

Introduction

THE present volume includes the English translations of 172 works, including both doctrinal theses and letters, written by Nichiren Daishonin (1222–1282). Before proceeding to the translations themselves, a word or two about the historical and cultural background of the period in which Nichiren Daishonin lived may be helpful.

In addition, we have included a brief biography of the Daishonin and a summary of his thought, and we conclude with a general description of his writings. We have also provided a glossary and other explanatory material at the back of the book. Furthermore, a short essay and supplementary notes concerning background and content follow each translation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Thirteenth-century Japan was ruled by a warrior government whose headquarters was in Kamakura, a seacoast city southwest of present-day Tokyo. The Kamakura shogunate, as the government is commonly known, lasted from 1185 to 1333, and thus this span of time is referred to as the Kamakura period.

The Kamakura shogunate, a government organization created and wholly dominated by members of the warrior class, represented a new phenomenon in Japanese history. In the earliest period of Japanese history, if traditional accounts are to be trusted, the emperors exercised military power in person when the occasion demanded. But in the succeeding centuries the duties of the emperor became increasingly confined to religious and ceremonial functions. An elaborate central and provincial bureaucracy modeled after that of China carried out the administration of the affairs of the land, and a conscript army kept order and guarded the frontiers.

At the end of the eighth century, the emperor bestowed the title of Seii-taishogun, or Great General Who Subdues the Barbarians, on a court official and sent him to conquer the indigenous tribes of the north. The title, abbreviated to “shogun,” was to figure prominently in later Japanese history, when it came to designate the military ruler of the nation. But at this time there was as yet nothing like a distinct warrior class or profession.

During the long centuries of the Heian period (794–1185), when the capital

was located at Heiankyo, or present-day Kyoto, the situation began to change. The court aristocrats, who headed the Chinese-style bureaucracy mentioned earlier, tended increasingly to pursue artistic and cultural interests in the capital and to neglect the actual administration of government affairs, particularly in the outlying provinces. As a result, a new class of farmer-warriors emerged, who were commonly referred to as samurai. By reclaiming or opening up new lands for cultivation in the remoter regions, they succeeded in creating small estates for themselves. To avoid taxation from the central government, their lands were nominally entrusted to powerful aristocratic families or Buddhist temples, but in effect these constituted private holdings protected by the military prowess of individual samurai.

To strengthen their position, the samurai rapidly grouped together or placed themselves in the service of one of the more powerful local clans. Soon they came to constitute a new class of professional warriors, leaving the actual cultivation of their estates to the peasants under their direction and concentrating on the improvement of the military arts and on the ideals of fortitude and daring that supported them.

At first these powerful provincial clans were content for the most part to remain aloof from affairs in the capital. There, the imperial institution had come under the absolute domination of the great courtier family known as the Fujiwara. The Fujiwara monopolized the highest offices, married their daughters to the emperors, and, placing child rulers on the throne, managed affairs in their name. As a consequence, most Japanese emperors at this time reigned for only a brief time, after which they were obliged to yield the throne to an infant heir and retire to a life of relative seclusion.

In such a complex political situation, in which one or more retired emperors lived contemporaneously with a reigning emperor, and various branches of the Fujiwara family vied for supremacy, power clashes were inevitable. When these occurred, the rivals not surprisingly attempted to bolster their position by seeking support from the warrior clans of the provinces, some of whom were related to the court aristocracy. Thus the warriors came to play a part in the affairs of the court and the capital, at first only infrequently, but later with increasing regularity.

The branches of the Fujiwara family living in northeastern Japan were among the first to take up such a role. In time they were overshadowed by two other warrior clans, the Minamoto, or Genji, whose holdings were centered in the Kanto region of eastern Japan, and the Taira, or Heike, who had their base of power in the Inland Sea region.

Eventually, the leader of the Taira clan, Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181), through his intervention in two successive struggles for power at court, succeeded in becoming the virtual dictator of the nation. He proceeded to install himself in the highest government position, and for the first time in history, reigning and retired emperors and Fujiwara lords alike all found themselves at the mercy of a military leader and his followers.

The Taira, however, proved to be no real enemies to the aristocracy, instead taking enthusiastically to the ways of the capital. Before long, they had abandoned their warrior manners and ideals, and become indistinguishable from the courtier class. But they had shown to others the way to power, and with the death of Kiyomori in 1181, their position of dominance was swiftly challenged by

other warrior clans headed by the Minamoto family of the east. The Taira were forced to abandon Kyoto and flee west, and suffered a final crushing defeat in 1185 at the naval battle of Dannoura.

Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), the leader of the Minamoto forces, was careful not to repeat the mistakes made by the Taira. Instead, he established his military government in Kamakura, where it would be safely removed from the influence of the court and its debilitating ways. He made no attempt to dismantle the government machinery already in existence in Kyoto. On the contrary, he deliberately sought acknowledgment of his actions from the emperor and the court, and in 1192 succeeded in obtaining the prestigious military title of shogun.

It soon became evident, however, that the administrative functions previously carried out by the court would in the future be increasingly taken over by warrior families under the direction of the Kamakura shogunate. In 1185, Minamoto no Yoritomo appointed *shugo*, or constables, to keep order in the various provinces, and *jito*, or stewards, to oversee public and private estates, and although these functionaries were ostensibly only handling affairs connected with the warrior class, they soon became the de facto governors of their region.

