

## Letter to Akimoto



I HAVE received the thirty cylindrical vessels and the sixty plates that you were kind enough to send.

A vessel is a kind of utensil. Because the great earth is hollowed out, water collects on it; and because the blue sky is pure, the moon shines in it. When the moon rises, the water glows with a pure light; and when the rain falls, the plants and trees flourish.

A vessel is hollowed out like the earth, and water can be collected in it the way water is stored in a pond. And the reflection of the moon floats on the surface of the water in the same way that the Lotus Sutra pervades our being.

But a vessel is susceptible to four faults. The first is being upset or covered, which means that the vessel can be overturned or covered with a lid. The second is leaking, which means that the water leaks out. The third is being defiled, which means that the contents can be contaminated. Though the water itself may be pure, if filth is dumped into it, then the water in the vessel ceases to be of any use. The fourth is being mixed. If rice is mixed with filth or pebbles or sand or dirt, then it is no longer fit for human consumption.

The vessel here stands for our bodies and minds. Our minds are a kind of vessel, and our mouths too are vessels,

as are our ears. The Lotus Sutra is the Dharma water of the Buddha's wisdom. But when this water is poured into our minds, then we may jar and upset it. Or we may shut it out by placing our hands over our ears, determined not to listen to it. Or we may spit it out of our mouths, determined not to let our mouths chant it. In such cases, we are like a vessel that has overturned or has had a lid placed on it.

Again, although we may have a certain amount of faith, we may encounter evil influences and find our faith weakening. Then we will deliberately abandon our faith, or, even though we maintain our faith for a day, we will set it aside for a month. In such cases, we are like vessels that let the water leak out.

Or we may be the kind of practitioners of the Lotus Sutra whose mouths are reciting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo one moment, but Namu Amida Butsu the next. This is like mixing filth with one's rice, or putting sand or pebbles in it. This is what the Lotus Sutra is warning against when it says, "Desiring only to accept and embrace the sutra of the great vehicle and not accepting a single verse of the other sutras."<sup>1</sup>

The learned authorities in the world today suppose that there is no harm in mixing extraneous practices with the practice of the Lotus Sutra, and I,

Nichiren, was once of that opinion myself. But the passage from the sutra [that I have just quoted] does not permit such a view. Suppose that a woman who had been the consort of a great king and had become pregnant with his seed should then turn round and marry a man of common stature. In such a case, the seed of the king and the seed of the commoner would become mixed together, and as a result, the aid and assistance of heaven and the protection of the patron deities<sup>2</sup> would be withdrawn, and the kingdom would face ruin. The child born from two such fathers would be neither a king nor a commoner, but someone who belongs not to the human realm.

This is one of the most important points in the Lotus Sutra. The doctrine of the sowing of the seed and its maturing and harvesting<sup>3</sup> is the very heart and core of the Lotus Sutra. All the Buddhas of the three existences and the ten directions have invariably attained Buddhahood through the seeds represented by the five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo. The words Namu Amida Butsu are not the seeds of Buddhahood, nor can the mantras or the five precepts act as such seeds. One must be perfectly clear about this point, because this is the fault referred to as being mixed.

If a vessel is free of these four faults of overturning, leaking, being defiled, and being mixed, then it can be called a perfect vessel. If the embankments around a moat do not leak, then the water will never escape from the moat. And if the mind of faith is perfect, then the water of wisdom, the great impartial wisdom, will never dry up.

Now these vessels that you have sent me are sturdy and thick, and in addition they are coated with pure lacquer. They symbolize the firmness and sturdiness of the power of your faith in the Lotus Sutra.

It is said that the heavenly king

Vaishravana presented four bowls to the Buddha, and as a result, became known as the foremost deity of good fortune in all the four continents of the world. Lady Pure Virtue presented eighty-four thousand bowls as an offering to the Buddha Cloud Thunder Sound King, and as a result, became Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound. And now, since you have presented these thirty vessels and sixty plates, is there any doubt that you will become a Buddha?

