

An Outline of the “Entrustment” and Other Chapters



I HAVE received your offering of seven thousand coins. The essence of the “Entrustment” chapter of the Lotus Sutra is as follows: [Rising from his seat in the treasure tower,] the Buddha stood in open space and, in order to transfer the Lotus Sutra, patted no fewer than three times the heads of Bodhisattva Superior Practices and his followers, Manjushri and his followers, the great Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, the four heavenly kings, the dragon kings, the ten demon daughters, and others. They had clustered before the Buddha as thickly as dewdrops, crowding four hundred ten thousand million nayutas of worlds, like the grasses of Musashino Plain¹ or the trees covering Mount Fuji. They knelt close to one another, bent their bodies so that their heads touched the ground, joined their palms together, and streamed sweat. Shakyamuni Buddha patted their heads just as a mother strokes the hair of her only child. Then Superior Practices, the gods of the sun and moon, and the others received the Buddha’s auspicious command and pledged to propagate the Lotus Sutra in the latter age.

As for the “Medicine King” chapter: In the past a bodhisattva called Gladly Seen² learned the Lotus Sutra from the Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue. So deeply moved was he by this

favor received from his teacher and by the loftiness of the sutra that he exhausted all his precious treasures in offerings. Still unsatisfied, he anointed himself with oil and burned his body as an offering to the Buddha for a period of twelve hundred years, just as today we burn oil by inserting a wick and lighting it. Then, in his next lifetime he made torches of his arms and burned them for seventy-two thousand years as an offering to the Lotus Sutra. So if a woman makes offerings to the Lotus Sutra now in the last five-hundred-year period, this bodhisattva’s benefits will all be bequeathed to her without exception, just as a wealthy man transfers his entire fortune to his only son.

The “Wonderful Sound” chapter tells of a bodhisattva called Wonderful Sound who dwells in the land of the Buddha Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom in the east. In the past, in the age of the Buddha Cloud Thunder Sound King, he was Lady Pure Virtue, the consort of King Wonderful Adornment. At that time, Lady Pure Virtue made offerings to the Lotus Sutra and was reborn as Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound.³ When the Thus Come One Shakyamuni expounded the Lotus Sutra in the saha world, this bodhisattva came to attend the ceremony and pledged to protect those women

who would embrace the Lotus Sutra in the latter age.

The "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter is also called the "Universal Gateway" chapter. The first part describes the merit of those who put faith in Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds; hence the title "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter. The latter part expounds the merit of those who embrace the Lotus Sutra, [the teaching of the Universal Gateway], which the bodhisattva upholds; hence the title "Universal Gateway" chapter.

The "Dharani" chapter describes how the two sages, the two heavenly gods, and the ten demon daughters will protect the votary of the Lotus Sutra. The two sages are Medicine King and Brave Donor, and the two heavenly gods are Vaishravana and Upholder of the Nation. The ten demon daughters are the ten major female demons, the mothers of all demons of the four continents. Moreover, these ten demon daughters have a mother, who is called the Mother of Demon Children.

It is the nature of demons to feed on human beings. Human beings are formed of thirty-six elements: excrement, urine, saliva, flesh, blood, skin, bone, the five solid internal organs,⁴ the six empty internal organs,⁵ the hair of the head, the hair of the body, energy, life, and so forth. Demons of inferior capacity feed upon excrement and the like. Demons of intermediate capacity eat bones and similar parts, while demons of superior capacity live on human vitality. As demons of superior capacity, the ten demon daughters subsist on human vitality. They are the powerful demons who bring about epidemics.

There are two kinds of demons, good and evil. Good demons feed upon enemies of the Lotus Sutra, while evil demons feed upon the sutra's votaries. How should we interpret the great epidemics that have spread throughout Japan both this year and last? From one

viewpoint, they are the work of good demons who are devouring enemies of the Lotus Sutra with the approval of Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings. Yet from another view, they are the work of evil demons who are feeding upon the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra at the urging of the devil king of the sixth heaven. Good demons devouring enemies of the Lotus Sutra are like government soldiers punishing enemies of the ruler. But evil demons eating votaries of the Lotus Sutra are like robbers and night thieves murdering government soldiers.

