

**Living the Rissho Ankoku Ron:  
The Prophetic Call of Nichiren for Today**

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## Introduction

It is said that Nichiren's teachings begin and end with the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* (*Treatise on Spreading Peace Throughout the Country by Establishing the True Dharma*). Unfortunately, this work is very difficult for people today to relate to. Nichiren was addressing a feudal Japanese society whose state religion was Buddhism, a milieu very far removed from what Japan is today, let alone what non-Japanese would be familiar with. In addition, much of the sophistication of Nichiren's thought is not present in *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, which is a simple call to action. Many of the issues Nichiren sees as a matter of life and death for his nation strike even modern Japanese people as obscure and of no relevance in a culture that has become thoroughly secular and which upholds democracy and the separation of church and state as nonnegotiable political values. However, I believe the central theme of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* is still relevant. In fact, I believe it is of great significance. I believe that Nichiren was trying to warn his contemporaries that a society that does not base itself on Truth and the universal dignity of human life will become corrupt and will eventually destroy itself. In upholding the *Lotus Sutra*, Nichiren was not simply upholding a text sacred to the Buddhist tradition. Rather, he was trying to uphold the sacred nature of all life in this world. That is the theme that binds together all of Nichiren's teachings from beginning to end. I hope that in this commentary on *Rissho Ankoku Ron* I can explain the background and context of this work in order to clarify its meaning, and ultimately show that this work can still speak to us today.

Throughout this commentary I refer to two different translations of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* that can be found in two different volumes of translations of Nichiren's writings. The WNSD1 refers to *the Writings of Nichiren Shonin Volume 1* published by the University of Hawaii. WND refers to the *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* published by the Soka Gakkai. I include the latter because I know that many people have access to that edition and it is also online.

The World's Suffering

I The Cause of the Disasters

A Traveler Came to Lament

WNSD1: pp. 107-108

WND: pp. 6-7

Between the years 1256 and 1260, Japan saw numerous catastrophes, including fire, storms and flooding that destroyed vital crops, famine, epidemics, and violent earthquakes. Nichiren wrote the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* in response to the horrendous suffering faced by the Japanese people at that time. From 1258 to 1260 he secluded himself at Jisso-ji temple, a Tendai temple with an extensive library of sutras and commentaries. There he tried to find out whether Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings in the sutras could provide any guidance in averting or dealing with such anguish and uncertainty. During that time, he wrote many preliminary versions, including the *Shugo Kokka Ron (Treatise on Protecting the Nation)* in 1259, and other works. The final product he submitted to the retired regent Hojo Tokiyori (1227-1263), who was still the de facto ruler of Japan. In the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, the host represents Nichiren Shonin, while the traveler who becomes a guest of the host represents Hojo Tokiyori. Thus, the whole work is an imaginary dialogue in which Nichiren presents his findings and recommendations to the military government, the Kamakuran shogunate that ruled Japan and controlled even the religious establishment of Japan.

The *Rissho Ankoku Ron* opens with a traveler lamenting the famine and pestilence that has swept the land.

In recent years, there have been unusual disturbances in the heavens, strange occurrences on earth, famine and pestilence, all affecting every corner of the empire and spreading throughout the land. Oxen and horses lie dead in the streets, and the bones of the stricken crowd the highways. Over half the population has already been carried off by death, and there is hardly a single person who does not grieve.

Today, we face similar problems with drug & alcohol abuse, AIDS, violent crimes, terrorism, political and social injustice, including genocide, and of course wars and famines and natural disasters that continue to sweep through the world. Basically we have just as many reasons or more to lament as the traveler. Even in the supposedly wealthy and civilized USA, walking around in many areas of the inner city at night you can hear the crack addicts shouting at each other in the street, drunkards hooting and hollering, the sound of sirens from fire trucks, ambulances, or police cars signaling that somewhere nearby is a fire or people dying of either disease, disaster, or foul play. This is *dukkha*, the Buddhist term for the suffering, anguish, or even simple discontent that characterizes life in this world, and not just for individuals but also on the level of the whole society, the whole world. *Dukkha* is part of a self-perpetuating system of suffering that Nichiren explored in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*.

The traveler goes on to enumerate the many ways in which people try to overcome suffering. Nichiren believed that many of these methods actually made things worse, but for now they are simply listed. The worship of celestial Buddhas like Amitabha (Infinite Light) or Bhaisajyaguru (Medicine Master) who are looked upon as saviors is mentioned. Reliance on ceremonies, rituals, and appeals to Buddhist and Shinto deities of various types are mentioned as well. Today, in the USA, people look to Jesus Christ to save them, or to the sacraments of the Catholic Church, or various New Age or Neo-pagan rituals for healing or liberation. But rituals or appeals to divine saviors have yet to bring about a peaceful world, and it should be noted that one of the first obstacles to enlightenment overcome through Buddhist practice is the false belief that rites and ceremonies can bring about liberation from suffering in and of themselves. Buddhist practitioners who really begin to enter the stream of the Dharma come to realize it is a change of heart and genuine insight that brings about liberation and not just pious gestures or a complacent reliance on some deity or savior to do the inner work for us.

Zen style meditation, which is understood by the traveler as an attempt to

perceive the emptiness of all things, is also mentioned. Various forms of silent sitting meditation and/or yoga are very popular even today among those with the time, money, and education to participate in such practices. Though silent sitting practices focusing on mindful observation of all phenomena starting with the breath would appear to be easy enough, it is actually a very difficult task for many people to approach and sustain, and even more difficult for people to actually attain any real insight without hours of dedicated practice. This kind of meditation often involves a support system of retreats, practice halls, access to good teachers, a fair amount of leisure time, and the ability to pay for such things. As a result only a small portion of people are ever drawn to or even exposed to this kind of meditation. The practice of sitting meditation is indeed a healthy one that can lead to greater concentration, peace of mind, mindfulness and even great insight. It is not meant to be an indulgent "abiding in emptiness." It is in fact taught as a supporting practice in some Nichiren Buddhist temples and is a part of *Shodaigyo* meditation. Nichiren Buddhism does not, however, promote it as an end in itself, or even as the primary practice of Buddhism.

Benevolent government and the tradition of Confucian humanism are also mentioned among the many solutions the traveler's contemporaries used to rectify or at least ameliorate the tremendous suffering they were facing. Unfortunately, even the most powerful and wealthy of governments only has finite resources, and not only natural disasters but also the deep anguish that fills life are far beyond the scope of what any government can ever prevent or adequately deal with.

The solution then must be something that strikes deeper than any of the supernatural or humanistic methods the traveler observed. All of the above methods of dealing with suffering are shown to be partial and limited in their scope. Even the practice of sitting meditation does not necessarily resolve people's suffering because the practice of silent sitting can also lead to getting lost in one's own random ruminations or perhaps stuck in a mental blankness which is not the same thing as the Buddhist understanding of emptiness (though

often mistaken for it by those without good teachers).

The traveler states that despite the existence of the three treasures of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha for the eradication of suffering and a prophecy which seemingly guaranteed the secure and prosperous rule of 100 emperors the people were still suffering and the emperors had been overthrown by the military. Like many of us, the traveler seems to think that suffering is an anomaly and not the normal state of affairs. And so he laments, "Then why is it that the world has already fallen into decline and that the laws of the state have come to an end? What is wrong? What error has been committed?"

The Master Answered

WNSD1: p. 108

WND: p. 7

Now the host responds and invites the traveler to lament and investigate the problem together. The host does not set himself up as a guru or as someone who knows any better himself. Rather, he sees himself as someone who is just as concerned and perplexed as his guest, with the only difference that he has been pondering the problem a little longer and has had time to consult the teachings of the Buddha. What the sutras have to say comes later, but in this section the host talks about the futility of his own attempts to move the gods and buddhas. He voices his naive but unfounded trust in religious teachers, as well as his resentment and anxiety. All of this should be very familiar to us as well, since we also are faced with religious institutions, teachings, teachers, and methods that are ineffective at best and absolutely corrupt and dehumanizing at their worst.

When a man leaves family life and enters the Buddhist way, it is because he hopes to attain buddhahood through the teachings of the Buddha. But attempts now to move the gods fail to have any effect, and appeals to the power of the buddhas produce no results. When I observe carefully the state of the world today, I cannot help wondering whether a man as ignorant as I will ever be

able to attain buddhahood in the future. So I look up at the heavens to calm my anger, or gaze down at the earth and sink deep into despair.

In the end, the host concludes that what is wrong is that, "The people of today all turn their backs upon the right Dharma; to a man, they give their allegiance to false Dharmas." Because of this, the host believes, deities and sages leave the country and demons, devils, disasters, and calamities enter in their place.

The word "Dharma" means many things, "Truth," "Reality," "Law," or "Teaching." Its implications are vast, but basically the host is saying that the problem is not that the gods don't care or don't exist, or that people aren't benevolent enough or mindful enough. Rather, the problem is that people have taken a false view of reality and have committed themselves to points of view that perpetuate suffering for themselves and others. They may not even be aware they are holding any particular point of view, but everyone does and the trick is to become conscious of the unexamined assumptions we base our lives on so we can determine if they are helping or harming us. By claiming that disasters and suffering are brought on by holding to false Dharmas, the host is saying what Shakyamuni Buddha himself taught - suffering is caused by ignorance and the selfish craving stemming from ignorance; and the way to end suffering is to examine and change one's life starting with the relinquishing of wrong views in order to discover and uphold right views.

## The Origin of the Sutras and the Role of their Predictions

### II Predictions of Calamities in Sutras

#### The Traveler Inquired

WNSD1: p. 109

WND: p. 7

The guest then asks upon what sutras the host bases his views. This would be similar to someone in our culture being told that our nation's problems are clearly the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies, so a listener who also believed in the literal truth of the Bible would want to know what Biblical passages are being fulfilled. But even in our culture not everyone believes in the literal truth of the Bible or that the Bible's prophecies apply to modern nations, events, and issues. However, in 13th century Japan the sutras held an authority equivalent to the authority the Bible holds for modern fundamentalists today. The Buddha was looked upon as fully omniscient, so anything he said in the sutras was held to be indisputable. In several sutras, the Buddha predicts what the future will hold for the Sangha, and also for rulers who do or do not uphold the Dharma. These predictions are actually lessons in cause and effect: those who uphold the Dharma will prosper while those who fail to uphold it will increase their suffering. For medieval East Asian Buddhists, these predictions were viewed as prophecies and were held in the same regard as some hold the Biblical prophecies in our own culture. For this reason, the guest was particularly interested to know if the host's opinions were based on the authority of the sutras.

It might not occur to Western Buddhists (by which I mean those in countries where European languages predominate) that medieval East Asian Buddhists (and even many modern ones) are not that different in their assumptions about the inerrancy of scripture than their monotheistic counterparts in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but such was the case. Nichiren Shonin himself took (or appeared to take) the sutras at their word as the absolute truth spoken by a fully omniscient Buddha. Many modern Nichiren

Buddhists have followed suit and do not seem to be aware of the origins of the sutras or the possible intentions of their compilers.

The term “sutra” means "thread of discourse" and specifically refers to a teaching given by Shakyamuni Buddha. The Buddha’s discourses or sutras were preserved by means of an oral transmission by the monastic Sangha since the time of the legendary first council after the death of the Buddha in the fourth or fifth century B.C.E. Eventually there came to be several lines of transmission and the one recited in the Pali language (said to be closely related to the Magadhi dialect the Buddha spoke) was first written down in Sri Lanka in the first century B.C.E. according to the *Mahavamsa*, the *Great Chronicle* of Sri Lanka, that was composed in the 6th century C.E. The Pali material still exists in totality preserved by the Theravadin tradition in Sri Lanka and other countries in SE Asia. Because this version is recorded in the Pali dialect it is often called the Pali Canon (even when it has been translated into other languages like English). All of the sutras in the Pali Canon have been translated into English, and from them we can read for ourselves what scholars believe are the best record we can hope to have of the historical Buddha's actual teachings. This is not to say the Pali Canon is free of legend and later accretions, not to mention the bias of the monastically oriented Theravadin monks, but for the most part it is believed to present a fairly straightforward recounting of the historical Buddha's discourses.

Other recensions of these early discourses have also been preserved. The version of the canon passed down by the Sarvastivadin school of early Indian Buddhism was originally preserved in Sanskrit rather than Pali. Unfortunately, when Islam delivered the *coup de grace* to Buddhism in Central Asia and India, the original Sanskrit version of the Sarvastivadin canon was lost with the exception of a few fragments discovered in Eastern Turkistan and some individual discourses preserved in Tibet. The Sarvastivadin version now survives only in a Chinese translation called the Agama sutras. While there are some differences, on the whole both the Pali Canon and the Agama sutras present a consistent view of the Buddha's main teachings such as the four noble truths,

dependent origination, and the eightfold path. In fact, the two collections are obviously two different versions of the same material.

At roughly the same time that the Pali Canon is said to have been written down, the earliest portions of the Mahayana sutras began to be recorded as well. The *Lotus Sutra* itself has portions that are believed to date back to the first century B.C.E. and other portions were added to the original nucleus over time. From about the first century B.C.E. until the Islamic invasion of the 12th century C.E. new sutras were compiled and added to the growing Mahayana canon. Even in China, Mahayana sutras were conceived and added to the canon, though sometimes their authenticity was challenged when certain monks came to suspect their non-Indian origins. Indeed, sutras like the *Brahma Net Sutra* containing the Mahayana precepts, one version of the *Surangama Sutra* that has been of great influence in Chinese Zen practice and the source of a widely used *dharani*, and perhaps even the oft-recited *Heart Sutra* may all have been the handiwork of Chinese rather than Indian monks.

This means that many of the sutras that Nichiren and his contemporaries took to be the actual words of the Buddha were not in fact verbatim records of the Buddha's teachings. The Mahayana sutras in particular are the products of later followers of the Buddha who felt that the true depth of his insight and actual scope of his intentions could be better-expressed using myth, poetry, and paradox. They believed that any wisdom that was in keeping with the insights and awakening of the Buddha could be considered to be no different than the voice of the Buddha himself. In the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, a work which itself is attributed to Nagarjuna but may have been written by its ostensible translator Kumarajiva, four seals of the Dharma are proposed by which any teaching can be verified as the voice of the Buddha. These four seals are that any teaching must affirm (1) the impermanence of all phenomena, (2) the inability of phenomena to bring complete or lasting happiness, (3) the lack of a permanent or independent self within phenomena, and (4) that true peace is only found by realizing nirvana. As long as a teaching was in keeping with these

it could be affirmed as the teaching of the Buddha.

The guest's request for proof-texts from the sutras can be taken by us to be a question as to whether Nichiren's views were or were not grounded in the Buddhist tradition. As we will see, Nichiren's views were very much in line with the sutras. The question we must now ask is what do those sutras mean for us today?

The Master Responded

WNSD1: p. 109 - 113

WND: p. 7 - 10

In this section the host responds to the request of his guest for proof-texts from the sutras. The host provides several pages of quotations from the following four sutras:

*The Sutra of Golden Light (or Sutra of Golden Splendor)*: which asserts that the four heavenly kings will abandon a nation whose rulers do not propagate the Dharma.

*The Great Collection Sutra (or Sutra of the Great Assembly)*: which asserts that when the principles of Buddhism become truly obscured and lost, then the natural world will also suffer and the laws which govern human society will also be neglected and forgotten. The sutra is also cited for its predictions of the three calamities of famine, war, and epidemics as well as other apocalyptic events if the ruler does not prevent the Dharma from perishing.

*The Benevolent Kings Sutra*: discusses the spiritual and political disorder in a nation bereft of the Dharma and also predicts the departing of sages and the coming of seven disasters of a human, natural, and astronomical nature: (1) irregularities of the sun and moon, (2) irregularities of the stars and planets, (3) fires, (4) floods, (5) tornadoes, (6) drought, (7) warfare brought about by foreign

invasion or revolt.

*The Medicine Master Sutra*: also provides a list of seven disasters that range from man-made to natural to astronomical. These seven disasters are: (1) disease, (2) invasion, (3) revolt, (4) strange celestial omens, (5) eclipses of the sun and moon, (6) unseasonable storms, (7) drought.

It is from these four sutras that Nichiren derives his prediction that Japan has yet to face invasion from without and civil war from within. In his view, the other disasters had already been fulfilled. These sutra passages link the harmony of the natural world and of human society to the ruler's upholding of the Dharma. This view is very alien to us today. Though some might predict national disaster if one or another political party or candidate wins a presidential election, few of us would think to blame earthquakes or tornadoes on people's political, religious, or social views. Of course, there are still religious fundamentalists who would, but in Nichiren's time the view was much more common even among the educated upper classes. In fact, it was the common assumption among agrarian people that nature and the weather reflected the approval or disapproval of the gods or God, and that the ruler was specifically responsible for keeping the gods or God happy through prayer, morality, and good government. From a Buddhist point of view, the ruler was responsible for upholding the Dharma and it was the devas (the gods of the sacred hymns of ancient India known as the Vedas) and the kami (the indigenous gods of Japan) as well as the bodhisattvas who would ensure that all was well if they did, and the various demons and Mara who would take advantage if they did not.

Thus Nichiren makes his conclusion as to the source of the disasters facing Japan:

People turn away from the Buddhas and the sutras and no longer endeavor to protect them. In turn, the benevolent deities and sages abandon the nation and leave their accustomed places. As a result, demons and followers of heretical doctrines create disaster and

inflict calamity upon the populace.

Note that Nichiren is not saying the Japanese have some kind of special dispensation or are some kind of chosen people as one might expect from a nationalist. In the past, Nichiren's teachings were taken out of context and co-opted by certain people in Japan who wished to use Nichiren Buddhism to promote a nationalist agenda, and several scholars outside of Japan accepted this view uncritically. However, an objective reading of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* clearly shows that Nichiren was no nationalist. He was more like a Hebrew prophet calling his nation to task for not fulfilling its responsibilities. This is one reason why it is greatly mistaken to accuse Nichiren of nationalism, though it is true that Nichiren was very concerned with the fate of the Japanese people.

And yet, it is a bit disturbing to see that Nichiren is basing his argument upon sutra passages that make the assumption that politics, nature, and even the course of the sun and moon are determined by which religious teaching one chooses to follow. The whole argument he makes would seem to be invalidated by modern astronomy, meteorology, and geology. For instance, we now know that the shifting of tectonic plates, not the displeasure of supernatural entities, causes earthquakes. Even in the realm of human activity, modern economics and sociology show that religion is just one among many factors (and not always a major one) that causes wars, epidemics, and famine.

I think we need to step back and not take the sutra passages so literally to see if we can find a meaning that speaks to us today. I think if the Dharma really is "the way things are" then to uphold the Dharma is to uphold the truth, to face facts squarely, to see the interdependent nature of the world, to be responsible for one's acts and the consequences thereof, and to be compassionately motivated by the view of interdependence and the selfless nature of things as they really are. To behave dishonestly, irresponsibly, callously, and blindly would be to invite disaster - to turn our world upside down in a manner of speaking. If those who govern a nation act like this - the consequences will be enormous and

far-reaching. Many nations and societies have indeed toppled because of irresponsible rulers and a compliant populace. Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, Fascist Italy, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, and others all came to ruin. Their fate included an impact on the natural world as well. And how many deaths have been caused by famine, earthquakes, and flooding because the government mismanaged resources, or refused to uphold certain building codes or maintain a proper infrastructure and emergency system? Human decisions can indeed lead to the exacerbation of natural disasters, and can sometimes cause them in the first place. I would not argue that failing to be a Buddhist will cause an earthquake, but I would say failing to live in accord with what Buddhism calls the Dharma can lead to personal, national, or even worldwide disaster in the long run. In this sense, I think the sutra passages and Nichiren's conclusions based on them can be taken seriously.

## The Transmission of Buddhism to East Asia and the West

### III Slandering the True Dharma

Angry, the Traveler Frowned Deeply and Asked the Master:

WNSD1: p. 113 - 114

WND: p. 10 - 11

The next section begins with the guest who is flustered by the assertions of the host in the last section that Japan is being punished because the people have turned away from Buddhism. Arguing that devotion to Buddhism is widespread, the guest recounts key events that history and legend describe as the introduction of Buddhism into China and Japan. The first reference is to the Chinese Emperor Ming (28-75 CE), the second emperor of the Later Han dynasty (25-220 C.E.), who supposedly dreamed of a golden man floating over his garden. His counselors told him that in the western region (India) a great sage had been born many hundreds of years ago called the Buddha. The emperor sent 18 envoys to India to bring back the Buddha's teachings and in response two monks returned with Buddhist sutras and images on the back of a white horse in the year 67 C.E. As a commemoration of this the emperor established the White Horse Temple. Of course, this legend is a romanticized version of the introduction of Buddhism to China in the first century. Buddhist merchants and maybe even monks may have unofficially been traveling into China along the silk route long before then. There may have even been Buddhist enclaves in China already at the time this story supposedly took place. In any case, Buddhism was brought into China very early on and was (at least at first) welcomed by the imperial court itself as well as the intelligentsia.

In Japan, things did not proceed so smoothly. It was introduced to the Japanese Emperor Kimmei (r. 531-571) in 538 C.E. when the ruler of Paekche (one of the three kingdoms on the Korean peninsula which would eventually be united into one country) sent the emperor an image of the Buddha. The emperor gave it to the Soga clan who wished to give this new and potentially potent form of foreign magick a try. The Mononobe clan, however, opposed it and claimed

this foreign superstition would anger the *kami*, the Japanese gods. Of course this religious debate was also wrapped up in the conflicting ambitions of these two rival clans and they eventually went to war over a dispute concerning the succession of the emperor. In 587, the Soga won, and the Empress Suiko (r. 593-628) embraced Buddhism after her brother Emperor Yomei (r. 585-587) passed away. Her nephew, the son of Yomei, was Prince Shotoku (574-622) and it was he who wrote Japan's first constitution, which specifically states that all should take the threefold refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Prince Shotoku is also credited with writing commentaries on the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, and the *Queen Shrimala Sutra*. From this time on Buddhism was firmly established as the state religion of Japan along with Shinto, the indigenous way of the gods.

The guest also refers to the lineage of Shariputra who meditated on the moon atop Eagle Peak and the adherents of Haklenayashas. Shariputra was the foremost disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha who passed away one year before the Buddha. Haklenayashas was the 23rd patriarch of Buddhism in India after Shakyamuni Buddha according to an apocryphal lineage of patriarchs originating in the T'ien-t'ai school and since championed by Zen Buddhism with the addition of several patriarchs and the extension of the system into China with Bodhidharma and his successors. In this context however, the lineage of Shariputra seems to refer to practitioners of meditation while the adherents of Haklenayashas refers to transmission of the teaching.

In any case, from the guest's point of view, Buddhism has been firmly established throughout East Asia, and all people revere it. Both its practices and doctrines seem to be alive and well. So he wonders how the host can claim that Buddhism is being neglected and slandered to the point of karmically endangering the country?

One might wonder at this point, what the guest or the host would make of the state of Buddhism in the USA today. In this country only a small minority

actually practice Buddhism. The vast majority has a passing familiarity with the Dalai Lama or Zen, and a good number of people see it as a pagan superstition at odds with Christianity. Far from being the universally respected state religion of Nichiren's time, Buddhism is very much the province of ethnic minorities (who themselves often leave it behind as they assimilate into the mainstream) and an even smaller group of converts who are unhappy or otherwise dissatisfied with the mainstream religions of this culture. Some even associate Buddhism with the taking of psychedelic drugs or even tantric sex practices that would have been unimaginable to the majority of people in Nichiren's day. On the positive side, forms of Buddhism from all over Asia are meeting in the USA for the first time. In addition, books (even those expounding previously esoteric and/or oral teachings) are easy to get in bookstores or online. In addition, the population is almost universally literate and more or less educated well enough to understand Buddhism on a conceptual level. Until the 20th century Buddhism had never encountered such a literate, well-educated, religiously and ethnically diverse and prosperous culture as the one it has encountered in the USA. So right at this point in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* we can see the huge gulf between the assumptions which drive this treatise and the actual conditions of Buddhism in our own day. This must be taken into account as we read further in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* and Nichiren's writings in general.

## Prophecies of the Latter Age of the Dharma

### The Master Tried to Persuade Him

WNSD1: p. 114 - 118

WND: p. 11 - 12

Continuing with the section on slandering the Dharma, the host responds to the guest's question with an eloquent acknowledgement of the pervasiveness of Buddhism in his society. However, he also points out that beneath the surface there is corruption and deceit.

To be sure, Buddhist halls stand rooftop to rooftop, and sutra storehouses are ranged eave to eave. Monks are as numerous as bamboo plants and rushes, or as common as rice and hemp seedlings. The temples and monks have been honored from centuries past, and every day respect is paid them anew. But the monks of today are fawning and devious, and they confuse the people and lead them astray. The ruler and his subjects lack understanding and fail to distinguish between what is correct and what is erroneous.

The host then cites several sutra passages that describe exactly the kind of situation that he believes they are now faced with. These prophetic passages also describe some of the consequences that will follow if the rulers do not take steps against such corruption and abuse of the Dharma. In the original version of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* the sutra passages cited are as follows:

*The Benevolent Kings Sutra*: in this sutra ambitious monks of evil intent who promulgate teachings in violation of the Dharma deceive the rulers. This leads to the destruction of both the Buddha Dharma and the nation.

*The Nirvana Sutra*: warns that evil friends are worse than mad elephants. "Even if you are killed by a mad elephant, you will not fall into the three evil paths [of hells, hungry ghosts, animals]. But if you are killed by an evil friend, you are certain to fall into them."

*The Lotus Sutra*: the 20-line verse from the 13th chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, "Encouragement for Upholding the Sutra," is cited that describes those who will persecute the practitioners of the *Lotus Sutra* in the time known as the Latter Age of the Dharma. These persecutors would come to be known as the three powerful enemies in accordance with the interpretation of the T'ien-t'ai patriarch Miao-lo (711-782). The three are: (1) the ignorant laity who are deceived by the false and hypocritical monks and elders and will abuse the true monks, (2) the false monks who are deceitful and claim to be enlightened when in fact they are not, and (3) the respected elder monks who are revered as *arhats* ("worthy ones" who are liberated from birth and death) but who in fact are simply better at hiding their ulterior motives of greed and contempt. The original version of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* only quotes the portion that relates to the evil monks, but a later expanded version (believed to have been completed by 1278) includes the verses relating to the ignorant laypeople.

The omission of the "ignorant laity" could be because in the original *Rissho Ankoku Ron* he was specifically blaming monks like Honen (1133-1212) and his followers and saw no need to antagonize the secular rulers. In any case, in submitting the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* to the shogunate he was giving the lay rulers the chance to do the right thing. It was only after years of persecution, two exiles, and an attempted execution that Nichiren would conclude that the rulers were in fact representative of the ignorant lay people who would persecute the practitioners of the *Lotus Sutra* in the Latter Age of the Dharma.

*The Nirvana Sutra*: describes the corrupt and greedy monks who will begin to appear in the time of the Middle or Counterfeit Age of the Dharma and who will claim to be arhats though in fact they are far from enlightened. These monks are compared to cats on the prowl for mice.

In the expanded version of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* Nichiren adds several other passages (these passages are included in parenthesis in the WNS: D1) to strengthen his argument on the basis of the Buddha's teachings:

*The Guardian Sutra:* several passages are cited stating that the false and evil monks will fool the rulers and have them drive out the true monks. Several man-made and natural disasters will follow because of this. Finally, none other than these internal enemies, the evil monks, will destroy the Buddha Dharma.

*The Golden Light Sutra:* states that when the evil monks who violate the precepts are revered and those who keep them are punished this will bring about the downfall of the ruler, and the ruin of the country due to natural and man-made disasters. The gods themselves will be angry with the king and will abandon the country to its ruin.

*The Great Collection Sutra:* the gods vow that if the kings persecute the Buddha's disciples then they will cause other nations to invade and in addition will bring about several internal disasters like civil war, epidemics, famines, and unseasonable weather.

*The Nirvana Sutra:* one passage is cited which cautions against the false monks who will misunderstand and then misrepresent the *Nirvana Sutra* (and by extension the Buddha Dharma in general). Another passage speaks of those who are *icchantika* (“incorrigible evildoers”) but who appear to be arhats. Yet another passage from the six-fascicled version of the *Nirvana Sutra* is cited to show that those who slander the Mahayana may be taken to be arhats when in fact they are *icchantika*, while those who criticize the Hinayana may be taken to be *icchantika* when actually they are bodhisattvas who are trying to teach that all beings have buddha-nature.

After these citations (whether just the original citations or both those and the additional ones) Nichiren concludes with the following: “When we look at the world in the light of these passages of scripture, we see that the situation is just as they describe it. If we do not admonish the evil monks, how can we hope to do good?” This is an interesting assertion on the part of Nichiren, which he will

back up later with other passages from the sutras. He is claiming that in order to do good one must actively oppose evil. In order to uphold the truth, one must denounce and expose that which is a lie. This is not a call for passive resignation or to retreat from a corrupt society. It is, rather, a challenge to an active engagement against corruption and deceit.

A few remarks need to be made about the sutra passages. These, and many others which Nichiren will cite, certainly do sound as though they are prophecies. However, they should not be understood to be predictions of the future made by an omniscient Buddha, though that is how Nichiren and others in past ages understood them. In particular, the Buddha's prediction that there will be three ages of the Dharma known as the Former, Middle, and Latter Ages is often taken either too literally or too easily dismissed out of hand. So I think it is important to understand the nature of these "prophecies."

There are two reasons these prophecies appear in the sutras. The first is that Shakyamuni Buddha had a keen understanding of human nature and he also seemed to accept (at least to a certain extent) the cyclic nature of the Vedic worldview. Shakyamuni Buddha understood that while the Dharma itself is incorruptible and in a sense eternal (having no beginning or end but simply being the way things actually are) its historical expressions and the institutions set up to uphold and pass them along are not. Eventually, these constructed phenomena will themselves come to an end after a period of corruption and decline. The teachings will be obscured, misunderstood, and fought over. People will lose the true spirit of the teachings and either follow the empty form or twist the forms to suit their own ends once the actual Dharma is forgotten. The Sangha as an institution will either fade away, or face oppression as social and political circumstances change, or it will rot from within due to the actions of those who use religion for their own aggrandizement. The Buddha did not need to see the future to make such a "prediction." His own deep understanding of human weakness and the impermanent and contingent nature of all phenomena caused him to realize that even his own teachings and the Sangha he was

creating were not immune to the process of change and loss.

The other reason these prophecies appear is because the Mahayana sutras themselves were the artistic and inspired creation of monks living many generations after the time of the Buddha. Putting their own insights and observations into the mouth of the historical Buddha or a glorified Buddha or disciple or bodhisattva or god in imaginary discourses, these monks described the circumstances of corruption and persecution that they themselves were facing in the form of "prophecies" given by the Buddha, his contemporaries, and mythic figures who were supposedly present to hear the Buddha's teaching many centuries before.