Yoritomo had been assisted in his rise to power by his wife's relatives, members of the Hojo family, a powerful military clan of the Izu region. When Yoritomo died in 1199, he was succeeded as shogun by his eighteen-year-old son, Yoriie. But actual power was wielded by Yoriie's maternal grandfather, Hojo Tokimasa (1138–1215), who acted as *shikken*, or regent, for the boy and eventually had him done away with. Yoriie's younger brother, Sanetomo, replaced him as shogun in 1203, but was assassinated in 1219, thus bringing to an end the line of Yoritomo's direct descendants.

For the remainder of the Kamakura period, the position of shogun was occupied by an infant or child chosen at first from the Fujiwara family and later from the imperial family. All real authority was exercised by the members of the Hojo family who held the office of regent for these puppet rulers.

The supremacy of the Hojo regents did not go entirely unchallenged. In 1221 the Retired Emperor Gotoba, along with two other retired emperors, attempted to break free of the shogunate's domination. But though orders were sent out to the provinces to levy troops and raise support for the imperial cause, the number of warriors that responded was pitifully small. The imperial forces were easily defeated, and the Kamakura government deposed the reigning emperor and exiled the retired emperors to distant islands. This incident is known as the Jokyu Disturbance, from the name of the era in which it took place. To ensure that nothing like it would occur again, the Hojo family set up a military headquarters in Kyoto to keep watch on the court.

The second serious threat to Hojo power was in fact a threat to all Japan that came from abroad. In the past, mainly because of the distance that separated Japan from the continent, the country had seldom had to fear the grim possibility of invasion. But in the thirteenth century a new and ruthless race of conquerors, the Mongols, became active in Asia. In addition to their victories in Central Asia and Europe, they overran northern China and Korea, and were in the process of subjugating southern China as well when Japan engaged their attention. In 1268 the Mongol ruler Khubilai Khan sent the first of a succession of envoys to Japan to demand that it acknowledge fealty to him. Hojo Tokimune, who headed the shogunate, vehemently rejected the demands and

ignored all the subsequent Mongol envoys. In 1274 a Mongol force arrived in the waters off southern Japan to punish the Japanese for their recalcitrance. They overran several small islands and made a landing in Kyushu, but with the onslaught of a severe storm, soon withdrew.

The leaders in Kamakura, knowing well that they had not seen the end of the matter, began hurriedly constructing walls and taking other precautions to guard against a second invasion. The Mongols appeared once again in 1281 at the head of a huge fleet of Chinese and Korean vessels. Again the Japanese put up a fierce resistance, though they suffered terrible losses. Before the Mongols could move the bulk of their forces into action, however, a great storm struck the area, sinking or crippling the ships of the invaders and bringing their expedition to a disastrous conclusion.

Although the Mongols contemplated yet another invasion attempt, they eventually abandoned their ambitions and in 1299 made peace overtures to Japan. But the losses suffered by the Japanese warriors in the conflict had seriously weakened the confidence they placed in the Kamakura shogunate. At the same time, the heavy cost of the defense measures threatened the government's stability. Both these factors hastened the process of the Kamakura shogunate's decline. In the early years of the fourteenth century, a strong-willed emperor named Godai-go came to the throne. Resolved to rule alone and to rid himself of the dominance of the Hojo regents, he made several attempts to overthrow the Kamakura shogunate. His efforts eventually proved successful in 1333 when the warrior leaders supporting him seized the military headquarters in Kyoto and Kamakura, and put an end to Hojo rule.

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

Japan at an early stage of its history was affected by the strong cultural influence of China and Korea. The Japanese adopted the Chinese written language for use in keeping government records and writing works of history and philosophy, and utilized the Chinese characters to devise a writing system for their own language. They also, as was noted earlier, introduced much of the Chinese bureaucratic system, setting up a centralized system of government under the supreme authority of the emperor. In such fields as philosophy, art, architecture, medicine, and engineering, the Japanese likewise borrowed heavily from the continent.

About the middle of the sixth century, according to traditional accounts, Buddhism was introduced to Japan from Korea. At first it met with sharp resistance from supporters of the native Shinto faith, but in time gained a foothold among the upper classes. Soon the government was taking an active role in encouraging the new religion, founding temples, welcoming priests from abroad, and sending Japanese priests to the mainland for study. The great city of Nara, capital of the nation from 710 to 784, was famed for its imposing array of temples and the gigantic bronze image of the Buddha Vairochana that was erected by the government in 749.

But the type of Buddhism brought to Japan at this time, though mainly Mahayana in thought, was largely concerned with abstruse doctrine or the observance of complex rules of monastic discipline. Beyond the outward majesty

and beauty of the buildings and images associated with it, there was little in this sort of Buddhism that appealed to or was understood by ordinary people of limited education. The aristocracy patronized the religion because they believed it would help insure their personal safety and well-being and that of the state. But it is unlikely that the Buddhist influence penetrated very deeply at the lower levels of Japanese society.

In the early Heian period, two new schools of Buddhism were introduced from China. The first was T'ien-t'ai Buddhism, which was introduced by Saicho (767-822), better known by his posthumous title, the Great Teacher Dengyo. This Buddhism spread in Japan under the name Tendai Buddhism, Tendai being the Japanese rendering of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai. The T'ien-t'ai doctrines, which are based on the Lotus Sutra, form one of the chief elements in the teaching of Nichiren Daishonin. The second school was True Word, or esoteric Buddhism, introduced by Kukai (774-835), or the Great Teacher Kobo. It emphasized the role of music and the arts in assisting one to gain religious understanding, and advocated various mystic rituals to ward off evil and attain salvation.