The country of Japan is known by ten different names, such as Fuso, Yamato, Mizuho, and Akitsushima. In addition, it may be described as a country of sixty-six provinces and two islands that measures over three thousand *ri* in length and varies in width from a hundred *ri* to five hundred *ri*. It is divided into the five regions around the capital and the seven marches, and it has 586 districts and 3,729 villages. In terms of fields it includes 11,120 *cho* of superior lands and 885,567 *cho* of other kinds. The population numbers 4,989,658 persons. There are 3,132 shrines and 11,037 temples. Men number 1,994,828 and women 2,994,830.

Among all these men, Nichiren alone deserves to be regarded as the foremost. In what sense is he the foremost? He is foremost in being hated by men and women. The reason is that, although the provinces of Japan are numerous and their inhabitants are likewise numerous, they are alike at heart and their mouths all utter Namu Amida Butsu. They look upon Amida Buddha as their object of devotion and, hating all the other nine directions, long only for the west.<sup>4</sup> Thus those who practice the Lotus Sutra, those who carry out True Word practices, those who observe the precepts, those who are wise, and those who are foolish all look upon these practices as secondary and upon the Nembutsu as their primary practice, and, hoping in this way to expiate their offenses, they

recite this Buddha's name. Hence some of them recite it sixty thousand times, eighty thousand times, or four hundred eighty thousand times, while others recite it ten times, a hundred times, or a thousand times.

But I, Nichiren, one man alone, declare that the recitation of the name of Amida Buddha is an action that leads to rebirth in the hell of incessant suffering, that the Zen school is the invention of the heavenly devil, that the True Word school is an evil doctrine that will destroy the country, and that the Precepts school and the observers of the precepts are traitors to the nation.

Because I do so, from the sovereign on down to the common people, all people fear me more than they would an enemy of their parents, an enemy from a past existence, a plotter of treason, a night raider, or a bandit. They rage, they curse, they strike at me. Those who slander me are given grants of land, while those who praise me are driven from their areas or fined, and the people who desire to kill me are singled out for rewards. And on top of all this, I have twice incurred the wrath of the authorities.<sup>5</sup>

I am not only the strangest person alive in the world today; in the ninety reigns of human sovereigns,<sup>6</sup> in the more than seven hundred years since the Buddhist teachings were first introduced to Japan, there has never been such a strange person. I, Nichiren, am like the great comet of the Bun'ei era (1264), a disorder of the heavens such as had never happened in Japan before that time. I, Nichiren, am like the great earthquake of the Shoka era (1257), a freak of the earth that had never before occurred in this land.

In Japan since the history of this country began, there have been twenty-six perpetrators of treason. The first was Prince Oyama, the second was Oishi no Yamamaru, and so on down

to the twenty-fifth, Yoritomo, and the twenty-sixth, Yoshitoki. The first twenty-four of these men were struck down by the imperial forces and had their heads put on display at the prison gate, or their corpses left to rot in the mountain fields. But the last two succeeded in overthrowing the sovereign and gaining complete control of the nation, and at that time the imperial rule came to an end.

And yet these various perpetrators of treason are less hated by the mass of people than is Nichiren. If you ask why that should be, I will tell you. The Lotus Sutra contains a passage declaring that that sutra is first among all the sutras.<sup>7</sup> However, the Great Teacher Kobo declares that the Lotus Sutra ranks third,<sup>8</sup> while the Great Teacher Jikaku declares that the Lotus Sutra ranks second,<sup>9</sup> and the Great Teacher Chisho agrees with Jikaku. Hence at present, when the priests of Mount Hiei, To-ji, and Onjo-ji look upon the Lotus Sutra, they read the passage that says the Lotus Sutra is first, but what they understand when they read it is that the Lotus Sutra is second or third in standing.

Neither the nobility nor the warrior clans have any detailed information about this matter. But since the eminent priests in whom they place their faith all subscribe to this opinion, the laity share the same view as their teachers.

With regard to other groups, the Zen school describes itself as a teaching transmitted apart from the sutras,<sup>10</sup> and hence speaks with scorn of the Lotus Sutra. The Nembutsu school asserts that "not even one person in a thousand" can be saved through the other teachings<sup>11</sup> and that "not a single person has ever attained Buddhahood"<sup>12</sup> through them, by which it means that, in comparison to the Nembutsu, the Lotus Sutra is too lofty to practice and therefore ought to be rejected. The

Precepts school is composed of Hinayana doctrines. Even in the Former Day of the Law the Buddha would not condone the spread of such teachings, so surely he would never approve of them being propagated in the Latter Day of the Law, causing the ruler of the nation to be confused and misled.