The three ages of the Dharma appear in the Pali Canon and in the Mahayana sutras as a way of summarizing the teaching that even the Dharma itself (as a conceptual teaching and historical phenomena) will decline. It fits in very well with the common Vedic motif of the cycle of creation, maintenance, decline, and destruction. According to the teaching of the three ages, the Former or True Age of the Dharma begins with the first rolling of the Wheel of the Dharma by the Buddha at the Deer Park. It will continue for a thousand years to be followed by the Middle or Counterfeit Age of the Dharma. After a thousand years of the Counterfeit Dharma the 10,000 years of the Latter or Declining Age of the Dharma will begin. During the first age, those with a strong affinity for the Buddha and the Dharma will be born during the lifetime of the Buddha or soon enough afterwards to be able to benefit from the True Dharma and thereby attain enlightenment. Those with a weaker karmic affinity will be born in the Counterfeit Age when the true spirit of Buddhism has been lost and only the outward forms remain more or less intact. But even they are able to make some progress, and according to Mahayana teachings they can be reborn in the pure lands of the celestial buddhas and bodhisattvas after their deaths and thereby attain enlightenment in those happier circumstances. Those born in the Latter Age, however, have no good roots or genuine karmic affinity for the Dharma, so they are born into an age when even the outward forms are disappearing and rather

than practice the Dharma people will only fight over it.

When the teaching of the three ages is taken too literally, people start trying to affix dates so they can definitively state when one age has ended or begun. In East Asia, it was believed that the Buddha lived from 1029 to 949 B.C.E. due to the attempts of Chinese Buddhists to show that the Buddha predated Lao-tzu and the Taoist teachings. Assuming these dates for the life of the Buddha they, and Nichiren, believed that the Latter Age had begun in 1052 C.E. However, modern scholars believe the Buddha's actual dates were 500 years or more later than that. The Japanese Buddhist scholar Hajime Nakamura set the dates as late as 463-383 B.C.E. What all this means is that if the dates of the three ages are taken literally, then Nichiren's belief that he was living in the Latter Age is completely off the mark since the Latter Age would not actually begin until the 16th or 17th century. In addition, the idea that the world suddenly shifts gears spiritually like clockwork when the correct calendar date comes around should strike us as naive and entirely too arbitrary.

The three ages of the Dharma should not be dismissed however. It is a teaching that shows an awareness of the contingent and corruptible nature of the historical manifestations of the Dharma. It is recognition that existentially, in addition to historically and geographically, we are indeed alienated from the true spirit of the Buddha's teachings and therefore we should listen to the Dharma as if hearing it for the first time (which many of us are) and not take it for granted. It is a recognition that Buddhism as a historical phenomena cannot remain static but must meet new challenges in every age. Furthermore, the three ages teaches us to never be complacent about the three treasures - the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. This teaching challenges us to try to renew the Dharma in the face of all corruption, deceit, oppression, and misunderstanding. It should not be taken in a way that causes us to be cynical or to despair that we are living in an age too corrupt to practice Buddhism. Nichiren did not take it that way at all - rather he saw the Latter Age as an opportunity to spread the Dharma in a new way through the Odaimoku. Other Buddhists might point to Nichiren's polemics

and seeming reduction of Buddhist practice to the chanting of a mantra as just a further symptom, or even cause, of the corruption and loss of the true spirit and original form of the Dharma. Nichiren Buddhists, however, should have confidence that Nichiren did not misinterpret the true intent of the many sutra passages he marshaled to show the correct way to practice in the Latter Age. He may have taken these passages more literally than we might, but I do believe he saw the actual intent of these teachings - to spur us out of our complacency and despair and to renew our commitment to the Dharma and its efficacy in new ways for a new age. This is an argument that Nichiren will make in more detail in his later more mature writings on the subject (particularly the *Senji Sho*, the *Selection of the Time*) but for now he simply wants to show that the conditions which these sutras speak of are the conditions that his contemporaries were facing.

We should also ask ourselves how Nichiren's critique of the rulers and evil monks could possibly apply to us today? We do not live in a feudal society with emperors, kings, or regents. Furthermore, we do not live a society where all respect Buddhist monks and nuns. In fact we live in a society (in the USA anyway) that has repudiated aristocratic rule or rule by the military and where large numbers of people are deeply suspicious if not disdainful of any clergy, let alone Buddhist clergy. So how can what Nichiren is writing about hold any meaning for us?

The rulers in our age are publicly elected officials and the bureaucracy that supports them. I would also add the media and the leaders of big business among those who direct and disseminate the policies and ideas that influence our lives and shape public opinion. In this sense, politicians, captains of industry, and the media are the ones who now hold the primary power, and the responsibility that goes with it, to govern society in a way that is compassionate and in accord with the truth. Because of the separation of church and state they do not and should not be expected to support Buddhism or any one religion or sect or denomination over and above another. However, it is my conviction that

the law of cause and effect is not a matter of belief or religious affiliation. What goes around comes around, we reap what we sow, and the golden rule is the universal basis for morality and ethics that is at the base of our system of laws and human rights. In two writings prior to *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, the *Sainan Koki Yurai (The Cause of Misfortunes)* and the *Sainan Taiji Sho (Treatise on the Elimination of Calamities)* Nichiren stated that the rulers of China before the introduction of Buddhism were karmically accountable for their actions because they were civilized enough to have embraced the humanistic ethics and values of Confucius. Nichiren specifically pointed to the five virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness as the moral equivalent of Buddhism's five major precepts against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication. In the same way, our secular nation-states, multi-national corporations, and worldwide media conglomerates should hold themselves accountable to commonly recognized standards of decent conduct and international law. If this is not done, as the Nazis, the Imperial Japanese, the Khmer Rouge, the Taliban, Saddam Hussein and his Baathist party, and other nations have learned - they only sow the seeds of their own destruction. I would say that as citizens and consumers in democratic free-market societies each of us also has a share in the responsibility once held only by the emperors, kings, shoguns and regents of the past to determine the policies and trends that our nations, media and businesses follow. We should ensure that those entities of which we are a part do not participate in or instigate evil themselves, even when combating evil.

I have talked about the rulers and expressed my view that we are in a sense the rulers and the Dharma we are held accountable to as a society is the Dharma of international law, human rights, and common decency. But who are the false and evil monks of this age? I would say that they are those who are responsible for teaching us our worldviews, values, morality and ethics. They are the priests, ministers, rabbis, imams, scientists, doctors, psychologists, and of course school teachers. Now Nichiren was not concerned with reforming other religions or even with converting other people to Buddhism since he lived in a

society where everyone was Buddhist. His concern was with what kind of Buddhism people were going to follow - a false one that distorted the Buddha's teachings or an authentic Buddhism that was in accord with the Buddha's teachings. We, however, live in a pluralistic society where Buddhism is a minority view and has only recently begun to have an impact on our culture and its worldview and values. As yet, that impact is not very strong, and may amount to no more than a fad. But I think that, Buddhist or not, our society should be committed to the truth and to a compassionate engagement with each other and the rest of the world. This is what our age's teachers should be held accountable for. This goes beyond religious affiliation. The commitment to truth, justice, and compassion should be a universal and deeply ecumenical endeavor that goes beyond particular dogmas. In promoting a commitment to truth, justice, and compassion (and not necessarily just that) I believe that we will be living in the spirit of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* wherein the health and welfare of society is dependent on its fidelity to the Dharma, the true nature of reality.

## The Subversive Nature of Nichiren's Prophetic Stance

### IV Honen, Slanderer of the True Dharma

#### The Traveler, Still Furious, Persisted

WNSD1: p. 118

WND: p. 12

The guest is very upset by the host's accusation that evil monks have misled the rulers of Japan. To say this is to question the judgment of the rulers. So the guest wants to know who exactly he is accusing and on what grounds. Here we have come to the potentially subversive nature of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*. Nichiren was very much in the mold of a Biblical Hebrew prophet. He "spoke the truth to power" as some people say today. The Hebrew prophets were not fortunetellers, though unfortunately that is how many people often view them. Primarily the prophets were charged by God to warn the rulers and the people that they were leading their country to ruin by defying God's demands. These demands almost always concerned fidelity to God and to God's call for justice. The prophet's predictions were actually warnings of what would happen if the nation did not change course, and words of hope if they did repent and reform. Like the prophets, Nichiren came before the rulers of Japan with words of warning and words of hope. Unlike the prophets, Nichiren was not the representative of a deity but of the Buddha Dharma. He came before the rulers and the people with a call to fidelity to the Truth and to a way of life that would restore justice and compassion to his society based upon the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Nichiren was a patriot, because he cared deeply about the welfare of the people of Japan. But his patriotism was not the idolatrous nationalism that says, "my country right or wrong." Rather, Nichiren's patriotism was of the sort that caused him to risk his life by telling those in power what he believed they needed to do to align Japan with the Wonderful Dharma so that true peace and prosperity could be restored and maintained. Of course in doing so he had to challenge the status quo of the military government and its patronage of

Buddhist movements which Nichiren believed were leading the country away from the true intent of the Buddha's teachings.

It is important to remember that Nichiren was not just persecuted for holding unorthodox religious views. In the first place, Nichiren's views, at the time of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, were not very far off from T'ien-t'ai orthodoxy. Rather, Nichiren's critique was subversive because he questioned the judgment of the ruling Hojo regency that controlled the religious establishment at that time. Military governments like the Kamakuran shogunate do not take well to having their judgment questioned, and Nichiren seems to have realized this would be the reaction to his criticisms, which is why he has the guest respond as he does in this passage.

Review of Pure Land Buddhism Part 1: The *Triple Pure Land Sutras*

The Master Replied

WNSD1: p. 118 - 123

WND: p. 12 – 15

The host's reply to the guest commences the most complex part of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*. At this point, Nichiren moves from a general outline of the situation facing Japan to a specific critique of Honen's magnum opus, the *Senchaku Hongan Nembutsu Shu* (*Collection of Passages on the Nembutsu and the Original Vow*), usually referred to simply as the *Senchaku Shu*. Honen and the *Senchaku Shu* were very well known to Nichiren and his contemporaries. Likewise the tradition of Pure Land Buddhism in East Asia which this section discusses in detail was also very well known; so Nichiren did not have to provide any background, but took it for granted that his audience knew what he was talking about. In our case, however, we need to become familiar with the larger context in which Nichiren was writing, starting with the very beginnings of Pure Land Buddhism.

As has already been explained, starting around the first century B.C.E. the Buddha's teachings that had been passed down by means of oral transmission were put into writing. Alongside the Pali Canon and the Agamas, the earliest of the Mahayana sutras were also written down. The Mahayana canon, however, grew and evolved over a period of several hundred years. Even individual sutras like the *Lotus Sutra* took several centuries to achieve the form by which they are known today. While the Mahayana sutras take the basic teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha as found in the Pali Canon or the Agamas as their starting point, they also attempt to go beyond them in terms of subtlety of understanding, spiritual aspiration, and the scope of liberation. The Mahayana sutras especially emphasize and elaborate on the teaching of the emptiness of all phenomena and the bodhisattva way consisting of the six perfections of generosity, discipline, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom. They also introduce the concept of celestial buddhas who have created pure lands throughout the

universe into which sentient beings can be reborn after death and thereby enjoy the most suitable environment with the best conditions for completing their bodhisattva practices and attaining buddhahood. The *Triple Pure Land Sutras* that became so influential throughout East Asia expound on the most popular buddha and pure land of all - Amitabha Buddha (aka Amitayus) and the Pure Land of the West. These sutras are: the *Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life*, the *Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life*, and the *Pure Land Sutra*.

The *Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life* (aka the *Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra*, Jap. *Muryoju-kyo*) originated in India and was first translated into Chinese in the second century C.E. It tells the story of a bodhisattva named Dharmakara (Dharma Treasury) who made 48 vows to create the best of all pure lands in the western region of the universe beyond all known worlds wherein all beings could attain enlightenment. In fulfilling his vows he became a buddha known either as Amitabha (Infinite Light) or Amitayus (Infinite Life). The 18<sup>th</sup> vow in particular became known in the Pure Land tradition as the Original Vow that expressed his true intention for all beings. The 18<sup>th</sup> vow states:

If, when I attain buddhahood, sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions, who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me, desire to be born in my land, and call my name even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain perfect enlightenment. Excluded, however, are those who commit the five gravest offences and abuse the Wonderful Dharma. (Adapted from *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, p. 243)

Alternatively, the part that is usually translated as "call my name" could be translated as "are mindful of my name." The Japanese term "nembutsu" which refers to the chanting of the name of Amitabha Buddha could mean either "calling on" or "being mindful of the Buddha." In short, the 18<sup>th</sup> vow states Amitabha Buddha's intention that all who call upon his name be reborn in his Pure Land of the West. In Japan, the nembutsu became the practice of chanting "Namu Amida Butsu," which means "Devotion to Amitabha Buddha."

The exclusionary clause in this vow refers to those who “commit the five grave offences” which are: (1) killing one’s father, (2) or mother, (3) or an arhat, (4) injuring the Buddha (it is believed that a buddha cannot be killed due to accident or foul play but only injured), (5) creating a schism in the Sangha. These five acts are so heinous that one who commits them is said to be reborn in hell immediately upon dying. “Abusing the Wonderful Dharma” refers to the “Saddharma,” the same “Wonderful Dharma” that also appears in the title of the *Lotus Sutra*. Abusing the Wonderful Dharma means to disparage, misrepresent, or neglect the true intent of the Buddha’s teachings as expressed, for instance, in the *Lotus Sutra*. Pure Land Buddhists sometimes claim that this “exclusionary clause” was just a warning and that Amitabha Buddha in fact excludes no one. Nichiren, however, took this passage at its word. I will return to this point later.

Later on Shakyamuni Buddha, who is relating the story of Amitabha Buddha, states that this teaching will outlast all the others:

I have expounded this teaching for the sake of sentient beings and enabled you to see Amitayus and all in his land. Strive to do what you should. After I have passed into nirvana, do not allow doubt to arise. In the future, the Buddhist scriptures and teachings will perish. But, out of pity and compassion, I will especially preserve this sutra and maintain it in the world for a hundred years more. Those beings that encounter it will attain deliverance in accord with their aspiration. (Ibid, p. 312)

The *Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* (Jap. *Kammuryoju-kyo*) was allegedly translated into Chinese from the Sanskrit in the fifth century but no extant Sanskrit or even Tibetan copy of it has been found. It opens with story of Prince Ajatashatru's palace coup. At the urging of Devadatta who had ambitions to take over the Sangha, Prince Ajatashatru imprisoned his father, King Bimbisara, and tried to starve him to death. Queen Vaidehi, however, smuggled food and drink on her person when visiting her husband in the dungeon and thereby kept him alive. When Ajatashatru found out about this he threatened to cut her down himself with his sword but was restrained by one of

his ministers and the physician Jivaka. Instead, he had her locked away in the palace. Filled with despair she looked to Vulture Peak and called out for the Buddha to send his disciples to comfort her with the teaching of the Dharma. Miraculously, the Buddha appeared himself along with Ananda and Maudgalyayana. Queen Vaidehi then asked the Buddha what she had done to deserve such an evil son, and also why was it that the Buddha had such an evil cousin as Devadatta. Apparently these questions were taken as rhetorical because they are not answered in this sutra (though the Buddha does discuss his past karmic relations with Devadatta in the *Lotus Sutra*). Queen Vaidehi then asks if there is a land where she can be reborn where she will be free of sorrow and afflictions. The rest of the sutra is the Buddha's response as he teaches a total of 16 subjects for contemplation. The first 13 deal with various aspects of the Pure Land of the West and of Amitabha Buddha and his two attendants Avalokiteshvara (Regarder of the Cries of the World) Bodhisattva and Mahasthamaprapta (Gainer of Great Strength) Bodhisattva. The last 3 deal with contemplations involving those of high, middle or low spiritual capacity and their response to the saving power of Amitabha Buddha. The power of simply hearing and saying the name of Amitabha Buddha is especially stressed towards the end of this sutra.

The *Pure Land Sutra* (aka the *Smaller Sukhavativyuha Sutra* Jap. *Amida-kyo*) was translated into Chinese by Kumarajiva in the fifth century. In it, the Buddha expounds the benefits of calling on the name of Amitabha or Amitayus and also the advantages of aspiring to birth in the Pure Land of the West.

Though there were a multitude of pure lands with resident celestial buddhas distributed throughout the universe according to the Mahayana sutras, Amitabha Buddha and his Pure Land of the West became the most popular because it was believed that this buddha and his pure land manifested the virtues of them all. Best of all was the fact that one needs only call upon Amitabha's name to be reborn there. Because these three sutras in particular emphasized the power of simply calling upon Amitabha Buddha's name, they

soon eclipsed all other Pure Land sutras, including even those about Amitabha Buddha. As we shall soon see, they even threatened to eclipse the rest of the Buddha Dharma altogether.

## Review of Pure Land Buddhism Part 2: Pure Land Buddhism in India and China

Pure Land Buddhists in East Asia often point to the great Indian Mahayana patriarchs Nagarjuna (c. 150-250) and Vasubandhu (c. 320-400) as advocates for the practice of Pure Land Buddhism. Nagarjuna, the founder of the Madhyamika school of Indian Mahayana Buddhism, is credited with writing the *Commentary on the Ten Stage Sutra* (a sutra which is actually a chapter in the *Flower Garland Sutra*) in which it is said that there is a way of difficult practice to attain enlightenment through self-cultivation and a way of easy practice to attain enlightenment by thinking of and calling upon the names of the buddhas of the ten directions. Devotion to Amitabha Buddha is especially recommended. The practice of keeping in mind and visualizing Amitabha Buddha in this commentary is not based upon the aforementioned *Triple Pure Land Sutras* but rather upon another early Mahayana sutra called the *Pratyutpanna Samadhi Sutra* (*Sutra on the Meditation to Behold the Buddhas*). As we shall see, the *Pratyutpanna Sutra* would come to have a great influence on Chinese Buddhist practice, but would eventually lose its place to the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* within the Pure Land Buddhist tradition.

Vasubandhu, one of the founders of the Indian Yogacara school of Buddhism, is credited with writing the *Hymns of Aspiration for Birth [in the Pure Land]*, which is also known as the *Discourse on the Pure Land* when its auto-commentary is included. The *Hymns of Aspiration for Birth* is a commentary on the *Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life* and it emphasizes the visualization of Amitabha Buddha, the merit contained in his name, and the saving power of his 18<sup>th</sup> vow.

In China, the monk Hui-yuan (334-416) is regarded as the founder of the Pure Land tradition. According to the traditional account, in the year 402 he gathered together 123 fellow monks, hermits, and literati together on Mt. Lu and founded the White Lotus Society. The White Lotus Society dedicated themselves to the practice of the *Pratyutpanna Sutra*, which was translated into

Chinese in the 2nd century C.E. Their practice consisted of chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha and visualizing the buddha and his Pure Land of the West. They also rigorously observed the precepts and their aim was to retire from the world and aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land. They did not try to spread this teaching among the masses and Hui-yuan's group passed away along with its founders. However, it was to serve as an inspiration for later Pure Land practitioners and other groups going by the name of the White Lotus Society or more simply the Lotus Society in later times.

The practice of devotion to Amitabha Buddha also became a part of the T'ien-t'ai school from its inception. The founder, Chih-i (538-597), made Pure Land Buddhism an integral part of his system of meditative practice. Chih-i's major work, the *Great Concentration and Insight*, describes four kinds of meditation practice: (1) constant sitting, (2) constant walking, (3) half-walking and half-sitting, and (4) neither walking nor sitting. The constant walking meditation practice was based upon the *Pratyutpanna Sutra*. It consisted of circumambulating a statue of Amitabha Buddha while chanting that Buddha's name and visualizing him.

Pure Land Buddhism quickly became a major feature of just about all forms of Chinese Buddhism. After the persecution of Buddhism by the Emperor Wu in 845, only the Pure Land and Zen schools continued to flourish in China. The Zen school initially held itself aloof from and even criticized Pure Land Buddhism, but in the end Zen Masters such as Yung-ming (904-975) and Chu-hung (1535-1615) incorporated Pure Land Buddhism into the Zen school.

The Pure Land Buddhism which survived the persecution of 845 and which attained mass appeal throughout East Asia was not, however, the Pure Land Buddhism of the *Pratyutpanna Sutra* championed by Hui-yuan or Chih-i. Rather, it was the form of Pure Land Buddhism inspired by the *Triple Pure Land Sutras*. This form of Pure Land Buddhism deemphasized the visualization of Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land of the West, and put much greater

emphasis on the 18th vow, called the Original Vow, and the chanting of the name of Amitabha Buddha to the virtual exclusion of all other practices.

Three teachers of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism in particular should be noted because they provided the major source of inspiration for the Pure Land movement of Honen in Japan. These teachers are T'an-luan (476-542), Tao-ch'ò (562-645), and Shan-tao (613-681).

T'an-luan started out as a monk in the Four Treatise school of Chinese Madhyamika Buddhism. When stricken with a grave illness, however, he turned to Taoism in order to discover a way to prolong his life. He then met an Indian monk named Bodhiruci (?-527) who converted him to Pure Land Buddhism by presenting him with translations of the *Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* and the *Discourse on the Pure Land* attributed to Vasubandhu. T'an-luan subsequently wrote a very influential commentary on Vasubandhu's *Discourse*. In his commentary, T'an-luan emphasized four key points: (1) the distinction between the easy way and the difficult way of attaining enlightenment discussed in the *Commentary on the Ten Stage Sutra* attributed to Nagarjuna, (2) the chanting of the name of Amitabha Buddha as a way of eradicating karmic evil, (3) the importance of the mind of faith, (4) and the efficacy of reliance upon the Other-power of Amitabha Buddha as opposed to reliance upon our own limited self-power. These and other teachings of T'an-luan would become important elements in Pure Land Buddhism.

Tao-ch'ò considered himself a disciple of T'an-luan even though the latter had passed away long before Tao-ch'ò was even born. Tao-ch'ò was originally a teacher of the *Nirvana Sutra*; but at age 48, inspired by T'an-luan's teachings and the *Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life*, he became a fervent practitioner and popularizer of Pure Land Buddhism. In particular he taught that the Latter Age of the Dharma had already begun (according to his calculations wherein the age of the True Dharma was believed to have lasted only 500 years) so the difficult Path of Sages was no longer a viable practice for people who

should turn instead to the easy Path of Rebirth in the Pure Land.

Shan-tao was the direct disciple of T'an-luan and came to enjoy even greater esteem than his master. He wrote the *Commentary on the Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* that would have an enormous impact on Pure Land Buddhism. Shan-tao divided all Buddhist practice into those practices that were based upon *the Triple Pure Land Sutras* and all those that were not. He termed the former the correct, and the latter the miscellaneous practices. Shan-tao then selected the practice of chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha as the practice that would assure rebirth in the Pure Land of the West, and referred to four other devotional practices as auxiliary practices. Shan-tao also expounded the three kinds of faith discussed in the *Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life Sutra* as essential for rebirth: sincere faith, deep faith, and the faith that aspires to rebirth in the Pure Land. Finally, Shan-tao provided a very graphic depiction of the way of Pure Land Buddhism in terms of his famous parable of the two rivers and the white path. All of these ideas and images would appear prominently in the teachings of the Japanese Pure Land movement begun by Honen.

## Review of Pure Land Buddhism Part 3: Pure Land Buddhism in Japan

Pure Land Buddhism was a ubiquitous feature of Japanese Buddhism right from the start. The Pure Land Buddhism of the Nara period (710-794) and the Heian period (794-1185) that followed was not the sole practice of reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha nor was it a separate school of Buddhist practice. Rather, as in Chinese Buddhism, nembutsu was a practice utilized by all schools as a form of meditation. As explained before, the term “nembutsu” in fact means “thinking of the Buddha” and does not exclusively mean the vocal recitation of “Namu Amida Butsu.” Nembutsu practice originally included the various forms of contemplation and visualization associated with Amitabha Buddha. Many monks and nuns took up the meditative practices of visualizing Amitabha Buddha and his Pure Land, contemplating his wisdom and virtues, as well as keeping his name in mind or even reciting it out loud. Many Buddhist clergy of all schools and their aristocratic patrons aspired to be reborn in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha so lectures were given on the *Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life*; copies of the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* and the *Pratyutpanna Sutra* abounded; and many statues, paintings and mandalas of Amitabha Buddha, his attendants, and the wonders of his Pure Land were made.

The simple practice of reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha was spread among the common people by wandering holy men like Gyogi (668-749) and later Kuya (903-972) in spite of laws which forbade the unauthorized propagation of Buddhism outside the aristocracy and the official government sponsored temples, whose sole job was to pray for the peace of the nation. However, even this early popularization of vocal nembutsu was not taught as an exclusive practice, and both Gyogi and Kuya and others like them were devoted to the study and practice of Buddhism as a whole. They also dedicated themselves to building bridges, digging wells, clearing roads, setting up hospices and other social welfare projects of practical benefit for the people.

Pure Land practice was also given further impetus by the Tendai school

(the Japanese version of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai school) founded by Saicho (767-822, known posthumously as Dengyo Daishi). Saicho himself aspired to rebirth in the Pure Land, but it was Ennin (794-866, also known as Jikaku Daishi), the third chief abbot of Enryakuji, the main Tendai temple on Mt. Hiei, who established the Jogyo Zammai-do (Hall for Walking Meditation) in 849. This hall was dedicated to the practice of the constant walking meditation taught in the *Great Concentration and Insight* of Chih-i which featured the chanting of nembutsu as discussed previously. After that, Pure Land devotion became an important part of Tendai Buddhism.

The Tendai monk Genshin (942-1017) made an especially important contribution to the development of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan when he wrote his *Ojo-yoshu (Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land)* in 985. The *Ojo-yoshu* was a compilation of passages compiled to warn the reader about the sufferings of the six lower worlds (hells, hungry ghosts, animals, fighting demons, humanity, and the heavens). In particular, its gruesome descriptions of the torments awaiting wrongdoers in the hell realms was intended to cause people to aspire to rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. This work became immensely popular in Japan and even gained acclaim in China. However, even though Genshin had been inspired by Shan-tao, he did not advocate the exclusive practice of vocal nembutsu. In fact, he remained an orthodox Tendai monk who was equally, if not more, devoted to the *Lotus Sutra* as he was to the Pure Land teachings and practices. In fact, Genshin advocates the simple practice of vocal nembutsu only for those whose capacities are so weak that they are incapable of the more disciplined and rigorous practices of the Tendai school encompassing everything from the specifically Pure Land practice of visualizing Amitabha Buddha to the more general Mahayana practice of the six perfections.

This by no means exhausts the many different teachers or approaches to Pure Land Buddhism during the Nara and Heian periods of Japan. Other notable Pure Land practitioners include: Yokan (1033-1111) of the Sanron school who wrote a work called the *Ten Conditions for Rebirth in the Pure Land* which

emphasized the vocal recitation of nembutsu as a primary practice; Ryonin (1072-1134) of the Tendai school who developed the Yuzu Nembutsu (the Nembutsu of Mutual Interpenetration) wherein it is taught that the nembutsu contains the merits of all other practices and one person's practice becomes the practice of all; and Kakuban (1095-1143) of the Shingon school who provided an esoteric explanation for the nembutsu and set the stage for the later development of the Shingi (New Doctrine) school of Shingon in the late 13th century. However, none of these earlier teachers ever tried to establish a separate school or argue for the exclusive practice of vocal nembutsu. Nor did the practice of vocal nembutsu ever become the basis of a powerful mass movement outside the purview of the government authorized schools of Buddhism until Honen inaugurated his Pure Land movement and wrote the *Senchaku Shu*, the *Nembutsu of the Original Vow Chosen Above All*.

## Review of Pure Land Buddhism Part 4: The Life and Teachings of Honen

Honen was the founder of the Jodo Shu, or Pure Land school, and was the first of the Kamakuran reformers. He was born in Mimasaka Province (modern day Okayama Prefecture) as the son of a local samurai. Unfortunately, in the year 1141, the local estate manager for the retired emperor murdered Honen's father over a land dispute. Honen was only eight years old at the time. It is said that, as he lay dying, Honen's father begged Honen not to desire revenge or resort to violence but rather to renounce the world and seek enlightenment instead. It is not known what happened to his mother. What is known is that he went to the local Bodaiji temple to live with his uncle, his mother's younger brother, who was the resident monk there. At age 13, in the year 1145, the talented young man was sent to study at Mt. Hiei, where he was ordained as a Tendai monk two years later. In 1150, disillusioned by the worldliness and brutal power struggles of the *sohei* (warrior monks) at Enryakuji, he moved to the Kurodani area in the western part of the mountain. In Kurodani he studied with Eiku, a disciple of Ryonin, and took the name Honen. There, except for occasional excursions to study in Kyoto or Nara, he spent the next 25 years deeply immersed in the Pure Land teachings and practices that were popular there, especially those of Genshin taught in the *Ojo-yoshu*. It is said that during this time he read the entire Buddhist canon multiple times (Nichiren says seven) in order to determine the best means of salvation in the Latter Age of the Dharma.

In 1175, at the age of 42, Honen chanced upon a passage in Shan-tao's *Commentary on the Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* that he felt clarified everything. The passage asserted that one should simply chant the nembutsu, "Namu Amida Butsu," single-mindedly at all times in order to be reborn in the Pure Land of the West and there attain buddhahood, and that this was the practice that accorded with the Original Vow, or 18<sup>th</sup> vow, of Amitabha Buddha. This became the inspiration for Honen's insistence on the exclusive practice of nembutsu. It was even claimed that Honen received confirmation of

this new form of Pure Land practice from Shan-tao himself in a dream. Honen soon left Kurodani and moved to Kyoto, the imperial capital. He eventually settled in the district known as Otani. There he began to teach all who would listen about the exclusive practice of nembutsu that he insisted could save all people in the Latter Age of the Dharma. According to Honen, all people, without any qualification except faith in Amitabha Buddha, could become assured of rebirth in the Pure Land. In 1186, Honen was given the chance to present and defend his teachings before the leading Buddhist scholars of his day in what is referred to as the Ohara Debate. From that point on his popularity increased and even many of the aristocracy became his followers, including the Fujiwara Regent, Kujo Kanezane (1148-1207). Though Kanezane was deposed in 1196, he continued to be a powerful patron and defender of Honen. Honen's major work, the *Senchaku Shu* was supposedly written at his request in 1198.

But not everyone was impressed by Honen's teachings. The growing popularity of Honen's movement and the excesses of some of his followers particularly distressed the monks of Enryakuji temple on Mt. Hiei. In 1204 they petitioned Emperor Gotoba (1180-1239) to have Honen's exclusive nembutsu movement suppressed. The Tendai monks were especially disturbed by the antinomian tendencies of Honen's disciples Gyoku and Junsai (aka Anraku). Gyoku had achieved notoriety by teaching that one need only say the nembutsu once in order to be saved, and that any practice beyond that was superfluous. Junsai had the dubious reputation of being the handsomest monk in Japan and was quite popular with the noble ladies of Kyoto. Honen and his movement had the sympathy of many at court, so no action was taken against him or his followers at that time. Honen himself repudiated the doctrine of "once-calling" and supposedly expelled Gyoku. He also refuted the idea that by relying on the nembutsu one could continue to indulge in wrongdoing. However, both these ideas seemed to be implied in Honen's own teachings on the saving power of even a single recitation of nembutsu. In order to rein in the excesses of some of his disciples, Honen had them sign a seven-article pledge. The pledge is interesting in that it reveals the kinds of abuses of the Pure Land teachings that

his followers were prone to. The seven articles consisted of the following:

1. You must not, in your devotion to Amida, through ignorance of the sutras and commentaries, adversely criticize the principles of either Shingon or Tendai, or despise the other buddhas and bodhisattvas.