While both of these new schools of Buddhism enjoyed the support of the government, they preferred to establish their headquarters on mountaintop retreats somewhat removed from the court. The head temple of the Tendai school was situated on Mount Hiei northeast of Kyoto, and that of the True Word school on Mount Koya far to the south. Both mountain monasteries played a vital role in later centuries as centers of Buddhist learning, the former in particular serving as a training ground for many of the most famous leaders of Japanese Buddhism, including Nichiren Daishonin.

However, although both schools emphasized that all beings are capable of attaining Buddhahood, they appear to have done little to spread that message among the people. Instead, True Word, and in time Tendai as well, became increasingly concerned with the performance of elaborate rituals and mystic incantations, or caught up in sordid struggles for power with rival schools or among the warring factions within their own schools.

Turning to literature for a moment, it is important to note that *The Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*, the great anthology of ancient Japanese poetry compiled toward the close of the Nara period (710-794), is outstanding for its relative simplicity, directness of expression, and sunniness of outlook, as well as for the fact that it includes poems from all classes of society.

In the succeeding Heian period, however, poetry became almost exclusively the possession of the courtly class, and grew increasingly contrived in expression and intellectual in tone. At the same time both poetry and other literary forms became imbued with an air of melancholy. The beginnings of this pessimistic attitude are already to be glimpsed in *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves* and are characteristically associated with the Buddhist emphasis upon the impermanent and ever-changing nature of life, a quality known in Japanese as *mujo*. Buddhism, of course, stresses the element of change in human life in order to rouse people to think seriously about their salvation. Fundamentally, Mahayana Buddhism is anything but pessimistic in outlook. But to the Japanese of the Heian period, particularly in its later trouble-filled years, the great hope held out by the Buddhist religion seemed less real than the inevitability of change, which to them invariably meant change for the worse. Thus, the greatest literary work of the period, *The Tale of Genji*, which dates from the eleventh century, is

suffused with a sense of the briefness, uncertainty, and inherent sadness of life.

The Japanese of this period had a particular reason for believing that life was fated to be sorrowful and that hopes for salvation were uncertain. Buddhism taught that, after the passing of Shakyamuni Buddha, the Buddhist teachings would go through three major periods of change: an age when the Law, or doctrine, would flourish, an age when it would begin to decline, and finally an age known as the Latter Day of the Law, when the Law, or doctrine, would decline even further and ultimately lose its power of salvation.

Although there are different methods of calculating the duration of the three periods, the Japanese believed that they would enter the age of the Latter Day around the middle of the eleventh century. Their expectations seemed to be confirmed at this time by the declining power of the court, unrest in the outlying areas, and other signs of decay in the social order.

In earlier times Japanese Buddhism, particularly the Tendai school, had stressed that it is possible for a person to achieve enlightenment, or Buddhahood, in this life through his or her own efforts. But there was a widespread feeling that, with the arrival of the Latter Day of the Law, such hopes would become unrealistic. In the Tendai monastery at Mount Hiei a belief arose that, in an age of degeneracy, one must look to some outside power as the means of obtaining enlightenment. This belief made faith in the saving power of the Buddha Amida look increasingly attractive. Amida is a Buddha who is said to preside over a paradise known as the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss. As a bodhisattva, he took a vow to save all people who call upon his name and to see that, after death, they are reborn to a life of bliss in the far-off Pure Land.

The practice of offering prayers to Amida was very popular in Chinese Buddhism and was introduced to Japan at an early date. But it was not until Heian times that it became widespread. One may easily see why its appeal was so great. It did not demand that the believer undertake any strenuous religious exercises or abide by strict rules of discipline. All one had to do was to recite the simple formula of praise known as the Nembutsu with sincere faith in order to be assured of salvation. The aristocrats, notably the members of the Fujiwara family, demonstrated their enthusiasm for the worship of Amida by erecting magnificent temples adorned with splendid golden statues of him. At the same time, priests went about among the common people to preach the message of Amida's salvation and to sing hymns of praise. As a result, Buddhism spread more widely than ever before among the lower classes and came to take a deep hold upon the spiritual life of the nation.

At first, this devotion to Amida remained simply one element among the religious practices of the Tendai school, the dominant school in the Heian period. But in the closing years of that period, two vigorous religious leaders appeared who established a separate form of Buddhism based solely on devotion to Amida. The first was Honen (1133–1212), the founder of the Pure Land school. The other was Shinran (1173–1262), whose followers in time came to be known as the True Pure Land school. Both men received religious training at Mount Hiei, but were later forced to leave the capital area because of opposition from the older schools of Buddhism. Their teachings in time won a wide following, particularly in rural areas.

If the masterpiece of Heian literature is *The Tale of Genji*, that of the Kamakura period is the historical romance known as *The Tale of the Heike*. *The Tale of*

Genji was written by a woman, Murasaki Shikibu, and deals almost entirely with the lives and romantic intrigues of the court aristocracy. *The Tale of the Heike*, an anonymous work, was probably compiled in the thirteenth century on the basis of narratives that had been circulated earlier in oral form by storytellers. It describes in detail the phenomenal rise to power of the Heike, or Taira, family, and its overthrow by the Minamoto family. In marked contrast to *The Tale of Genji*, the work abounds in scenes of conflict and military prowess, is written in a sonorous masculine style, and reflects the interests and ideals of the newly emergent warrior class. There is one way, however, in which it resembles the earlier masterpiece. *The Tale of Genji*, as we have seen, is dominated by a mood of sadness over the brevity of human life. This same note of melancholy informs *The Tale of the Heike*, sounding in the very first sentences of the work. Indeed, to the Japanese of the time, the dramatic rise and fall of the Taira family was the ultimate symbol of *mujo*, the unavoidable transience of worldly glory.