Three women of antiquity—Ta Chi, Mo Hsi, and Pao Ssu—misled the rulers of the three dynasties<sup>13</sup> and caused them to lose their thrones. And in the same way, these evil doctrines are propagated throughout the nation and cause the Lotus Sutra to lose its proper place. As a result, the great sovereigns Antoku, Takahira, and the others were cast aside by the Sun Goddess and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman and drowned in the sea or were exiled to distant islands. They were overthrown by families who for generations in the past had been their followers, and this was because they had lost the protection of the heavenly deities. They put their faith in those who are enemies of the Lotus Sutra. But because there was no one who understood this, they had no way to learn of their error. This is illustrated in the statement that wise men can perceive the cause of things, just as snakes know the way of snakes.<sup>14</sup>

I, Nichiren, am no wise man. But just as a snake can understand the mind of a dragon and crows can foretell the coming of good or bad fortune in the world, so I was able to fathom the course that events would take. And I knew that, if I spoke out on the matter, I would instantly meet with punishment, while if I did not speak out, I would fall into the great Avichi hell.

In practicing the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, there are three principles that must be understood. The first is that regarding slanderers. The monk Superior Intent, the monk Shore of Suffering, the Scholar Vimalamitra, and the Great Arrogant Brahman are exam-

ples. These men dressed their bodies in the three robes, lifted a single begging bowl up before their eyes,<sup>15</sup> and meticulously observed the two hundred and fifty precepts, and yet they were in fact enemies of the Mahayana and in the end fell into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering.

In recent times in Japan there have been men like Kobo, Jikaku, and Chisho who observed the precepts just as those earlier monks did and who did not differ from them in wisdom. But because they asserted that the True Word teaching of the Mahavairochana Sutra ranked first and the Lotus Sutra ranked second or third, if my view of the matter should by any chance be correct, they are now in the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering.

It is a fearful thing to utter such words, and still more does one hesitate to put them into writing. But when the Buddha himself has declared that the Lotus Sutra is foremost, if one learns of a person who ranks it second or third and, out of fear of other people or of government authorities, fails to speak out, then "one is in fact his enemy,"<sup>16</sup> that is, one is acting as a fearful enemy to all living beings. This is stated in both the sutras and the commentaries, and so I speak out.

To speak out without fearing others and without flinching before society—this is what the sutra means when it says, "We care nothing for our bodies or lives but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way."<sup>17</sup>

It is not that one does not recall the calumny, the staves and stones that were suffered by Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. It is not that one is unafraid of the world. It is just that the censure of the Lotus Sutra is even more severe. It is like the case of Sukenari and Tokimune,<sup>18</sup> who acted as they did even though they found themselves in the camp of the shogun, because they longed to avenge themselves upon

their enemy and were ashamed at the thought of failing to do so.

The above is the principle relating to individual slanderers.

As for the families of slanderers, the family members may pass their entire lives without slandering the Lotus Sutra. But even though they practice it every hour of the day and night, the fact that they were born into the family of a slanderer means that they will invariably be reborn in the hell of incessant suffering.<sup>19</sup> For example, those persons who were born into the family of the monk Superior Intent or the monk Shore of Suffering and became their disciples or lay supporters all fell, against their will, into the hell of incessant suffering. Or it is like the family members of Yoshimori. Setting aside those who gave their lives in battle, even the children still in their mothers' wombs, torn from their mothers' bellies, were killed before birth.

Now I, Nichiren, have mentioned the three great teachers Kobo, Jikaku, and Chisho, who boldly state in their writings that the Lotus Sutra represents the region of darkness, that it is a false and deluded doctrine. If what the Lotus Sutra itself says is correct, then what do you suppose will become of the priests at Mount Hiei, To-ji, Onjo-ji, the seven major temples of Nara—at all the 11,037 temples throughout Japan? If the examples cited earlier are any indication, they will without a doubt fall into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering.