2. The ignorant must not get into angry disputes with men of profound knowledge, who differ from them in the theory and practice of religion.

3. You must not foolishly and narrow-mindedly insist that people of a different faith and practice from your own give up their distinctive religious practices. Never mock them.

4. You must not, in the name of the nembutsu, which you say requires no precepts, encourage people to indulge in meat eating, wine drinking, or sexual misconduct. Never say of people who strictly practice the religious disciplines prescribed by their sect, that they belong to the so-called "miscellaneous practitioners," nor that those who trust in the Buddha's Original Vow never need be afraid of wrongdoing.

5. Ignorant people who are not yet clear in their own minds about moral distinctions, must not willfully press their own ideals upon others, departing from the sacred teachings of the sutras, and opposing the opinions of their teachers. You must not lead the ignorant astray by getting into quarrelsome disputes with them, which can only bring upon you the derision of the learned.

6. A dullard yourself, you must not undertake preaching about the Way, and in ignorance of the Wonderful Dharma, expound all sorts of mistaken doctrines sure to have an adverse influence on ignorant clergy and laypeople.

7. You must not set forth your own opinions contrary to the teaching of the Buddhas, wrongly calling them the views of your teachers.

(adapted from *Honen the Buddhist Saint*, p. 551)

This did not stop the abuses and excesses however. Nor did it quell the criticisms from the Buddhist establishment. In 1205 a new petition requesting the suppression of Honen and his disciples was presented to Retired Emperor Gotoba (he had retired in the past year) from Kofukuji temple. This petition pointed out nine problems with the Pure Land movement of Honen:

1. Starting a new sect without government permission.
2. Painting a doubtful picture representing Amida's light as illuminating only those who call upon his name, but turning away

from those who practice other religious disciplines.

3. Despising Shakyamuni Buddha who impartially taught multifarious doctrines.

4. Putting a stop to all religious disciplines.

5. Rejecting all the gods.

6. Obscuring the Pure Land sutras and commentaries, which teach that other practices might also lead to the same goal.

7. Misrepresenting the meaning of the nembutsu by teaching over reliance on the Original Vow to the exclusion of other good practices.

8. Corrupting the clergy by causing them to neglect monastic discipline.

9. Disturbing the public order.

(adapted from Ibid, p. 562)

Once again, the imperial court did nothing. Unfortunately, the indiscretion of two of his monks, Juren and the aforementioned Junsai, brought about a new crisis in 1206. While Retired Emperor Gotaba was away on a pilgrimage to the Kumano shrine, these two monks held an all night service at the palace at the invitation of some ladies of the court, two of whom were said to have been ordained without permission. It is not certain that anything untoward occurred, but to have monks staying overnight at the palace and ordaining court ladies without any supervision or permission was too much of a scandal to ignore. The enemies of the Pure Land movement finally got their wish in 1207 as the court ordered the execution of Juren, Junsai, and two other disciples, and the laicization followed by exile of Honen and seven of his disciples. Thanks to his influential friends, like the former regent Kujo Kanezane, Honen's exile was comparatively mild. He was sent to the province of Tosa on the island of Shikoku and by the end of the year he was pardoned. He was not allowed to return to the capital however, and so he lived just outside Osaka for four years. In 1211 he was allowed to return to Otani in Kyoto, where he died the following year in 1212.

## Review of Pure Land Buddhism Part 5: The Pure Land School after Honen

In 1212, the very year that Honen passed away, his main work the *Senchaku Shu* was published for the first time. Now the teachers of the established schools of Buddhism were truly outraged, and this time at Honen himself. Prior to his death, Honen may have had his detractors, but most viewed him as an orthodox Tendai monk with a single-minded focus on vocal nembutsu practice and the desire to share it with as many people as possible. In this sense, he fit the mold of earlier Pure Land popularizers like Gyogi or Kuya. Aside from that, he continued to uphold the precepts, he was well known as an ordination master, he participated in the rites of esoteric Buddhism, and he even kept a record of his deep meditative experiences and visualizations which were like those taught in Genshin's *Ojo-yoshu*. With the publication of the *Senchaku Shu*, however, it became clear that the excesses of his disciples might actually have been in accord with the more radical ideas that Honen had kept to himself and his inner circle. The *Senchaku Shu* was roundly condemned, even by those who had formerly held Honen himself in high esteem for his scholarly acumen and personal integrity even as they had looked askance at the Pure Land movement he had inspired.

The first serious critique of Honen was by Koin (1145-1216) of the Onjoji temple of the Tendai school. He wrote the *Jodo Ketsugi Sho (Discerning the Meaning of the Pure Land)* in which he critiqued Honen for saying that only the nembutsu could lead to rebirth in the Pure Land. Koin asserted that the *Lotus Sutra* led to instant rebirth in the Pure Land and that even the *Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* spoke of attaining rebirth in the Pure Land through the recitation of the Mahayana sutras in addition to the nembutsu. Pure Land hagiographies of Honen claim that Honen himself convinced Koin that he was in error, converted him to the Pure Land cause, and that Koin then burned the *Jodo Ketsugi Sho* himself.

A more substantial critique came from Myoe Koben (1172-1232) of the

Kegon school (the older Nara school of Buddhism based on the *Flower Garland Sutra*). The very year of the publication of the *Senchaku Shu* he produced the *Zaijarin (Refuting the Evil Dharma)* to refute it, and one year later he wrote the *Zaijarin Shogonki (Supplementary Writing to Refuting the Evil Dharma)*. Myoe's critique was reinforced in 1225 in the Tendai monk Josho's work *Dan Senchaku (Denouncing the Collection of Passages on the Nembutsu)*. A summary of these critiques is given in *A History of Japanese Religion*:

Koben's main grievances were that Honen had ignored the 'aspiration to enlightenment' (*bodaishin*), which Koben considered to be fundamental to all Buddhism, and that Honen had outrageously compared the Gate of the Holy Path - the Tendai, Shingon, and Kegon sects - to a band of robbers. (The doctrine of the aspiration to enlightenment implies that all living things possess the potential for enlightenment and that they need to arouse and realize that potential.) Koben also claimed that Honen rejected the attainment of enlightenment in this life as a Difficult Practice and insisted that the nembutsu alone was sufficient to ensure rebirth in the Pure Land, there being no need for the aspiration to enlightenment. Yet for Koben, there could be no Buddhism without the aspiration to enlightenment.

Koben described Honen as 'chief destroyer of the Law in the present age,' 'the greatest enemy of Buddhism in the three worlds of the past, present, and future,' and 'a great misleader of sentient beings.' In their objections and the vehemence of their rhetoric, the writings of Koin and Josho resembled those of Koben; together these works fueled the controversy surrounding nembutsu practice and the community of nembutsu believers." (p. 176)

Ryukan (1148-1227), one of Honen's closest disciples, rose to the challenge of countering these refutations. In response to Josho's *Dan Senchaku*, he wrote the *Ken Senchaku (Revealing the Collection of Passages on the Nembutsu)*. The response of Josho and the Tendai school in 1227 was to destroy Honen's tomb and burn the wood blocks used to print the *Senchaku Shu*. This was done with the consent of the imperial court. In addition, the court exiled Ryukan and many other members of the Pure Land movement. Though Ryukan himself did not advocate it, the court especially wanted to get rid of those disciples of Honen who taught the radical doctrine of once-calling, like Jokakubo

Kosai (1163-1247).

These refutations and persecutions did not put a stop to Honen's Pure Land movement. His disciples continued to spread his teachings and gain sympathizers both among the common people and the nobility, and in time even many of the temples of the established schools, such as Tendai and Shingon, became centers of Pure Land practice and devotion following the teachings of Honen.

The mainstream of Honen's Jodo Shu or Pure Land school is considered to be the Chinzei branch of Shokobo Bencho (1162-1238). He met Honen in Kyoto in 1197 and became his disciple in 1199. From 1204 until his death he propagated Honen's teachings in northern Kyushu. Unlike the more radical disciples of Honen, Bencho taught that one should continue to chant the nembutsu throughout one's life as opposed to relying on the single recitation of nembutsu, or once-calling. In addition, he taught that it was possible to attain rebirth in the Pure Land through other practices besides the nembutsu in accordance with the other vows of Amitbaha Buddha. Because his teaching was not so radical or exclusive, he had an easier time gaining support from the Tendai establishment. He is considered to be the second patriarch of the Jodo Shu after Honen.

Ryochu (1199-1287) was a Tendai monk who became Bencho's disciple in 1236. He later moved to Kamakura and received the patronage of Hojo Tsunetoki, the fourth regent, and established the Komyoji Temple there in 1243. He is considered the third patriarch of the Jodo Shu. Ryochu and his disciple Gyobin would later come into conflict with Nichiren in Kamakura. Gyobin in particular made several accusations against Nichiren to the shogunate that led to Nichiren's near execution at Tatsunokuchi in 1271.

There were many other disciples of Honen who also succeeded in spreading his teachings. Zenne Shoku (1177-1247) is notable for bringing about

the acceptance of Honen's teaching among the aristocracy in Kyoto and for founding the more Tendai oriented Seizan branch of the Jodo Shu. One of his grand disciples was Ippen (1239-1289) the founder of the Ji (Timely) school of Pure Land Buddhism that was one of the strongest of the Pure Land schools until the 16th century. Shinran (1173-1262), the founder of the Shin (True) school of Pure Land Buddhism, was also a disciple of Honen. In fact, he was among those exiled in 1204. From the 16th century on the Jodo Shinshu became the most powerful and influential of all the Pure Land schools and one of the largest of all the schools of Japanese Buddhism to this day.

It should be pointed out, however, that until the time of Shogei (1340-1420), the seventh successor of Honen in the Chinzei branch, the Jodo Shu was considered a sub-sect of Tendai and was not able to ordain its own monks or maintain temples not affiliated with Tendai. From the point of view of Nichiren, the Pure Land movement had not been successfully refuted since its followers abounded and the movement lived on, now hosted by the Tendai temples themselves who had gone from critiquing it to accommodating it. Seeing the mass popularity of Honen's teachings and the support given it by its former opponents, Nichiren had this to say in his earlier work the *Shugo Kokka Ron* about the previous critiques of Koin, Myoe, and Josho:

Many books have been written with the aim of refuting this evil doctrine, such as *Discerning the Meaning of the Pure Land*, *Denouncing the Collection of Passages on the Nembutsu*, and *Refuting the Evil Dharma*. Although the authors of these books are all well-known Buddhist monks of high virtue, they have not thoroughly revealed the fundamental reason why the *Collection of Passages on the Nembutsu* discredits the True Dharma. Contrary to their intention, therefore, they only helped to propagate the book. They are like a light drizzle during a severe drought, that helps to kill the trees and grasses instead of reviving them, or like cowardly soldiers placed in the front lines of a battle, who only serve to encourage the powerful enemy. (WNS: D1, p. 4)

Nichiren hoped to make up for this with a more powerful critique grounded on faith in the *Lotus Sutra* and a call to return to Tendai orthodoxy in his *Shugo*

*Kokka Ron* written in 1259 and in his magnum opus the *Rissho Anokoku Ron* in 1260. Now that we have reviewed the background of the target of Nichiren's critique we can return to the *Rissho Anokoku Ron* itself.

## Key Points of the *Senchaku Shu* Part 1: Rejecting the Gateway of the Holy Path

In this section of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, Nichiren summarizes the arguments of Honen from several chapters in the *Senchaku Shu* in order to show exactly what it was about Honen's teaching that he found objectionable. Though English translations of *Rissho Ankoku Ron* make it appear as though these are direct quotations from *Senchaku Shu*, they are actually amalgamations of statements found in each of the chapters of the *Senchaku Shu* that Nichiren examines. These amalgamations serve to draw out and underscore the full implications of Honen's teaching. In 1997, the Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research published a full translation of the *Senchaku Shu* by Morris J. Augustine and Kondo Tessho. Now that a full translation of the *Senchaku Shu* is available in English we can compare Nichiren's summary with Honen's full argument and judge whether Nichiren's citations are accurate assessments of Honen's points. I certainly invite any reader of this commentary to carefully read both the *Senchaku Shu* and the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* and make their own comparisons, but for now I will do my own review of the sections of *Senchaku Shu* that Nichiren honed in on using the Augustine and Tessho translation.

Nichiren begins with a review of chapter 1 of the *Senchaku Shu*. In that chapter Honen starts off citing a long passage from the *Collection of Passages on the Land of Peace and Bliss* by Tao-ch'o that compares what he calls the Holy Path with Rebirth in the Pure Land. Honen then reviews the ways in which other Buddhist schools like the Yogacara (Vijnanavada), Madhyamika, or Flower Garland divided the Buddhist teachings in order to discern which are the most profound. He then says, "Regarding the Pure Land school now under discussion, we see that it has - if we rely on the Dhyana Master Tao-ch'o - set up the Two Gateways encompassing the whole of the Buddha's message: the Gateway of the Holy Path and the Gateway of the Pure Land." (p. 9) Honen then tries to answer the objection that there is no precedent for claiming the existence of a separate Pure Land school by citing the words of revered Chinese masters like

Yuan-hsiao, Tz'u-en (632-682) the founder of the Consciousness Only school in China), and Chia-ts'ai (c. 620-680) who seemingly made reference to the existence of such a school. In any case, he goes on to define what he believes Tao-cho's reference to the Holy Path encompasses:

First, the Gateway of the Holy Path is divided into two parts: one is the Mahayana and the other is the Hinayana. The Mahayana is further divided into the Exoteric and Esoteric, as well as the Provisional and the Real. In the *Collection of Passages on the Land of Peace and Bliss* only the Exoteric and the Provisional Teachings of the Mahayana are treated. Hence, the Holy Path Teachings refer to the circuitous or 'gradual' forms of practice, which requires many kalpas. From this we can infer that the Holy Path Teachings also include the Esoteric and the Real. It follows then that the teachings of all eight contemporary schools - the Shingon, Busshin, Tendai, Kegon, Sanron, Hosso, Jiron, and Shoron - are also included in the Holy Path. We ought to be aware of this. (p.10)

What Honen has done here is to include all forms of Buddhism he was aware of under the rubric of the Holy Path. "Busshin," incidentally, means "Buddha Mind," and that was another name for the Zen school. The phrase, "from this we can infer..." is even an admission on the part of Honen that he has gone beyond what Tao-ch'o explicitly said in including the esoteric school of Shingon and the Tendai school, the latter of which claimed to teach the definitive (called the "Real" in the passage quoted) as opposed to provisional Buddha Dharma insofar as it upheld the *Lotus Sutra*. But of course any of the schools listed would claim that their teaching was definitive and not provisional. Honen has basically ignored all the sectarian classifications of the other schools, such as exoteric and esoteric, provisional and real, by asserting the schema of his own Pure Land school and sweeping all of the other groups, no matter how they may have defined themselves, into the category of the Gateway of the Holy Path as compared to the Gateway of the Pure Land. And how do these two gateways measure up to each other and which should one choose? Honen's view is very clear:

Now the reason why Tao-ch'o, in his *Collection*, set up the distinction between the Two Gateways of the Holy Path and the Pure Land was to teach people to reject the Gateway of the Holy Path in favor of entering the Gateway of the Pure Land. (p. 12)

Honen then claims that other revered Chinese teachers made the same distinctions including T'an-luan, T'ien-t'ai, Chia-ts'ai, Tz'u-en and others. He then cites T'an-luan in a passage where the authority of Nagarjuna is in turn invoked:

To begin with Dharma Master T'an-luan, we see that he stated in his *Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth in the Pure Land*: "Let us reverently reflect on what the Bodhisattva Nagarjuna said in his *Treatise Explaining the Ten Stages*. He declared that there are two paths by which the Bodhisattvas may seek the Stage of Non-Retrogression: one is the Way of Difficult Practice and the other is the Way of Easy Practice." (p. 12)

Honen then makes the following identifications for his readers: "In this context, the Way of Difficult Practice is the Gateway of the Holy Path, and the Way of Easy Practice is the Gateway of the Pure Land." (p.13)

Honen cites some passages from Tz'u-en that contrast the difficult practice of those who follow the three vehicles (the way of the Buddha's monastic disciples, the solitary contemplatives, and the bodhisattvas) and those who simply call upon the name of Amitabha Buddha to attain rebirth in the Pure Land. Honen again identifies the three vehicles and rebirth in the Pure Land with the Gateway of the Holy Path and the Gateway of the Pure Land respectively. He then goes on to make his essential point:

He who would learn of the Pure Land school should first of all understand the import of the above passages. Even though a man may have previously studied the Gateway of the Holy Path, if he feels an inclination toward the Gateway of the Pure Land, he should set aside the Holy Path and take refuge in the Pure Land. (p.14)

Honen points to T'an-luan and Tao-ch'o as two revered teachers of former

times who did just that. He ends the chapter by positing several alternate transmissions or “blood lineages” for the Pure Land school and specifies that he is concerned only with the lineage of Tao-ch’o and Shan-tao.

It is clear from these passages that Honen is advocating that people “reject” and “set aside” the Gateway of the Holy Path. And that encompasses rejecting and setting aside all other teachings and practices of Buddhism other than those of the Pure Land school, including the Tendai school and the *Lotus Sutra*. For Nichiren, a devotee of the *Lotus Sutra*, this was unconscionable.

## Key Points of the *Senchaku Shu* Part 2: Casting Aside the Miscellaneous Practices

Next, Nichiren turns to chapter 2 of the *Senchaku Shu* that deals with teachings of Shan-tao in his *Commentary on the Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life*. Honen quotes a long passage from that work which elucidates Shan-tao's division of all Buddhist practices into "correct" or "right" practices and "miscellaneous" practices and then dividing the "correct" practices into the "rightly established act" and the "auxiliary acts." Honen starts his own summary of this by stating:

As to the first, elucidation of the practices proper for Rebirth, according to Master Shan-tao, the practices leading to Rebirth are many but can be grouped under two major divisions: the Right and the Miscellaneous Practices. (p. 18)

Honen then reviews the five right practices according to Shan-tao:

1. The right practice of chanting the *Triple Pure Land Sutras*
2. The right practice of contemplating Amitabha Buddha and his Pure Land
3. The right practice of doing reverence to Amitabha Buddha
4. The right practice of uttering the name of Amitabha Buddha
5. The right practice of giving praise and offerings to Amitabha Buddha

Then, in accord with the passage from Shan-tao, Honen specifies that the right practice of uttering the name of Amitabha Buddha (the nembutsu) is the rightly established act whereas the other four practices are to be considered auxiliary.

All other Buddhist practices of chanting sutras, contemplation, doing reverence, uttering the names of the buddhas, and giving praise and offerings to other buddhas, bodhisattvas or deities aside from those focused on Amitabha Buddha and the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* are to be considered miscellaneous

practices along with the practice of the six perfections and all other forms of Buddhist cultivation and devotion. Nichiren is particularly concerned with the dismissal of the recitation of any other sutra beside the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* as miscellaneous and the dismissal of doing reverence to any other buddha but Amitabha Buddha as miscellaneous, because this means that the chanting of the *Lotus Sutra* and the giving of reverence to Shakyamuni Buddha are being compared unfavorably to the chanting of the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* and the giving of reverence to Amitabha Buddha. Here are those two passages from the *Senchaku Shu* in full:

Regarding the first, the Miscellaneous Practice of Sutra-Chanting, with the exception of the above-mentioned *Meditation Sutra* and others pertaining to Rebirth in the Pure Land, cherishing and chanting the sutras, whether Mahayana or Hinayana, whether Exoteric or Esoteric, is called the Miscellaneous Practice of Sutra-Chanting. (p. 21)

Regarding the third, the Miscellaneous Practice of Doing Reverence, with the exception of the above-mentioned reverence to Amida, all forms of worshipping and showing reverence to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as well as to the various divinities, are called the Miscellaneous Practice of Doing Reverence. (p. 21)

Honen then makes the claim that in regard to the correct and miscellaneous practices, the correct practices will allow the practitioner to become more intimate with Amitabha Buddha while the miscellaneous practices will lead to estrangement. The correct practices will allow the practitioner to become closer to Amitabha Buddha while the miscellaneous practices will lead far away from him. The correct practices can be performed without ceasing whereas the other practices can only be performed intermittently. The merit from the correct practices are naturally utilized for the purpose of enabling rebirth in the Pure Land of the West, whereas the miscellaneous practices will only do so if there is a specific intention to dedicate the merit for that purpose. The correct practices are pure in that they lead directly to rebirth in the Pure Land whereas the miscellaneous practices do not lead directly there. Honen then provides what

he claims are precedents for the categorization of things into pure and miscellaneous in the Buddhist canon and the works of past teachers, but none of them have any relevance to this particular division.

In regard to the idea that the nembutsu is the exclusive practice that surpasses all the other right practices, Honen cites not only Shan-tao but also his master Tao-ch'ō and Shan-tao's own disciple Huai-kan (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries). In this way he attempts to show that this was not merely Shan-tao's private opinion.

Finally, Honen ends the second chapter of the *Senchaku Shu* with another long passage from Shan-tao, this time from his *Hymns in Praise of Rebirth* that compares the odds of benefiting from the correct practices with the odds of benefiting from the miscellaneous practices. Honen then summarizes this passage from Shan-tao as his own final statement regarding the relative merits of the correct and miscellaneous practices in this chapter.

I believe that anyone who reads these words ought to cast aside the Miscellaneous and take up the Exclusive Practice. Why should anyone cast aside the Exclusive and Right Practice, by which a hundred out of a hundred attain Rebirth, and stubbornly cling to the Miscellaneous Practices, by which not even one out of a thousand attains Rebirth? Practitioners ought to seriously ponder this. (p. 28)

Nichiren saw that Honen was not merely advocating Pure Land Buddhism but was actually recommending that Buddhists cast aside the most important scripture of all, the *Lotus Sutra*, and the most important buddha of all, Shakyamuni Buddha. According to Honen's logic, chanting the *Lotus Sutra* or expressing reverence for Shakyamuni Buddha must be considered miscellaneous practices that can not bring about rebirth in the Pure Land and therefore should be "cast aside" in favor of the right practices of Pure Land Buddhism and in particular the rightly established practice of the exclusive nembutsu.

## Key Points of the *Senchaku Shu* Part 3: Closing the Gateway of the Mahayana Sutras

At this point, Nichiren skips ahead to the 12th chapter of the *Senchaku Shu* wherein Honen discusses the transmission of the nembutsu to Ananda by Shakyamuni Buddha in the *Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* in accordance with the interpretation of that sutra by Shan-tao. As was mentioned earlier in the review of that sutra, in it are taught 16 subjects for contemplation. The first 13 involve various visualization practices concerning Amitabha Buddha and his Pure Land of the West. The last 3 describe the practices of the high, middle, and lower grades of spiritual aspirant. Each of these can be further subdivided into high, middle, and lower class for a total of nine classes of people. Honen, following Shan-tao, categorizes the first 13 as the contemplative good practices and the practices of the high, middle, and lower grades as the distractive practices because they can be performed even when the mind is distracted outside the formal practice of meditation. These practices include such things as acts of filial piety, not harming others and cultivating compassion, taking refuge, following the precepts, recitation of the Mahayana sutras, deep faith in the law of cause and effect, and aspiring to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

Honen claims that, while these practices are meritorious, they were not the practices that the Buddha transmitted to Ananda for posterity. In fact, he states that they were taught in order to highlight the superiority of the nembutsu by way of contrast. This is so because the contemplative and distractive practices are not in accord with the true intention revealed in the Original Vow of Amitabha Buddha, the 18<sup>th</sup> vow. The nembutsu, on the other hand, is in accord with the vow and is the easy and all-inclusive way for people to attain rebirth without any other required practice.

This means that recitation of the Mahayana sutras, including the *Lotus Sutra*, is one of the practices that Honen states are no longer required because

the Buddha intended to transmit the nembutsu alone to Ananda. Honen even provides a counter argument to the claim that the *Lotus Sutra* would be an exception since it is the Buddha's highest teaching. Honen specifies:

Reference was made simply to "the Mahayana sutras." No distinction was intended between Provisional and Real Teachings. That being the case, the phrase correctly applies equally to such Mahayana sutras as the *Avatamsaka* and *Vaipulya*, as well as to those like the *Prajna*, the *Lotus*, and the *Nirvana*. (p. 111)

Those familiar with T'ien-t'ai teaching might note that the sutras mentioned in the above passage are the sutras used to name the four groups of Mahayana sutras that are listed in the sutra classification scheme known as the "five flavors" or "periods" of the Dharma. According to the teaching of the five periods of the Dharma the Buddha taught the *Avatamsaka* or *Flower Garland Sutra* right after his enlightenment. Seeing that only advanced bodhisattvas could understand that teaching the Buddha went to the Deer Park and began to teach the so-called Hinayana teachings instead, of which the four noble truths are representative. After twelve years the Buddha decided that his disciples were ready to hear Mahayana teachings, and so began teaching the *Vaipulya* or *Expansive* sutras that introduced Mahayana themes like the bodhisattva vows and the existence of the celestial buddhas and their pure lands. After eight years of this the Buddha decided that his disciples were ready for the teachings concerning emptiness and so taught the *Prajna Paramita* or *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras. After 22 years of this, the Buddha decided that the time was ripe to teach the *Lotus Sutra* in which he revealed the One Vehicle that leads all beings to buddhahood and also the teaching that the Buddha's enlightened life span is unborn and deathless. These teachings took up the last eight years of his life and were reiterated in the *Nirvana Sutra* taught from his deathbed. So the names of the sutras in this passage are also the names of the periods of time wherein the Buddha taught the Mahayana according to the five period classification scheme of the T'ien-t'ai school. Nichiren, however, does not cite this passage with its reference to the T'ien-t'ai formula that might not be familiar

to his intended audience, even though it specifically mentions the *Lotus Sutra* as included in the practice of “reciting Mahayana sutras.” Instead, he cites the following passage from *Senchaku Shu* that also clearly shows how inclusive Honen’s reference to Mahayana sutras was meant to be:

Now with regards to the sutras that have already been brought over and translated, the *Chen-yuan Catalogue of Scriptures Contained in the Pitaka*, compiled in the T’ang Dynasty contains a total of 637 texts of Mahayana sutras, both exoteric and esoteric, in 2883 fascicles. They begin with the *Larger Prajnaparamita Sutra* of 600 fascicles and end with the *Sutra of the Dharma’s Eternal Dwelling*. All these should certainly be understood as included in the one phrase: “reading and reciting the Mahayana sutras.” (p. 110)

In the concluding section of chapter 12 of the *Senchaku Shu*, Honen unequivocally states that only the practice of the nembutsu is good for all time, whereas the 13 contemplative practices and the 3 distractive practices, including the recitation of all the Mahayana sutras, which were only taught provisionally by the Buddha will not remain.

One ought to clearly understand that Shakyamuni first opened the Gateway of the Contemplative and Distractive Good Practices in response to the wishes of the people. He later closed this gateway in accordance with his own wish. The only gateway that, once opened, will remain unclosed for long eons is that of the Nembutsu. Practitioners should know this is the intent of Amida’s Original Vow and of Shakyamuni’s act of entrusting it [to Ananda]. (p. 118)

Nichiren saw that Honen was trying to make the case that the Buddha himself had “closed” the gateway to all the Mahayana sutras, including the *Lotus Sutra*, with the presumable exception of the *Triple Pure Land Sutras*. Again, Honen was not merely advocating the practice of nembutsu alongside other Mahayana practices. He was arguing that the whole rationale of Pure Land Buddhism rests upon the closing of the Mahayana sutras in order to open the way to the nembutsu alone. Furthermore, he was claiming the authority of past masters such as Shan-tao, and ultimately appealing to the authority of

Shakyamuni Buddha himself in order to close the gateway to the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha.

## Key Points of the *Senchaku Shu* Part 4: The Band of Robbers in the Parable of the White Path

Next, Nichiren turns back to chapter 8 of the *Senchaku Shu* that almost entirely consists of a very long citation from Shan-tao's *Commentary on the Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life*. The passage cited elaborates on the meaning of the three kinds of faith needed to attain rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha: sincere faith, deep faith, and the faith that aspires to rebirth in the Pure Land. In the course of this explanation Shan-tao tells his famous parable of the white path. This parable came to have a great impact on the popular understanding of East Asian Pure Land Buddhism, and its imagery can still be seen in popular entertainment in East Asia to this day. For this reason, it is worth quoting the parable in full along with Shan-tao's explanation of it:

Now I should like to say something for the sake of everyone who desires Rebirth. I wish to relate a parable in order to protect the faith in their minds and defend it from foreign and heretical views. What is this?

Imagine a man intending to travel hundreds and thousands of miles to the West. Unexpectedly he comes upon two rivers blocking the roadway. The one to the south is a river of fire while the north is of water. Each is a hundred paces across, bottomless in depth, and stretches endlessly to the north and south.

Exactly between the two streams of fire and water, there is a single white pathway about four or five inches wide which extends a hundred paces, from the eastern to the western shores. The waves of the water river surge over and submerge the path; the flames of the fire river rise up and sear it. Both the water and the fire continually surge over the passageway without rest.

The man, upon reaching this faraway deserted place, finds no one there except a large band of robbers and savage beasts. Seeing the man alone, they come racing after him intending to kill him. The man, fearing that death is imminent, turns and runs straight toward the West. But suddenly he sees those great rivers, and he says to himself, "I see no shore of these rivers, either to the north or south, but between them I see a single white path. It is extremely narrow.

The distance between shores is not great, but how shall I cross? Surely I am doomed to die today! If I try to turn back, the band of robbers and savage beasts will close in for the kill. Certainly if I try to avoid them and flee to the north or south, there too savage beasts and poisonous insects will come racing to swarm upon me. If I go West and try to flee along the path, in all probability I shall fall into the stream of fire and water.” At this point, his fear is too great to be described. He reflects further, “If I turn back, I shall die. If I stay here, I shall also die. If I go forward, I face the same fate. Since there is no escape from certain death, I had better go straight ahead over the narrow path that lies before me. Since a path exists, one must surely be able to cross over on it.”

While he is thinking in this way, from the eastern bank he suddenly hears someone encouraging him saying, “Oh traveler, simply make up your mind firmly to try to cross on this path and you will surely escape the pangs of death! If you linger here, you will surely die!” Then he hears someone else on the western shore calling and saying, “Oh traveler! Single-mindedly and with full concentration come straightforward. I can protect you! Do not worry about the horrors of falling into the fire or the water.”

Hearing one voice urging him on and the other beckoning him, he is able to steel his own body and mind properly, and he firmly resolves to cross over the path. He goes straight forward, allowing no doubt or uncertainty to arise in his mind. But after a step or two, he hears the gang of robbers on the eastern shore shouting, “Turn back, traveler! The path is dangerous! You cannot possibly pass over it. You will surely die! Our band means you no harm.” But the traveler, even though he hears the voices calling him, does not go back or even glance behind him. Single-mindedly he moves straightforward concentrating on the path before him. Soon he reaches the western bank, free forever from all possible dangers. Then in the company of good friends who have come to greet him, he rejoices greatly forever.