As this similarity suggests, the culture of the Kamakura period in one sense marked a sharp break with the past, but in another, a continuation of it. The samurai, as was suitable for a member of a warrior class in a feudal society, attached great importance to simple living, personal daring, and unswerving loyalty to one's lord. As we shall see when we come to the life of Nichiren Daishonin, there was a harshness and violence to life in the Kamakura period that reflected the warrior ethic. It was a time when even Buddhist temples armed themselves to defend their property and prerogatives, and the necessity to resort to arms seemed a possibility that was never far away.

At the same time the warriors, having little distinct culture of their own, were obliged to look to the members of the old court aristocracy for leadership in matters of higher culture, no matter how they might despise them for their effete way of life. The attitude of Kamakura toward Kyoto was thus one of ambiguity. Military leaders wished to remain aloof from the enfeebling and intrigue-filled atmosphere of the capital, but they envied the courtiers their knowledgeability in matters of music, poetry, and artistic taste. It is not surprising to find, therefore, that the heads of the Kamakura shogunate and their wives frequently turned to Kyoto for guidance in questions of art and learning, or welcomed to their city religious and cultural leaders from the capital who could act as mentors in such matters.

One of the ways the shogunate officials sought to lend prestige to their city and government was by patronizing a new form of Buddhism known as Zen. Zen was the dominant school of Buddhism in China at this time, and Japanese priests traveled to the mainland to study it and bring its teachings back with them. They attempted to introduce these teachings in Kyoto around the beginning of the thirteenth century, but met with strong opposition from the established schools of Buddhism.

It was natural, therefore, that they should journey to Kamakura, where the older schools exercised less influence, and try to interest the leaders of the military government in their doctrines. The members of the Hojo family and their followers responded with enthusiasm, founding temples for the new school and inviting Chinese Zen masters to come to Kamakura. Doryu (1213–1278), or Tao-lung, whom Nichiren Daishonin refers to frequently, was one such Chinese priest who enjoyed great favor with the Hojo regime.

In its basic doctrines, Zen does not differ much from other Mahayana schools

of Buddhism. But in contrast to those schools that stress study of the sutras and other sacred writings, or the saving power of some particular Buddha or bodhisattva, Zen urges the individual to gain enlightenment the way Shakyamuni Buddha gained it—by spending hours in meditation in the lotus posture. Zen thus minimized the importance of learning and called instead for discipline, untiring personal effort, and obedience to the Zen master. It is easy to see why such a doctrine would appeal to members of the warrior class. It assured them they need cope with no difficult doctrinal writings or philosophical subtleties to gain enlightenment. All they needed was the determination and patience to endure long and often painful hours of meditation. This was something any soldier could understand.

This, then, was the state of religious affairs when Nichiren Daishonin began his activities. The older schools of Buddhism centered in Nara and Kyoto enjoyed great power and prestige, though they were morally weakened by factionalism and worldliness. The Pure Land Buddhists, or Nembutsu believers as Nichiren Daishonin calls them, continued to grow in number, constituting a very important religious element, particularly in the countryside. Zen, though enjoying the patronage of the shogunate in Kamakura, and later of the court in Kyoto, was confined mainly to those two cities. One final Buddhist group mentioned by Nichiren Daishonin is the priests of the Precepts school. This school, which enjoins the observance of elaborate precepts, or rules of monastic discipline, had been introduced to Japan in the Nara period and enjoyed something of a revival in Kamakura times.

The period of Nichiren Daishonin's lifetime was an age when the Japanese, troubled by rapid social changes they could not fully comprehend, as well as by natural catastrophes and the threat of foreign invasion, were searching for spiritual satisfaction. They attached great importance to religious matters, and were prepared to argue vehemently and even to resort to physical force to defend what they regarded as the truth. It was an age far different from the one of religious tolerance or indifference in which we live today, and in order to understand it, we must make a sincere effort to see into the minds and motives of its inhabitants.

THE LIFE OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN

Nichiren Daishonin was born on the sixteenth day of the second month, 1222, in the village of Kominato on the eastern coast of Awa Province in present-day Chiba Prefecture. His father's name was Mikuni no Taifu, and his mother's name was Umegiku; they made their living by fishing. As Nichiren Daishonin said in *Letter from Sado*, he was "the son of a chandala family." The chandala are the lowest group in the Indian class system, comprising such professions as fisherman, jailer, and butcher. Nichiren Daishonin is acknowledging that his origins were of the humblest kind. He was given the childhood name Zennichi-marō and lived in the fishing village until the age of twelve, when he left home to study at a nearby temple called Seicho-ji. In those days temples were the only place where common people could learn reading and writing.

Zennichi-marō became interested in and studied Buddhism at Seicho-ji, which belonged to the Tendai school. There he was placed under Dozen-bo,

a senior priest of Seicho-ji, and received instruction not only in Tendai doctrines but in True Word and Pure Land ones as well. He was particularly concerned about the bewildering multiplicity of Buddhist schools and the doctrinal contradictions within the Buddhist canon. He was convinced that one sutra among the many that existed must represent the ultimate truth. He began to wonder where he could find that truth. Another concern was the fundamental problem of life and death, which he had wished to solve since his early years. He came to realize that the answer could only be found in the Buddha's enlightenment.