For example, when Buddhism was brought to Japan, the Chief Minister Mononobe no Moriya and others who opposed it were struck down by epidemics, but the Great Minister Soga no Umako and others [who espoused Buddhism] also fell ill.⁶ Three successive emperors, Kimmei, Bidatsu, and Yomei, believed in Buddhism and the Thus Come One Shakyamuni in their hearts, but outwardly honored the Sun Goddess and the Kumano shrines,⁷ abiding by the traditional rites of the nation. Because their faith in the Buddha and his teachings was weak, while their faith in the gods was strong, these three rulers were pulled by the stronger influence and succumbed to smallpox epidemics.

In light of these examples, you should ponder the two kinds of demons mentioned above, as well as the reasons why epidemics spread among the people of the world today and why some among my followers also fall ill and perish. It follows on the one hand that those who commit their lives for the sake of faith will not fall ill, or that, even if they should fall ill, they will recover. On the other hand, if they encounter great evil demons, they may be deprived of their lives. They might then be likened to Hatakeyama Shigetada,⁸ who was finally destroyed by the

sheer number of his enemies, though he was the most powerful general in Japan.

All the True Word teachers in Japan have turned into evil spirits, and evil demons are rampant throughout the country, inciting the Zen and Nembutsu priests to oppose Nichiren. On the other hand, the followers [good demons] of Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the ten demon daughters have also swarmed into Japan, each side battling fiercely to dominate over the other.

As the ten demon daughters pledged to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra in general, one may think they should protect all those who embrace the sutra. But even among people who embrace the Lotus Sutra, some are True Word teachers who read and recite it while asserting the superiority of the Mahavairochana Sutra. Such people are actually slandering the Lotus Sutra. And the same principle applies as well to any other school [whose followers practice the Lotus Sutra while believing in the superiority of their own sutras].

Even among those who embrace the Lotus Sutra according to its words, there are some who resent the votary of the Lotus Sutra either because of their greed, anger, and foolishness, because of worldly matters, or because of his various actions. Although such people believe in the Lotus Sutra, they will not obtain the benefit of faith, but will instead incur retribution. To explain, if a son disobeys his father and mother, he will be acting in an unfilial manner, except in a case where his parents are plotting a rebellion. Though a father may take his own son's beloved wife, or a mother may steal her own daughter's beloved husband, if the son or daughter should deviate even in the slightest from the path of filial piety, they will create causes that will lead them to be abandoned by the heavenly gods in this

life and to fall into the Avichi hell in the next. Graver still is the act of going against a worthy ruler, who is superior to a father or mother. And even graver is that of going against a secular teacher, who is a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million times superior to one's parents or sovereign. How grave a matter must it be, then, to go against a Buddhist teacher who has forsaken the secular world; and even more so, the teacher of the Lotus Sutra!

It is said that the Yellow River becomes clear once in a thousand years, and that a sage likewise appears in the world once in a thousand years. A Buddha appears in the world once in countless kalpas. Yet even if one should meet a Buddha, it is far more difficult to encounter the Lotus Sutra. And even if one should encounter the Lotus Sutra, it is rarer still for an ordinary person of the latter age to meet the votary of the Lotus Sutra. The reason is that the votary who expounds the Lotus Sutra in the latter age surpasses [the Buddhas and bodhisattvas appearing in] the sutras of the Flower Garland, Agama, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom periods and the twelve hundred and more honored ones⁹ of the Mahavairochana and other sutras—who did not expound the Lotus Sutra. The Great Teacher Miao-lo states in his commentary, "Those who give alms [to the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra] will enjoy good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles, while those who vex or trouble them will have their heads split into seven pieces."¹⁰

The epidemics that the Japanese nation has suffered since last year, as well as those of the past Shoka era (1257–1259),¹¹ are totally without precedent in the reigns of the more than ninety emperors who have ruled since the beginning of the imperial era. These calamities appear to stem from the fact that the people hate the presence of a sage in this country. This is

exactly what is meant when it is said that a dog that barks at a lion will have its bowels ripped open, and that an asura who tries to swallow the sun and moon will have his head broken. Two-thirds of all the people in Japan have already fallen ill in the epidemics, and half of these have perished. The remaining third may not be afflicted in body, but they are afflicted in mind. Visibly or invisibly, their heads have surely been broken.

There are four kinds of punishment: general and individual, inconspicuous and conspicuous.¹² If the people nurture hatred for a sage, general punishment will sweep across the entire country, extending to the four continents, the six heavens of the world of desire, and the four meditation heavens. When enmity is directed toward a worthy, only those who harbor it will suffer punishment. The epidemics now spreading in Japan are general punishment. Surely the people must have opposed a sage living in this country. Because a mountain contains a jewel, its plants and trees do not wither. Because a country has a sage, that country is protected from ruin. Ignorant people do not realize that plants and trees on a mountain do not wither because of the presence of a jewel. Nor do they realize that a country falls because of enmity toward a sage.