This is the parable. Now let me explain what it means. The eastern bank corresponds to our Saha world that is like a house on fire; the western bank is the Treasure Land of Supreme Bliss. The gang of robbers pretending to be kind-hearted and the pack of savage beasts represent the elements that make up all human beings: the six organs of sense, the six forms of consciousness and their six objects, the five aggregates, and the four elements. The barren and uninhabited marsh corresponds to [our condition] in which we are always tempted by evil companions and are never able to meet a true and good teacher.

The two rivers of water and of fire are like greedy love that floods

the hearts of all sentient beings and their hatred which burns like fire. The white path only four or five inches wide between the two rivers corresponds to the awakening of the pure mind that desires Rebirth in the midst of the evil passions of greed and anger. Because such greed and anger are strong, they are likened to fire and flood, whereas the good mind, being delicate, is like the white path. The surging waves that always wash over the path are like the covetousness that constantly arises to defile good hearts. The fire ceaselessly sending its flames burning over the path is like the anger and hatred of our hearts whose flames threaten to devour the Dharma treasury of merit and virtue.

The traveler turning directly to the West to cross over the paths is like the practitioner turning straight to the West to transfer all his meritorious practices toward Rebirth. The fact that the traveler heard the voice on the eastern shore urging him to go forward and follow the path directly toward the West refers to people who, even after Shakyamuni has passed away, are able to follow the teaching of his Dharma, which still abides even though they no longer see the Buddha. The words of his teaching then are like the voice.

The traveler being called back by the band of robbers after taking only one or two steps shows that those followers of other doctrines and practices, or men with evil views who confuse others by their views and opinions, themselves commit sin and fall away from the path by teaching their views and opinions. By themselves committing sins, they regress and lose what little they had. The person on the western shore calling out to the traveler is Amida expressing his intent to save all beings through his Vow.

The traveler's quick arrival on the western shore, joining his good friends and rejoicing in their company, is like sentient beings when they reach their final destination after having long been submerged in the sea of birth and death, deluded and bound by their evil passions, transmigrating for endless kalpas without knowing how to emancipate themselves. Favored by Shakyamuni who kindly encourages them by pointing to the West and turning them in that direction, and blessed with Amida Buddha's compassionate heart inviting and beckoning them, they now trust in the intent of the two honorable ones without even taking notice of the two rivers of flame and water.

Remembering without fail the Original Vow, they take the path of the Vow's power. After death they can attain Rebirth in that Land, where they will meet the Buddha and where their joy will know no bounds." (pp. 78 - 82)

Towards the conclusion of chapter 8 of the *Senchaku Shu*, Honen makes it clear who he believes are the band of robbers who try to call back the traveler.

Further, the passage above that refers to “all other interpretations, other practices, differing teachings, differing views” is speaking about the various interpretations, practices, and views of the Gateway of the Holy Path. (p. 84)

In the *Samyutta Nikaya* there is a tale called the “Simile of the Vipers” (*Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 1237) in which a man flees four deadly vipers and six murderous enemies and escapes them by taking a raft across a great expanse of water to the safety of the far shore. In this parable the vipers and the murderers also represent the elements of human life, the great expanse of water also represents cravings and delusion, the raft represents the eightfold path, the far shore represents nirvana, and attaining the far shore represents attaining the state of an arhat - the liberated person who is free of the world of birth and death. Shan-tao was most likely familiar with this parable or some version of it and adapted it to illustrate the Pure Land teachings. It is in many ways a very encouraging and easily adaptable parable that could be applied to many spiritual paths.

Honen, however, used the parable in such a way that he effectively branded all those who followed the more traditional schools and teachings a “band of robbers.” Honen clearly identifies the Gateway of the Holy Path with the band of robbers in Shan-tao’s version of the parable and as we saw before, the Gateway of the Holy Path according to Honen is definitely inclusive of the Tendai school and the teachings and practice of the *Lotus Sutra*.

## Key Points of the *Senchaku Shu* Part 5: Lay Aside, Abandon, and Set Aside All but the Nembutsu

Nichiren concludes his review of the *Senchaku Shu* with a passage from chapter 16. In many ways the passage is the climax of the *Senchaku Shu*. In it, Honen brings his argument to a conclusion and states that in order to be reborn in the Pure Land one should practice the nembutsu alone and set aside all other practices. The rest of the chapter is taken up with Honen's reasons for relying specifically on Shan-tao and his *Commentary on the Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life*. Nichiren only quotes the passage up to the point where Honen advises setting aside miscellaneous practices, but in order to show the full extent of Honen's radical exclusivism, I will provide Honen's full statement concerning what needs to be set aside in favor of nembutsu. The passage is as follows:

When I consider the matter carefully, I wish to urge that anyone who desires to escape quickly from the cycle of birth and death should decide between the two types of the excellent Dharma, lay aside the Holy Path for awhile, and choose to enter through the Gateway of the Pure Land. If such a person should desire to enter through the Gateway of the Pure Land, he or she should decide between the Right Practices and the Miscellaneous Practices, abandoning for a while the various Miscellaneous Practices, and choose to take refuge in the Right Practices. If one desires to exercise oneself in the Right Practices, one should decide between the one Right Practice and the Auxiliary Right Practices, setting aside the Auxiliary Practices and resolutely choosing the Act of Right Assurance and follow it exclusively. This Act of Right Assurance is uttering the Name of Amida Buddha. Those who utter the Name will unfailingly attain Rebirth because it is based on Amida's Original Vow." (p. 134)

In this passage it is clear that Honen's movement was not simply the embrace of the nembutsu but also a radical rejection of all other practices, even other devotional practices within the Pure Land tradition. "Laying aside" the Gateway of the Holy Path means laying aside all attempts at attaining enlightenment in this world by following the eightfold path or the six perfections

or other virtuous and meditative practices. “Abandoning” the miscellaneous practices means abandoning any practice not explicitly focused on Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land, even if the merits of such virtuous, meditative, or devotional practices are dedicated to rebirth in the Pure Land of the West. “Setting aside” the auxiliary practices means setting aside every other devotional practice directed towards Amitabha Buddha except for the vocal nembutsu. This includes such practices as chanting the *Triple Pure Land Sutra*, visualizing Amitabha Buddha and his Pure Land, worshipping Amitabha Buddha, and praising and making offering to Amitabha Buddha. The Pure Land Buddhism that Honen is advocating has one practice and one practice alone - the chanting of nembutsu. All other practices are superfluous and are even looked upon as undermining one’s sole focus and faith in nembutsu.

It is not unheard of in the sutras for the Buddha to teach a disciple who cannot remember or practice many teachings to only focus on the most essential point. Usually these stories end with the disciple awakening to the meaning of a single verse or phrase and then by virtue of their enlightenment they come to realize the true meaning of all the teachings and come to embody the virtue of all the practices. One example would be the story of the monk Chudapanthaka who supposedly was too dull-witted to remember even a single verse and in despair was thinking of returning to the home life. The Buddha had compassion for him and taught him to simply sweep out the monastery while saying, “Sweep away the dirt” over and over again. Much to the surprise of the other monks, including his sharper but scornful older brother, Chudapanthaka realized that sweeping the dirt really meant sweeping the mind clean of greed, anger, and ignorance and he thereby became an arhat, liberated from birth and death. He was even able to form thousands of replica bodies to sweep the monastery, thus demonstrating his understanding to the other monks and also expressing the multi-faceted nature of his insight into that one phrase.

Mahayana sutras likewise abound in promises that anyone who upholds even a single verse or phrase will attain inestimable merits. So there are plenty

of precedents in both the pre-Mahayana and Mahayana canons for the claim that a single simple practice can lead to enlightenment. Nowhere, however, is the claim made that other practices should then be laid aside or abandoned. Rather, the disciples are being encouraged to receive, remember, and live in accord with as much of the Buddha Dharma as they can, even if it is only a verse or a phrase. The idea is not to neglect everything else. Instead, by upholding a single verse or phrase the disciple would then gain access to the true intent of all the teachings and thereby come to understand and practice them as well. One must, therefore, be careful not to simply scour the sutras for an easy practice that will allow one to bypass everything else. Rather, one should choose the verse or phrase that will in fact provide the key to the rest.

It was Nichiren's contention that Honen had made two fundamental mistakes. The first was to reduce all of Buddhism to the practice of the nembutsu to the exclusion of all else. This was a mistake because Nichiren believed that the nembutsu did not in fact express the Buddha's true intent - the attainment of enlightenment in this world. The second mistake, a corollary of the first, was to slander the *Lotus Sutra*; the one sutra that Nichiren was convinced did in fact reveal the true intent. Honen did this when he advocated laying aside all other sutras, teachings, and practices other than the Pure Land sutras and the practice of nembutsu and insisting that they could no longer help people in the Latter Age of the Dharma. Put simply, in the *Senchaku Shu*, Honen performed a radical act of reductionism by teaching the exclusive practice of nembutsu and in doing so missed the essential point of Buddha Dharma itself by advocating the neglect of the *Lotus Sutra*.

## Nichiren's Critique of the *Senchaku Shu* Part 1: Honen's Slandering Recommendations

After reviewing Honen's *Senchaku Shu*, Nichiren launches into his own critique of that work. He points out that Honen has lumped together all the sutras, teachings, and practices of Buddhism outside of the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* and recommended that they be "abandoned, closed, set aside, and cast away." Looking back over the passages from the Augustine and Tesho translation of the *Senchaku Shu*, Nichiren's four-word summary of Honen's intent seems to be justified. Honen does indeed say to "reject" and "set aside" the Holy Path that would include the teaching and practice of *the Lotus Sutra*, to "cast aside" and "abandon" the miscellaneous practices that would again include the teaching and practice of the *Lotus Sutra*. Honen also asserts that the Buddha "closed" the gateway to all teachings and practices other than the nembutsu. So it would appear that Honen does indeed use the phrases that Nichiren accuses him of using in reference to the entire Buddhist canon and the teachings and practices of Buddhism outside the exclusive practice of nembutsu. To add insult to injury, Honen even brands the scholars and teachers of other schools of Buddhism who would disagree with this approach as a "band of robbers" in his interpretation of Shan-tao's parable of the white path.

In the *Shugo Kokka Ron*, Nichiren remarks that the distinctions between the holy path and the Pure Land way, and between the way of difficult practice and the way of easy practice, and between the correct and miscellaneous practices taught by the Pure Land patriarchs in India and China did not include the *Lotus Sutra*, *Nirvana Sutra* or even the esoteric teachings of Shingon in their categorization of the Buddha's teachings. In this passage of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, Nichiren makes it a point to say that the *Lotus Sutra* and Shingon sutras were included by Honen in these categories with the implication that they should not have been. As we saw in the above review of *Senchaku Shu*, Honen stated that he believed the categories of holy path, way of difficult practice, and miscellaneous practices definitely included all sutras other than *the Triple Pure*

*Land Sutras* including the esoteric sutras and *Lotus Sutra* even if the previous Pure Land patriarchs had not specified this. So it would seem that Honen was introducing a new twist to the Pure Land teachings of his predecessors that would exalt the vocal nembutsu at the expense of the Tendai and Shingon schools that had become the pillars of Japan's religious establishment and the arbiters of orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Nichiren, who at this point in his career seems to be calling people back to Tendai orthodoxy, does not hesitate to point out the radical nature of what Honen was advocating.

Nichiren, however, does not stop with Honen's extreme recommendations and denigration of other Buddhist teachers. Nichiren even calls into question the scriptural interpretations of T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o, and Shan-tao that Honen relied upon by calling them "false interpretations." By referring to the interpretations of the Chinese Pure Land patriarchs as false, Nichiren calls into question the validity of the categories themselves, and not just whether or not they should include the *Lotus Sutra*, *Nirvana Sutra* and esoteric sutras of Shingon. Nichiren does not spell out exactly why these categories are illegitimate. Perhaps Nichiren viewed the Pure Land categories as illegitimate because they contradicted the T'ien-t'ai categories of sutra classification; but this begs the question as to the legitimacy of the T'ien-t'ai systems, such as the five periods of the Buddha's teaching, that Nichiren relied upon in his assertion that the *Lotus Sutra* is supreme among all the sutras. Nichiren will return to this issue of the proper classification of the sutras later in *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, and so this question will be dealt with then.

Instead of comparing and contrasting the T'ien-t'ai and Pure Land divisions of the canon, Nichiren appealed directly to the sutras. This is in keeping with the four standards for judging the relative merits and profundity of Buddhist teachings set forth in the *Nirvana Sutra*: "Rely on the Dharma and not upon persons; rely on the meaning and not upon the words; rely on wisdom and not upon discriminative thinking; rely on sutras that are final and definitive and not upon those which are not final and definitive." The first statement, "Rely on the

Dharma and not upon persons,” Nichiren took to mean, “Rely directly on the teachings of the Buddha (Dharma) and not upon the commentaries of later persons.” With this in mind, Nichiren bypassed all commentarial traditions and went right back to the primary sources of the Buddhist tradition – the sutras.

The first sutra passage that Nichiren looks at is the 18<sup>th</sup> vow of Amitabha Buddha as given in the *Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life*. It has already been pointed out that the 18<sup>th</sup> vow contains an exclusionary clause that specifically excludes those “who abuse the Wonderful Dharma” from being reborn in the Pure Land. Nichiren took this to mean that anyone who abuses the *Wonderful Dharma of the Lotus Flower Sutra* would be excluded from the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. Nichiren follows with a passage from the third chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* that asserts that not only will anyone who slanders the *Lotus Sutra* not enter the Pure Land; they will instead fall into the Avichi Hell, a hell of unceasing torment wherein one is bound to spend millennia until the unwholesome karma of slandering the Dharma is expiated.

We should probably pause here and consider what “abusing” or “slandering” the Dharma could possibly mean. The answer is actually provided in the very passage from the *Lotus Sutra* that Nichiren cites only a part of in this section of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*. The whole passage reads:

Those who do not believe this sutra  
But slander it,  
Will destroy the seeds of Buddhahood  
Of all living beings of the world.

Some will scowl at this sutra  
And doubt it,  
Listen! I will tell you  
How they will be punished.

In my lifetime or after my extinction  
Some will slander this sutra,  
And despise the person who reads or recites  
Or copies or keeps this sutra.  
They will hate him,

Look at him with jealousy,  
And harbor enmity against him.  
Listen I will tell you how they will be punished.

When their present lives end,  
They will fall into the Avichi Hell.  
They will live there for a kalpa,  
And have their rebirth in the same hell.  
This rebirth of theirs will be repeated  
For innumerable kalpas.

(The *Lotus Sutra*, p. 81)

So it would appear that slander or abuse refers to looking down upon the sutra and doubting it, or despising, hating, being jealous of, and bearing enmity towards those who uphold the sutra. In chapter 13, after the 20-line verse describing the future enemies of the practitioners of the *Lotus Sutra*, it states that they will accuse the practitioners of having “made up the sutra by themselves” and of “expounding the teaching of heretics.” It also says: “They will speak ill of us, or frown at us, or drive us out of the monasteries from time to time.” (p. 208, *Ibid*) In chapter 20, Bodhisattva Never Despise’s assurances of the future buddhahood of all he meets is disbelieved and he is both verbally and even physically abused in just the way that chapter 13 describes.

In his letter the *Ken Hobo-sho (A Clarification of Slandering the True Dharma)* Nichiren relies upon the definitions of T’ien-t’ai and Vasubandhu in responding to the question, “What does slandering the Dharma mean exactly?” Nichiren writes:

Grand Master T’ien-t’ai explains in his *Commentary on the Brahma Net Sutra*, “the term slander means to go against.” We may say slandering the True Dharma means to go against the teaching of the Buddha. Vasubandhu’s *Treatise on the Buddha-nature* preaches, “Hate means to go against principle.” It means that to slander the True Dharma equals to cause people to abandon it.  
(WNS: D3, p. 115)

It is Nichiren’s contention that Honen’s recommendation that all the

sutras, including the *Lotus Sutra*, be “abandoned, closed, set aside, and cast away” in favor of nembutsu and that those who would argue against this view are “a band of robbers” constitutes exactly the kind of abuse and slander that both the *Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life* and the *Lotus Sutra* are warning against. Honen’s exclusive nembutsu, therefore, is going against both *the Lotus Sutra* and even the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* themselves.

As has been discussed, Nichiren and his contemporaries believed that the sutras were the actual words of Shakyamuni Buddha. So if one sutra says that you cannot be reborn in the Pure Land if you slander the Wonderful Dharma and another says that you will fall into the Avichi Hell for doing so then that was all that needed to be said. Furthermore, the Pure Land and the Avichi Hell were taken to be actual places where one could be reborn, though they were also understood more metaphorically as well. But since most modern Buddhists do not believe that these sutras were verbatim discourses of the Buddha and many do not believe in literal heavens and hells and some seriously question even the doctrine of rebirth, it must be asked what possible meaning any of this has for us.

As discussed earlier, the Mahayana sutras were the inspired products of later followers of the Buddha who felt that it would be better to express the true intent of the Buddha’s teachings through myth, poetry, and paradox. So the question is – what was really intended by these passages in *Triple Pure Land Sutras* and by the *Lotus Sutra*?

The *Triple Pure Land Sutras* express a Mahayana development of an early pre-Mahayana practice called *buddhanusmrti*, or “recollection of the Buddha.” This practice, common to all forms of Buddhism, involves the recollection of the Buddha’s meritorious qualities and even physical features in order to arouse devotion and make merit that could help one to attain enlightenment.

The concept of a pure land wherein conditions were conducive for the attainment of buddhahood may also have been a Mahayana development of the earlier idea that a Buddhist, whether lay or ordained, who attained the stage of “non-returner” through their practice would be reborn in the very highest of the heavens of the realm of form called the “pure abodes” wherein they would proceed to cut off any remaining cognitive and emotional fetters and attain nirvana. In addition, Mahayana developments concerning celestial buddhas, bodhisattva vows, and the bodhisattva’s transference of merit for the sake of sentient beings all came together with the practice of recollecting the qualities and merits of a buddha. All of this resulted in the inspiring myth of a bodhisattva who makes vows to create the best of all possible pure lands for the sake of all beings and that upon becoming a buddha he enables all those calling him to mind to be reborn there and attain buddhahood.

What was even better, because the focus was on a celestial buddha residing in another realm, this buddha, Amitabha Buddha, could even be considered an active presence in the lives of his devotees, unlike the historical Shakyamuni Buddha who had attained *parinirvana* or the “complete nirvana” of one who has passed away and will no longer be reborn in the realms of suffering. A devotee of Amitabha Buddha could then be considered to be taking refuge in and recollecting a living Buddha. All of this was a way to encourage those who wished to embark upon the Mahayana path to raise their aspirations, have faith that their efforts would be aided by celestial buddhas and bodhisattvas, and to constantly recollect the merits and characteristics of a buddha. In this way they could be assured that their practices would come to fruition, if not in this lifetime than most certainly in the next.

*The Triple Pure Land Sutras* are not, however, recommending that the rest of the Dharma be neglected in favor of rebirth in the Pure Land. The exclusionary clause makes it clear that the 18<sup>th</sup> vow was not conceived as a loophole by which one could avoid the Dharma and automatically become a buddha through the practice of another on one’s behalf. In fact the whole

purpose of rebirth in the Pure Land is so that one can awaken to the Wonderful Dharma in a place where all the conditions are conducive to easily doing so.

The *Lotus Sutra's* main themes concern the One Vehicle whereby even those who would seem to be excluded from attaining buddhahood are promised its attainment and the revelation that Shakyamuni Buddha had in fact been the Buddha since the primordial past even before his awakening beneath the Bodhi Tree. Women, evildoers like Devadatta, and those disciples who were believed to have become arhats who would no longer return to the world after their passing, are all told that they will in fact return to the world and attain buddhahood. This was in seeming contradiction to the earlier teaching that only a very few could aspire to and attain buddhahood. The revelation of the attainment of buddhahood in the remote past means that even during the Buddha's innumerable past lifetimes as an ordinary human being, or an animal, or some other form of sentient being striving to attain buddhahood the Buddha had been a buddha all along. And now even though Shakyamuni Buddha is going to appear to pass away for good, he asserts that he will still be present. In light of these two themes, buddhahood should be understood as inclusive of all beings, all time, and all space. It is a constant and active presence even when it is not apparent or seems to be absent in the lives of those who strive for it. Throughout the *Lotus Sutra* these ideas are put forward as the fullest expression of the Dharma and to embrace them with faith and joy is to embrace the Wonderful Dharma and to reject them is to reject the Wonderful Dharma. The Wonderful Dharma is held to be even more worthy of respect and offerings than the Buddha himself because it is through the Wonderful Dharma that one attains buddhahood. It is for this reason that rejection means a total alienation from what is truly of value in life, and therefore leads to rebirth in hell. It is for this reason that a single moment of faith and rejoicing in *the Wonderful Dharma of the Lotus Sutra* is said to bring unequalled merit, rivaled only by the merit brought by the perfection of wisdom which is none other than buddhahood itself.

So it would seem that the most important thing is to revere the Wonderful

Dharma and to awaken to its full significance. *The Triple Pure Land Sutras* make a point of excluding any who would slander it, and the *Lotus Sutra* describes the vast demerit incurred or merit made by those who slander or praise it respectively. Whether the Buddha directly taught these sutras or not, and whether or not there are literal rebirths in the Pure Land or the Avichi Hell, the point seems to be that we create our own misery to the extent that we deny the Wonderful Dharma whereas we can attain awakening through upholding the Wonderful Dharma. And what is this Wonderful Dharma? It is not simply a formula, text, or even a creed that one must believe without evidence. It is none other than the true nature of all existence, the reality of all things. This is what all buddhas awaken to, praise, and point out to all sentient beings using many skillful methods so that they too may realize that they are buddhas as well.

The *Triple Pure Land Sutras*' intent is to provide people with a way to be reborn in a Pure Land where they can then awaken to the Wonderful Dharma. The *Lotus Sutra* directly expounds the fullness of the Wonderful Dharma that can be encountered here and now in terms of the One Vehicle and the unborn and deathless nature of buddhahood. So does it make sense to embrace the indirect way of hoping to encounter the Wonderful Dharma only after death while excluding the possibility of taking faith in and rejoicing in the Wonderful Dharma here and now? Does it make sense to claim that the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* should be used to turn people away from the expounding of the Wonderful Dharma in the *Lotus Sutra*? That would contradict the clear intent of the *Triple Pure Land Sutras*. This is what Nichiren was trying to point out in his critique of *Honen's Senchaku Shu*. That the Pure Land teachings should not be used to overshadow the direct expression of the Wonderful Dharma is a critique that I believe still holds up today.

## Nichiren's Critique of the *Senchaku Shu* Part 2: The Effects of Honen's Teachings on Buddhism in Kamakuran Japan

Having shown that Honen's *Senchaku Shu* was a work that recommended neglecting and even denigrating the Wonderful Dharma of Shakyamuni Buddha, Nichiren proceeds to describe the consequences of Honen's Pure Land movement as he observed it for himself in mid-13<sup>th</sup> century Kamakura. Nichiren sums up the situation in the following words:

Now we have come to this Latter Age, when people are no longer sages. Each enters his own dark road, and all alike forget the direct way. How pitiful that no one cures them of their blindness! How painful to see them taking up these false beliefs in vain! As a result, everyone from the ruler of the nation on down to the common people believes that there are no true sutras outside the *Triple Pure Land Sutras*, and no other buddhas other than Amitabha Buddha with his two attendants.

Honen's Pure Land movement, in Nichiren's eyes, had caused people to neglect the whole Buddhist tradition with the exception of the Pure Land teachings because they are convinced that there is no direct way to attain buddhahood in this world, and that the only escape is to be reborn in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha after death. People are no longer interested in supporting any temples or clergy aside from Pure Land temples and Pure Land teachers. This means that the more comprehensive Buddhist teachings centered on the *Lotus Sutra* had begun to decline and Nichiren describes such temples as abandoned and dilapidated. His fear is that within a generation or two the classical *Lotus Sutra* centered teachings of the Tendai school will be entirely forgotten and only otherworldly Pure Land piety will remain.

Today, what is the state of Buddhism? As mentioned before, there are very few countries that could be considered primarily Buddhist today. Mainland China's reigning ideology is the dialectical materialism of communism. The same is true in Vietnam and North Korea. While there are many people who are

nominally Buddhists in South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, free market capitalism is more or less the reigning ideology. Buddhism has become little more than a cultural trapping, a moribund tradition relegated almost solely to the performance of funeral or memorial services. Most Buddhists in East Asian traditions consider Buddhism to be nothing more than a way of making sure that those who die are able to pass on to the Pure Land of Amitabha. This is the case for Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese Buddhists. The *Lotus Sutra* is revered, but usually only for the recitation of chapter 25 that deals with Kuan Yin Bodhisattva, the Goddess of Compassion, who can be called upon to help overcome worldly troubles and concerns and who is considered the handmaiden of Amitabha Buddha. The central points of the *Lotus Sutra* are not a part of the average teaching or practice of East Asian Buddhism, though occasionally Zen teachers might make reference to it. Shakyamuni Buddha, whether in his historical aspect or as the Eternal Buddha of chapter 16 of the *Lotus Sutra*, takes a distant second place to the veneration of Amitabha Buddha, and the teaching that this world is the actual pure land, the Pure Land of Tranquil Light, is reserved only for the few who delve into Zen practice and the demythologization of the Pure Land teachings and practices. Except for the minority who practice Nichiren Buddhism, it would seem that Nichiren's fear that the veneration of Shakyamuni Buddha and the *Lotus Sutra* would be overcome by Pure Land piety and otherworldliness has come true. Attaining enlightenment in this life and thereby overcoming the sufferings of birth and death, the main point of Buddhism, has indeed taken second place to the goal of attaining rebirth in the Pure Land after death and to attaining worldly benefits in this life. Nichiren's *Lotus Sutra* inspired vision of a society focused on bringing out the buddhahood in all beings in this life has not been realized.

This is why Nichiren castigates Honen and his later followers for turning people away from Buddhism as a whole, and with it the *Lotus Sutra*, in favor of what could be called a form of otherworldly escapism. Nichiren laments that there are no longer people of the caliber of Saicho, the founder of the Tendai school in Japan, and his successors at Mt. Hiei: Gishin (781-833), Ennin, and

Chisho (814-891). Nichiren praises them because they brought the entirety of the Buddhist tradition to Japan in the form of the *Lotus Sutra* centered teachings of the T'ien-t'ai school. In later works Nichiren would severely censure Ennin and Chisho for betraying Saicho's vision and turning the Tendai school into the Shingon school in all but name, but in this work Nichiren praises their contributions to Japanese Buddhism. The 1278 expanded version of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* even includes the name of Kukai (774-835, posthumously known as Kobo Daishi), the founder of the Shingon school, among those who went to China to learn more about the Buddha Dharma in order to establish the teachings in Japan. The inclusion of Kukai in the 1278 expansion is especially interesting because by that time Nichiren had already begun criticizing him and the Shingon school, claiming that it was Shingon that was actually the root cause of Japan's downfall. In this work, however, Nichiren simply wants to praise those who brought Buddhism as a whole to Japan from China, as opposed to Honen's Pure Land teachings that are advising people to discard the Buddha Dharma with the exception of the sole invocation of nembutsu.

In the same way, Nichiren praises the honor given to the historical Shakyamuni Buddha and to Medicine Master Buddha, as well as to Earth Repository Bodhisattva (Kshitigarbha) and Sky Repository Bodhisattva (Akashagarbha) in the past at Enryakuji, the head temple of the Tendai school on Mt. Hiei. Later, Nichiren would make the case that only the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha of the essential section of the *Lotus Sutra* should be revered as the gohonzon or "focus of devotion" in the Latter Age of the Dharma, thus going beyond the explicit teachings of the Tendai school. In *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, however, he is simply pointing to the honor paid to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas by the Tendai school as Dengyo had established it, as opposed to the exclusive devotion to Amitabha Buddha taught by Honen.

Nichiren may have had his critiques of Ennin, Enchin, and Kukai as well as his exclusive devotion to the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha already in mind when he wrote the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*. However, these were not battles that he

wanted to fight at this time. The purpose of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* was to simply point out to the Hojo rulers that Honen's exclusive nembutsu was subverting the established and governmentally approved hegemony of the more inclusive and theoretically *Lotus Sutra* centered Tendai school and that something must be done to stop it before the Tendai school was totally ruined and the *Lotus Sutra* forgotten. The *Shugo Kokka Ron*, written the year before *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, even refers to Tendai and Shingon together as the schools and teachings that were being subverted by Honen's Pure Land movement. This shows that Nichiren saw himself, at this point, as a reformer trying to call the rulers and the people back mainstream Buddhism represented by the Tendai and Shingon establishment as opposed to the radical and unauthorized exclusive nembutsu of Honen that was taking people away from mainstream Buddha Dharma.

At this early date in his teaching career, Nichiren may have hoped that if the otherworldly Pure Land movement could be quelled then popular support would return to the Tendai and Shingon schools that both taught the possibility of attaining buddhahood in this world. At that point the Tendai and even Shingon practitioners could be convinced to reform their own practices by turning back to the *Lotus Sutra*. Things did not at all work out as Nichiren hoped. Years later Nichiren would explain that the root causes of Japan's suffering lay not with Honen's exclusive nembutsu, but with the Shingon teachings of Kukai, and even with Ennin and Enchin, the successive patriarchs of the Tendai school who put the Shingon sutras on a par with or even above the *Lotus Sutra*.

Nichiren's praise of the inclusive nature of the Tendai school was not just a tactic to please the authorities by praising the Buddhist establishment. Nichiren believed that in the Former and Middle Ages of the Dharma, the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha had intended that skillful methods, such as devotional practices directed to the celestial buddhas and bodhisattvas, be used to encourage people and to help them bring the seeds of buddhahood to fruition – either here or in the pure lands. In such circumstances the Pure Land teachings

and in fact the many teachings and practices of Buddhism all had their place, as long as they were not clung to excessively and did not cut one off from the Wonderful Dharma of the Lotus Flower Teaching that they were all supposed to be leading up to. In later works, however, Nichiren reveals that in the Latter Age of the Dharma there are no longer people who can benefit from these teachings and that the Latter Age is the time when only a direct relationship (even a negative one) with the *Lotus Sutra* can plant and bring to fruition the seed of buddhahood in people's lives. This argument is dealt with at length in Nichiren's later works and so will not be discussed here. However, if we can assume that Nichiren was already thinking in this way about the difference between the times of Chih-i and Saicho and his own circumstances, then we can understand why Nichiren would praise the inclusive Tendai practices of the past while advocating an exclusive devotion to the *Lotus Sutra* himself.

Nichiren concludes his critique of Honen by pointing out that people have become very confused about what is an incidental teaching, such as rebirth in a pure land, and what is the primary point of Buddhism, attaining enlightenment through devotion to the Wonderful Dharma. They have turned away from Buddhism as a whole, to embrace a very small and relatively insignificant part of it. For this reason, he foresees the occurrence of even more disasters. In light of this, Nichiren recommends that the teaching of Honen be outlawed.

How pitiful to think that, in the space of a few decades since the publication of the *Senchaku Shu*, hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of people have been deluded by these devilish teachings and in so many cases confused as to the true teachings of Buddhism. If people favor only what is incidental and forget what is primary, can the benevolent deities be anything but angry? If people cast aside what is perfect and take up what is biased, can the world escape the plots of demons? Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better to outlaw this one evil.