In the temple's hall of worship, there was a statue of Bodhisattva Space Treasury. Zennichi-marō prayed before the statue to become the wisest man in Japan, and his prayer was answered when, as he wrote later, the "living" Bodhisattva Space Treasury bestowed on him "a great jewel" of wisdom. At that moment he awakened to the ultimate reality of life and the universe. But in order to reveal this enlightenment to the people of the Latter Day of the Law, he had to systematize his ideas in relation to the whole spectrum of the Buddha's teachings.

At the age of sixteen, he resolved to be ordained and took the religious name Zesho-bo Rencho. Some time later he took leave of his teacher Dozen-bo and went to Kamakura to further his studies. There he delved into the teachings of the Pure Land and Zen schools. But Kamakura was still a new city with only a limited tradition in Buddhism. In 1242, after three years of study there, Rencho returned to Seicho-ji briefly, and left again the same year for western Japan. This time he went to Mount Hiei, the center of the Tendai school and of Buddhism in general, and later to Mount Koya, the headquarters of the True Word school, and to other important temples in the Kyoto and Nara areas. After some ten years of study at Mount Hiei and elsewhere, he concluded that the true teachings of Buddhism are to be found in the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus represents the heart of Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment; all other sutras are mere expedients leading up to the Lotus.

He returned to Seicho-ji in 1253. There, shortly afterward, very early on the morning of the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month, he chanted Nam-myoho-enge-kyo for the first time, thereby providing the key for all future generations to unlock the treasure of enlightenment hidden in their hearts. He also changed his name to Nichiren (Sun Lotus).

At noon on the same day, he propounded his doctrine at the temple in the presence of his teacher and other priests and villagers. Rubbing his prayer beads between his palms, he chanted Nam-myoho-enge-kyo three times. Then he declared that none of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings reveals the Buddha's enlightenment, and that all the schools based on those teachings are misguided. He stated that the Lotus Sutra is supreme, and that Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, is the only teaching that can lead the people of the Latter Day of the Law to enlightenment.

Few in the audience understood the meaning of Nichiren Daishonin's first sermon, but people responded angrily, since it appeared to be an attack upon their own religious beliefs. The steward of the region, Tojo Kagenobu, a devout follower of the Pure Land school, took steps to have the Daishonin arrested. Though the Daishonin managed to escape, he was determined to go to Kamakura to preach. Before departing, however, he visited his parents and converted them to the new faith.

In the eighth month of 1253, he settled in a small dwelling at a place called

Matsubagayatsu in the southeast section of Kamakura. At his dwelling and at the homes of supporters, he began to tell people about the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. On occasion, he visited temples in the city to debate with their chief priests. He denounced the beliefs of the Pure Land school, which teaches that salvation can be gained merely by invoking the name of Amida Buddha, and also attacked Zen for its rejection of the sutras.

His attacks angered not only religious leaders, but government authorities as well, since the latter were in many cases ardent patrons of the Pure Land and Zen schools. Soon he faced fierce opposition, though he continued his efforts to win converts. It was in those early years of propagation that such major disciples as Shijo Kingo, Toki Jonin, Kudo Yoshitaka, and Ikegami Munenaka were converted.

Beginning in 1256, Japan suffered a series of calamities. Storms, floods, droughts, earthquakes, and epidemics inflicted great hardship upon the nation. In 1257, a particularly severe earthquake destroyed many temples, government buildings, and homes in Kamakura, while in 1259 and 1260 severe famine and plague ravaged the populace.

Nichiren Daishonin believed that the time had come for him to explain the basic cause of these catastrophes. In 1258 he went to Jisso-ji, a temple in Iwamoto in present-day Shizuoka Prefecture, to consult its copies of the Buddhist canon, and to assemble incontrovertible proof of the real cause of the disasters. During his stay there, he met a thirteen-year-old acolyte, who was so impressed by the Daishonin that he became his disciple. At this time, the Daishonin gave the young man the name Hoki-bo. Later, the Daishonin named him Nikko and designated him as his legitimate successor.

The most powerful man in the country was Hojo Tokiyori, a former regent of the Kamakura shogunate who had retired to Saimyo-ji, a Zen temple. On the sixteenth day of the seventh month, 1260, Nichiren Daishonin presented to Tokiyori a treatise entitled *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*. In it, he attributes the cause of the recent calamities to the people's slander of the correct teaching of Buddhism, and their reliance on false doctrines. The worship of Amida Buddha, he asserts, is the source of such slander. The nation will know no relief from suffering unless the people renounce their mistaken beliefs and accept the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Quotes from the Golden Light, Medicine Master, Benevolent Kings, and Great Collection sutras are included to substantiate these assertions. These sutras mention various calamities that will befall any nation hostile to the correct teaching. Of the seven mentioned in the Medicine Master Sutra, five had already struck Japan. The Daishonin predicts that, if the authorities persist in turning their backs on the correct teaching, the two remaining calamities, foreign invasion and internal strife, will strike the nation as well.

Tokiyori and the government officials appear to have taken no notice of the treatise. However, when word of its contents reached the followers of the Pure Land school, they were incensed. A band of them swarmed down on the Daishonin's dwelling at Matsubagayatsu intent on taking his life. The Daishonin narrowly escaped with a few disciples to Shimosa Province, where he stayed for a time at the home of Toki Jonin, his follower and an influential figure in the area. But his sense of mission would not allow him to remain there long. In less than a year he was back in Kamakura to resume his preaching.