Such is the principle relating to the families of slanderers.

Next, we come to the country of slanderers. Those persons who happen to live in a country where there are slanderers of the Law will all—everyone in the entire country—be condemned to the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. Just as all the various waters gather in the great ocean, so all kinds of misfortune gather about

such a country. They will abound in the way that grass and trees abound on a mountain.

When the three calamities pile up month after month and the seven disasters appear day after day, then hunger and thirst will prevail and the country will be changed into a realm of hungry spirits. When plague and disease sweep over the land, the country will become a realm of hell. When warfare breaks out, it will be transformed into a realm of asuras. And when parents, brothers, and sisters, ignoring the fact that they are kin, begin taking each other for a husband or wife, the country will become a realm of animals. Under such circumstances, one does not have to wait until death to fall into the three evil paths. While one is still alive, the country in which one lives will be changed into these four evil realms.

Such is the principle relating to a country where slanderers live.

The people in such a country will be like those who lived in the Latter Day of the Law of the Buddha Great Adornment, or in the defiled age of the Buddha Lion Sound King. Or if what the Repaying Debts of Gratitude Sutra tells us is true, people will eat the flesh of their own deceased parents or brothers or sisters or of any other dead person, and they will eat live creatures as well.

Japan at present is just such a country. The entire nation is full of people who eat human flesh such as the teachers of the True Word school, priests of the Zen school, and observers of the precepts. And this has come about wholly as a result of the false doctrines of the True Word school.

Ryuzo-bo is merely one of the countless eaters of human beings whose case has happened to come to light. In a spirit similar to his, people procure human flesh and mix it with boar or deer meat, or cut it up and blend it with fish or fowl, pound it or pickle it, and then

sell it. It is impossible to tell how many people have eaten it. All this has happened because the country has been cast aside by the heavenly gods and abandoned by the benevolent deities who watch over and protect it. In the end, this country will be attacked by other nations, its inhabitants will fall to fighting among themselves, and it will be transformed into a veritable hell of incessant suffering.

Because I, Nichiren, have for some time been able to see the great error of its ways, because I wish to avoid the offense of complicity in slander, because I fear the accusations of the Buddha, and because I understand my obligations and wish to repay the debt of gratitude I owe my country, I have announced and made known all of this to the ruler of the country and to all its inhabitants.

The precept against the killing of living beings is the first among all the various precepts. The five precepts begin with the precept against taking life, and the eight precepts, the ten precepts, the two hundred and fifty precepts, the five hundred precepts, the ten major precepts of the Brahma Net Sutra, the ten inexhaustible precepts of the Flower Garland Sutra, and the ten precepts of the Jeweled Necklace Sutra, all begin with the precept against killing. And among the three thousand penalties prohibited by the Confucian school, capital punishment stands in first place.

The reason is that "even the treasures of the entire major world system cannot equal the value of one's body and life,"<sup>20</sup> which means that even the jewels and treasures that fill the major world system are no substitute for life. One who kills a mere ant will fall into hell, to say nothing of those who kill fish or birds. One who cuts a mere blade of green grass will fall into hell, to say nothing of those who cut up dead bodies.

And yet, grave as are these prohibi-

tions against taking life, it is stated that, if a person acts as an enemy of the Lotus Sutra, then to put such a person to death is to perform an act of outstanding merit. And if this is so, then how could it possibly be right to offer alms and support to that person? This is why King Sen'yo put to death five hundred Brahman teachers, why the monk Realization of Virtue put to death a countless number of slanderers of the correct teaching, and why the great monarch Ashoka put to death 108,000 non-Buddhists.

These rulers were looked upon as the most worthy kings in the entire land of Jambudvīpa, and the monk as the wisest of all among the observers of the precepts. King Sen'yo was later reborn as Shakyamuni Buddha, the monk Realization of Virtue was reborn as Kashyapa Buddha, and the great monarch Ashoka was recognized as a man who had attained the way.