This recommendation may seem outrageous to those of us who value the separation of church and state, free speech, the right of peaceful assembly, and

other civil rights. Nichiren, however, lived in a society where the rulers controlled (or tried to control) what teachings could or could not receive official authorization, patronage, and support. In his view, Honen's movement was not a legitimate Buddhist teaching and therefore should not be recognized or supported by the rulers as if it were. Even still, one might ask what right Nichiren had to ask the rulers to suppress the beliefs of others and whether his recommendations were not more in the spirit of the inquisitor rather than the bodhisattva. As we shall see, this also outrages the guest, and so Nichiren himself will try to clarify what he means in the sections that follow.

The Buddha's Criteria for Evaluating Teachings

V Pure Land Buddhism as the Cause of Calamities

Very Angry, the Traveler Frowned Back

WNSD1: p. 123-124

WND: p. 15-16

The guest is outraged by the host's criticisms of the revered teachings of Honen and the Pure Land patriarchs. He points out that Shakyamuni Buddha himself taught the *Triple Pure Land Sutras*. T'an-luan turned away from the Madhyamika teachings contained in the works of Nagarjuna and his disciple Aryadeva upheld by the Four Treatise school in order to single-mindedly seek refuge in Pure Land Buddhism. Tao-ch'o set aside the practices recommended in the *Nirvana Sutra* in order to devote himself to spreading the practice leading to rebirth in the Pure Land. Shan-tao discarded all the miscellaneous practices and only practiced the nembutsu. Genshin advocated the single practice of nembutsu in his *Ojo-yoshu*. The expanded version of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* adds the Sanron monk Yokan as well. All of these past masters in China and Japan were discussed in the review of Pure Land Buddhism given above. In Nichiren's time they were all revered and credited with providing the precedent for the practice of the exclusive nembutsu. In the words of the guest, "Thus Amitabha Buddha has been revered by many great masters of Buddhism before us. Also imagine how many people there are who were able to be reborn in the Pure Land by calling the name of Amitabha Buddha!"

The guest then proceeds to summarize the religious quest of Honen, his reading of the Buddhist canon as many as seven times, his despair at being unable to cut off the chain of birth and death, his discovery of the teachings of Shan-tao and the sole practice of nembutsu, and the dream in which his course was confirmed by Shan-tao himself. All of this was covered in the short biography of Honen given above. The guest then states that some people consider Honen an earthly appearance of Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva, one of the attendants of Amitabha Buddha. Others consider Honen a rebirth of Shan-

tao. In any case, all people throughout Japan revere his great wisdom and virtue. Honen, in the eyes of many of Nichiren's contemporaries, was held to be beyond reproach.

Nichiren (as the host) dared to critique Honen's teaching, the teachings of the past revered masters of Pure Land Buddhism, and even went so far as to recommend that Honen's teaching be banned. This was too much for the guest, who accuses the host of mean-spirited nitpicking and even prepares to leave. In all this, we can see that Nichiren is very aware of how his recommendations will sound to others. Even today people often react to Nichiren's critiques and call to suppress Pure Land practice as a form of militant sectarianism. In the words of the host:

Despite all this, do you dare hold in contempt the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha expounded in the *Triple Pure Land Sutras*, and slander the forty-eight vows of Amitabha Buddha? This is terrible! How can you blame the august reign of the past emperor for calamities in recent years? How can you speak ill of not only such earlier masters as T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o and Shan-tao, but also Honen. What you are doing is, as the saying goes, 'deliberately blowing back the fur and hunting for flaws in the leather,' or 'deliberately piercing the skin in hopes of drawing blood.' When one looks for trouble, he will find it. I have never heard such abusive remarks as these. You should be afraid of this; you should refrain from this. You have committed a serious offense, for which you will never be able to escape punishment. It is awful for me just to sit before you. Taking my stick in hand, I would rather go home straight away.

These might be the same questions we would ask. Isn't Nichiren criticizing the practice recommended by the Buddha himself in the *Triple Pure Land Sutras*? Isn't he blaming the present calamities on things that happened decades before when Honen was alive during the reign of an earlier emperor? Isn't he looking only for the flaws in the teachings of T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o, Shan-tao, and Honen and overlooking their positive contributions to the practice of Buddhism by providing a way for all people to be born in the Pure Land in accordance with the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha and the vows of Amitabha Buddha? Like many

people today, the guest does not wish to subject himself to such seeming sectarianism, intolerance, and negativity and so prepares to go on his way. This is the reaction that Nichiren anticipated and will respond to in the next sections.

Smiling Gently, The Master Stopped the Traveler and Said:

WNSD1: p. 124-127

WND: p. 16-17

Nichiren's reply to the criticism of his criticism is that what has come to be the unquestioned normal state of affairs in Japanese Buddhism is actually a confused state of affairs. It only seems normal because it has gone on for so long and people have not bothered to question it anymore, though they certainly did during and right after the time of Honen. He writes:

Insects that live on smartweed forget how bitter it tastes; those who stay long in privies forget how foul the smell is. Here you listen to my good words and think them wicked, point to a slanderer of the Dharma and call him a sage, mistrust a correct teacher and take him for an evil monk. Your confusion is great indeed, and your offense anything but light. Listen to my explanation of how this confusion arose, and let us discuss the matter in detail.

Before getting to Nichiren's own explanation, I would like to point out that the critical evaluation of teachings that claim to express Buddha Dharma is not something that Nichiren came up with on his own. Rather, the tradition of critical evaluation has always been a part of Buddhism going back to Shakyamuni Buddha himself. If we can trust the account given in the Pali Canon, the Buddha was very concerned that after his passing the Dharma should be handed down as he had taught it. The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* in particular shows this concern throughout. In one passage, the Buddha even tells Mara that he will not "attain final nirvana" (i.e. pass away) until he knows that the whole Sangha will be able to uphold the true Dharma, refute false teachings, and spread the Dharma widely.

Soon after Ananda had left, Mara, the Evil One came to the Lord, stood to one side, and said: 'Lord, may the Blessed Lord now attain final nirvana, may the Well-Farer now attain final nirvana. Now is the time for the Blessed Lord's final nirvana. Because the Blessed Lord has said this: "Evil One, I will not take final nirvana till I have monks and disciples who are accomplished, trained, skilled, learned, knowers of the Dharma, trained in conformity with the Dharma, correctly trained and walking in the path of the Dharma, who will pass on what they have gained from their Teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyze it, make it clear; till they shall be able by means of the Dharma to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dharma of wondrous effect."

'And now, Lord, the Blessed Lord has such monks and disciples. May the Blessed Lord now attain final nirvana, may the Well-Farer now attain final nirvana. Now is the time for the Blessed Lord's final nirvana. And the Blessed Lord has said: "I will not take final nirvana till I have nuns and female disciples who are accomplished... till I have laymen followers... till I have laywomen followers...(as above)."

'May the Blessed Lord now take final nirvana... And the Blessed Lord has said: "Evil One, I will not take final nirvana till this holy life has been successfully established and flourishes, is widespread, well-known far and wide, well-proclaimed among mankind everywhere." And all this has come about. May the Blessed Lord now attain final nirvana, may the Well-Farer now attain final nirvana. Now is the time for the Blessed Lord's final nirvana.'

At this the Lord said to Mara: 'You need not worry, Evil One. The Tathagata's final passing will not be long delayed. Three months from now, the Tathagata will take final nirvana.'  
(adapted from *Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 247)

Later in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, the Buddha sets forth what he calls four criteria for judging the validity of any teachings they hear, to ensure that they are in accord with the teachings and disciplines set forth in the Buddha's own discourses and disciplinary instructions.

'Suppose a monk were to say: "Friends, I heard and received this from the Lord's own lips: this is the Dharma, this is the discipline, this is the Master's teaching", then, monks, you should neither approve nor disapprove his words. Then, without approving or

disapproving, his words and expressions should be carefully noted and compared with the sutras and reviewed in the light of the discipline. If they, on such comparison and review, are found not to conform to the sutras or the discipline, the conclusion must be: "Assuredly this is not the word of the Buddha, it has been wrongly understood by this monk", and the matter is to be rejected. But where on such comparison and review they are found to conform to the sutras or the discipline, the conclusion must be: "Assuredly this is the word of the Buddha, it has been rightly understood by this monk." This is the first criterion.'  
(*Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 255)

The second, third, and fourth criteria are the same except that they are applied not to a single monk claiming to have heard the teaching from the Buddha, but to a monk claiming to have heard the teaching from elders and distinguished teachers, from elders who are acknowledged experts in the Dharma and discipline, or from a single elder who is an acknowledged expert. In other words, the Buddha himself stated that Buddhists should always check to make sure that it really is the Buddha's teaching that is being taught, no matter what the alleged source.

In a discourse to the Kalama clan the Buddha advised them to follow that teaching which strikes them as true in their hearts and which will lead to happiness and liberation if followed. This teaching was also intended as a safeguard against dogmatic assertions. The following excerpt from that discourse begins with the Kalamas who live in the town of Kesaputta asking the Buddha how to deal with the conflicting truth claims of the various teachers who come there. The Buddha's reply follows.

"There are, Lord, some ascetics and brahmins who come to Kesaputta. They explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, debunk, revile and vilify the doctrines of others. But then some other ascetics and brahmins come to Kesaputta, and they too explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, debunk, revile and vilify the doctrines of others. For us, Lord, there is perplexity and doubt as to which of these good ascetics speak truth and which speak falsehood?"

"It is fitting for you to be perplexed, O Kalamas, it is fitting for you to be in doubt. Doubt has arisen in you about a perplexing matter. Come, Kalamas. Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by a reflection on reasons, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think: 'The ascetic is our teacher.' But when you know for yourselves, 'These things are unwholesome, these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; these things if undertaken and practiced lead to harm and suffering', then you should abandon them.  
(*Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 65)

Further on the Buddha gives the positive version of the same criteria:

"Come, Kalamas. Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by a reflection on reasons, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think: 'The ascetic is our teacher.' But when you know for yourselves, 'These things are wholesome, these things are blameless; these things are praised by the wise; these things if undertaken and practiced, lead to welfare and happiness', then you should engage in them.  
(*Ibid*, p. 66)"

Putting together this guidance from the Buddha for evaluating whether any teaching is in accord with the Dharma we come up with the "three proofs." The first "proof" is that a teaching must be accord with what the Buddha taught. The second is that a teaching must be reasonable and in accord with what we know about our own lives. The third is that a teaching must actually lead away from harm and suffering and lead to welfare and happiness. Nichiren often cited these "three proofs" as a criteria for ensuring that what is claimed to be a Buddhist teaching is actually so. For instance, in the *San Sanzo Kiu no Koto* (*Concerning the Prayer Services for Rain by Three Tripitika Masters*):

Practicing Buddhism, I, Nichiren, believe that it is important to use reason and scriptural proof in order to distinguish the true teaching from false ones or to compare the superiority among the sutras. Furthermore, it is more important to have actual proof (actual

happening as a proof) in addition to reason and scriptural proof.  
(WNS: D3, p. 205)

Nichiren applied the three proofs to the teachings of Honen and others who he felt had departed from the true intention of Shakyamuni Buddha. Previously it was mentioned how Nichiren used the four standards found in the *Nirvana Sutra* for judging the relative profundity of Buddhist teachings. “Rely on the Dharma and not upon persons; rely on the meaning and not upon the words; rely on wisdom and not upon discriminative thinking; rely on sutras that are final and definitive and not upon those which are not final and definitive.” Between the three proofs and the four standards, Nichiren believed that the Buddha fully intended for his followers to double check any and all teachings and to scrutinize them carefully and to accept nothing out of blind belief or merely because it was taught by an honored teacher or because something has become customary or traditional. The true spirit of Buddhism is a spirit of seeking the truth rather than complacency and blind belief. Honen and his predecessors, however, seemed intent on promoting faith to the exclusion of all other teachings and practices. So from Nichiren’s point of view, his sutra based criticisms of Honen were authentically Buddhist, whereas he viewed Honen’s exclusive faith in the nembutsu as a betrayal of the true spirit of Buddhism.

## The Sutra Classification System of the T'ien-t'ai School

Nichiren begins his explanation by asserting that, “Shakyamuni Buddha expounded the five periods of doctrines, established the order in which they were preached, and divided them into the provisional and the true teachings.” The idea that Shakyamuni Buddha’s sutras could be classified according to five different periods or “flavors of the Dharma” originated with Chih-i, the founder of the T'ien-t'ai school in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

Chih-i was faced with the problem of how to deal with the plethora of Buddhist sutras brought to China from India. We have covered the origins of these sutras earlier in this commentary. Textual scholars and even Buddhist practitioners today recognize that not all of the sutras are verbatim accounts of Shakyamuni Buddha’s discourses. The Mahayana sutras in particular are looked upon as works that originated in later times and were the products of inspired practitioners who were attributing their teachings to either the historical Buddha or to an idealized manifestation of the Buddha. Chih-i and his contemporaries, however, believed that all of these were the actual words of the Buddha. Because of this belief they had to find a way to reconcile the seeming differences in doctrine, practice, or at least emphasis between the so-called Hinayana sutras and the Mahayana sutras, and also the differences between the various Mahayana sutras.

Even before the time of Chih-i (at least as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century), Chinese Buddhists created various systems of dividing up the sutras according to the periods in the Buddha’s life and by their relative profundity in order to reconcile the seemingly contradictory teachings of the Buddha. They did this because they believed the Buddha had given different teachings to different people at different times and what may have been relevant for some would not be for others, and what was taught early on was by way of preparing his disciples for deeper insights and greater aspirations later on. Chih-i tried to improve upon these earlier systems with two interlocking systems known as the eight teachings

and the five flavors that would have a long lasting influence on East Asian Buddhism, though rival systems would often overshadow it.

It was Chih-i's system of sutra classification that Nichiren believed had the most credibility. It was his belief that it adhered most closely to the evidence provided in the sutras. Nichiren discusses this system in detail in the *Shugo Kokka Ron*, *Ichidai Shogyo Tai-i (Outline of All the Holy Teachings of the Buddha)*, *Ichidai Goji Keizu (Genealogical Chart of the Buddha's Lifetime Teachings in Five Periods)* and in other works. It also formed an important part of Nichiren's five guides for propagation that he would explain in later writings such as *Kyo Ki Ji Koku Sho (Treatise on the Teaching, Capacity, Time and Country)*. Because of the immense importance of this system to Nichiren's own teachings and especially because it was a crucial element of Nichiren's critique of Honen and the Pure Land patriarchs and his own conviction that the *Lotus Sutra* was supreme among all the sutras I will attempt to outline it beginning with the eight teachings and then moving on to the five flavors/periods.

### The Eight Teachings

Chih-i taught that the Buddha's teachings could be categorized into eight teachings divided into four teachings by content of deepening profundity and four by method of presentation.

#### The Four Teachings by Content:

The Tripitika Teaching - this corresponds to pre-Mahayana teachings as found in the Chinese Agamas or the Pali Canon and is directed to the *shravakas* (voice-hearers) who strive to become arhats (those who escape from this world of birth and death and do not return). It emphasizes emptiness and approaches it through analysis of the aggregates and the links of dependent origination. In other words, this teaching aims to reveal the emptiness of the self by examining

the components of existence such as the five aggregates of form, sensation, perception, volition, and consciousness. It is shown that each of these is impermanent, subject to suffering, and cannot be the basis of an abiding independent self either alone or together. The links of dependent origination reveal the succession of causes and effects that make up existence and likewise reveal that an abiding self cannot be found therein. By doing this, the shravakas will realize the contingent nature of the self and thereby extinguish greed for what could satisfy the “self,” anger in regard to what threatens such a “self,” and ignorance regarding the selfless nature of the aggregates. In this way they will realize nirvana and free themselves from birth and death. It might be asked: “What are the aggregates if they are not a self?” Do they somehow exist in their own right in some manner? And who is it that is free of birth and death and who enters nirvana if there is no self? These are questions that are taken up in the following teachings.

The Common Teaching - this corresponds to the *Prajnaparamita Sutras* and is directed to the more advanced shravakas and those just starting out on the bodhisattva path. Because these teachings are directed at both shravakas and bodhisattvas it is called the teaching they hold in common. This level of discourse approaches emptiness more immediately or intuitively because it does not involve analysis. Rather, one learns not to impute substance or a fixed nature onto things in the first place. It is also more thoroughgoing in its application of emptiness in that it applies it not just to the self but also to all dharmas (phenomena). So in answer to the above question, the aggregates not only do not provide a self either together or in part to an individual, but they themselves have no abiding substance or fixed nature. Each aggregate depends upon causes and conditions, which are also dependent on causes and conditions and so on ad infinitum. Emptiness in this teaching is the emptiness of any fixed nature or substance whatsoever. In response to the question as to who is saved, this teaching asserts that the bodhisattvas vow to save all sentient beings but do not cling to the idea that there are beings at all. It is all an empty show, but a show manifesting suffering or liberation depending upon the flow of causes and

conditions. The question might then be asked: “How should bodhisattvas deal with causes and conditions if they know that they are all ultimately empty and have no basis, origin, or goal and no real self or entity abides anywhere?”

The Specific Teaching - this corresponds to the *Flower Garland Sutra* that is directed specifically to those who are firmly established bodhisattvas. At this point, one needs to see that emptiness is not a dead-end but just the beginning. This requires an appreciation for contingent phenomena and thus the truth of provisional existence. While continuing to recognize that all things are empty, the bodhisattvas also see that this emptiness is not a blank void or nothingness. Rather, the lack of a fixed or independent nature is what allows all things to flow and move, change and grow, and ultimately interrelate so thoroughly that all things affect all other things like a web that quivers all at once when any one strand is touched. All things, all beings, are provisional manifestations of this interpenetrating dynamic process. Realizing this, bodhisattvas negate the negation of emptiness. They are free to reengage the world and appreciate all things without clinging or attachment. Gradually they realize the Middle Way that integrates peaceful detachment with compassionate involvement. Chih-i called the empty, the provisional, and the Middle Way aspects of reality the three truths. In this teaching they are approached dialectically. Emptiness is the thesis, provisional existence is the antithesis, and the synthesis is the Middle Way. This is not the final teaching however, because an even greater integration lies ahead. Finally, one might ask: “If the Tripitika and common teachings negate the self and all phenomena, and the specific teaching negates that negation, is there any explicitly affirmative teaching in Buddhism at all?”

The Perfect Teaching - this corresponds to the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Nirvana Sutra* and it is considered perfect or well rounded (the Chinese character used for this teaching holds both meanings) because it presents the integration of all three truths - the empty, the provisional, and the Middle Way - into a seamless whole. Each of these, if properly understood, immediately leads to an understanding of the other two in this teaching. For instance, what is empty is

provisionally existent and therefore exemplifies the Middle Way. While the earlier teachings negate the world of birth and death through an analytical or intuitive approach to emptiness, or negate a one-sided emptiness by affirming the provisional existence of all things; the perfect teaching affirms the total unity of the three truths of the empty, the provisional and the Middle Way. In this teaching, the affirmative aspects of the earlier negations are made explicit. Negative and limiting aspects are emptied, positive and boundless phenomena are provisionally affirmed, and all manifests the liberation of the Middle Way. For instance, previously the vehicles of the shravakas and *pratyekabuddhas* (private-buddhas) were condemned in favor of the bodhisattva vehicle, but now all the provisional vehicles are shown to be none other than the unfolding of the One Vehicle leading all to buddhahood. In previous teachings the historical Shakyamuni Buddha was shown to be a finite provisional manifestation of the cosmic principle of buddhahood that is sometimes personified as a cosmic buddha named Mahavairochana who is said to transcend birth or death. The *Lotus Sutra*, however, portrays Shakyamuni Buddha himself as the one who reveals the unborn and deathless nature of buddhahood through his timeless spiritual presence and skillful activity. Previous teachings compared and contrasted the empty, the provisional and the Middle Way, but here the intrinsic unity of the freedom of emptiness, the creative responsiveness of the provisional, and the sublimity of the Middle Way is fully revealed.

#### The Four Teachings by Method

The Sudden Method – the Buddha teaches directly from his own awakening without any preliminaries. This is usually identified with the *Flower Garland Sutra*. The *Flower Garland Sutra*, however, is more of a presentation of the Buddha's awakened state than a discursive teaching by the Buddha.

The Gradual Method – the Buddha begins at a very basic common sense level and then gradually cultivates the understanding of his disciples. He starts with the Tripitika teachings, and then gradually introduces Mahayana teachings

up to and including the *Prajnaparamita*. In this way, the disciples' understanding and aspiration matured until they could appreciate and benefit from the Buddha's highest teaching in the *Lotus Sutra*. The *Lotus Sutra* itself was held to transcend any of the four methods because it was the goal of all of them.

The Secret Method: the Buddha teaches some people who can benefit by a specific teaching but others are not aware of this because they are not ready and would misunderstand or even misuse the teaching. For instance, the Buddha might give advanced teachings on emptiness to bodhisattvas unbeknownst to the shravakas who might misinterpret it as nihilistic if they were to hear it.

The Indeterminate Method: the Buddha teaches one doctrine but the various people who hear it understand it in different ways. For instance, the four noble truths might be taught and understood by shravakas as referring to existing states of suffering or liberation that actual beings can reside in. Bodhisattvas, however, would understand that the four noble truths lead beyond grasping at existing states and that no actual beings reside anywhere outside of the interdependent flow of causes and conditions.

#### The Five Flavors / Periods

Chih-i taught that the four teaching according to content were combined like ingredients into five different flavors of Dharma. The perfect teaching by itself was the best, but other flavors and periods made concessions to those who were not ready for the perfect teaching by combining it with other teachings, or in the case of the Deer Park period excluding it altogether. While Chih-i believed that the Buddha used these different flavors throughout his 50 years of teaching, he also indicated that certain sutras exemplified particular flavors. The seventh century T'ien-t'ai patriarch and reformer Miao-lo later identified these flavors and their corresponding sutras more rigidly with a chronological scheme of the Buddha's teachings called the five periods. In *Shugo Kokka Ron*, Nichiren provides citations from various sutras to justify this time scheme of the five

periods. These five flavors or periods were then made to correspond to certain analogies used in the sutras. One analogy comes from the *Nirvana Sutra* and relates the teachings to milk and its products – cream, curds, butter, and clarified butter. This analogy was Chih-i's inspiration for the five flavors. Another analogy relates the teachings to the process by which an estranged son is reconciled with his father and given his birthright as related in the parable of the prodigal son in the fourth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. Yet another analogy comes from the *Flower Garland Sutra* and relates the teachings to the progression of the sun from dawn to high noon.

The Flower Garland - This lasted for the first three weeks after the Buddha's enlightenment and as such was not perceived by anyone but the gods and advanced bodhisattvas. This period combines the perfect teaching with the specific teaching. This means that while the *Flower Garland Sutra* presents the final goal of Buddhism, many parts are aimed only at the bodhisattvas and so exclude those who do not share their aspirations or insight. This period is compared to fresh milk before it undergoes any further refinement; or to the time when the prodigal son is overawed by the magnificent wealth and power of the father whom he has forgotten; or the sun at dawn that illuminates only the highest peaks of the mountains.

The Deer Park - for the next 12 years beginning with the Deer Park discourse, the Buddha exclusively taught the Tripitika doctrine for the shravakas. At this stage the Buddha taught the four noble truths and the twelve links of dependent origination in order to free people from worldly attachments and to overcome self-centeredness. This period is compared to the cream derived from milk; or the time when the father sends servants to employ the son for menial labor and later visits the son dressed as a fellow worker; or the sun when it has risen high enough to illuminate the deepest valleys.

The Expansive (Vaipulya) - for the next 8 years the Buddha taught preliminary Mahayana teachings in order to castigate the shravakas for their complacency

and to inspire the novice bodhisattvas by teaching the six perfections, the emptiness of all phenomena, and the existence of the buddhas in the pure lands of the ten directions. The *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the *Triple Pure Land Sutras*, and those pertaining to Consciousness Only and later the esoteric teachings are all lumped into this catch-all category which contains all four teachings by content that are taught depending on how they correspond to the needs of the audience at any given time and place. This period is compared to the production of curds; or the time when the son and the father develop mutual trust and the son enters his father's mansion freely on business; or the sun at breakfast time.

The Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajnaparamita*) - for the next 22 years the Buddha taught the *Prajnaparamita Sutras* which included the common, specific and perfect teachings, but not the Tripitika teachings. This period emphasized the emptiness of all phenomena and negated all the distinctions and dichotomies set up in the previous teachings so the way would be clear for the Buddha's ultimate teaching in the following period. This period is compared to the production of butter; or the time when the father entrusts the son with his storehouses of gold, silver, and other treasures; or the sun late in the morning.

The Lotus and Nirvana - in the last 8 years of the Buddha's life he taught only the unadulterated pure teaching in the *Lotus Sutra* and reiterated it in the *Nirvana Sutra*. This was the period which not only comes full circle back to the Buddha's own point of view, but brings along all those who were gradually prepared by the last three periods and who did not understand or felt left out of the sudden teaching of the Flower Garland period. In this teaching the eventual attainment of buddhahood by all beings and the timeless nature of the Buddha's enlightenment are affirmed. This period is compared to the production of clarified butter; the time when the father reveals that he is the son's true father and bestows all his wealth upon the son; or the sun at high noon.

Nichiren firmly believed that this system accorded with the sutras and were not just an arbitrary interpretation of Chih-i. With the eight teachings and

five periods as his frame of reference, Nichiren viewed the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* as belonging to the extended period. It was not even comparable to the *Flower Garland* or the *Prajnaparamita Sutras* let alone the *Lotus Sutra*. It was therefore a distortion of the Buddha's intent for T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o, and Shan-tao to neglect the more profound teachings and embrace a more rudimentary one. Honen's suggestions to "abandon, close, set aside, and cast away" all the teachings in favor of nembutsu were especially egregious. What they had done could be compared to insisting that algebra, calculus, and trigonometry should all be discarded in favor of the study of the multiplication tables. If the teachings of the extended period were for the sake of leading people to the perfect teaching, then discarding the perfect teaching for the earlier and more provisional teachings of the extended period was to completely miss the whole point of all the teachings.

## Competing Systems of Sutra Classification

Nichiren's assessment of Honen is unequivocal. He condemns Honen's recommendations to ignore all but devotion to Amitabha Buddha and the *Triple Pure Land Sutras*.

His is the worst kind of baseless talk, a clear case of defamation. There are no words to describe it, no way to censure it that is too mild. And yet people all put faith in this baseless talk of his, and without exception pay honor to his *Senchaku Shu*. As a consequence, they revere the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* and cast all other sutras aside; they look up to only Amitabha Buddha of the Land of Perfect Bliss, and forget about the other buddhas. A man such as Honen is in truth the archenemy of the buddhas and the sutras, and the foe of sage monks and ordinary men and women alike. And now his distorted teachings have spread throughout the eight regions of the country, permeating the ten directions.

In the 1278 expanded edition of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, Nichiren goes so far as to state that Honen's teaching are worse than the teachings of Tz'u-en, Kukai, Fa-yun (467-529) or Fa-tsang (643-712) and that Honen was like the Great Arrogant Brahman or Vimalamitra reborn.

Tz'u-en was the founder of the Consciousness Only school in China and was a disciple of Hsuan-tsang (596-664). Hsuan-tsang was famous for making an unauthorized pilgrimage to India, but he received great acclaim and official patronage when he returned with many sutras and commentaries from India relating to the Vijñānavāda or Consciousness Only school. Hsuan-tsang translated more than 70 texts and his translations were of such quality that scholars consider his work the beginnings of a new period of translation of the Buddhist canon in China.

This school taught that it was the One Vehicle of the Lotus Sutra that was actually a provisional teaching, and that in actuality some people only had the nature to become arhats, some only had the nature to become pratyekabuddhas, some had the nature to become bodhisattvas and attain

buddhahood, some had an indeterminate nature and could develop along any of the first three lines, and finally there were those incapable of ever transcending the world of birth and death who could only hope to attain rebirth as humans or in the heavenly realm. The three vehicles were therefore totally distinct and not all would transition to buddhahood. The Consciousness Only school held that the One Vehicle was just a provisional teaching taught for the sake of those who had an indeterminate nature and therefore could attain to the bodhisattva vehicle if they aspired to it. This was a very different interpretation than that of the T'ien-t'ai school that held that the One Vehicle was for all people, and that the three vehicles were provisionally taught so that those who did not yet aspire to buddhahood could develop themselves by training to achieve lesser goals until they were ready to arouse the aspiration to attain buddhahood.

During the lifetimes of Hsuan-tsang and Tz'u-en, this school overshadowed the T'ien-t'ai school in terms of prestige and royal patronage. It was in turn overshadowed by the Hua-yen or Flower Garland school until the persecution of the Emperor Wu-tsung in 845 that was the end of the flourishing of the great scholastic schools of Buddhism in China. After that, the Zen and Pure Land schools dominated Chinese Buddhism.

In Japan, the Consciousness Only school was one of the six schools of Buddhism established in the Nara period. When Saicho established the Tendai school in Japan, he became embroiled in a debate with a monk of the Consciousness Only school named Tokuitsu over whether the three vehicles or the One Vehicle represented the true intention of Shakyamuni Buddha. Their debate was carried on through letters and treatises and ended with Saicho's death. The Tendai view based on the *Lotus Sutra* did succeed in becoming the most commonly accepted one in Japan after the time of Saicho.

Kukai was a contemporary of Saicho. In fact, they traveled to China together in 804. Kukai returned to Japan in 806 after having studied and received the authority to teach esoteric Buddhism. He established the Shingon

school on Mt. Koya. Though he and Saicho had started out as friends, their relationship soured in later years, in part over disagreements concerning whether the *Lotus Sutra* and the Tendai teachings were more important than the Shingon sutras and practices. Not surprisingly, Kukai compared the *Lotus Sutra* and Tendai teachings unfavorably with the Shingon sutras, teachings, and especially esoteric practices in his writings.

After the passing of both Saicho and Kukai, the successive patriarchs of the Tendai school on Mt. Hiei developed Tendai esotericism to bolster the popularity of their school. Ennin, the third chief priest, and Enchin, the fifth, were particularly responsible for bringing esoteric Buddhism to the fore in the Tendai school and even for making it more important than the *Lotus Sutra*. Because of this, Nichiren would in his later years accuse them of having turned the Tendai school into the Shingon school in all but name, thus leading to the neglect of the *Lotus Sutra* within the Tendai school itself. Nichiren would express his critiques of Kukai, Ennin, and Chisho in his later writings such as the *Senji Sho* and *Ho'on Jo (Essay on Gratitude)*.

Fa-yun was one of many early Chinese monks who held that the *Nirvana Sutra* was superior to the *Lotus Sutra*. Fa-tsang was the third patriarch of the Flower Garland school and through his efforts the Flower Garland school became one of the most powerful schools of early Chinese Buddhism and even after the persecution of 845 it's influence continued, as its teachings became the theoretical underpinning of Zen Buddhism. The Flower Garland school championed the *Flower Garland Sutra* as the foremost sutra in the Buddhist canon. The Great Arrogant Brahman appeared in Hsuan-tsang's travelogue of his journey to India. Apparently the Great Arrogant Brahma believed that his wisdom surpassed that of the Vedic gods and the Buddha but he was bested in a debate with a Mahayana monk named Bhadraruchi. Vimalamitra was a scholar of the Sarvastivadin school who tried to refute the teachings of Vasubandhu, the Mahayana teacher and advocate.