The priests of the Pure Land school, alarmed at his success in attracting followers, contrived to have charges brought against him by the Kamakura government. The regent at the time was Hojo Nagatoki, whose father was Shigetoki, a lay priest at Gokuraku-ji temple and a confirmed enemy of the Daishonin. Without investigation or trial, Nagatoki accepted the charges and on the twelfth day of the fifth month, 1261, ordered Nichiren Daishonin banished to the desolate coast along the Izu Peninsula. This was the first government persecution suffered by the Daishonin.

Izu was a stronghold of the Pure Land school, and exile there clearly placed the Daishonin in great personal danger. Fortunately, however, he was taken in by Funamori Yasaburo, a local fisherman, and his wife. They treated him with great kindness. Later he won the favor of Ito Sukemitsu, the steward of the area, who became a believer in his teaching when he successfully prayed for the steward's recovery from illness. In time the government, apparently at the instigation of the former regent, Hojo Tokiyori, issued a pardon, and Nichiren Daishonin returned to Kamakura in the second month of 1263.

In the autumn of 1264, Nichiren Daishonin, concerned about his aged mother, returned to his home in Awa. He found his mother critically ill—his father had died earlier—but he prayed for her recovery and she was able to overcome her illness and live nearly four years longer. Unfortunately, word of his return reached the steward, Tojo Kagenobu. When the Daishonin and a group of followers set out to visit Kudo Yoshitaka, a supporter in the area, they were attacked by Tojo and his soldiers at a place called Komatsubara. Although the Daishonin escaped death, he received a sword wound on his forehead, and his left hand was broken.

In 1268, the foreign invasion that Nichiren Daishonin had predicted seemed about to materialize. That year, as mentioned earlier, a letter from the Mongols arrived in Kamakura demanding that Japan acknowledge fealty to Khubilai Khan. The Japanese leaders realized that the nation faced grave danger. Construction of defensive fortifications was immediately undertaken in Kyushu on the coasts facing Korea, and every temple and shrine in the country was ordered to offer prayers for the defeat of the enemy.

Nichiren Daishonin, who had returned to Kamakura, was convinced that it was time for him to act. He sent eleven letters of remonstrance to top-ranking officials, including the regent, Hojo Tokimune; the deputy chief of military and police affairs, Hei no Saemon; and the two most influential priests in Kamakura at the time, Doryu of the Zen school and Ryokan of the True Word Precepts school. These letters briefly restated the declaration made in *On Establishing the Correct Teaching*—that unless the government embraced the correct teaching, the country would suffer the final two disasters predicted in the sutras. All eleven men chose to ignore the warnings.

In 1271, the country was troubled by persistent drought. The government, fearful of famine, ordered Ryokan, the well-known and respected chief priest of Gokuraku-ji temple, to pray for rain. When Nichiren Daishonin learned of this, he sent a written challenge to Ryokan offering to become his disciple if the latter succeeded in bringing on rain. If he failed, however, Ryokan was to become the Daishonin's follower. Ryokan accepted the challenge, but in spite of his prayers and those of hundreds of assistant priests, no rain fell. Instead, Kamakura was struck by fierce gales. Ryokan not only did not become

a disciple of the Daishonin, but actually began to plot against him in collusion with Hei no Saemon.

Ryokan and the Zen priest Doryu both headed temples that had been founded by high officials of the Hojo family. Though the founders had died, their wives still exercised strong influence within the government. Ryokan and Doryu aroused the anger of these women by telling them that the Daishonin, in his letters of remonstrance, had spoken disrespectfully of their deceased husbands. Eventually, as a result of the machinations of the priests, a list of charges against the Daishonin was submitted to the government.

On the tenth day of the ninth month, 1271, Hei no Saemon ordered Nichiren Daishonin to appear in court to answer the charges. This marked the beginning of the second phase of official persecution. The Daishonin eloquently refuted the charges and repeated his predictions of foreign invasion and strife within the ruling clan. Two days after the investigation, Hei no Saemon and his soldiers burst into the Daishonin's dwelling. Though innocent of all wrongdoing, the Daishonin was arrested and sentenced to banishment on the island of Sado.

However, Hei no Saemon was determined to have him beheaded at an execution ground in Tatsunokuchi on the outskirts of Kamakura. Nichiren Daishonin and his followers believed that his death was at hand, but at the last moment the sudden appearance of a luminous object in the sky so terrified the officials that they called off the execution. Thereafter the Daishonin declared himself to have been reborn to a new life as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. A detailed description of these dramatic events in the Daishonin's own words can be found in the letter entitled *The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra*.

In the tenth month of 1271, Nichiren Daishonin, accompanied by warrior escorts, sailed across the Sea of Japan to Sado, his place of exile. The only friendly person to go with him was his faithful follower Nikko Shonin. The two were quartered in a dilapidated hut in an area where the corpses of paupers and criminals were abandoned. They were short of food and clothing, and had no fire to keep them warm. Huddling in skins and straw mantles, they somehow managed to survive the first winter.

In the first month of 1272, in response to a challenge from priests in the area, Nichiren Daishonin engaged in a religious debate with representatives of other Buddhist schools, who had gathered from around Sado and from as far away as the mainland. During what has become known as the Tsukahara Debate, he completely refuted their doctrines and demolished their positions.