Today Japan resembles the countries of these leaders. It is a country where, whether they are observers of the precepts, breakers of the precepts, or persons without precepts, whether they are rulers, ministers, or common people, everyone joins together as one in slandering the Lotus Sutra. The situation is such that, even if a person should peel off his own skin and transcribe the Lotus Sutra on it, or should offer his own flesh as alms,<sup>21</sup> the country would still be certain to perish, and that person himself would fall into hell, so great is his offense. The only remedy is to bar the way to the True Word school, the Nembutsu school, the Zen school, and the observers of the precepts, and to devote oneself to the Lotus Sutra.

Those persons who can recite from memory the sixty volumes of the Tendai school, and who are thought by the ruler of the nation and the other authorities to be persons of wisdom: is it because their wisdom fails them, or

because, though they understand the true situation, they fear the world, that they praise the True Word school and join forces with the Nembutsu, Zen, and Precepts followers? Their guilt is a hundred, a thousand times greater than that of these followers. They may be compared to Shigeyoshi or Yoshimura.<sup>22</sup>

The Great Teacher Tz'u-en wrote the ten-volume *Praising the Profundity of the Lotus Sutra*, in which he extolled the Lotus Sutra, and yet he fell into hell. This man was a leading disciple of the Tripitaka Master Hsüan-tsang, who was the teacher of Emperor T'ai-tsung, and was said to have been a reincarnation of the eleven-faced Perceiver of the World's Sounds.<sup>23</sup> The subject matter of his writings resembled the Lotus Sutra, but at heart it was identical with the sutras preached previous to the Lotus, and that was the reason he fell into hell.

The Great Teacher Chia-hsiang wrote the ten-volume *Treatise on the Profundity of the Lotus Sutra*, and that would under ordinary circumstances have condemned him to fall into the hell of incessant suffering. But he set aside his own manner of reading the Lotus Sutra and served the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, and thus was able to escape the pains of hell.

The men of the Lotus school today are like these men. Mount Hiei should be a stronghold of the Lotus Sutra, and Japan should be a country devoted to the teachings of the single vehicle. And yet the Great Teacher Jikaku stole the post of chief priest of the school that should have been devoted to the Lotus Sutra and instead made himself into a chief priest of the True Word teachings, and all the three thousand priests of the mountain became his followers.

The Great Teacher Kobo stole the allegiance of Emperor Saga, who earlier had been a lay supporter of the Lotus school, and turned the imperial

palace into a temple of the True Word school.

Emperor Antoku, who relied on the chief priest Myoun as his teacher, had him pray with incantations for the defeat of the court minister Yoritomo. However, not only were these men punished by the General of the Right Yoritomo, but in the end Emperor Antoku drowned in the western sea and Myoun was put to death by Yoshinaka.

The sovereign Takahira summoned the Administrator of Priests Jien, the Tendai chief priest, and other eminent priests of To-ji, Omuro, and other temples, forty-one men in all, and had them erect a great altar in the imperial palace and perform incantations to overpower Yoshitoki, the acting administrator of the western sector of the capital. But on the seventh day, which fell on the fourteenth day of the sixth month, the capital was overwhelmed by Yoshitoki's forces, the sovereigns<sup>24</sup> were exiled to the province of Oki and to the island of Sado, and the chief priest and the prelate of Omuro<sup>25</sup> and the others were severely reprimanded, and in some cases worried themselves to death.

The people of our time fail to understand the true origin of these events. This is entirely because they are confused as to the relative merit of the Lotus Sutra and the Mahavairochana Sutra.

And now, when Japan faces the threat of an attack from the great empire of the Mongols, we are told that the authorities are employing these same inauspicious doctrines in an attempt to overpower the Mongols through incantations. The daily records also make it clear that this is so. Can anyone who understands the true situation fail to sigh in sorrow?

How tragic that we should be born in a country where people slander the correct teaching and should encounter such great hardships! Though we may escape being slanderers ourselves, how

can we escape censure for belonging to a family of slanderers or a country of slanderers?

If you would escape censure for being a member of a family that includes slanderers, then speak to your parents or your brothers about this matter. Perhaps they will hate you for it, but perhaps they will put faith in your words.

If you would escape censure for living in a country where slanderers exist, then you should remonstrate with the sovereign, though you may be condemned to death or to exile. "We care nothing for our bodies or lives but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way," says the Lotus Sutra. And the commentary states, "One's body is insignificant while the Law is supreme. One should give one's life in order to propagate the Law."<sup>26</sup>

The reason you have not succeeded in attaining Buddhahood from countless distant kalpas in the past down to the present is that when a situation such as this has arisen you have been too fearful to speak out. And in the future as well, this principle will prevail.