In later years, Nichiren would claim that in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* he had already refuted all those schools that denigrated the *Lotus Sutra*. It is not immediately clear upon reading the original *Rissho Ankoku Ron* that Honen is meant to be representative of all those who would slander the *Lotus Sutra* by causing its neglect in favor of some other teaching or practice. This passage of the expanded edition of 1278 helps to clarify that connection. Nichiren also states that Honen is the worst of the lot, though in other writings Nichiren seems to see the triumph of Shingon esotericism over the *Lotus Sutra* within the Tendai school itself as the fundamental error in Japanese Buddhism.

This brings us back to the five periods and eight teachings classification that Nichiren believed correctly set out the order and relative profundity of the various sutras. From the point of view of the T'ien-t'ai classification system, Honen and the others all made the mistake of using a provisional teaching to usurp the rightful place of the *Lotus Sutra*. For their part, Honen and the other founders of the different schools of East Asian Buddhism each had their own method of rating the relative importance of the sutras and each school believed that its own system accorded with both the words of the sutras and their true intent. Today, few scholars or even educated practitioners believe that the sutras are the verbatim records of the discourses of the historical Shakyamuni Buddha. If the Mahayana sutras are, as is generally believed, the product of later generations of Buddhists, then one cannot claim that any of them were accorded any special privileged position by the Buddha. Such being the case, doesn't this mean that none of the claims of these competing schools has any legitimacy? Even the T'ien-t'ai claim for the supremacy of the *Lotus Sutra* is rendered moot.

I believe that there is more to the comparative classification systems than competing sectarian claims based upon the supposed authority of the Buddha. Each classification system could be viewed as a heuristic device for reconciling seemingly conflicting claims within the Buddhist canon and for discerning, evaluating, and assimilating the insights of Buddhism in a consistent and comprehensive manner. So the different systems should not be evaluated by

whether they have the authority of Shakyamuni Buddha or whether they have sufficient proof-texts to back them up. Rather, the systems should be evaluated by how well they allow their respective adherents to develop and put into practice the deepest insights and highest aspirations expressed in the Buddhist teachings.

In Nichiren's case, he believed that there were two distinctive doctrines in the *Lotus Sutra* that set it apart from any of the other sutras. The first was the teaching of the attainment of buddhahood by the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas because it is taught that all the Buddha's teachings lead to the One Vehicle of buddhahood. The other sutras taught that the shravakas who had become arhats and the pratyekabuddhas who had attained nirvana on their own would no longer be able to develop the aspiration to attain buddhahood because they had become detached from all things and would no longer be reborn in this world or any other. So their inclusion in the One Vehicle represented the possibility that anyone and everyone could eventually attain buddhahood, even those for whom it might seem impossible. This promise of universal buddhahood caused Nichiren to call all other sutras Hinayana in comparison because their teachings tended to exclude or imply the exclusion of certain groups from ever achieving the highest goal. The second teaching was the revelation that Shakyamuni Buddha's awakening did not occur for the first time under the Bodhi Tree but actually occurred in the remote past, a past so inconceivably distant that it is evident the sutra is talking about an unconditioned state that has no beginning or end. Nichiren took this teaching to mean that the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha is spiritually present even now leading us all to buddhahood and that the world we are living in is this buddha's Pure Land of Tranquil Light. This means that unlike the other sutras, where buddhahood is a remote possibility or something that can only be attained in another world after death, the *Lotus Sutra* is teaching that buddhahood is something much more immediate and accessible if one has sufficient faith in the Wonderful Dharma. Nichiren believed that the T'ien-t'ai classification system showed that all the other sutras were leading up to these two teachings concerning the universality

and immanence of buddhahood and that is what Shakyamuni Buddha had been trying to share with people all along.

The T'ien-t'ai sutra classification system, therefore can be understood as a way of highlighting the importance of these two doctrines in comparison with the teachings emphasized by the other sutras. These two doctrines of the *Lotus Sutra*, the attainment of buddhahood by those in the two vehicles of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, and Shakyamuni's attainment of buddhahood in the remote past, are held to be much more important than the teachings related to rebirth in the pure lands (Pure Land school), or teachings emphasizing esoteric practice (Shingon or Tendai esotericism), the teachings of emptiness by analysis (the so-called Hinayana schools) or intuition (the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*), or the teaching of the total interpenetration of all phenomena (*Flower Garland Sutra*), or the teaching that all is consciousness (Consciousness Only school).

Today, it serves no purpose to argue whether one classification system is more authoritative than another, but we can still concern ourselves with which teaching best expresses the fullness of the Buddha's compassionate insight. Those who adhere to Nichiren Buddhism believe that the *Lotus Sutra*, even if it did not originate with the historical Buddha, is the sutra that best articulates the Wonderful Dharma that lies at the heart of all the other teachings. This Wonderful Dharma or Truth is that the full awakening and liberation called buddhahood is a present possibility for all.

## The Confucian Nichiren Part 1: Confucius and the Origins of Confucianism

Nichiren then turns his attention to the guest's criticism that it is absurd to blame the present calamities on Honen who passed away almost four decades past. In response, Nichiren cites several incidents in the history of China and Japan wherein various acts of impropriety preceded the downfall of the rulers. The first incident involves the fall of the Chou dynasty (c. 1100-256 BCE) in China, the second involves the fall of the Western Chin dynasty (265-316), the third involves the death of Emperor Wu-tsung (r. 840-846) of the T'ang dynasty (618-906), and the last example involves the fate of the Retired Emperor Gotoba.

The first incident is reported in the *Records of the Historian*, a history of China written by the historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien (c. 145-86 BCE), as cited by Chih-i in the *Great Concentration and Insight* and then elaborated on by Miao-lo in his *Annotations on the Great Concentration and Insight* wherein he cites *Tso's Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*. King P'ing (r. 770-720 BCE) of the Chou dynasty, while moving his court east to Loyang, observed that those living by the Yi River were no longer following the ancient customs of the Chou and were reverting to their own local rustic customs. They were letting their hair down, wearing no upper garments, and making offerings in the fields. One of the king's officers predicted that this territory would soon be lost to them.

The second incident is also from the *Great Concentration and Insight*. Chih-i describes how the noted poet and philosopher Yuan-chi (210-263) allowed his hair to grow wild and would leave his belt undone among other improprieties. Yuan-chi was one of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove, who were proponents of living a naturalistic lifestyle in accordance with the Taoist influenced philosophy called the Mysterious Learning. The Seven Worthies and their followers were infamous for speaking and acting in an informal or even vulgar fashion as a matter of course. They were basically ancient Chinese hippies. This kind of behavior was seen in later years as one of the indications

that the house of Ssu-ma, rulers of the short lived Western Chin dynasty (265-316), was on the decline.

Before moving on to the third and fourth incidents we should pause and wonder why the lack of propriety on the part of a few is regarded as a portent of disaster for the ruling dynasty. What meaning did these stories hold for Nichiren and his contemporaries? What did any of this have to do with Buddhism? The answer lies with Confucius (551-479 BCE). It is no exaggeration to say that the worldview and values of China, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan were formed or at least clearly articulated by Confucius. Confucianism was the foundational cultural context that East Asian Buddhism had to relate to and develop in. From the very beginning of Buddhism in East Asia until today, East Asian Buddhists have accepted, accommodated, or at least tried to account for many Confucian tenets even as they committed themselves to the study and practice of the Buddha Dharma. In order to understand Nichiren, his values and worldview, one must also have an understanding of how Confucianism and Buddhism mutually transformed each other in East Asia. A complete account of Confucius and Confucianism would be outside the scope of this commentary, but I would at least like to provide a survey of those aspects of Confucianism that are relevant to Nichiren's teachings.

Confucius is the Latinized name of K'ung Fu-tzu. He was the son of an aristocrat who was born in the state of Lu during the declining years of the Chou dynasty. His father died when he was only three, but his mother raised him with a great love of learning. He married at 19 and soon had a son. As a young man he was employed in what would today be called middle management positions. He eventually attained the post of police commissioner. He later quit that post and traveled throughout China as an itinerant teacher. At that time China was little more than a patchwork of feudal kingdoms whose allegiance to the Chou dynasty was nominal at best. The conflicting ambitions of the many feudal lords and scheming ministers led to frequent warfare and social upheaval. Confucius hoped to be given the chance to implement his ideas for a model government,

but none of the rulers of the various states of China were interested in his reforms. He contented himself with studying the already ancient classics of poetry, history, and ritual and teaching his many disciples so that his vision of a harmonious society could be passed down and someday realized.

Confucius did not claim that he was teaching anything original. In fact, he insisted that he was trying to pass on the heritage of the idealized sage-rulers of the legendary golden age of China's past. These sage-rulers were the Three Sovereigns, Five Emperors, and Three Kings. The Three Sovereigns were the mythical prehistoric tribal rulers credited with the beginnings of civilization. They were: Fu Hsi (c. 2852 BCE) who invented cooking, hunting, and the domestication of animals while his wife "discovered" marriage and family; Shen Nung (c. 2737 BCE) who is credited with the invention of the plow and agriculture, tea drinking, and herbal medicine; and Huang-ti (c. 2607 BCE), the Yellow Emperor who invented pottery, houses, carts, and boats while his wife discovered how to gather and weave silk. A member of the court of the Yellow Emperor is even credited with the creation of the Chinese ideograms. The Yellow Emperor also organized the first army and used it to conquer the fertile land around the Yellow River. The legendary Five Emperors succeeded his rule: Shan-hao, Chuan-hsu, Ti-hung, Yao (r. 2356-2347 BCE), and Shun (r. 2244-2205 BCE). Yao and Shun were particularly revered as ideal rulers who instituted many of the rites that Confucius believed were at the heart of civilized life. The Three Kings were the founders of the first three dynasties to rule China. The first was the Hsia dynasty (c. 2205-1751 BCE) founded by Yu, the engineer who was the first to succeed in bringing the flooding of the Yellow River under control. The second was the Shang or Yin dynasty (c. 1751-1112 BCE) founded by a feudal prince named Ch'eng T'ang who rose up against the corrupt and evil Emperor Chieh. History repeated itself when King Wu Wang founded the Chou dynasty (c. 1111-249 BCE) by overthrowing the corrupt Emperor Chou Hsin. King Wu was a model of filial piety, and so he attributed the founding of the new dynasty to his father King Wen. When King Wu died, his brother, the Duke of Chou, ruled as regent until King Wu's son came of age. The Duke of Chou proved to be an

excellent ruler; nevertheless, he quietly stepped aside when it was time to do so. Confucius regarded the Duke of Chou as a paragon of virtue and strove to emulate him. Confucius believed that these sage-rulers had left behind a blueprint for a model civilization in texts that Confucius designated as the “six classics.” The six classics are:

1. The *Book of Changes* (the *I Ching*): a book of divination with various layers of commentary centered on a series of 64 hexagrams composed of broken and unbroken lines viewed in a state of dynamic transition from one to another. These hexagrams and their components represent the various cosmological forces the Chinese believed made the world the way it is, most notably the receptive and nourishing element known as yin and the dynamic and creative element known as yang that are represented by the broken and unbroken lines respectively. The ancient form of divination utilized the casting of yarrow stalks in order to discover which hexagram and its transitions applied to any given situation. Each hexagram and its transitions would reveal the underlying dynamics of the situation and provide appropriate advice. The ancient sage-ruler Fu Hsi is credited with creating the eight trigrams that compose the hexagrams of the *Book of Changes*. King Wen received the credit for combining the trigrams into hexagrams. The various commentaries that compose the *Book of Changes* are attributed to Fu Hsi, King Wen, the Duke of Chou, and Confucius himself.

2. The *Book of Poetry*, also known as the *Book of Odes* or *Book of Songs*, is a collection of 305 poems dating from the beginning of the Chou dynasty to around 600 BCE. These poems described the ideal conditions of life in a harmonious society. Confucius summarized the teachings of these poems with the saying, “Swerving not from the right path.” (*Confucius: The Analects*, p. 63)

3. The *Book of History* or *Book of Documents* is a historical record of the Hsia, Shang, and Chou dynasties. It contains conversations between various kings and their ministers and is therefore held to be a repository of guidance on good government, morality, ethics, and religion.

4. The *Book of Rites* is a collection of writings that according to tradition describe the ancient rituals and ceremonies adhered to by the founders of the Chou dynasty as collected and interpreted by Confucius and his disciples. These writings deal with matters of propriety in all matters, from public sacrifices to Heaven and the ancestors to the proper way of conducting oneself in all affairs of daily life.

5. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* are the court records of the state of Lu from 722-481 BCE. These records provided Confucius with a standard of virtue and good government by which to measure one's conduct. Confucius is even reported to have said, "Those who understand me will do so through the *Spring and Autumn Annals*; those who condemn me will also do so because of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*." (*Mencius: A Bilingual Edition*, p. 141) It was one of three classical commentaries on this work that Miao-lo cited in his *Annotations on the Great Concentration and Insight*.

6. Unfortunately, the *Book of Music* was lost during the persecution of Confucianism and the burning of Confucian literature by the short lived but brutal Ch'in dynasty (221-206 BCE). Confucius valued music that could exalt the mind and heart and convey an appreciation for harmonious living. He considered the teaching of the rites of propriety and music the twin pillars of culture and civilization. Confucius once said, "Be stimulated by the *Odes*, take your stand on the rites and be perfected by music." (*Confucius: The Analects*, p. 93)

With the six classics as the basis of his curriculum, Confucius taught his disciples the Tao or Way that human beings should follow in order to become genuinely human and bring peace and harmony to their families, their society, and ultimately the world. Confucius teachings were composed of four main subjects: culture, right conduct, doing one's best for others, and trustworthiness. He told his disciples that his many teachings were strung on one main thread: benevolence. Confucius' concept of benevolence encompassed the values of

filial piety, generosity, treating others as one would want to be treated oneself, doing one's best for others, and many other virtues. Many of the teachings and sayings of Confucius were recorded for posterity in a collection called *The Analects of Confucius*.

After the death of Confucius, the tradition continued to develop and several important works appeared. One was the *Book of Filial Piety* by Tseng Shen (505-435 BCE), who was a disciple of Confucius. Tseng Shen is also credited as the transmitter of the *Great Learning*, an important work that was incorporated in the *Book of Rites*. Tseng Shen was also the teacher of Tzu Ssu (483-402 BCE), the grandson of Confucius. Tzu Ssu is credited with compiling the *Doctrine of the Mean* that was also incorporated into the *Book of Rites*. One of Tzu Ssu's disciples would become the teacher of Mencius, the second great Confucian sage. The *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* became very important as Confucianism developed. Both teach that self-cultivation is the key to a harmonious society. The *Great Learning* emphasizes the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge as the basis of personal cultivation that in turn leads to peace in the family, then the state, and ultimately world peace. The *Doctrine of the Mean* in particular teaches the cultivation of personal integrity and harmony in one's conduct as the Middle Way beyond unbalanced extremes that leads to a mystical integration with Heaven and Earth, in other words "all that is."

Mencius (372-289 BCE) was the second great sage of Confucianism. Mencius is the Latinized name of Meng-tse. He lived during the Warring States period (475-221 BCE) of Chinese history when the Chou dynasty was nothing more than a name and the princes of all the various states vied with each other over who would get to become the founder of a new dynasty. Despite the chaos and bloodshed, Mencius believed that through self-cultivation in accordance with the Confucian teachings people could manifest and develop their innate goodness and thereby bring about a peaceful and unified empire united by moral virtue rather than force of arms. His teachings were collected into a work called simply the *Book of Mencius*. Two passages from the Book of Mencius should be

examined closely as they relate two very important themes in the Confucian tradition. The first passage relates the “four beginnings” which are the innate seeds of good all people possess:

As far as what is genuinely in him is concerned, a man is capable of becoming good,” said Mencius. “This is what I mean by good. As for his becoming bad, that is not the fault of his native endowment. The heart of compassion is possessed by all men alike; likewise the heart of shame, the heart of respect, and the heart of [knowing the difference between] right and wrong. The heart of compassion pertains to benevolence, the heart of shame to righteousness, the heart of respect to propriety, and heart of [discerning] right and wrong to wisdom. Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom do not give me a luster from the outside, they are in me originally. Only this has never dawned on me. That is why it is said, ‘Seek and you will get it; let go and you will lose it.’ (adapted from *Mencius: A Bilingual Edition*, p. 247)

In the next passage, Mencius relates the ideal pattern of human relationships in terms of the five relations set forth by the Sage Emperor Shun:

According to the way of man, if they are well fed, warmly clothed, and comfortably lodged but without education, they will become almost like animals. The Sage (emperor Shun) worried about it and he appointed Hsieh to be minister of education and teach people human relations, that between father and son, there should be affection; between ruler and minister, there should be righteousness; between husband and wife, there should be attention to their separate functions; between old and young, there should be proper order; and between friends there should be faithfulness. (*A Source Book In Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 69-70)

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of Confucius and Mencius and their followers, force of arms triumphed over moral virtue and the ruthless King Cheng of Ch'in became Shih-Huang-Ti, the first emperor of the ruthlessly totalitarian but mercifully brief Ch'in dynasty. Incidentally, the English name “China” was derived from the name of this dynasty, the first to truly unify China under imperial rule. The ruling philosophy of this dynasty was Legalism. Legalism taught that humanity was innately evil and that the only way to unify and control the empire

was through the impartial administration of strict and harsh laws. The Ch'in dynasty tolerated no ideological rivals to Legalism and banned all other schools of thought. They particularly despised Confucianism and did their best to eradicate it by burning the Confucian classics and either executing or banishing the Confucianists themselves. In the end, the successors of Shih-Huang-Ti fell victim to their own arrogance and corruption and it soon gave way to both peasant revolutions and the rebellion of the former feudal lords.

## The Confucian Nichiren Part 2: Confucian Virtues and the Mandate of Heaven

Confucianism revived during the Former Han dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE). Under the Emperor Wu (r. 140-87 BCE) Confucianism became the state orthodoxy. A meritocracy under the emperor was established on the basis of a civil service examination that tested applicants on their knowledge of the five classics (the six discussed above minus the *Book of Music* lost during the Ch'in dynasty). The leading light of Confucianism at this time was Tung Chung-shu (179-104 BCE). Tung Chung-shu, consolidated and systematized Confucianism so that it could serve as the ideological underpinning of a united empire. When Nichiren speaks about Confucianism in his writings, it is most often the Confucianism of Tung Chung-shu that he is referring to.

Tung Chung-shu's approach was rather eclectic and he fused certain aspects of Legalist authoritarianism and the cosmology of the Yin Yang school of early Chinese metaphysics with the humanism of Confucius and Mencius in order to create a more comprehensive ideology for the Han rulers. In particular, he believed that the forces of yin and yang govern human life and the processes of nature. Yin and yang interact and give rise to the succession of the five primary elements or agents: metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. Tung Chung-shu believed that a correspondence could be found between these five agents that compose and govern the world and other categories of five such as the five relations (as taught by Mencius in the passage cited above) and what he termed the five constant virtues: benevolence (*jen*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*chih*), and trustworthiness (*hsin*). Mencius had taught that the first four of these were inborn in all people, at least in nascent form. Trustworthiness was a quality often emphasized by Confucius in relation to doing one's best for others and other aspects of benevolent conduct. The five constant virtues taught by Tung Chung-shu become a useful summary of Confucian values.

At this point, let us turn from the history of Confucianism to an examination of Confucian thought and values as Nichiren understood them, starting with the

five constant virtues. The first and most important is benevolence. Benevolence was the one thread that Confucius insisted held together all his teachings. Benevolence means much more than just a general feeling of well-wishing towards others. Confucius held it out as an almost impossible to attain ideal of admirable and inspiring conduct. He taught that it was rooted in the love and respect that it is hoped one naturally feels towards one's parents and elder siblings and in the kindness and tolerance one ideally feels towards one's younger siblings and other family members. It also includes one's sense of dignity and self-respect. Extended beyond the family, it becomes generosity and kindness towards those one is responsible for, and an attitude of respect and deference towards one's elders and social superiors such as the ruler. The benevolent person always tries to put themselves in the others place so they can act as they would have others act towards them – the so-called golden rule. On this basis they always try to do their best for others at all times. The benevolent person is not an obedient automaton or a simpleton however. They balance their kind-heartedness with learning and discernment and have the courage to remonstrate with their superiors if need be. Under no circumstances will they give in to wrongdoing nor do they value profit over virtue. The benevolent person is someone who has overcome selfishness and through personal example inspires and instructs others. Confucius believed that all people had the capacity to be benevolent but that few lived up to, or even tried to live up to, their potential. Mencius taught that the natural feelings of compassion people feel in the face of suffering, esp. of children or innocents, is the nascent form of benevolence.

The other four virtues support benevolence and complete it. The second is righteousness, the virtue of knowing how to act appropriately in all circumstances. Righteousness is having the self-restraint to resist temptation and the fortitude to do one's duty. Standing up for what is right also involves courage in the face of opposition or persecution. Above all righteousness is about preserving one's integrity. Mencius taught that people's natural feeling of shame in regard to wrongdoing is the nascent form of righteousness.

Propriety refers to “ritual propriety.” It is the virtue of knowing and acting in accord with the rites handed down from ancient times. These rites involved court manners, the proper way to perform ceremonies like sacrifices to Heaven or the ancestors, funerals, weddings, and other occasions, and matters of etiquette in various social situations. The rites governed social relationships and the mutual duties, responsibilities, and expectations between people. They set the standard but also set limits so that people could act in a way that was mutually beneficial and not exploitive. Confucius saw the rites as integral to culture along with music. They directed benevolence and righteousness in specific and concrete ways and refined one’s character. Confucius was not inflexible about them however. He recognized that the rites had changed over time from the Hsia to the Shang to the Chou dynasty. He preferred frugality and sincere expressions of feeling in regard to them, and approved of changes along those lines. However, he was also concerned when standards were allowed to slide or when those not entitled to perform certain rites or to initiate changes in the rites presumed to do so. This was a sign of decadence and social disintegration. Above all, it would seem that for Confucius, ritual propriety was rooted in natural human feelings and mutually beneficial relationships and the goal was harmony both within oneself and between people and ultimately between Heaven and Earth and humankind. Mencius taught that the natural wish to be courteous and modest is the nascent form of propriety.

Wisdom is primarily the virtue of discerning right from wrong. In a sense it precedes the others because without wisdom one will have no sense of ethics, or social skills, or even just the plain common sense the other virtues require for guidance. Wisdom, however, does not rate as highly as the others because it is sometimes spoken of as though it involved only what is good or bad for oneself. In other words, this is the wisdom of enlightened self-interest and not cosmic awareness or esoteric knowledge. Mencius taught that people’s instinctual ability to distinguish right from wrong is the nascent form of wisdom.

The final virtue is trustworthiness, sometimes called “faithfulness.” Confucius praised this virtue many times and spoke of it as the mainstay along with doing one’s best for others. Trustworthiness means not only being honest and sincere, but also being able to live up to one’s word. The trustworthy person is the person who can be relied upon in all things. On one occasion Confucius stated that this virtue was close to righteousness. On another he stated that it was the consummation of the other virtues.

A student of the Tao or Way according to Confucianism aims at becoming a person of nobility (*chun-tzu*) who can guide others by exemplifying these five constant virtues. A noble person is a person of refinement and integrity. They are impeccable in their actions, fair and just in their dealing with others, and above all full of loving-kindness. Confucius confessed that in his own estimation he had not accomplished much in the way of the person of nobility. Beyond even the noble person is the sage whose virtue benefits all people and whose conduct can serve as the model for future generations. The sage’s virtue and wisdom is so great that they are at one with Heaven and Earth. Incidentally, the title “shonin” which is given to Nichiren is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese word for “sage.”

Only the virtuous are fit to receive the Mandate of Heaven according to the political vision of Confucianism. The term “Heaven” is not any easy one to define. Sometimes it can mean the collective will of the ancestors and sage-rulers of the past who have ascended to the status of gods, becoming a kind of celestial bureaucracy under the Supreme Emperor of Heaven. At other times, Heaven can indicate the laws of nature or the supreme but impersonal metaphysical principle that gives rise to all life and all life-sustaining patterns and relationships. In any case, the Mandate of Heaven refers to a divine commission given to a nobleman worthy enough to serve as the Son of Heaven. The Son of Heaven rules China (the entire civilized world as far as the Chinese were concerned) as the emperor and in doing so serves to unite Heaven and Earth by fulfilling the will of Heaven in this world through benevolent leadership and the

performance of the proper rituals and sacrifices. However, if the rulers do not fulfill their obligations and maintain their virtue, the Mandate of Heaven can be rescinded. In such a case, the corrupt dynasty will fall to anarchy and revolution and a new dynasty will receive the Mandate of Heaven in its place, as happened when the villainous emperors Chieh and Chou were overthrown by Ch'eng T'ang and King Wu respectively.

In connection with the idea that Heaven commissioned rulers in recognition of virtue or rescinded such commissions due to malfeasance, Tung Chung-shu also taught that humanity's actions could affect the natural world and vice versa:

Tung Chung-shu (179-104 B.C.), the greatest Confucian scholar of the age, expressed the central idea best when he wrote that the action of man flows into the universal course of heaven and earth and causes reciprocal reverberations in their manifestations. Since there was this close relationship between heaven and man, the Han Confucianists believed that abnormal events in the human world caused heaven to manifest abnormal phenomena in the natural world. These abnormal phenomena were known as catastrophes and anomalies. Catastrophes represented the warnings of heaven to errant man. Such warnings might be in the form of floods, famines, landslides, or earthquakes. If man persisted in his evil ways despite these warnings, then heaven caused strange anomalies to arise in the form of eclipses of the sun or moon, unusual movements of the stars, growths of beards on women, or birth of babies with two heads. If man still persisted in evil, unmindful of these signs from heaven, then he was doomed to ruin. On the other hand, if man acted correctly, then the world system would be harmonious and well governed. (*Buddhism in China*, pp. 22-23)

As has been seen previously in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, Nichiren and the Buddhist sutras shared this view, common among agrarian people all over the world. Here we see the Confucian version of it. While we no longer share this mythic view of natural events, it is still true that human greed, anger, and ignorance can bring about civil strife, warfare, poverty, famine, and can even bring about or exacerbate natural disasters through ecological damage, or the

refusal to adequately plan and prepare for natural events like earthquakes, drought, forest fires, flooding, or hurricanes.

This brings us back to the notion that the appearance of hippies signals the downfall of civilization, or at least the ruling dynasty. When the people living by the Yi River began to forsake the rituals and manners of the Chou court, this showed that the court was no longer respected and that China was again disintegrating into a patchwork of warring tribes with no central authority or common customs and traditions. The Chou had lost the Mandate of Heaven because the dynasty no longer represented a benevolent central rule that could unite all of China by acting as the proper intermediary between Heaven and Earth. Confucianists also took the philosophy and behavior of Yuan-chi and the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove in the third century of the Common Era as a sign of the decadence of the house of Ssu-ma. Only a ruler who could govern benevolently and uphold the rites would be able to gain the respect of the people, establish a central authority, and unite China. Only such a ruler could receive and maintain the Mandate of Heaven. The observance of the proper rites, therefore, was looked upon as the responsibility of the rulers, and when people began to turn away from the correct rites, customs, and traditions, then it was viewed as a sign that the rulers were losing the Mandate of Heaven and that if disaster was to be averted either reform or a new regime was needed.

We may not subscribe to the idea that a divinely appointed emperor is needed to maintain law and order and act as an intermediary with God or Heaven, but these ideas are not totally alien either. Confucianism is basically about family values. Ideally within a family there are clearly delineated relationships and responsibilities and an underlying spirit of love and affection. If the family is the basic building block of society, then the same values that hold a family together in love and harmony should also be the values that hold the country itself together. The country, then, becomes an extension of the family. Even today, there are those who argue that family values are needed if our society is to hold together and receive God's blessing. Some believe that one of

the greatest threats to these values is when public figures like politicians, actors, singers, or sports stars act contrary to these values or endorse ideas or ways of life that could possibly lead to or encourage the breakdown of the family. Usually it is religious conservatives who hold such views. Often these are the very same people who believe in the literal unfolding of scriptural prophecy and the intervention of an all-powerful God in human affairs through things like earthquakes, floods, disease, and other disasters. So the Confucian view that certain core values rooted in family relationships are vital to a healthy society should not be all that unfamiliar to us.

Unfortunately, the term “family values” has also come to represent various forms of bigotry, such as homophobia, and authoritarianism. Family values are sometimes viewed as another way of imposing outmoded patriarchal values in which women are subordinated to men, regardless of ability or relative merits, and in which unjust hierarchical relationships, unbendingly severe laws, and social conformism and repression are the norm. Certainly Confucianism throughout its history came to represent a very patriarchal system which devalued women, emphasized rote learning and strict conformity, and was often responsible for the political suppression of rival systems of thought and even outright bigotry against non-Chinese people and cultures. It became a very narrow, close-minded, and oppressive system of thought. But this was the dark side of the Confucian tradition. The dark side of Confucianism and what are called “family values” need to be recognized and critiqued. However, we should not lose sight of the positive aspects. The Confucian emphasis on the five constant virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness need not necessarily be connected with bigotry and patriarchal repression. These Confucian “family values” had a vital role in uplifting the human spirit and steering human society (at least in East Asia) towards a more peaceful and harmonious way of life based on the fundamental building block of a loving family. It was these values that Nichiren praised in many of his writings as necessary precursors to the reception of Buddhism. Hopefully, we too can come to appreciate the continuing relevance of such values and find ways to

incorporate them into our own lives in a way that is appropriate in our day and age wherein other values such as equality, creativity, progress, and tolerance prevail.

### The Confucian Nichiren Part 3: The Buddhist Appropriation of Confucianism

When Buddhism and Confucianism encountered each other after the entry of Buddhism in the first century the Confucian elite were not impressed. They viewed it as a foreign superstition whose teachings about rebirth and karma were outlandish. They could see no reason to bow down to this foreign god, the Buddha, especially since he was so unfilial as to abandon his family to become a vagabond in the forest. They were especially scandalized by Buddhist monasticism. The teaching that one should leave home and abandon all one's filial duties in order to pursue the ephemeral goal of enlightenment struck them as appalling. Buddhists in China from the beginning have had to defend the validity of the Dharma and also show that it was not trying to undermine Confucian values but rather supported them even as it claimed to transcend them.