The situation on Sado improved somewhat for the Daishonin as he began to receive offerings of food and clothing from local people who had converted to his teachings. However, he faced constant hostility from the priests and lay believers of other schools. His time was devoted mainly to preaching and writing. Many of his most important works, including *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind* and *The Opening of the Eyes*, date from this period.

On the eighteenth day of the second month, 1272, a ship reached Sado Island bringing news that fighting had broken out in Kamakura and Kyoto. It was a power struggle within the Hojo family. The Daishonin's prophecy of dissension within the ruling clan had come true. And before long, the second disaster he had prophesied, foreign invasion, became more likely as the Mongols repeatedly sent envoys demanding submission. In the second month of 1274, the regent,

Hojo Tokimune, who had never completely agreed with the severe treatment accorded to the Daishonin, revoked the edict of banishment. And on the twenty-sixth day of the third month, two years and five months after he was exiled, Nichiren Daishonin returned to Kamakura.

On the eighth day of the fourth month, Nichiren Daishonin was ordered to appear before the military tribunal. Hei no Saemon was the presiding official, as he had been three years earlier when charges were brought against the Daishonin. But this time he behaved with reserve and politeness. In reply to questioning concerning the possibility of a Mongol attack, the Daishonin stated that he feared an invasion within the year. He added that the government should not ask the True Word priests to pray for the destruction of the Mongols, since their prayers would only aggravate the situation.

An old Chinese text says that, if a sage warns his sovereign three times and still is not heeded, he should leave the country. Nichiren Daishonin had three times remonstrated with the rulers, predicting crises—once when he presented *On Establishing the Correct Teaching*, again at the time of his arrest and near execution at Tatsunokuchi, and once more on his return from Sado. Convinced that the government would never heed his warnings, he left Kamakura on the twelfth day of the fifth month, 1274. He settled in a small dwelling at the foot of Mount Minobu in the province of Kai (present-day Yamanashi Prefecture).

Because of the remoteness of the region, his life in Minobu was far from easy. His followers in Kamakura sent him money, food, and clothing, and occasionally went in groups to receive instruction from him. He devoted much of his time to writing, and nearly half of his extant works date from this period. He also spent much time lecturing and training his disciples. The lectures on the Lotus Sutra he delivered at this time were compiled by Nikko Shonin and are known as *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*.

In the tenth month of 1274, five months after Nichiren Daishonin moved to Minobu, the Mongols launched the attack described earlier. In a letter to one of his followers, the Daishonin expressed his bitter disappointment that his advice had been ignored, for he was convinced that, had it been heeded, the nation would have been spared much suffering.

During this period, Nikko Shonin was successful in making a number of converts among the priests and lay people of Atsuhara Village. The priests of a Tendai temple in the area, angered at his success, began harassing the converts. Eventually, they arranged for a band of warriors to attack a number of unarmed farmers of the convert group and arrest them on false charges of thievery. Twenty of the farmers were arrested and tortured, and three were eventually beheaded.

The incident, known as the Atsuhara Persecution, was significant because, whereas earlier persecutions had been aimed mainly at the Daishonin, this time it was his followers who were the victims. In spite of the threats of the authorities, however, the farmers persisted in their faith. Nichiren Daishonin was thus convinced that his disciples and lay followers were now strong enough in faith to risk their lives for the Mystic Law. This led him to inscribe the object of devotion for all humankind. The date was the twelfth day of the tenth month, 1279, nearly twenty-seven years after he had first chanted Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

By his sixty-first year, the Daishonin was in failing health. Feeling that death was near, he designated Nikko Shonin as his legitimate successor. Disciples and

followers urged him to visit a hot spring in Hitachi to improve his health. On the eighth day of the ninth month, 1282, he left Minobu for Hitachi. When he reached the residence of Ikegami Munenaka in what is today part of the city of Tokyo, he found he was too ill to continue. Many of his followers, hearing of his arrival, gathered at Ikegami to see him. On the morning of the thirteenth day of the tenth month, 1282, surrounded by disciples and lay believers reverently chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, he peacefully passed away.

NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism begins with the belief that all living beings have the potential to achieve enlightenment. That idea is the epitome of Mahayana Buddhism, one of the two principal divisions of Buddhism that arose in India after the passing of Shakyamuni Buddha. The followers of Mahayana Buddhism did not shut themselves off from society, as some other Buddhist groups did, but instead worked to spread Buddhism throughout the population and to assist others on the path to enlightenment. Mahayana is thus characterized by a spirit of compassion and altruism.

Mahayana Buddhism was in time introduced to China, where it in turn gave rise to various schools. One of the most important of these was founded by Chih-i (538–597), also referred to as the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, and is known as the T'ien-t'ai school. It teaches that the Lotus Sutra is the highest of all the Mahayana sutras, and that all things, both animate and inanimate, possess a dormant potential for enlightenment. This doctrine is summarized in the theory known as three thousand realms in a single moment of life. The doctrines of the school were further clarified by Miao-lo (711–782), the sixth patriarch of the school.

T'ien-t'ai Buddhism was introduced to Japan as Tendai Buddhism in the early ninth century by the Great Teacher Dengyo, a Japanese priest who had gained a profound understanding of its doctrines in China. Later, in the thirteenth century, when Nichiren Daishonin studied at Mount Hiei, the headquarters of the Tendai school in Japan, he was able to confirm his conviction that the Lotus Sutra constitutes the heart of all Buddhism. Soon after, he began to teach the substance of his realization. According to his teachings, the workings of the universe are all subject to a single principle, or Law. By understanding that Law, one can unlock the hidden potential in one's life and achieve perfect harmony with one's environment.