Though the sun and the moon shine, their light will not benefit the blind. Of what use is the sound of voices to the deaf? The people in Japan are all as though blind or deaf. How immense would be the benefit if one could open all these eyes and ears, causing all the eyes to see and the ears to hear! Who could possibly fathom this benefit? And I may add that, although parents may give birth to a child who is endowed with both sight and hearing, if there is no teacher to instruct that child, then its eyes and ears will be no better than those of an animal.

Among the ten directions, all the people in Japan aspire to the west.¹³ Among all Buddhas, they revere Amida Buddha, and among all practices, they invoke Amida's name. Some make these three concerns their basis yet engage in other practices, while others devote themselves to the Nembutsu alone. In the more than twenty years since the fifth year of the Kencho era (1253) up until the present, I have first clarified the Buddha's lifetime teachings in terms of their relative merit, sequence of preaching, and profundity, and upon that basis I have asserted the superiority of the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra over the invocation of the name of Amida Buddha. Yet no one, from the ruler on down to the common people, has heeded my words. They have questioned their teachers about me, appealed to their lords, talked with their companions, and spoken to their wives, children, and retainers, so that rumors concerning me have spread to every province, district, village, and hamlet, as well as to their temples and shrines. As a result, everyone has come to know my name, and they all say that, if one compares the Lotus Sutra with the Nembutsu, the Nembutsu is superior and the Lotus Sutra is no match for it, and that other priests are worthy of respect while I am contemptible. So, the ruler regards me with hostility, the people have come to hate me, and all Japan has become a great foe of both the Lotus Sutra and its votary. But if I say this, not only the people of Japan in general but also the ignorant among my followers will think that I am inventing groundless falsehoods in an attempt to make people believe me. I am saying all this, however, for the benefit of those men and women who believe in the principles of Buddhism, and I will leave it to them to judge for themselves.

The "King Wonderful Adornment" chapter of the Lotus Sutra is especially applicable to women, for it explains

how a wife encouraged her husband. In the latter age as well, though her name may differ, a wife who leads her husband to take faith will enjoy the same benefit as Lady Pure Virtue. All the more fortunate is a case like yours, in which both wife and husband have faith! It is like a bird possessing two wings, or a cart having two wheels. What is there that you two cannot achieve? Because there is a heaven and an earth, a sun and a moon, the sun shines and the rain falls, and the plants and trees of benefit will surely blossom and bear fruit.

Next, we come to the "Encouragements" chapter. Though there were many monks among the disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha, Mahakashyapa and Ananda always accompanied him on his right and left, just like the ministers of the right and left who attend the ruler. This was when the Buddha expounded the Hinayana sutras. Moreover, among all the innumerable bodhisattvas, Universal Worthy and Manjusri were distinguished as the ministers of the right and left of Shakyamuni Buddha. It was strange, therefore, that Bodhisattva Universal Worthy, one of Shakyamuni's two ministers, should be absent during the eight years when the Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra, which surpasses all the other sutras of his lifetime teachings, in the ceremony where the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions gathered in numbers exceeding those of the dust particles of the land. But when the "King Wonderful Adornment" chapter had been expounded and the preaching of the Lotus Sutra was drawing to a close, Bodhisattva Universal Worthy came hurrying belatedly from the land of the Buddha King Purity of Jeweled Dignity and Virtue¹⁴ in the east, accompanied by the sounds of ten thousand million musical instruments and leading a retinue of countless numbers of the eight kinds of nonhuman beings. Prob-

bly fearing the Buddha's displeasure at his tardy arrival, he assumed a serious expression and pledged in all earnestness to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra in the latter age. The Buddha, no doubt pleased with Universal Worthy's extraordinary sincerity in vowing to spread the Lotus Sutra throughout the continent of Jambudvīpa, thereupon praised him—more warmly, in fact, than he had earlier praised the other bodhisattvas of higher rank.

