explains that the Law of Myoho-enge-kyo, the five characters of the sutra’s title, is identical to the Buddha nature inherent in our own lives and in all things in the universe. When we revere this Law, the essence of our own life, and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, we simultaneously manifest the Buddha nature, both in ourselves and in the world around us.

11. Lotus Sutra, chap. 14.

12. *Ibid.*, chap. 10.

13. *Outstanding Principles*.

14. A comparative classification of the Buddhist sutras. The five teachings are the Hinayana teaching, the elementary Mahayana teaching, the final Mahayana teaching, the sudden teaching, and the perfect teaching. The perfect teaching indicates the Flower Garland and Lotus sutras, between which the Flower Garland Sutra is assigned the higher place.

15. A classification established by Shantao of the Chinese Pure Land school. “Correct practices” are practices for attaining rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha. The term is used in contrast to “sundry practices,” or all Buddhist practices not directed toward Amida Buddha.

16. Honen does not use these words in this particular form, however. Nichiren Daishonin took these words from *The Nembutsu Chosen above All* and put them together as a set.

17. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra.

18. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, chap. 3. In the text of the sutra, these words are spoken in the singular by Shariputra. The Daishonin interprets them here as expressing the thoughts of the entire assembly.

23. *Ibid.*, chap. 4. In the text of the sutra, these words are spoken by Mahakashyapa.

24. *Ibid.*, chap. 3. In the text of the sutra, these words are spoken by the sons of the gods.

25. *Ibid.*, chap. 17. In the text of the

sutra, these words are spoken by Maitreya.

26. *Outstanding Principles*.

27. This statement actually appears in Miao-lo's *Annotations on "The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra."*

28. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

29. *Ibid.*, chap. 5.

30. *Ibid.*, chap. 10.

31. *On Resolving Doubts regarding Rebirth in the Western Paradise* by Tz'u-en of the Dharma Characteristics school.

32. *The Collected Essays on the World of Peace and Delight* by Tao-ch'o.

33. Buddha Infinite Life Sutra.

34. In his *Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land*, Shan-tao interprets the "hundred years" mentioned in the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra as referring to the period following the Latter Day of the Law. He says, "After the ten thousand years following the Buddha's passing, the three treasures will perish, and this sutra will remain for a period of a hundred years."

35. Chapter 23 of the Lotus Sutra states, "Just as the ocean is foremost among all bodies of water such as rivers and streams, so this Lotus Sutra will likewise be foremost."

36. A reference to a passage in the Brahma Excellent Thought Sutra. It states that, just as the rivers and streams will evaporate before the great ocean does in the fire at the kalpa's end, so the inferior way will die out before the bodhisattva teachings when Buddhism perishes.

37. Here the Daishonin interprets the passage of the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra as referring to conditions at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law.

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

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

40. Yasha was the chief monk of Kukkutarama Monastery of Magadha. He lived about one hundred years after Shakyamuni's death and headed the Second Buddhist Council in Vaishali.

41. Lotus Sutra, chap. 5.

42. *Ibid.*, chap. 2.

43. Earlier the "Teacher of the Law" chapter speaks of "persons who embrace, read, recite, expound, and copy the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, even only one

verse, and look upon this sutra with the same reverence as they would the Buddha."

44. These persons suffered no immediate punishment in this life, but after death they fell into hell. Eventually, however, they were able to take faith in the Lotus Sutra.

45. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

46. *Ibid.*, chap. 12.

47. *Ibid.*, chap. 23. The full passage reads: "If in the last five-hundred-year period after the Thus Come One has entered extinction there is a woman who hears this sutra and carries out its practices as the sutra directs, when her life here on earth comes to an end, she will immediately go to the World of Peace and Delight where the Buddha Amida dwells surrounded by the assembly of great bodhisattvas and there will be born seated on a jeweled seat in the center of a lotus blossom."

48. *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

49. This statement is not found in the extant Chinese versions of the Flower Garland Sutra. However, *A Collection of Treasures* cites it as a quotation from the Flower Garland Sutra.

50. Source unknown.

51. That Shan-tao never in his life looked at a woman is stated in *The New Biographies of Those Who Attained Rebirth in the Pure Land*, written by Wang-ku in 1084.

52. Ariwara no Narihira (825-880). One of the six poetic geniuses, or the six most renowned poets, in the Heian period (794-1185). The poem cited is from *Tales of Ise*.

53. Jung Ch'i-ch'i was a man of the Spring and Autumn period (770-403 B.C.E.). According to *Lieh Tzu*, he told Confucius that he had obtained three pleasures in this world: the first was having been born a human being, the second was having been born a man, and the third was being able to enjoy a long life.

54. *On "The Words and Phrases."* This statement is commenting on the passage in the "Medicine King" chapter cited in n. 47.

55. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

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

57. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra.

58. Lotus Sutra, chap. 26.

59. *Ibid.*, chap. 11.