Now I, Nichiren, understand these things because of what I myself have undergone. But even if there are those among my disciples who understand them, they fear the accusations of the times; believing that their lives, which are as frail as dew, are in fact to be relied upon, they backslide, keep their beliefs hidden in their hearts, or behave in other such ways.

A passage in the Lotus Sutra says that the sutra is "the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand,"<sup>27</sup> and I have learned the value of this passage through my own experience. Slanderers are as numerous as the dust particles of the land; believers are as few as the specks of dirt that can be placed on a fingernail. Slanderers are a huge sea, and upholders, one drop of water.

On Mount T'ien-t'ai there is a place called the Dragon Gate, which is a waterfall a thousand feet in height. At the beginning of spring the fish gather there and attempt to ascend the waterfall. If there is one fish in a hundred or a thousand that succeeds in ascending the waterfall, it will become a dragon.

The current of this waterfall is swifter than an arrow or a flash of lightning. Not only is it difficult to ascend, but at the beginning of spring fishermen gather by the waterfall and spread hundreds and thousands of nets to catch the fish, or shoot arrows at the fish, or scoop them up. Eagles, hawks, kites, owls, tigers, wolves, dogs, and foxes gather there as well, day and night snatching up the fish and devouring them. Thus ten or twenty years may go by without a single fish changing into a dragon. It is like a person of common and humble station dreaming of being admitted to the palace of the emperor, or a woman of humble birth hoping to become consort.

And you should understand that taking faith in the Lotus Sutra is even more difficult than this.

The Buddha has constantly warned us, saying that, no matter how great an observer of the precepts one may be, no matter how lofty in wisdom and well versed in the Lotus Sutra and the other scriptures, if one sees an enemy of the Lotus Sutra but fails to rebuke and denounce him or report him to the ruler of the nation, instead keeping silent out of fear of others, then one will invariably fall into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. Suppose, by way of analogy, that one commits no treasonable act oneself, but knows of someone who is plotting treason. If one fails to inform the ruler, then one is guilty of the same crime as the person who is plotting treason.

The Great Teacher Nan-yüeh has stated, "If one sees a foe of the Lotus Sutra and yet fails to censure him, one

becomes a slanderer of the Law and will fall into the hell of incessant suffering.”<sup>28</sup> Even a man of great wisdom, if he sees such a person and fails to speak out, will fall into the depths of the hell of incessant suffering, and as long as that hell shall endure, he will never escape.

I, Nichiren, fearing these admonitions of the Buddha, accordingly accused all those throughout the nation who were deserving of it, and more than once I was condemned to exile or to death. Believing that my past offenses had now been eradicated, and that I was blameless of any fault, I left Kamakura to take up residence on this mountain, and since then seven years have passed.

Let me describe this mountain. In Japan there are seven marches, and it is in the march called the Tokaido, which is made up of fifteen provinces. Within these is the province of Kai, where there are three village districts called Iino, Mimaki, and Hakiri, and it is in the one called Hakiri. It is a remote mountain region that stretches over an area of more than twenty *ri* in the northwestern part of the district.

The northern part is Mount Minobu, the southern, Mount Takatori, the western, Mount Shichimen, and the eastern, Mount Tenshi. They are like boards set up on all four sides. Around the outside of this area are four rivers. The Fuji River runs north to south and the Haya River runs west to east behind this area. In front is the Hakiri River, which runs west to east, and its tributary, which has a waterfall and is called the Minobu River. You might suppose that Eagle Peak had been moved from central India and set down here, or that Mount T'ien-t'ai had been brought from China.

In the midst of these four mountains and four rivers is a flat area no broader than the palm of one's hand, and here I

have built a little hut to shield me from the rain. I have peeled bark off trees to make my four walls, and wear a robe made of the hides of deer that died a natural death. In spring I break off ferns to nourish my body, and in autumn I gather fruit to keep myself alive. But since the eleventh month of last year the snow has been piling up, and now, into the first month of the new year, it goes on snowing. My hut is seven feet in height, but the snow outside is piled up to a depth of ten feet. I am surrounded by four walls of ice, and icicles hang down from the eaves like a necklace of jewels adorning my place of religious practice, while inside my hut snow is heaped up in place of rice.