It is no ordinary thing for a woman in the latter age to have resolved to make an offering to each of the twenty-eight chapters of this wonderful Lotus Sutra. At the ceremony of the "Treasure Tower" chapter, the Thus Come Ones Many Treasures and Shakyamuni, the Buddhas of the ten directions, and all bodhisattvas gathered together. When I ponder where this "Treasure Tower" chapter¹⁵ is now, I see that it exists in the eight-petaled lotus flower of the heart within the breast of Nichinyo. This is like the lotus seed containing the lotus flower within it, or a consort carrying a crown prince in her womb. When someone, having observed the ten good precepts, is destined to be born a crown prince and awaits his birth in the consort's womb, the heavenly gods will protect him. That is why a crown prince is called the Son of Heaven. Each of the 69,384 characters of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra is like a crown prince and is the seed of a Buddha.

There are shadows in the darkness, but people cannot discern them. There are trails in the sky where birds fly, but people cannot recognize them. There are paths in the sea along which fish swim, but people cannot perceive them. All people and things of the four continents are reflected in the moon without a single exception, but people cannot see them. But they are visible to the heavenly eye.¹⁶ In like manner, ordinary people cannot see that the

“Treasure Tower” chapter exists within the body of Nichinyo, but Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions perceive it. I, Nichiren, also presume this to be the case. How praiseworthy!

King Wen of the Chou dynasty was victorious in battle because he took care to provide for elderly people. During the thirty-seven reigns spanning eight hundred years in which his descendants ruled, there were some incidents of misgovernment, but on the whole the Chou dynasty prospered due to that fundamental virtue. King Ajatashatru, though a most evil man, was able to hold the throne for ninety years owing to the merit of his father, King Bimbisara, who had made offerings to the Buddha for several years. The same principle holds true today. I do not think the present regime will last long, as it opposes the Lotus Sutra. Yet, probably because of the excellent leadership of the late acting administrator and the former governor of Musashi¹⁷ who became a lay priest, it appears to be secure for the time being. But in this case, too, the present government will eventually collapse if it continues its enmity toward the Lotus Sutra. The government of-

officials mistakenly think that, while the Nembutsu priests are friendly to the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren is hostile to the Nembutsu; and they claim to believe in both teachings. I, Nichiren, say in rebuttal: If nothing is vitally wrong with the present government, then why have such unprecedented epidemics, famines, and wars broken out? Why have the authorities twice subjected the votary of the Lotus Sutra to grave punishment without allowing him to confront the other schools in open debate? How pitiful, how unfortunate!

Even under such circumstances, as a woman you have inherited the life of the Lotus Sutra. In fact, you have inherited the life of the parents of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions.¹⁸ Is there anyone else in the entire land of Jambudvipa who possesses such good fortune?

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twenty-fifth day of the sixth
month

Reply to Nichinyo



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Minobu in the sixth month of the first year of Koan (1278) to Nichinyo in response to her sincere offerings. In this letter, the Daishonin outlines each of the last seven chapters of the Lotus Sutra, from the twenty-second, or “Entrustment,” chapter through the twenty-eighth, or “Encouragements,” chapter, and describes the benefit of each chapter. Hence the title of this letter.

First, the Daishonin discusses the

“Entrustment” chapter, identifying as its heart the ceremony of the transfer of the Lotus Sutra. In the preceding “Supernatural Powers” chapter, Shakyamuni Buddha transfers the essence of the sutra specifically to Bodhisattva Superior Practices and the other Bodhisattvas of the Earth. In “Entrustment,” he makes a general transfer of the Lotus Sutra to all the assembled bodhisattvas.

Next, the Daishonin summarizes the “Medicine King,” “Wonderful Sound,” and “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds”

chapters, describing the benefit and protection conferred by the bodhisattvas Medicine King, Wonderful Sound, and Perceiver of the World's Sounds. These three chapters explain how these bodhisattvas, who have been entrusted with the Lotus Sutra in the preceding "Entrustment" chapter, will propagate the Buddha's teachings while manifesting their own powers to the fullest and thereby saving people.

Nichiren Daishonin then turns to the twenty-sixth, or "Dharani," chapter, in which the bodhisattvas Medicine King and Brave Donor, the two heavenly kings Vaishravana and Upholder of the Nation, and the ten demon daughters pledge to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra who will propagate the Buddha's teachings in an evil age to come. Here, the Daishonin clarifies the workings of two kinds of demons, good and evil.

The last portion of this letter addresses the twenty-seventh, or "King Wonderful Adornment," chapter and the final chapter, "Encouragements." The "King Wonderful Adornment" chapter tells how Lady Pure Virtue led her husband, King Wonderful Adorn-

ment, to take faith in the correct teaching. Because Nichinyo and her husband were both his followers, the Daishonin emphasizes how great are the benefits that a husband and wife can receive by devoting themselves together to faith. The "Encouragements" chapter describes the protection of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy, who vowed to safeguard the Lotus Sutra and its votaries after the Buddha's passing.