One of the ways this was done was through the claims of apocryphal sutras, like the *Practicing the Pure Dharma Sutra* cited by Nichiren in the *Kaimoku Sho (Opening of the Eyes)*, that the Buddha himself had commissioned three bodhisattvas with the task of appearing in China as the three sages Confucius, his favored disciple Yen-hui (511-480 BCE), and Lao-tzu (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE?) the legendary founder of Taoism. He did so to ensure that secular virtues and civilized arts would be taught to the Chinese so they would be receptive to the Dharma. In particular, the five major precepts that can enable one to be reborn as a human being were taught in terms of the five constant virtues. One example of how Chinese Buddhists identified the five precepts with the five constant virtues can be found in the 9<sup>th</sup> century work *Inquiry Into the Origin of Humanity* by Tsung-mi (780-841): "Not killing is benevolence, not stealing is righteousness, not committing adultery is propriety, not lying is trustworthiness, and, by neither drinking wine nor eating meat, the spirit is purified and one increases in wisdom." (p. 117) Nichiren accepted this story as fact, and summarized it in the *Sainan Koku Yurai*, considered a trial essay for *Rissho Ankoku Ron*:

Prior to Buddhism being introduced in China sage rulers such as the Yellow Emperor governed their kingdoms by means of the five virtues. After the introduction of Buddhism we can see these five virtues are the same as the five precepts of Buddhism prohibiting killing, stealing, adultery, lying, and drinking liquor. Ancient Chinese sages such as Lao-tzu and Confucius are the three sages whom the Buddha dispatched to China in order to propagate a Buddhism adapted to suit the land in the distant future. Therefore, the loss of kingdoms by such rulers as King Chieh of Hsia, King Chou Hsin of Yin, and King Yu of Chou through violating the five virtues equals violating the five precepts.

Also, to be fortunate in being born a human being and becoming a king is due to the merit of having observed the five precepts and the ten virtuous acts. Although non-Buddhist scriptures are superficial in teaching, not preaching the cause-and-effect relationship between merits in the past and rewards in the future, those who observed the five precepts and ten virtuous acts became kings. Accordingly, when people transgress the five virtues, heavenly calamities and terrestrial disasters will occur in succession. (WNS: D1, p. 82)

As far as Nichiren and other East Asian Buddhists like Tsung-mi, or the T'ien-t'ai patriarchs Chih-i and Miao-lo were concerned, the Mandate of Heaven was not the collective will of the ancestors or the inscrutable workings of nature, but the unfolding of the law of cause and effect. Cause and effect operate according to the nature of one's deeds for better or worse. In Buddhism wholesome and unwholesome causes have been taught in terms of the five major precepts or the ten courses of wholesome conduct: not killing, not stealing, not committing adultery, not lying, not using divisive speech, not using harsh speech, not speaking irresponsibly, not giving in to greed, not giving in to anger, not giving in to false views. The five constant virtues and the Mandate of Heaven taught by Confucianism is just another way of presenting these precepts but without the explanation of the subtle workings of karma. Confucian teachings and values therefore are still upheld, but now they are subsumed within the skillful methods used by the Buddha and the bodhisattvas to prepare sentient beings for the Buddha Dharma. After the introduction of Buddhism to China, the Chinese rulers became accountable for protecting and upholding the Buddha

Dharma itself. Failure to do so on the part of the ruling emperors would mean the loss of their mandate. In the view of Nichiren, the fall of the Chou and Chin dynasties was the result of a failure to uphold the five constant virtues that were the equivalent of the five major precepts of Buddhism.

Naturally the Confucianists and Taoists did not see things this way, and argued that the introduction of Buddhism to China had proven to be a disaster, an enervating influence that contributed to the short-lived nature of the various dynasties in China after the fall of the Han. Confucianists and Taoists had even succeeded in bringing about three major persecutions of Buddhism in 446 by Emperor Wu of the Northern Wei dynasty (386-535), 574-577 by Emperor Wu of the Northern Chou dynasty (557-581), and 845 by Emperor Wu-tsung of the T'ang dynasty (618-907). In the persecution of 446, Emperor Wu and the chief instigators of the persecution were all dead within 5 years and the persecution itself never amounted to much due to opposition within the court. The persecution of 574-577 only lasted 3 years and ended with the death of Emperor Wu in 578. The third persecution was the most devastating to Chinese Buddhism but only lasted a year and ended with the death of Emperor Wu-tsung in 846. Given this record, it is perhaps understandable why many Buddhists like Nichiren would conclude that persecuting Buddhism is not a recipe for longevity.

This brings us back to the third incident that Nichiren relates by citing a passage from Ennin's *Account of a Pilgrimage in China in Search of the Dharma*. Ennin was in China from 838 until 847 and witnessed the persecution of Emperor Wu-tsung as well as the events leading up to it and the aftermath. In the passage, Ennin also mentions that prior to the persecution Emperor Wu-tsung had commissioned a monk named Ching-shuan to propagate the nembutsu, but this seemingly meritorious act was followed by Uighur invasions, the revolt of a regional commander, and the insubordination of Tibet. "In the same year a Buddhist monk, Hsuan-hsuan, claimed that he could defeat the hated Uighurs (a Central Asiatic people) by a magic sword, but when he was put to the test, he was found to be an imposter." (*Buddhism in China*, pp. 227-8)

Disillusioned with Buddhism, exasperated with the corruption within the Sangha, and incited by Taoists and Confucian ministers, Emperor Wu-tsung initiated the persecution of 845. Throughout China, monasteries and temples were destroyed, their wealth and lands confiscated, and the monks and nuns returned to lay life.

The suppression itself was of short duration. Within a year, in the third month of 846, Wu-tsung died, his health probably affected by the longevity potions which he had been taking, and the imperial scepter was taken up by Hsuan-tsung, who immediately initiated action to call off the anti-Buddhist movement. To start with, the Taoists, Chao Kuei-chen and Liu Hsuan-ching, along with eleven others, were executed because they had incited the previous emperor to extreme measures against Buddhism. (Ibid, pp. 232-3)

It would seem that Emperor Wu-tsung could not win. If he propagated Buddhism it led to unrest and even war. Persecuting Buddhism, on the other hand, seemed to result in the deaths of the emperor and all those who had instigated the persecution. Of course the invasions, revolts, and unrest most probably had very little to do with the propagation of nembutsu in China and everything to do with various internal and external enemies of the declining T'ang dynasty probing for weaknesses and taking advantage. Likewise, the Emperor's early death was most likely due to an ill-founded faith in dubious recipes for immortality.

Nichiren, however, saw the emperor's troubles and early demise as a clear indication of the karmic effects of at first promoting the nembutsu and later persecuting Buddhism. As we have seen in his critique of Honen, Nichiren believed that supporting Pure Land Buddhism was to support an otherworldly teaching that denigrated other forms of Buddhism including those that would give hope and practical guidance for this life and not just in the afterlife. In effect, it meant slandering or misrepresenting the Buddha Dharma and therefore inviting all the disasters predicted in the sutra passages Nichiren cited previously. The attempt to suppress all forms of Buddhism only made things worse. The death of

Emperor Wu-tsung was the result of his failure to propagate the True Dharma and later his attempt to destroy Buddhism in China. The Mandate of Heaven therefore depends upon the ruler's ability to protect and uphold the True Dharma.

So again the issue is raised, can we really say that the fate of a nation or at least its government is dependent upon Buddhism? Throughout the history of Confucianism in China, the Mandate of Heaven has been given various interpretations. Some interpretations depended more heavily on the intercession of heavenly powers, while others took a more naturalistic position. Mencius, for instance, seemed to equate the Mandate of Heaven with what we would call the "will of the people." It is not too hard to make a case for the view that virtuous rulers will govern wisely, gain and maintain the respect and trust of the people, and will not act against the public good for private gain. Such a government will be more stable and better able to weather a crisis than a corrupt government that does not have the people's support and which weakens or even sells out the nation for short-term personal gain. Such a government will enjoy the trust and confidence of the people; it will therefore enjoy the Mandate of Heaven.

Does it make sense, then, to claim that one can receive the Mandate of Heaven by supporting a particular religion, in this case Buddhism? In fact, the example of Emperor Wu-tsung shows the opposite. He patronized Buddhism in the beginning of his reign and still had to contend with rebellion and war. So could one say the Mandate can be gained or lost depending on what kind of Buddhism was supported or suppressed? Such a claim seems very far-fetched and more than a little self-serving when made by Buddhists who are trying to win the patronage of the rulers and/or convince them to suppress rivals. But let us suppose that the issue is not Buddha Dharma but the True Dharma. The True Dharma is not just the ideas or teachings, much less the opinions, of the Buddha and his followers. The claim of Buddhism is that the True Dharma is the true nature of reality and the way of life and methods of spiritual practice that lead to an awakening to that true nature. Fidelity to the True Dharma is really supposed

to mean fidelity to the Truth and not just to a religious system. The real issue should not be framed in terms of which religion will bring about a successful government. Rather, the real issue is what kind of a vision will guide any given government: expediency and self-interest, or fidelity to the Truth and compassionate action in service of the Truth? In this the Confucian and Buddhist traditions of good government can find common ground.

We cannot leave it at that however. Benevolent government, the main theme of Confucianism, has already been mentioned in the very beginning of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* as one of the many methods proposed to end the suffering of the Japanese people. But even at its best, the benign paternalism of Confucianism proved to be no match for the uncertainties at the core of the human condition, let alone the natural disasters that were then and still are largely beyond human control. In addition, the Confucian tradition has often fallen short of this ideal, and has ended up being nothing more than an authoritarian ideology on the side of an oppressive status quo. So something more is needed. For this reason, Nichiren saw the True Dharma as addressing the deeper concern of the universal suffering of all sentient beings and its causes in greed, anger, and ignorance. The True Dharma, particularly in its expression as the Wonderful Dharma of the Lotus Flower Teaching, shows the way to overcome this suffering by proposing that all beings in fact have the buddha-nature. In this view, we are not merely noblemen in need of an education in good government or commoners in need of governing as the Confucian tradition teaches. Rather we are potential buddhas and we should regard each other with great compassion and treat each other with dignity befitting the precious and interdependent nature of all life. This is the aim of Buddhism – not merely to foster good government and benevolence, but to enable all people to cultivate a deeper vision of what life itself is in order to overcome delusion and selfishness and instead realize this world as a pure land in which enlightenment is an ever-present possibility. In our age, government can no longer be expected to patronize Buddhism or even directly support it, but government can be expected to create the conditions wherein such a grand

vision of interdependence and universal regard for the dignity of life can become the basis for a truly just and peaceful world.

## The Confucian Nichiren Part 4: The Shinto/Buddhist Mandate of Heaven

At this point, Nichiren brings up the fate of the Retired Emperor Gotoba. For Nichiren, this last example held a far greater significance than the brief mention here would indicate. In the year 1275, Nichiren wrote the *Shinkoku-o Goshō* (*Sovereigns of Our Divine Land*) in which he stated that the defeat of Retired Emperor Gotoba in the Jokyu Disturbance of 1221 and the earlier death by drowning of the Emperor Antoku (1178-1185) at the Battle of Dan-no-ura had so disturbed him as a boy that making sense of those tragedies had been among the major reasons for his study of Buddhism.

Pondering these two great events in the history of Japan, I, Nichiren, since my childhood seriously studied both exoteric and esoteric Buddhism as well as all the sutras of various Buddhist schools by either learning from others or reading the sutras and contemplating them. Finally, I discovered the reason for these events. (WNS: D1, p. 176)

In order to understand why Nichiren found these events so disturbing, we must briefly survey Nichiren's understanding of the history and role of the Japanese emperors. Judging from the *Shinkoku-o Goshō*, Nichiren accepted the beliefs concerning Japanese imperial rule that were common in his day. One belief was that the emperors were all descended from the gods of Japan in an unbroken lineage going back to seven heavenly and five terrestrial gods. The first of the five terrestrial gods was said to be the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Omikami enshrined at the Grand Shrine of Ise. Nichiren would later include her on the calligraphic mandala that he would design to represent the Gohonzon of the Essential Teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*. After the twelve heavenly and terrestrial gods, the first mortal emperor was Emperor Jimmu (r. 40 BCE–10 CE). The imperial family, therefore, were believed to be a divine dynasty that could not be supplanted or replaced because an unbroken line of succession going back to the gods had to be maintained. When the Japanese began to model their court and bureaucracy on Chinese models, one thing they did not import was the Confucian concept of a Mandate of Heaven that could be withdrawn

from one dynasty and bestowed upon another.

In the ninth century, the Japanese identified Emperor Ojin (r. 362-394), the legendary sixteenth emperor, with the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman. Nichiren explicitly affirmed this identification in his *Kangyo Hachiman-sho (Remonstrations with Bodhisattva Hachiman)*. Hachiman had started out as a Shinto deity from the southern island of Kyushu. He was bestowed the title of Great Bodhisattva in the year 781 because an oracle had declared that Hachiman would grant his protection to the construction of the statue of Vairochana Buddha at the Todaiji temple in Nara. In the ninth century, Japanese Buddhists developed the theory of *honji suijaku*, “root essence and trace manifestation,” in which Shinto deities were identified as the traces or shadows of the buddhas and bodhisattvas who were in turn regarded as the origin or root of the local deities. Based on this theory, Hachiman was sometimes viewed as a trace manifestation of Amitabha Buddha. In the *Kangyo Hachiman-sho*, however, Nichiren identified Hachiman as a trace manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha. Nichiren also included the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman on his calligraphic mandala.

During the reign of Emperor Heijo (774-824), an oracle reported to the court that Hachiman had vowed to protect 100 rulers. This was taken to mean that all the Japanese emperors beginning with Emperor Jimmu up to the 100<sup>th</sup> in line of succession were under the divine protection of Hachiman. This was the Shinto answer to the Mandate of Heaven. Unfortunately for the Japanese desire for continuous direct rule by the descendants of the gods, imperial rule fell before the armed might of the samurai clans long before the time of the 100<sup>th</sup> emperor, though the new military government did claim to rule in the emperor’s name.

In brief, the story is as follows: since 644 the imperial family had become dominated by the intrigues of the aristocratic Fujiwara clan, whose daughters became the wives of the emperors, and whose clan leaders controlled a succession of child emperors, while forcing the older emperors into retirement. Over time, the Fujiwara and other noble families in Kyoto amassed more and

more tax-exempt private estates, as did the various Buddhist temples. They relied upon local warrior clans to manage and defend these estates. These warriors became the samurai class, and before long the Fujiwara were calling upon them to use their force of arms to help keep order and to settle succession disputes for the imperial throne. The two most powerful clans were the Heike (aka Taira) and Genji (aka Minamoto). These two clans realized that instead of propping up the Fujiwara they could seize power directly. After a two-year war between these clans, the Heike emerged victorious over the Genji in 1160 and their leader Taira Kiyomori (1118-1181) became the de facto ruler of Japan. In 1180 the Genji under the leadership of Minamoto Yoritomo (1147-1199) revolted and began the Gempei War that lasted until 1185. The Gempei War ended with the total defeat of the Heike and the drowning of Emperor Antoku (1178-1185), the 81<sup>st</sup> emperor of Japan and grandson of Kiyomori, at the Battle of Dan-no-ura. Yoritomo, wary of the intrigues and the soft and decadent life of the Kyoto aristocracy, created a *bakufu* or “bivouac government” in Kamakura. In 1192, Yoritomo was given the title *shogun* or “barbarian subduing general” by Emperor Gotoba, the brother of the drowned child-emperor Antoku. This marked the true beginning of the Kamakuran shogunate, and a transition from imperial rule to military rule that would last until 1868. The story of the rise and fall of the Heike and the end of imperial rule became the basis of Japan’s epic tragedy, the *Tale of the Heike*.

In his biography of Nichiren, J.A. Christensen provides a useful overview of the political situation during the Kamakuran shogunate beginning with Yoritomo’s incorporation of the feudal provincial lords known as the *daimyo* into the new political order:

Using the daimyo and the samurai as a power-base, Yoritomo reorganized the administration of the entire country. The daimyo, who had previously held their lands by force, were named legal stewards to the land as long as their allegiance remained with Yoritomo. Taxes were levied for military purposes and were paid directly to Yoritomo’s treasury. Yoritomo, himself, was given authority by the reluctant emperor to appoint all constables, judges,

and stewards throughout the land.

Yoritomo's power did not last, however. He died in 1199 and was succeeded by his two sons, both of them weak and dissolute young men who were eventually murdered. His government might have crumbled had it not been for his strong-willed widow who schemed so cleverly that her father, Hojo Tokimasa, a member of the conquered Taira clan, was named Regent to rule in the name of the Shogun. This brought about a peculiarly confused form of government.

The supposed head of the government was the Emperor in Kyoto, but his authority was delegated to the retired Emperor who, in turn, delegated authority to the Shogun in Kamakura. And the Shogun, himself, was ruled by a Hojo Regent. Complicated though it was, the system worked very well, and Japan was ruled by Hojo Regents until 1333. (Nichiren, p. 16)

At the time the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* was submitted in 1260 the situation had one more wrinkle, the retired regent Hojo Tokiyori was still the de facto leader of the Hojo clan, and it was he who actually pulled the strings. The main point, however, was that the actual rulers of Japan were no longer the emperors in Kyoto but the military government in Kamakura run by the Hojo clan. In the year 1221, the Retired Emperor Gotoba and his two sons, Retired Emperor Tsuchimikado (1195-1231) and Retired Emperor Juntoku (1197-1242) made an attempt to overthrow the Hojo regents and restore imperial rule. The forces of Hojo Yoshitoki (1163-1224), the regent at that time, defeated them and all three former emperors were exiled. Gotoba was sent to the island of Oki, Tsuchimikado was sent to Shikoku, and Juntoku was sent to Sado Island. Juntoku's son, the child emperor Chukyo (1218-1234) was deposed. This incident became known as the Jokyu Disturbance, named for the era in which it occurred.

This profoundly disturbed Nichiren, because to him it meant the reversal of the social order, the rulers had become the ruled. It also meant that the vow of Hachiman to protect 100 emperors had not been fulfilled. The world had entered a dark period of chaos and even the gods had failed to save them. The Heike

and later Emperor Gotoba had even appealed to the powers of the buddhas and bodhisattvas by having prayer services conducted by the chief priests of the leading Tendai temples in order to defeat their enemies, but their prayers came to nothing. So even the power of the buddhas and bodhisattvas had been unable to prevent the victory of the warrior clans and the tragic death by drowning of the seven-year-old Emperor Antoku and later the ignominious exile of Retired Emperor Gotoba and his two sons. It seemed as though injustice had prevailed and that no power on heaven or earth would or could set things right.

Nichiren, however, considered that perhaps things were not as bad as they seemed. Perhaps it was not just armed power alone that allowed the Minamoto and later the Hojo to prevail. Though Nichiren did not use the term “Mandate of Heaven” he effectively proposed the same idea in the *Kangyo Hachiman-sho* in connection with Hachiman.

In my opinion, protecting 100 rulers does not mean protecting all rulers from the first to 100<sup>th</sup>; it is the vow to protect 100 honest rulers. This is because Hachiman’s vow states, “He will reside in the head of honest persons, not in the heart of evil persons.” The moon reflects itself in clear water, but not in muddy water. Also the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman lives in the head of pure and honest men, but not in the heart of impure and dishonest men. The ruler is originally an honest person who does not tell a lie. In this sense, Minamoto Yoritomo and Hojo Yoshitoki were honest men who did not tell lies; they are among the 100 rulers, in whom the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman resides. That is the reason why they were victorious under the protective wings of Hachiman.

There are two meanings of honesty: first, honesty in the worldly sense and in the second place, honesty in Buddhism. Speaking of honesty in the worldly sense, the Chinese character for king means running through heaven, humanity, and earth. The three horizontal lines stand for heaven, humanity, and earth, which are run through by a vertical line. That is to say, the king is a person who treads the way of honesty throughout heaven, humanity, and earth. The character king also stands for the color yellow. In ancient China, five colors stood for five directions, with the color yellow in the center. As the ruler in the center, the king is also called “yellow emperor.” The lord of heaven, lord of humanity, as well as that of earth are all called the king. Ex-Emperor Gotoba, however, was the

ruler in name only; he was a liar, wicked and dishonest. On the contrary, Shogunal Regent Hojo Yoshitoki was a subject in name, but he was worthy of a great ruler without double-talk, in whom the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman vowed to reside. (WNS: D1, p.277)

Nichiren saw the fundamental problem as the failure of the emperors to uphold the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren expected not merely integrity in terms of secular values, but also a deep commitment and fidelity to spiritual values, the True Dharma as taught in the *Lotus Sutra*. In the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, Nichiren lays the blame for the fall of imperial rule on the failure of the emperors to put a stop to the rise of Honen's exclusive nembutsu movement. In later writings, Nichiren blames the emperors and the clergy of the Tendai temples for turning away from the *Lotus Sutra* and relying instead on the esoteric practices of the Shingon school in order to defeat their enemies. Either way, the emperors had forsaken what Nichiren believed was the primary responsibility of any ruler: upholding the True Dharma.

Here we find the convergence of Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism in the worldview and teachings of Nichiren. For Nichiren, the Mandate of Heaven was a matter of having or losing the protection of the gods, in particular Hachiman; and, as mentioned above, Nichiren believed that Hachiman was the trace manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha. It should be noted that the Kamakuran shogunate looked to Hachiman as their patron deity, a god of archery and war. Minamoto Yoritomo even built the Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine in Kamakura to honor Hachiman. In 1280 the Tsurugaoka Shrine burned down, prompting Nichiren to write the *Kangyo Hachiman-sho*. Nichiren saw the destruction of the shrine as an omen that Hachiman had abandoned Japan and its rulers because they continued to abandon the *Lotus Sutra*.

What can any of this mean for those of us who do not believe in divine emperors or the Mandate of Heaven or Shinto deities or Buddhist bodhisattvas? What can any of this mean for those of us who live in countries where the separation of church and state is an important value, and where no one would

ever seriously suggest that the fate of the nation depends upon upholding Buddhism, let alone a particular sutra within the Buddhist tradition? This is the question we come to again and again in this commentary. And again and again, we see that for pre-industrial people, the rulers were seen as the intermediaries between the natural and human worlds and the divine, whether the divine was the Confucian Heaven, Hachiman and the Shinto deities, or the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha of the *Lotus Sutra*. The ruler's responsibility was to create within themselves and then extend to their domain a harmony between Heaven and Earth by upholding the integral order of all things. There is no indication in Nichiren's writings that he did not take the existence of these things as anything less than literal. He certainly saw them as more than just literal, but the literal existence of these deities and cosmic functions and mandates was something that he and his contemporaries took for granted. But these are not things that modern people take for granted, and outside of Japan, very few can relate to Confucianism, Shinto, and Buddhism as anything other than foreign religions with no real relevance to modern life.

Perhaps we can relate to the intuition that these agrarian mythic ways of thinking are trying to communicate: that human beings have the responsibility to create a just society that is in harmony with the natural world. If we create a society whose foundation is built on exploitation and conquest, greed and aggression, then we will have a society where every hand is lifted up against another and short-term gain overrules long-term stability. We need to govern our lives and by extension our societies by a higher standard than greed for power and wealth. The power of the gods, buddhas, and bodhisattvas is actually the power of our own wisdom and compassion. We realize this power by following the higher standard of the True or Wonderful Dharma that Nichiren saw most fully expressed in the *Lotus Sutra*. The Wonderful Dharma is not a sectarian creed or dogma but the realization that all beings are intrinsically worthy of our respect, compassion, and gratitude; and that the place and time to realize true peace, purity, and awakening is right where we are standing at this very moment. This may sound vague and abstract, but it is only realized in the unfolding of the

concrete circumstances of our daily lives – in the way we fulfill our responsibilities, do our jobs, treat our families, spend time with friends, vote, shop, and contribute to various causes that effect the world around us. In this way we each create the integral harmony of Heaven and Earth beginning with ourselves and extending to the whole world.

## Empowerment and Responsibility of the Buddha's Disciple

### VI Appealing to the Authorities

Having Calmed Down Somewhat, The Traveler Stated:

WNSD1: p. 127

WND: p. 17

We might not be able to follow the kind of reasoning found in Confucianism, Buddhism, or Shinto that views the influence of Heaven, or bodhisattvas, or deified emperors of the past as a determining factor in world events, let alone be convinced by it, but Nichiren imagines that the shogunate, as represented here by the guest, might find this argument worthy of consideration. However, Nichiren anticipates that his own lack of status might become an issue. So at this point the guest asks the host, "Who are you that you feel qualified to make these criticisms and recommendations? By what right do you take such an unprecedented action upon yourself?" In a democratic society, this would ideally not be an issue, but in a society as stratified as medieval Japan, Nichiren was just a low-ranking Buddhist monk of no standing and was therefore seen as being very presumptuous to present a memorial to the government on his own.

In Response, the Master Declared

WNSD1: p. 127-129

WND: 17-18

The host tells his guest that like a blue fly riding on the tail of a thoroughbred horse, or a vine clinging to a tall pine tree, he is a born disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha and a servant of the king of sutras, the *Lotus Sutra*. This means that even though he is a lowly monk with, as he says, "little ability" he is nevertheless a child of the Buddha who cannot help but he troubled by the decline of the Buddha Dharma. In the expanded *Rissho Ankoku Ron* Nichiren follows this with several citations from chapters 10, 14, and 23 of the *Lotus Sutra* wherein the sutra asserts that it supreme among all sutras. This means that by

association those who uphold it are to be valued and respected just as much as the sutra they serve. This is a bold argument to make before the military rulers.

The argument is interesting in that it simultaneously presents the votary of the *Lotus Sutra* as humble but also as having an unparalleled dignity. The votary should be humble because they may have nothing of their own to be particularly proud of. The votary may be poor, ugly, uneducated, homeless, lacking in status, perhaps even simple-minded and unable to grasp the subtle teachings of Buddhism. However, through faith in the *Lotus Sutra*, they attain a dignity that sets them above those who do not have faith in what the sutra teaches. They have nothing of their own but gain everything from the *Lotus Sutra*. But what do they gain from the *Lotus Sutra*? Why should worshipping a particular scripture set someone seen as worthless by the world above all others, even shoguns and emperors, five star generals and presidents?

The answer is that upholding the *Lotus Sutra* is not about worshipping a text; it is about upholding the Wonderful Dharma that teaches the supreme dignity of all people. The supreme teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* is that all beings will attain buddhahood. Rich or poor, famous, infamous, or unknown, Olympic athletes, the mentally or physically handicapped, young or old, educated or uneducated, smart or dull, all races, classes, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and even creeds are all destined for buddhahood according to the *Lotus Sutra*. Even those who would be considered incorrigible evildoers like Devadatta or Judas Iscariot (the Christian equivalent of Devadatta) are extended the promise of eventual buddhahood in the *Lotus Sutra*. The *Lotus Sutra* is the great equalizer that reveals the hidden depths of unconditioned purity, bliss, and eternity that is the true selfless self of all beings. By upholding the *Wonderful Dharma of the Lotus Flower Sutra* the most humble person can realize the infinite dignity of all life, and those of great worldly wealth, power, and status can realize their essential equality with all beings. This is the humbling empowerment of the *Lotus Sutra*.

The host then cites a passage from the *Nirvana Sutra* that Nichiren will cite again and again in order to explain why he feels duty bound to remonstrate with those he believes are destroying the Dharma. The passage reads:

If even a good monk sees someone destroying the teaching and disregards him, failing to reproach him, to oust him, or to punish him for his offense, then you should realize that that monk is betraying the Buddha's teaching. But if he ousts the destroyer of the Dharma, reproaches him, or punishes him, then he is my disciple and a true voice-hearer.

We might recognize in this a Mahayana reiteration of the Buddha's statements in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* of the *Long Discourses of the Buddha* that were cited above in this commentary. According to that discourse the Buddha had told Mara that he would "... not take final nirvana till I have monks and disciples who are accomplished... able by means of the Dharma to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dharma of wondrous effect." (*Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 247) So it is not a Mahayana innovation to assert that the Buddha wanted his monks to be willing and able to refute teachings not in accord with the Buddha Dharma as he taught it. This is a theme that appears throughout the canon and in every branch of Buddhism. Nichiren took this to heart and believed that it meant he had a responsibility, as a disciple of the Buddha, to speak out against teachers and teachings that he believed were misrepresenting and even denigrating the Buddha Dharma, and particularly the Wonderful Dharma taught in the *Lotus Sutra*.

The expanded *Rissho Ankoku Ron* follows that citation with two more, one from the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* and the second from the *Nirvana Sutra*. Both of these citations teach that the disciples of the Buddha should be willing to uphold the truth even if it costs them their lives. The *Nirvana Sutra* compares this to a royal emissary who must deliver his king's message to a foreign land without changing or concealing the message even if it means he will be killed. Perhaps when the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* was first submitted, Nichiren did not realize that the consequences of his forthrightness would be a life of persecution, violence,

exile, the deaths of devoted disciples, and many near brushes with death himself. By the time Nichiren wrote the expanded version he had survived ambushes, attacks by angry mobs, two exiles, and an attempted execution, and so these passages are a reflection on his own hardships and a warning to those who would carry on his teachings and the Buddha's commission into the future. A votary of the *Lotus Sutra* may be possessed of unsurpassable dignity as a messenger of the Buddha, but must also have great fortitude and a noble spirit of self-sacrifice for the sake of all beings. As mentioned before, like a Hebrew prophet of old, the votary of the *Lotus Sutra* is called to "speak the truth to power" with all the risks entailed by such a calling.

Finally, the host refers to the earlier petitions of Enryakuji and Kofukuji to the imperial court which led to the destruction of Honen's tomb, the burning of the printing blocks of the *Senchaku Shu*, and the exile of Ryokan and other leading disciples of Honen in 1227. This was discussed previously as were earlier works by Tendai and Kegon monks critiquing the *Senchaku Shu* and earlier petitions from Enryakuji and Kofukuji calling for the suppression of the Pure Land movement during Honen's lifetime. The host does not refer to those earlier critiques and petitions here, but his point is clear: his critique of Honen is hardly unprecedented and earlier petitions against the exclusive nembutsu movement were made by the leading Tendai abbots to the imperial court, and these petitions had been heeded.

## Should One Refrain from Arguing Over the Dharma?

### VII The Means to Prevent Calamities

#### The Traveler Spoke in a Mild Manner

WNSD1: p. 129

WND: p. 18

The guest now admits that it is true that Honen urged his followers to “abandon, close, set aside, and cast away” all the buddhas and teachings of Buddhism except for Amitabha Buddha and the practice of nembutsu. However, he also says that it is hard for him to blame Honen alone for abusing fellow monks and casting aspersions on other sutras. The implication is that if Honen is at fault then so is the host. In addition, the guest accuses the host of harping on a “slight flaw in jade,” in other words of nitpicking. He states that between Honen and Nichiren it is hard to distinguish who is right and who is wrong, who is being foolish and who is being wise.

Like many modern people, particularly those attracted to Buddhism for its tolerance and nonviolence, the guest feels that doctrinal disagreements are unbecoming and unedifying. He assumes that Buddhists should not argue among themselves; they should not be critical but rather accepting and open to any and all views and methods based on the belief that they all ultimately lead to an enlightenment that transcends all conceptual views. Therefore, disagreements should be set aside and everyone should work together for the sake of peace. The One Vehicle teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* would seem to confirm this view. According to the One Vehicle all the different teachings given by the Buddha ultimately lead to buddhahood and are therefore a part of the One Vehicle. This view that all views are relative and therefore not worth arguing about also seems to be the point of three parables told by the Buddha in the Pali Canon: the parable of the blind men and the elephant, the parable of the snake, and the parable of the raft. However, a closer examination of these three parables shows that their point is not that all views are relative and therefore acceptable from some ultimate point of view. Rather, their point is that some

views or viewpoints are better than others and that how one handles and applies views also matters.