Even in ordinary times people seldom come here, and now, with the snow so deep and the roads blocked, I have no visitors at all. So at the moment I am atoning for the karma that destines me to fall into the eight cold hells, and, far from attaining Buddhahood in this present life, I am like the cold-suffering bird. I no longer shave my head, so I look like a quail, and my robe gets so stiff with ice that it resembles the icy wings of the mandarin duck.

To such a place, where friends from former times never come to visit, where I have been abandoned even by my own disciples, you have sent these vessels, which I heap with snow, imagining it to be rice, and from which I drink water, thinking it to be gruel. Please let your thoughts dwell on the effects of your kindness. There is much more I would like to say.

With my deep respect,  
Nichiren

The twenty-seventh day of the first month in the third year of Koan (1280)

Reply to Akimoto Taro Hyoe

## Background

This letter was sent from Minobu to Akimoto Taro Hyoe-no-jo, who lived in Imba District of Shimosa Province. In 1260, after the Matsubagayatsu Persecution, the Daishonin had left Kamakura to stay at Toki Jonin's residence in Katsushika District of Shimosa Province. Here the Daishonin delivered the so-called hundred-day lecture at the Lotus hall built on Toki Jonin's estate. And it was around this time that Akimoto is believed to have converted to the Daishonin's teachings. It is also thought that he may have been a relative of Toki Jonin. Akimoto was on friendly terms with Soya Kyoshin and Ota Jomyo, both lay believers, who lived in the same area and took faith around the same time.

The Atsuhara Persecution had taken place three months before the Daishonin wrote this letter; in addition, the Mongol forces were preparing for a second invasion of Japan, and people's hearts were heavy with foreboding. Winter at Minobu, where the Daishonin's hut stood, was extraordinarily cold, and there was a great scarcity of food and provisions. It was in this atmosphere of unspeakable hardship, cut off from civilization and visitors, that the Daishonin received Akimoto's gifts.

The Daishonin begins this letter by referring to the cylindrical vessels to illustrate the importance of cultivating a perfect attitude in faith. He notes that vessels have four inherent faults—overturning, leaking, being contaminated, and having their contents mixed—that correspond to obstacles blocking a person's path to enlightenment.

## Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.
2. "The patron deities" refers to the tutelary god of a clan. The Minamoto clan, for example, revered Great Bodhisattva Hachiman as their tutelary deity.
3. Reference is to the three phases of

In the next section, the Daishonin clarifies the importance of rebuking slander. He asserts that his refutations of the Nembutsu and other schools have made him the most hated man in Japan, bringing upon him persecutions that have threatened his life. He points out that it is he alone who has endured this kind of unparalleled persecution.

The Daishonin next touches on three principles, regarding slanderers, the families of slanderers, and the country of slanderers, that one must understand when practicing the Lotus Sutra, and explains what one must do to avoid the consequences of inclusion in any of these three groups. He also reveals the benefits to be obtained from refuting slander and the way to ensure peace and tranquillity in one's country.

The Daishonin introduces the story of the waterfall known as the Dragon Gate in order to illustrate the extreme difficulty of believing in the Lotus Sutra and achieving Buddhahood. He then explains the strict Buddhist principle of admonishing slanderers. It stipulates that, no matter how learned one may be, if one sees an enemy of the Lotus Sutra but fails to admonish that person out of fear, one will fall into the hell of incessant suffering. He states that because he has acted in accord with this unequivocating principle he has endured great persecution, mistreatment, and slander; and he writes that now, believing his past offenses to have been eradicated, he has settled in Mount Minobu.

the process by which a Buddha leads people to Buddhahood, corresponding to the growth and development of a plant. First the Buddha plants the seeds of Buddhahood in people's lives, then he nurtures them by helping them practice the Law,

and finally he enables them to fully manifest Buddhahood.

4. According to the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra, the Pure Land of Amida Buddha is located in the western region of the universe. The other nine directions are north, south, east, northwest, northeast, southeast, southwest, up, and down.