Then, the Daishonin praises Nichinyo's faith in making an offering to each of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra. He declares that the Ceremony in the Air, which begins in the middle of the "Treasure Tower" chapter, is to be found in Nichinyo's heart. The Daishonin depicted this Ceremony in the Air in the object of devotion. This passage corresponds to one in *The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon*, also written to Nichinyo a year earlier, which states, "Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myohorenge-kyo" (p. 832).

Notes

1. A wide plain encompassing present-day Tokyo and Saitama Prefecture.

2. Bodhisattva Gladly Seen, or Gladly Seen by All Living Beings, is a previous incarnation of Bodhisattva Medicine King.

3. In *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, T'ien-t'ai, interpreting a passage of the "Wonderful Sound" chapter, explains that Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound was Lady Pure Virtue in a past life.

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

5. The large intestine, small intestine, gallbladder, stomach, urinary bladder, and the "three organs." According to ancient Chinese medicine, the "three organs" are regarded collectively as one of the six empty internal organs. One is located below the heart and above the stomach, while an-

other is located inside the stomach. The third is located above the urinary bladder.

6. According to traditional accounts, in the fourteenth year of the reign of the thirty-first emperor, Bidatsu (538-585), Soga no Umako built a pagoda to enshrine the Buddha's relics. When an epidemic broke out, Moriya attributed it to the anger of the native gods at the respect shown to the new religion; and he destroyed the pagoda on the first day of the third month. After this incident, the emperor, Moriya, and Umako all fell ill in the epidemic. However, the supporters of Buddhism steadily gained ground over the anti-Buddhist faction. Moriya lost his allies and was eventually killed in a skirmish with Umako's soldiers in 587.

7. The Kumano shrines refer to the three

shrines dedicated to indigenous Japanese deities. They are located in an area called Kumano that encompasses part of present-day Wakayama and Mie prefectures.

8. Hatakeyama Shigetada (1164–1205) was a warrior who helped establish the Kamakura shogunate and enjoyed the confidence of its founder, Minamoto no Yoritomo. After Yoritomo's death, however, he was treated distantly by Hojo Tokimasa, who became the first Kamakura regent. In 1205 when Hatakeyama Shigeyasu, Shigetada's son, quarreled with Hiraga Tomomasa, a relative of the Hojo clan, Tokimasa accused Shigeyasu of treason and had him killed. Hojo Yoshitoki, Tokimasa's son, then led his forces against the Hatakeyama family. Shigetada resisted fiercely, but was too greatly outnumbered and was killed in battle.

9. The twelve hundred and more honored ones are venerable Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and others inscribed on the two mandalas of the Diamond and Womb realms.

10. *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra."* The Daishonin here reverses the order of the original sentence, which begins, "Those who vex or trouble . . ." This statement originally refers to the Lotus Sutra, but Nichiren Daishonin uses it in context to refer to the sutra's votary. The ten honorable titles are ten epithets for a Buddha.

11. The Daishonin refers here to the epidemics that broke out in the third year of the Shoka era (1259). At that time, the government ordered the priests of the various schools to offer prayers, but the epidemics continued unabated into the follow-

ing year, and a great number of people died.

12. General punishment is what falls upon the people as a whole, while individual punishment is what strikes only the individual. Inconspicuous punishment is karmic retribution that is not immediately recognizable, and conspicuous punishment is retribution that appears in clearly recognizable form.

13. This means that they aspire to rebirth in the western Pure Land of Amida Buddha.

14. In the "Universal Worthy" chapter, he is called the Buddha King Above Jeweled Dignity and Virtue.

15. The "Treasure Tower" chapter here indicates the Ceremony in the Air, which begins in this chapter. The eight-petaled lotus of the heart refers to the arrangement of the heart, lungs, and other organs in the chest cavity, which was thought to resemble an eight-petaled lotus blossom.

16. The heavenly eye is one of the five types of vision. It means the ability of heavenly beings to see beyond the physical limitations of darkness, distance, or obstruction.

17. The late acting administrator and the former governor of Musashi refer to Hojo Yoshitoki (1163–1224) and Hojo Yasutoki (1183–1242), the second and third regents of the Kamakura government, respectively. In the period from 1219 through 1238, Yasutoki was also the governor of Musashi Province.

18. "Parents" here indicates the Lotus Sutra, by which all Buddhas attain enlightenment.