Nichiren Daishonin defined the universal Law as Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, a formula that represents the essence of the Lotus Sutra and is known as the daimoku. Furthermore, he gave it concrete form by inscribing it upon the mandala known as the Gohonzon so that people could manifest Buddha wisdom and attain enlightenment. In his treatise entitled *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind*, he declares that chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with faith in the Gohonzon, the crystallization of the universal Law, reveals one's Buddha nature.

All phenomena are subject to the strict principle of cause and effect. Consequently, the present state of one's life is the summation of all the previous causes one has made. By chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, one is creating the

most fundamental cause, a cause that will offset negative effects from the past and lead to absolute happiness.

Enlightenment is not a mystical or transcendental state. Rather it is a condition in which one enjoys the highest wisdom, vitality, good fortune, confidence, and other positive qualities, and in which one finds fulfillment in one's daily activities, and comes to understand one's purpose in being alive.

THE WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN

The extraordinary fact that so many of the works of Nichiren Daishonin still exist today, seven hundred years after they were written, is due largely to the earnest struggles of Nikko Shonin (1246–1333), the Daishonin's closest disciple. He was the first to use the honorific term Gosho ("go" is an honorific prefix, and "sho" means writings) to refer to these works, and he fought hard to collect, copy, and preserve his teacher's writings. Because of his indefatigable efforts against great odds, most of the Daishonin's important works have been passed down to us today.

On April 28, 1952, to commemorate the seven hundredth anniversary of the founding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, Nichiren Daishonin's writings were published by the Soka Gakkai in one volume entitled *Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu* (The Complete Works of Nichiren Daishonin). The publication project was initiated by Josei Toda, the second president of the Soka Gakkai, and carried out under the editorial supervision of the scholar Nichiko Hori. Nichiko Hori (1867–1957) began his career as the librarian of Taiseki-ji temple, where, from the age of seventeen, he undertook a thorough study of the originals and copies of the Daishonin's writings and related documents. Over the years he visited a number of temples, many of which were the main temples of other schools, in order to study their archives. His work also took him to the island of Sado, in search of materials on Abutsu-bo, and to the birthplace of Nikko Shonin. Between the years 1925 and 1927, he served as fifty-ninth high priest of Taiseki-ji, but retired in order to devote himself entirely to his research.

A total of 426 documents, including fragmentary writings, are collected in that volume. Of these, 172 exist in Nichiren Daishonin's own handwriting. The Daishonin's works fall into several categories. Some are formal treatises on Buddhism with many quotations from sutras and doctrinal texts. Examples of such treatises are *On Establishing the Correct Teaching* and *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind*. The treatises are written in classical Chinese, which, like Latin in Europe until recent centuries, was widely used in Japan for works of history, philosophy, and religion. Nichiren Daishonin's writings in classical Chinese are distinguished by their great power and fluency.

Other writings by the Daishonin take the form of letters to his lay followers. Some of these are lengthy and detailed, giving us much valuable information about the Daishonin's activities and thinking. Others are short communications written to advise or encourage his followers. These works are written in the ordinary Japanese epistolary style of the Kamakura period. Like the works in Chinese, they show Nichiren Daishonin to have been a master of prose style, and contain passages of great warmth and beauty.

The treatises, since they are carefully constructed and logical in presentation,

pose relatively few problems of interpretation, though occasionally there are quotations whose sources have yet to be identified. But because classical Chinese is very concise in expression, and because much of the language of the treatises is highly specialized, it has at times been deemed advisable to expand the wording of the original in translation in order to make the meaning clear in English.

The letters, written in a more intimate and personal style, present greater difficulties of interpretation. Whereas the treatises were intended as formal documents to be handed down to posterity, the letters are in most cases private communications between the Daishonin and his followers and disciples. They take for granted a familiarity with certain background information that was known to the writer and the recipient, but that in many cases remains something of a mystery to us today. Thus, without a thorough knowledge of the circumstances under which the letter was written, and the identity of the recipient, we must often guess at the exact meaning of the text. In addition, epistolary styles tend as a rule to be challenging in any language, since they rely heavily upon politenesses and conventional phrases to convey subtle shades of meaning. The Japanese epistolary style of the Kamakura period is no exception, and in addition, it shares with other types of classical Japanese a tendency toward ambiguity of expression and is very sparing in its use of pronouns. All these factors contribute to making the letters of Nichiren Daishonin difficult to interpret at many points. Specific problems of interpretation are discussed in the notes to the individual translations.

As the reader will notice, Nichiren Daishonin in his letters and other writings frequently alludes to various anecdotes drawn from Buddhist texts or works of Chinese history. One should not suppose that he includes these allusions to show off his learning. Such allusions may seem pedantic to readers who are unfamiliar with the cultural background and must turn to the notes for assistance, but it should be kept in mind that the Japanese readers whom Nichiren Daishonin was addressing would have encountered no such difficulty. The anecdotes he refers to would have been as familiar to them as the stories of the Bible or Greek mythology are to Western readers, and thus they would have immediately grasped the significance of the allusion and appreciated its aptness. It may also be noted that quotations from the sutras and other Buddhist writings may very rarely appear in slightly different form from place to place in the Daishonin's writings. The English translation renders these differences exactly as the Daishonin does.