5. This refers to the exiles to Izu and Sado.

6. The successive emperors from the legendary first emperor, Jimmu (r. 660–585 B.C.E. according to *The Chronicles of Japan*), through the ninetieth emperor, Kameyama (r. 1259–1274).

7. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10. It reads, "I have preached various sutras, and among those sutras the Lotus is the foremost!"

8. This statement is found in Kobo's *Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind*.

9. This statement is found in Jikaku's annotations on the Susiddhikara Sutra.

10. The Zen school asserts that the essence of Buddhism is transferred from mind to mind rather than via the sutras.

11. This statement appears in Shan-tao's *Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land*.

12. This statement appears in Tao-ch'o's *Collected Essays on the World of Peace and Delight*.

13. The rulers of the three dynasties refer to King Chou (c. eleventh century B.C.E.), the last ruler of the Yin dynasty, King Chieh (c. seventeenth–sixteenth century B.C.E.), the last ruler of the Hsia dynasty, and King Yu (d. 771 B.C.E.), the last ruler of the Western Chou dynasty. The three kings doted on their consorts, Ta Chi, Mo Hsi, and Pao Ssu, respectively, to the detriment of their official duties, leading to the downfall of their dynasties.

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

15. The "three robes" and the "begging bowl" symbolize the austere life of a monk. These were the only possessions permitted to a monk.

16. *The Annotations on the Nirvana Sutra* by Chang-an. The full passage reads: "One who destroys or brings confusion to the Buddha's teachings is betraying them. If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy."

17. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

18. Sukenari (1172–1193) and Tokimune (1174–1193), also known as the Soga broth-

ers, were warriors whose father was killed in 1176 by Kudo Suketsune, later a henchman of the shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo. In 1193, they avenged their father by murdering Kudo Suketsune at a hunt hosted by Yoritomo. Sukenari was killed by Kudo's subject, while Tokimune was captured and executed.

19. Emphasis here is placed on the importance of refuting slander and avoiding the offense of complicity in slander. Even though one does not commit slander oneself, if one either fails to rebuke members of one's family who slander the Law or acts in concert with slanderers, one will be subject to the same fate as they.

20. In *The Commentary on the Brahma Net Sutra*, a similar passage is cited as a quotation from *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*.

21. Here the Daishonin cites examples that describe the bodhisattva austerities practiced by the ascetic Aspiration for the Law and the boy Snow Mountains; such practices, teaches the Daishonin, not only bring no benefit to the people of the Latter Day of the Law, but have no power to prevent people from slandering the Law.

22. Taguchi Shigeoyoshi (twelfth century) and Miura Yoshimura (d. 1239). Shigeoyoshi was the head of a powerful warrior family in Awa, a province in southern Japan. Though ostensibly a supporter of the Taira clan, he informed the rival Minamoto clan about the internal affairs of the Taira army, including their weak points. This helped bring about the Taira's downfall. Yoshimura was a general from a powerful warrior family in Sagami Province who was known for his shrewd political judgment. He promised to assist Wada Yoshimori, also a member of the Miura clan, during the latter's revolt against the ruling Hojo clan in 1213, but changed sides in favor of the Hojo at the last moment, helping ensure Yoshimori's defeat.

23. Because Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds was thought to assume various forms in order to save living beings, he is depicted in a number of ways. Several esoteric sutras make reference to different forms of Perceiver of the World's Sounds, such as the eleven-faced Perceiver of the World's Sounds and thousand-armed Perceiver of the World's Sounds.

24. The sovereigns refer to Takahira, or the Retired Emperor Gotoba (1180–1239),

and to Morihira, or the Retired Emperor Juntoku (1197–1242).

25. The prelate of Omuro refers to Prince Dojo, a son of Emperor Gotoba who had entered the priesthood. This generally means the title of a retired emperor or prince who entered the priesthood and lived at

Ninna-ji, a True Word temple in Kyoto. Omuro is another name for Ninna-ji.

26. *Annotations on the Nirvana Sutra*.

27. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

28. Source unknown. A similar passage is found in *On the Peaceful Practices of the Lotus Sutra*.