

Persecution by Sword and Staff



THE greatest of all the persecutions that I have suffered were the attempted beheading at Tatsunokuchi and the attack at Tojo.¹ None of the others were direct attempts on my life. I have been reviled, denounced, ousted, falsely accused, and struck across the face, but these were all comparatively minor incidents. I, Nichiren, am the only person in Japan to be abused in both body and mind [on account of the Lotus Sutra]. If anyone else has been slandered as I have, it was not because of the Lotus Sutra. One incident in particular I can never forget is how Sho-bo² seized the fifth scroll of the Lotus Sutra and struck me across the face with it. His attack on me stemmed from the three poisons.

Once in India there was a jealous woman³ who hated her husband so much that she smashed everything in the house. Her excessive rage completely altered her appearance; her eyes blazed like the sun and moon, and her mouth seemed to belch fire. She looked exactly like a blue or red demon.⁴ She seized the fifth scroll of the Lotus Sutra, which her husband had been reciting for some years, and trampled it savagely with both feet. Later she died and fell into hell, all of her except for her feet. Though the wardens of hell tried to force them down by beating them with iron staves, her

feet remained outside of hell as a result of the relationship, albeit a reverse one, that they had formed with the Lotus Sutra by trampling on it. Sho-bo struck me in the face with the fifth scroll of the Lotus Sutra because he hated me. Thus he too has formed a reverse relationship with this sutra.

One incident occurred in India, the other in Japan; one was perpetrated by a woman, and the other by a man; in one, a pair of feet committed the violence, and in the other, a pair of hands; one happened because of jealousy, and the other because of the Lotus Sutra. However, the same fifth scroll of the sutra was involved in both instances. The woman's feet did not enter hell, so why should Sho-bo's hands fall into the hell of incessant suffering? The woman, however, hated only her husband and not the Lotus Sutra itself, whereas Sho-bo hated both the Lotus Sutra and me, Nichiren. Therefore, his entire body will enter the hell of incessant suffering. As the sutra states, "When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avichi hell."⁵ There is no mention of his hands being spared. How pitiful, how truly pitiful! Eventually, however, he will meet me again and be able to gain the fruit of Buddhahood, just as the four kinds of believers who arrogantly persecuted Bodhisattva Never Dispar-

aging were ultimately saved by him.⁶

The fifth scroll contains the very heart of the Lotus Sutra, for it reveals that the dragon king's daughter attained Buddhahood in her present form. Devadatta represents the spiritual aspect of enlightenment, and the dragon king's daughter, the physical aspect. The principle of attaining Buddhahood in one's present form can be found nowhere else in the Buddha's entire lifetime of teachings. The Great Teacher Dengyo enumerated ten outstanding points in which the Lotus Sutra surpasses all others.⁷ One of them is the sutra's "superiority in leading people to attain Buddhahood in their present form." This is the most important doctrine of the Tendai school, and a section of *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* is devoted to this teaching of attaining Buddhahood in one's present form. It is also a point of controversy between the True Word and Tendai schools. The dragon king's daughter attained Buddhahood through the power of the Lotus Sutra. Bodhisattva Manjushri stated, "I constantly expounded the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law alone."⁸ The words "alone" and "constantly" are the core of this statement. However, *The Treatise on the Mind Aspiring for Enlightenment* reads, "Only in the True Word teachings [can one attain Buddhahood in one's present form]." Which is one to accept, "only" or "alone"? The word "only" in the treatise must be an error [in translation].⁹

The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra states, "In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth." The Lotus Sutra reads, "The World-Honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth."¹⁰ Many Treasures Buddha affirmed that only the Lotus Sutra enables one to attain Buddhahood in one's present form when he said, "All that you have expounded [in the Lotus Sutra] is the truth!"¹¹ No matter how firmly the

sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra guarantee the attainment of Buddhahood, and no matter how much the believers in these provisional doctrines may wildly insist that this is so, it is as easy to refute these assertions as it is to smash a thousand earthen cooking dishes with a single hammer. This is what is meant by the statement "The Lotus Sutra is the teaching of shakubuku, the refutation of the provisional doctrines."¹² The Lotus Sutra is indeed the most profound teaching.

Ever since Jikaku, scholars of the Tendai school have interpreted the passages from the three major works—*The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, *Words and Phrases*, and *Great Concentration and Insight*—in one way or another, and have given plausible explanations. Their views, however, are as useless to us now as last year's calendar or yesterday's meal. You should pay no attention to a person who says that in the first five hundred years of the Latter Day of the Law there exists a way to enlightenment apart from the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, even if this were the Buddha's teaching. How much more so if it was the opinion of some teacher. The "Devadatta" chapter of the Lotus Sutra states that Devadatta was the teacher of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni in some past existence. He who was once the teacher is now the disciple, and he who is now the disciple was formerly the teacher. In pondering this chapter, I, Nichiren, have realized that it reveals the profound meaning of the Lotus Sutra through the oneness of past and present, and the inseparability of the one who teaches and the one who learns. Therefore, the merciful Thus Come One Shakyamuni became the teacher of the wicked Devadatta, and the wise Manjushri became the teacher of the ignorant daughter of the dragon king. Certainly I can in no way be inferior to Manjushri or to the Thus Come One Shakyamuni. The men of Japan are

like Devadatta, and the women are like the dragon king's daughter. Whether by following it or opposing it, they will attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra. This is the message of the "Devadatta" chapter.

Next, we come to the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter. Only I, Nichiren, have read with my entire being the twenty-line verse from this chapter, which the eight hundred thousand million nayutas of bodhisattvas proclaimed in a single voice. Since the Buddha's passing, who else in the three countries of India, China, and Japan has ever read this verse as I have? No one even claims to have done so, nor do I believe that anyone has. The verse reads, "[There will be many ignorant people who will . . .] attack us with swords and staves." Perhaps others have been beaten with staves, but I have never heard of any who were injured by the sword.

We know that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was attacked with staves, as is written in the sutra, "Some among the group would take sticks of wood or tiles and stones [and beat and pelt him]," but he was not persecuted by the sword. T'ien-t'ai, Miao-lo, and Dengyo also escaped persecution by sword and staff, as the sutra states, "Swords and staves will not touch him."¹³ I, Nichiren, have met with persecution by both sword and staff. As I mentioned before, I was attacked with a sword at Matsubara¹⁴ in Tojo and later at Tatsunokuchi. No one else has met with such persecution [for the sake of the Lotus Sutra] even once, but I have met with it twice. As for being attacked with staves, I have already been struck in the face by Sho-bo with the fifth scroll of the Lotus Sutra. The fifth scroll was used as a staff to strike me, and it is this very scroll that carries the passage that [votaries of the Lotus Sutra] will be attacked with staves. What a mysterious passage of prediction! Sho-

bo hit me before dozens of people, and, though I knew it was for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, being an ordinary person, I felt miserable and ashamed. Had I had the strength, I would have wrestled it from him, trampled on and broken it, and thrown it away. However, it was in fact the fifth scroll of the Lotus Sutra.

This brings to mind a story.¹⁵ A father, anxious about his son's future, thrashed the boy with a bow made of zelkova wood because he refused to study. At the time, the son resented his father's action and hated the zelkova bow. However, he applied himself to his studies so much that eventually he [mastered Buddhism], thereby achieving emancipation himself and benefiting others. In retrospect, he saw that he owed his achievements to his father's thrashings. It is said that he erected a memorial tablet made from a zelkova tree for the repose of his deceased father.

It is the same with me. When I attain Buddhahood, how will I be able to forget my obligation to Sho-bo? Much less can I forget the thanks I owe to the scroll of the Lotus Sutra [with which he struck me]. When I think of this, I cannot restrain my tears of gratitude.

The "Emerging from the Earth" chapter also explains something about me, because it states that Bodhisattva Superior Practices and his followers will appear in the Latter Day of the Law to propagate the five characters of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. I, Nichiren, have appeared earlier than anyone else. How reassuring to think that I will no doubt be praised by bodhisattvas equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers! Be that as it may, commit yourself to the Lotus Sutra and have faith in its teachings. You must not only believe in them yourself, but also encourage others to do the same, so that you may save those who were

your parents in all your past existences.

From the time that I was born until today, I have never known a moment's ease; I have thought only of propagating the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra. I do not know how long I or anyone else may live, but without fail, I will be with you at the time of your death and guide you from this life to the next. All the Buddhas of the past, present, and future attain enlightenment during the hours of the ox and the tiger.¹⁶ In all three countries of India, China, and Japan, the place of Buddhist prayer is located to the northeast, in the direction of the demon gate.¹⁷ These are profound teachings of Buddhism, which are reverently transferred from teacher

to disciple. I will explain in more detail later.

With my deep respect.

As you crave food when hungry, seek water when thirsty, long to see a lover, beg for medicine when ill, or as a beautiful woman desires powder and rouge, so should you put your faith in the Lotus Sutra. If you do not, you will regret it later.

Nichiren

The twentieth day of the fourth month in the second year of Koan (1279), cyclical sign *tsuchinoto-u*

Reply to Ueno



Background

This letter was written to Nanjo Tokimitsu, the steward of Ueno Village in Fuji District of Suruga Province, in the fourth month of 1279. The Daishonin's life at Minobu was entering upon its fifth year; Nikko Shonin was actively propagating the teaching in the Atsuhara area near Mount Fuji in Suruga.

In the body of this letter, Nichiren Daishonin explains the significance of the chapters, from the "Devadatta" (twelfth) through the "Emerging from the Earth" (fifteenth), contained in the fifth volume or scroll of the Lotus Sutra, in terms of his own enlightenment. He reveals the profound meaning of the persecutions "with swords and staves" that befell him, particularly when he

was struck with the fifth scroll of the Lotus Sutra just before the attempted execution at Tatsunokuchi. The "Encouraging Devotion" (thirteenth) chapter, especially the twenty-line verse section, enumerates the types of persecutions that votaries of the Lotus Sutra will undergo in the fearful latter age after Shakyamuni Buddha's passing. Nichiren Daishonin declares that only he has lived out this chapter's predictions, thus identifying himself as the votary of the Lotus Sutra. By citing the "Emerging from the Earth" chapter, the Daishonin equates himself with Bodhisattva Superior Practices, and also hints at his identity as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

Notes

1. Tatsunokuchi was the name of the execution grounds in Kamakura where the deputy chief of military and police affairs, Hei no Saemon, attempted to behead the Daishonin in 1271. The attack at Tojo refers to the Komatsubara Persecution. On the

eleventh day of the eleventh month, 1264, the Daishonin was ambushed by Tojo Kagenobu, the steward of Tojo Village in Awa, and his men. He received a sword cut on his forehead and had his hand broken.

2. Sho-bo is a title indicating the deputy

or vice chief of a government ministry, and it is surmised that there were several individuals of the same title. Here reference is to a Sho-bo who was originally a follower of the Daishonin's teachings, but later abandoned his faith. When Hei no Saemon went to arrest the Daishonin on the twelfth day of the ninth month, 1271, he accompanied him as his retainer. The fifth scroll or volume, wrapped around a wooden staff, includes four chapters, from the twelfth through the fifteenth. Included therein is the so-called twenty-line verse section of the "Encouraging Devotion" (thirteenth) chapter, which states that votaries of the Lotus Sutra will be attacked with swords and staves.

3. The source of this story is not known. A somewhat similar story, but involving a Chinese woman, appears in *The Lotus Sutra and Its Traditions*.

4. A blue or red demon refers to the demons that punish the denizens of hell.

5. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

6. This story is found in the "Never Disparaging" chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging practiced the Lotus Sutra, and because of their slander of the sutra, the people—priests and nuns, laymen and laywomen—fell into the hell of incessant suffering. Eventually, however, due to the reverse relationship they had formed with the Lotus Sutra, they met Never Disparaging again and were able to attain enlightenment.

7. These are enumerated in the third volume of *The Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra*. The following sentence refers to the eighth principle.

8. Lotus Sutra, chap. 12. According to this chapter, the dragon king's daughter conceived the desire for enlightenment when she heard Bodhisattva Manjushri preach the

Lotus Sutra in the dragon king's palace. Later, she appeared before the assembly at Eagle Peak and attained enlightenment immediately, without changing her dragon form.

9. The Daishonin attributes this error to the translation of *The Treatise on the Mind Aspiring for Enlightenment* done by Pu-k'ung of the True Word school. In *The Doctrine of Attaining Buddhahood in One's Present Form*, the Daishonin asks if rejecting the above treatise does not amount to rejecting its author, Nagarjuna, and answers, "It is more likely that the translator distorted the meaning according to his personal views" (p. 1056). Obviously Nagarjuna could not have missed the Lotus Sutra's description of the dragon king's daughter attaining Buddhahood in her present form.

10. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

11. *Ibid.*, chap. 11.

12. *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*.

13. Lotus Sutra, chap. 14.

14. This refers to what is now commonly known as Komatsubara.

15. The following story appears in *Tales from the Three Countries*. The son later became Ensho (883–967), a chief priest of Enryaku-ji.

16. The hours 1:00 to 5:00 A.M., which Buddhism traditionally regards as a crucial interval in which, according to Chinese tradition, life moves from the negative (yin) to the positive (yang), from sleep to waking, or from death to life.

17. The direction of the demon gate refers to the inauspicious direction, that is, northeast. In both Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo) Buddhist temples were built to the northeast, the direction of the demon gate, to protect the cities against evil forces. Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei, for instance, was built to the northeast of Kyoto.