Let us start with the well-known parable of the blind men and the elephant from the *Udana*. The Buddha told this parable to his monks after they had observed the members of other schools of thought arguing with each other about the nature of the Dharma. The *Udana* says of these disputants that “they lived quarrelsome, disputatious and wrangling, wounding each other with verbal darts, saying: ‘Dharma is like this, Dharma is not like that! Dharma is not like this, Dharma is like that!’” The Buddha comments that these sectarians are blind and argue because they do not actually know what is or is not Dharma. He then tells the story of a king who, for his own perverse amusement, summoned several men who were blind from birth to his court and had each of them feel a part of an elephant and then asked them all to say what an elephant is like.

Those blind people who had been shown the head of the elephant replied, “An elephant, your majesty, is just like a water-jar.” Those blind people who had been shown the ear of the elephant replied, “An elephant, your majesty, is just like a winnowing-basket.” Those blind people who had been shown the tusk of the elephant replied, “An elephant, your majesty, is just like a ploughshare.” Those blind people who had been shown the body replied, “An elephant, your majesty, is just like a storeroom.” Those blind people who had been shown the hindquarters replied, “An elephant, your majesty, is just like a mortar.” Those blind people who had been shown the tail replied, “An elephant, your majesty, is just like a pestle.” Those blind people who had been shown the tuft at the end of the tail replied, “An elephant, your majesty, is just like a broom.”

Saying “An elephant is like this, an elephant is not like that! An elephant is not like this, an elephant is like that!” They fought each other with fists. And the king was delighted (with the spectacle).

Even so, monks, are those wanderers of various sects blind, unseeing...saying, “Dharma is like this!...Dharma is like that!”

Then on realizing its significance, the Lord uttered on that occasion this inspired utterance:

Some recluses and brahmins, so called,

Are deeply attached to their own views;  
People who only see one side of things  
Engage in quarrels and disputes.  
(adapted from *The Udana*, pp. 91-94)

Many who have heard a version of this parable assume that the point is that we all should admit that we have only a partial grasp of the truth and so should be humble and open-minded or at least tolerant of different views and not argue about them like the blind men fighting over their partial understanding of what an elephant is. But in the original context, the Buddha's is saying that unlike himself the disputatious sectarians are like blind men because they do not know what is beneficial or what is Dharma, and that is why they are arguing about it. We know from the Buddha's other discourses that he did claim to know what is beneficial and to know what the Dharma is. In other words, the Buddha is like the king who can see the whole elephant. So his point is not that no one knows the truth and therefore we should all adopt agnosticism. Rather, his point is that those who do not accept the Buddha Dharma will end up clinging to partial truths and these partial truths will be contradictory, will not enable anyone to overcome egoism, and will lead to the kind of arguing and fighting the monks witnessed. The Buddha, however, claims that he and his disciples hold "right view" which is not one-sided or biased but whole and complete.

Two parables from the *Alagaddupama Sutta* of the *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* further elucidate the Buddha's attitude towards the teaching of views and methods. In that discourse a monk named Arittha clings to the pernicious view that what the Buddha taught are obstructions to gaining enlightenment are not actually obstructions. Other monks try to correct him, but he refuses to back down. They take their dispute to the Buddha, who reprimands Arittha in no uncertain terms: "Misguided man, to whom have you ever know me to teach the Dharma in that way? ...But you misguided man, have misrepresented us by your wrong grasp and injured yourself and stored up much demerit; for this will lead to your harm and suffering for a long time." (*Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 225-226). The Buddha then asks the

monks if Arittha had kindled even a spark of wisdom and of course the monks deny that he could have. At this point the Buddha introduces the parable of the snake and the parable of the raft.

In the parable of the snake, the Buddha speaks of those who incorrectly learn the Dharma:

Here, monks, some misguided men learn the Dharma – discourses, stanzas, expositions, verses, exclamations, sayings, birth stories, marvels, and answers to questions - but having learned the Dharma, they do not examine the meaning of those teaching with wisdom. Not examining the meaning of those teachings with wisdom, they do not gain a reflective acceptance of them. Instead they learn the Dharma only for the sake of criticizing others and for winning in debates, and they do not experience the good for the sake of which they learned the Dharma. Those teachings, being wrongly grasped by them, conduce to their harm and suffering for a long time. (Ibid, p. 227)

He compares these people to someone who wrongly grasps a snake by its tail or middle, thereby allowing the snake to turn around and bite him, causing either death or deadly suffering from the snake's venom. If, however, people were to study the Dharma, wisely examine its meaning, and gain a reflective acceptance of it instead of just using the Dharma to criticize others or win debates, then they will "experience the good for the sake of which they learned the Dharma. Those teachings, being rightly grasped by them, conduce to their welfare and happiness for a long time." (Ibid, p. 227) This is compared to a snake handler who uses a cleft stick to pin the snake down so he can pick it up safely just behind the head so that it cannot turn around and bite. The point is that it is not enough to learn the Dharma. One must learn it carefully, think it through, understand the true meaning of it, and then put it into practice. One must not study it half-heartedly or use it for self-serving ends as the monk Arittha did.

In the parable of the raft, the Buddha asks the monks if it would be

appropriate for a man who had made a raft to cross to the other shore of a great expanse of water to continue to carry the raft around with him wherever he goes. Of course the monks acknowledge that this would not be appropriate and agree with the Buddha that the correct thing would be to leave the raft once one has crossed over. The Buddha teaches the monks that the Dharma is also like a raft, in that it is for the purpose of crossing over from the shore of birth and death to the other shore of liberation and not to be clung to for its own sake. “So I have shown you how the Dharma is similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping. Monks, when you know the Dharma to be similar to a raft, you should abandon even good states, how much more so bad states.” (Ibid, p. 229)

The last statement is important but easily misunderstood. The Buddha is not saying that one should seek a state or an amoral stance beyond good and evil. In the context of his remonstrance with Arittha, the Buddha is pointing out that even the otherwise good states of meditative bliss should not be clung to, let alone the sensual pursuits that the Buddha taught were obstacles to attaining enlightenment, particularly for celibate monastics. It also reiterates the point that the Dharma is to be practiced and then let go of once it has served its purpose and enabled the practitioner to attain liberation. The Dharma was not intended to be a fetish for intellectual self-gratification or a weapon to be used in disputes with others. The Buddha taught the Dharma as a practical means for attaining liberation and not as something of value in and of itself. Of course, this is in reference to the Dharma as a teaching or method, and not the Dharma as the true nature of reality that is realized through such teachings and methods. The Dharma in the latter sense is not an object that can be grasped in the first place.

These three parables of the Buddha show that the Buddha did not want people to cling to or argue about one-sided, partial, or biased views. He did not want people to learn the Dharma in a shallow or self-serving way. Nor did he want people to argue about the Dharma instead of putting it into practice. Nor did he want people to turn the Dharma into a set of dogmas to cling to, defend, and

fight over. But this does not mean that he did not want people to refrain from correcting false views or correcting those who held even right views wrongly. In an earlier part of this commentary we cited the Buddha's statements in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* to Mara that he will not pass away until he knows that he has instructed his lay and monastic disciples to competently teach the Dharma so that they "shall be able by means of the Dharma to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dharma of wondrous effect." In that spirit, the Buddha taught the parables of the snake and the raft in the context of correcting a monk who held wrong views and was stubbornly misrepresenting the Dharma. In other words, the Buddha was purposely refuting a slanderous view and at the same time teaching the Sangha about the right and wrong way to learn and handle the Dharma. In the parable of the blind men and the elephant he was making the point that Buddhists should not be satisfied with the partial, one-sided, or biased views put forth by those without a clear and direct knowledge of what they are arguing about, but rather should seek out the correct and complete view of the Dharma that the Buddha claimed was a product of direct knowledge and insight.

It was Nichiren's conviction that Honen's exclusive nembutsu was a one-sided, partial, and biased view resulting from a misapprehension of the Dharma that had poisoned Honen and his followers and become an object of clinging that no longer served any purpose but rather was causing people to abandon the *Lotus Sutra*. In Nichiren's view, the Buddha taught the *Lotus Sutra* to express the whole meaning of the Dharma that the other teachings were leading up to. In other words, the *Lotus Sutra* expresses the whole elephant whereas the nembutsu is just a small part of it. Putting one's faith in the *Lotus Sutra* is the correct way to apprehend the Dharma, whereas the exclusive nembutsu is like a snake wrongly grasped that bites and poisons the unskillful snake-handler. The awakening to the unborn and deathless nature of the Buddha's enlightenment taught in the *Lotus Sutra* is the other shore, whereas the nembutsu and other teachings were just rafts to relinquish once one has crossed over. Nichiren Buddhism, therefore, does agree that one should not cling to partial, one-sided, or biased views, that one should not learn the Dharma in a shallow or self-

serving way, and that one should not cling to the teachings dogmatically. At the same time, Nichiren Buddhists do believe that one should take up the True Dharma taught by the Buddha, carefully examine its meaning, and put it into practice in the correct way so as to come to same awakening as the Buddha himself. In this way, false views can be relinquished and right view can prevail and accomplish its purpose.

## The Question of Nationalism Part 1: Should the Dharma Serve the State?

The guest then insists that there is a higher priority than the problem of Honen's exclusive nembutsu:

After all, world peace and tranquility of a nation is what both the sovereign and subjects alike desire, and all the people of a nation wish for. Now, the prosperity of a nation depends on the Dharma, which is revered by all people. When the nation is destroyed and its people perish, who will revere the Buddha and who will put faith in the Dharma? Therefore, we should first pray for the peace and tranquility of the nation before trying to establish the Buddha Dharma. If you know the means to prevent calamities and disasters, I would like to hear about it.

The guest believes that these relative disagreements concerning doctrine and practice between Buddhist monks is unimportant and that the priority should be for all people to come together to pray for the peace and welfare of the nation. This statement of the guest assumes that the primary purpose of Buddhism is to secure peace and tranquility for the nation. In other words, Buddhism should serve the state first, and only then concern itself with the propagation of particular doctrines and practices among the people.

This may seem like a very strange assumption to those of us who grew up with the very different assumptions that church and state are constitutionally separate and furthermore that religion is something that is the business of the private life of the individual and should not be a community affair outside whatever place of worship or religious community one belongs to. On the other hand, these assumptions are not even shared by everyone even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even in the United States of America. All over the world there are countries with a state sponsored religion, such as the Church of England, or with a religiously based constitution and system of law such as in the theocracy of Iran. Even in the USA, there are those who believe that while no denomination should be favored, Christianity should nevertheless be the ideological basis of our society. The concept of the separation of church and state is in fact a very

new idea, begun by the predominantly Deist founding fathers of the United States who wanted the United States of America to be free of the tyrannical power of the clergy, the inquisitions, and the holy wars of Europe. They wished to create a state founded upon the democratic, secular, and rational values of the European Enlightenment as opposed to authoritarian claims based on divine revelation. Again, to this day, even in the USA, there are those who believe that it is presumptuous to subordinate the “divinely revealed” doctrines and morals of their sacred scripture to secular values and an empirically grounded rationalism. The separation of church and state, therefore, is not something that can be taken for granted, even at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even in the USA.

It was the common sense of Nichiren’s time that Buddhism existed to serve the state. Starting in the Asuka period (552-710), Buddhism had been sponsored by nobles such as the Soga clan and then established as the state religion by Prince Shotoku because it served as a vehicle for bringing in the high culture of China and more remotely India, and so its more sophisticated forms of prayer, esoteric rituals, and appeals to the protection and blessings of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and protective deities could bring health, wealth, and happiness to the rulers and the nation. In fact, it was even illegal to attempt to spread it among the common people, and monks and nuns were restricted to service within the temples and were viewed as a part of the court bureaucracy.

For all practical purposes, Asuka Buddhism functioned as a mundane instrument of the ruling classes. In other words, it was utilized as a superior form of magic and shamanism to enforce the roles of the Imperial family and aristocracy. Prior to the introduction of Buddhism, the indigenous faith had used prayers, divination and other practices as a means of relating to the powers of nature believed to be kami. When Buddhism entered the early society it was immediately viewed as another form of theurgy, in fact a more potent variety in view of its acceptance by Japan’s powerful civilized continental neighbors. The Buddhist images, having no counterpart in the native faith, were regarded with awe and gained popularity among certain court factions as having powerful efficacy in promoting material prosperity, the cure of illness and aversion of calamities... At this period the image itself was believed to possess powers and the philosophical significance tended to be

disregarded. (p. 17, *Foundations of Japanese Buddhism Vol. I*)

Earlier in this commentary we covered the acceptance of Buddhism as the state religion by Prince Shotoku who incorporated the threefold refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha into Japan's first constitution. Two years after his death, in 624, the Empress Suiko instituted a Bureau of Priests in order to oversee the Sangha and prevent misconduct by the monks and nuns. In 645 the Taika Reforms were initiated in order to create a centralized government modeled after the Chinese T'ang dynasty. This included the creation of a civil and criminal law code known as the Ritsuryo code, the first version of which was promulgated in 701. The Ritsuryo code included rules and regulations governing the Buddhist monks and nuns known as the Soniryō code. In this way, Buddhism became an official part of the Japanese imperial bureaucracy. In the Nara period, the Emperor Shomu (r. 724-749) instituted a system of national temples for the protection of the nation in 741, culminating in the creation of Todaiji temple in 757. Kazuo Kasuhara's *A History of Japanese Religion* provides a helpful account of how this was done and the motives behind it:

After about 732, relations with the Korean kingdom of Silla became strained. Year by year they worsened, and the court began to fear an invasion from the Korean peninsula. In addition, an epidemic disease, possibly smallpox, that had broken out at Tsukushi, on Kyushu, in 735 began to spread throughout western Japan. In 737 the disease reached Nara, where it claimed many victims among the aristocracy, including the minister of the left, Fujiwara no Muchimaro (680-737), and his three brothers. In March 737, with the country torn by crises at home and abroad, Emperor Shomu (r. 724-49) decreed that each province should make images of Shakyamuni Buddha and two attendants, as well as one copy of the *Daihannya-kyo* (Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra; in Sanskrit, *Mahaprajnaparamita-sutra*). In light of the turmoil at the time, it is clear that the intent of Shomu's decree was not simply to encourage Buddhism in Japan but also to enlist the aid of Buddhism in helping that state overcome the crises it faced.

In 740, Shomu commanded that each province make ten copies of the Lotus Sutra and erect a seven-story pagoda. In March of the next year, he ordered each province to erect another seven-story

pagoda and make ten copies each of the Golden Light Sutra, and the Lotus Sutra. In addition, a copy of the Golden Light Sutra transcribed in gold ink by the emperor himself was to be placed in each pagoda, with prayers to various buddhas for the protection of the nation. Finally, two provincial temples (*kokubunji*) were to be erected in each province: a monastery (*kokubunji*) to be called Konkomyo Shitenno Gokoku no Tera (Temple to Seek the Protection of the Nation by the Four Heavenly Kings, housing a copy of the Golden Light Sutra) and a nunnery (*kokubunniji*) to be called Hokke Metsuzai no Tera (Temple for the Elimination of Sins Through the Lotus Sutra, housing a copy of that sutra). This decree of 741 established the provincial temple system.

The Golden Light Sutra promises that four heavenly kings will protect the nation and people that reverence and propagate this sutra. The heavenly kings will fend off sovereign enemies and bestow prosperity and happiness on the sutra's devotees. The Golden Light Sutra had long been esteemed in China as a powerful spiritual protector of the nation from calamities. Shomu's imperial decree specifically mentions the intended recipients of the sutra's blessings. Prayers were offered for eternal happiness of the spirits of deceased emperors and loyal officials from the Fujiwara and other major families; for the happiness and well-being of the reigning emperor and his family and of the Fujiwara, Tachibana, and other great clans; and for the defeat and destruction of wicked, rebellious subjects. Clearly the provincial temples were not intended primarily as places for religious practice leading to enlightenment and salvation. They were institutions committed to the protection of the state and the preventing of national calamity through the quasi-magical powers of Buddhism. The provincial temple system cannot be idealized as a model achievement of Buddhist culture during Shomu's reign. (pp. 65-66)

The provincial temples begun by Shomu fell into disuse during the Heian period, but the assumptions behind them did not. In Nichiren's day, the Tendai and Shingon schools formed the backbone of the government sponsored and controlled Buddhist establishment. Like the national temple system instituted by Emperor Shomu, the main duty of the Tendai and Shingon establishment and other Buddhist temples was to offer prayers for the welfare and protection of the nation: warding off natural disasters like earthquakes and plagues, bringing timely rains to prevent draught and famine, and ensuring the security and prosperity of the rulers. The Kamakuran shogunate was not interested in

doctrinal controversies, or even in the question of which teaching or practice would provide an accessible and efficacious way to enlightenment for the people. Their concern was that the temples perform their duty to the nation and do their part to preserve the status quo.

In a society where the separation of church and state is valued, no religion is or can be supported by the state. While prayers for the nation may be offered by individual denominations or congregations this is not assumed to be their primary duty. In fact, it is assumed that the purpose of religion is to address the spiritual needs of the individual, and spiritual or religious beliefs and practices are largely, though not entirely, compartmentalized from one's public life. For instance, religious beliefs are a topic felt to be best avoided at work or in most other public gatherings in order to avoid contentious and rancorous debates. In a public school environment the introduction of prayer or religious values or worldviews is something that quickly leads to litigation, as people do not want their children to be indoctrinated by particular religious beliefs that may conflict with their own beliefs or lack thereof. When religions do seek to address the society at large or to share their beliefs and win new converts, it is understood that they cannot appeal to the coercive power of the state but must win people over by the merits of their arguments and/or personal example. In cases involving the repeal, amending, or enactment of laws touching on moral issues like the death penalty, abortion, euthanasia, reproductive rights, the rights or lack thereof of the unborn, the definition of marriage, or civil rights where the values of those holding particular religious commitments are at stake, the religiously motivated understand that their opinions will be weighed on their own merits and that they must follow the same democratic processes as everyone else. They cannot appeal to religious authorities to enact their wishes, but must make arguments appealing to values that they hope are held by those of other religions and those with no religious commitments. Sometimes the universality of certain values must themselves be argued.

Things were very different in Nichiren's day. The guest in the *Rissho*

*Ankoku Ron*, who represents the rulers of the Kamakuran shogunate, assumes that the primary responsibility of Buddhism is to enlist the spiritual powers of the deities, buddhas, and bodhisattvas on the side of the rulers and the nation they rule. The clergy among themselves and in official academic debates can argue the minutia of teaching and practice, but the rulers will ultimately decide what ideology will be publicly supported or even allowed. Nichiren does not necessarily disagree that Buddhists should pray for the safety and wellbeing of the nation, but as we shall see in his response, he does believe that discerning the truth and promulgating it among the people is a higher priority than simply supporting the national status quo.

## The Question of Nationalism Part 2: Should the State Serve the Dharma?

The Master Replied

WNSD1: pp. 129 - 134

WND: pp. 18 - 22

The guest's assertion that, "Therefore, we should first pray for the peace and tranquility of the nation before trying to establish the Buddha Dharma," has been falsely attributed to Nichiren as his own personal view. But, as is apparent, this was the view that Nichiren put in the mouth of the guest, the representative of the Kamakuran shogunate, whose views Nichiren was trying to change. To cite this statement as a way of showing that Nichiren was a "nationalist" is a gross distortion of Nichiren's actual views and is a complete misreading of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*. Far from being a nationalist, Nichiren subordinates the state to the service of Truth, in this case the True Dharma of the *Lotus Sutra* and warns that disaster will be the result of any other course. Nichiren states, "However, as I have often contemplated the matter in view of Buddhism, I have come to the conclusion that putting a ban on the slanderers of the True Dharma, and highly esteeming the upholders of the True Dharma will lead to the tranquility of the nation and world peace." Nichiren did not advocate an unquestioning support for the status quo or an uncritical backing of national interests. His conviction was that true security and wellbeing depends upon the effort to discern and support the True Dharma for the sake of world peace.

Nichiren then proceeds to cite several sutra passages supporting his view that it is the responsibility of the secular rulers to withdraw support from false teachers, and instead to support and even use deadly force to protect the teachers of the True Dharma.

*The Nirvana Sutra*: the Buddha teaches his disciple Chunda that the giving of alms a praiseworthy act, therefore alms should be given to all with the exception of the incorrigible evildoer known as an icchantika. The icchantika is defined by the Buddha as a monastic who has killed, stolen, engaged in sexual

relations, or lied about spiritual attainments (the four offenses of defeat for monastics that require expulsion of the offender from the monastic Sangha) or who has killed their mother, or their father, or an arhat, or injured the Buddha, or created a schism in the Sangha (the five grave offenses which lead directly to the Avichi Hell and is not only unrepentant but who goes on to slander and despise the True Dharma. More generally, any who slander the True Dharma, even those who are not monks or nuns, can be considered icchantika.

In a passage from chapter 19 of the *Nirvana Sutra* the story of King Sen'yo is told. According to the story in a past life the bodhisattva who would become Shakyamuni Buddha was a king who put to death several brahmins who slandered the Mahayana sutras. Because he took such action to protect the Mahayana he never thereafter fell into hell in all his subsequent rebirths. In chapter 20, the sutra goes on to explain that those who kill animals, even an ant, will be reborn in the hells or as hungry ghosts or animals; those who kill unenlightened people will also be reborn into those realms but will suffer even more; and those who kill their parents, arhats, pratyekabuddhas or bodhisattvas will fall into the Avichi Hell; but the killing of an icchantika does not bring about any such karmic recompense. The brahmins, in slandering the Mahayana teaching, had become icchantika and therefore King Sen'yo did not commit an evil act in killing them but a good one in fighting to protect the Mahayana.

*The Benevolent Kings Sutra*: in this sutra the Buddha entrusts his teachings to kings, rather than the monks and nuns, because the kings have the power to protect the teachings.

*The Nirvana Sutra*: in a similar passage the Buddha entrusts his teachings to the secular rulers as well as to the lay and monastic Sangha and instructs them to reprimand any who slander the Dharma. In chapter five the Buddha says, "Those who wish to uphold the True Dharma should arm themselves with swords, bows and arrows, and halberds, instead of observing the five precepts (against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and using intoxicants) and

keeping propriety.” Then he tells the story of King Possessor of Virtue, who was another past life of the bodhisattva who would become Shakyamuni Buddha. King Possessor of Virtue fought to his death against false monks who broke the precepts and were trying to kill the virtuous monk named Realization of Virtue. The Buddha then gives permission to the virtuous monks who follow the precepts and uphold the True Dharma to associate themselves with armed laymen who can protect them from persecution at the hands of the violent false monks. The armed laymen, however, are not to use their weapons to kill:

Good men, in the age of impurity and evil after I have passed away, the nation will fall into devastation and disorder, men will plunder and steal from one another, and the common people will be reduced to starvation. Because of hunger, many men at that time will declare their determination to leave their families and become monks. Men such as these may be called shavepates. When these crowds of shavepates see anyone who is attempting to protect the correct teaching, they will chase after him and drive him away, or even kill him or do him injury. That is why I now give permission for monks who observe the precepts to associate with and keep company with white-robed laymen who bear swords and staves. Even though they carry swords and staves, I would call them men who observe the precepts. But although they may carry swords and staves, they should never use them to take life.

*The Lotus Sutra*: in chapter three the Buddha states that those who fail to have faith and instead slander the sutra will destroy their seeds of buddhahood and will fall into the Avichi Hell.

Nichiren states that the testimony of these sutra passages is clear and that it should be obvious that slandering the True Dharma is the worst possible offense and that such slanderers should at the least receive no alms and that eliminating them would be, in fact, the right thing to do. He stresses the authoritative nature of the *Lotus Sutra* and *Nirvana Sutra*'s recommendations saying, “The *Lotus* and *Nirvana Sutras* are the essence of Shakyamuni Buddha's lifetime teachings preached in five periods, [the gist of 80,000 Buddhist teachings.] His warnings in them should weigh very heavily. Who would not

obey them?” Clearly, Nichiren assumes that the guest accepts the T’ien-t’ai classification of Buddhist sutras into five periods, and will therefore also accept the Buddha’s teaching in the *Lotus* and *Nirvana Sutras* as the last word regarding how the Dharma should be upheld.

Once again, Nichiren reviews what he sees happening in Japan wherein the exclusive nembutsu of Honen taught in the *Senchaku Shu* has become so popular that people have replaced the hands on statues formerly representing Shakyamuni Buddha so that the new hand configuration (mudra) show that the statue now represents Amitabha Buddha. Temples to Medicine Master Buddha have been transformed into temples enshrining Amitabha Buddha. The 400-year-old tradition on Mt. Hiei of copying the *Lotus Sutra* had been discontinued so that the monks could copy the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* instead. Even the lectures to commemorate the memorial day of the Great Master T’ien-t’ai had been suspended so that lectures on the teachings of Shan-*tao* could be held instead. It seemed to Nichiren as though all the traditional schools of Buddhism, including the T’ien-t’ai school, were being crowded out in favor of the exclusive Pure Land movement begun by Honen. Nichiren’s fear was that the radical and reductionist teachings of Honen would soon be all that would be left as all other forms of Buddhism, including the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* and the T’ien-t’ai school, became neglected and forgotten. Nichiren concludes with the following recommendation: “If you wish to bring about the tranquility of the empire as soon as possible, first of all, you had better put a ban on the slanderers of the True Dharma throughout the nation.”

Nichiren was convinced that the best interests of the nation lay in serving the best interests of the True Dharma. The sutra passages he cites proclaim that the protection and transmission of the True Dharma is the responsibility of the rulers and not just of the monastic Sangha. The white-robed laymen are the secular authorities who are charged with maintaining law and order through the use of, or at least threat of, deadly force if necessary. The people armed with swords, staves and other weapons in the *Nirvana Sutra* are perhaps the warrior

caste members of the army or the town watch. The Buddha gives permission to the monks who do uphold the precepts (and therefore would not handle weapons themselves) to stay close to these armed laypeople for their own protection. Intriguingly, the *Nirvana Sutra* states that the armed laypeople should not use their weapons to kill. In the story of King Possessor of Virtue it does not say that he actually killed any of the false monks attacking the monk Realization of Virtue though he did apparently succeed in fighting them off at the cost of his own life. It might be reasonably extrapolated that weapons are to be used only by the proper secular authorities in order to maintain law and order and to protect the lives of the innocent, and further that these weapons should only be used in defense and not to deadly effect but only to drive off or subdue. The secular authorities therefore have a duty to also protect innocent monks who live virtuously in accordance with the precepts and who teach the True Dharma. Laypeople, including the authorities, should likewise refrain from giving any support to those who are monks in name only who are living a parasitic existence to the detriment of the community and, in violation of their monastic vows, have even taken up arms against the true monks in order to persecute, injure or even kill them. The point of these sutras passages seems to be that the suppression and elimination of armed bands of robber monks and the protection and support of peaceful precept abiding monks who teach the True Dharma is a matter of national security, and that is exactly the point that Nichiren makes.

In a situation where there is a separation of church and state, a situation that cannot be taken for granted, the government has no right to pick favorites or to suppress religions they don't like. However, the secular authorities and lawful peace keepers do have the right, and even the duty, to protect innocent lives and to punish those who use dishonest or violent means to gain money and influence or who attempt to use such means to persecute those who don't follow their beliefs or belong to their particular group. In that sense, Nichiren's point is still relevant. To restate this point in a form compatible with the principles of the separation of church and state in a free democratic society: secular authorities should not lend their support to corrupt religious leaders or groups, but should

ensure that everyone's right to pursue or teach their religious convictions in a peaceful and law-abiding manner is equally protected.

More problematic is the story of King Sen'yo, who put several brahmins to death because they spoke badly about the Mahayana teachings. The sutra's explanation that they were icchantika and therefore it was ok to kill them is even more disturbing to modern ears than the story it is attempting to explain. It basically amounts to saying that we do not have to value the lives of those who insult our religious convictions and that killing such people is in fact a meritorious deed. Today, not a day goes by without stories in the news about religious fanatics willing to kill those who do not share or respect their particular religious convictions. Every religiously motivated terrorist in the world feels that they are justified in killing and will be given a free pass to heaven for doing so. Other passages in the *Nirvana Sutra* mitigate these passages, for they suggest that the icchantika may not always be what they appear, and that some might actually be bodhisattvas or else some may repent and cease to be icchantika and that in any case even the icchantika have buddha-nature that will some day come to fruition. Taking these other passages into account, the sutra seems to be saying that killing even an icchantika is to kill a potential buddha, and therefore a grave crime that can only lead to rebirth in hell, if not the Avichi Hell. However, the story of King Sen'yo and its distressing explanation remain, and it is these passages that Nichiren chose to include in *Rissho Ankoku Ron*. The disturbing implications of this story, as well as the story of King Possessor of Virtue do not escape the notice of the guest who is quick to point them out in the next section.

Should Slanderers Be Executed?

VIII Outlawing the Slanderers

The Traveler Then Asked the Master:

WNSD1: pp. 134 – 136

WND: pp. 22 – 23

The guest is horrified by the implication of the sutra passages that the host has just cited. They seem to be suggesting that those monks who, in the opinion of the host, slander the True Dharma should be put to death just as King Sen'yo put to death the brahmins who slandered the Mahayana teachings. The guest points out that this would be just as bad as the violence of the false monks and any who do this would also have to suffer the karmic consequences of putting others to death.

The guest then cites a passage from the *Great Collection Sutra* wherein the Buddha states that he regards those who shave their heads and put on monastic robes as his children, even if they do not receive the precepts or violate them after receiving them. In the expanded *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, several other passages are cited from this sutra and also one passage from the *Benevolent Kings Sutra* that also state the grave crime of persecuting or injuring monks, even those who violate the precepts. The passages state that it is a worse offence than injuring the Buddha, and that any king who does this will lose their throne and fall into the Avichi Hell.

The guest concludes, "According to this scriptural statement we have to give offerings to monks regardless of whether or not they are good ones or whether or not they keep the precepts. How dare you beat and insult the children of the Buddha to make their father sad?" He then cites the examples of the brahmins who murdered Maudgalyayana and of Devadatta who murdered the nun Utpalavarna. Both the brahmins and Devadatta fell into the Avichi Hell for their deeds. Clearly the sutra passages regard one who is a monk or a nun as sacrosanct, not because of their personal qualities, but because they represent,

however imperfectly, the monastic Sangha that the Buddha instituted so that the Dharma would remain in the world.

Obviously these passages contradict the ones the host cited that argue for the ruler's responsibility to discern the difference between the false monks and the true monks and to withhold support from the former and protect the latter. The guest presses the host on exactly this point, "You speak of punishing those who slander the Dharma, but to do so would violate the Buddha's prohibitions. I can hardly believe that such a course would be right. How can you justify that?"

The Master Stated in Response

WNSD1: pp. 136 – 137

WND: p. 23

The host expresses astonishment that the guest is not convinced by the citations from the *Nirvana Sutra* that declare that slanderers must be punished. Remember that according to the T'ien-t'ai classification scheme, the *Nirvana Sutra* is classified as the Perfect Teaching and an expression of the Buddha's final teaching whereas the *Great Collection Sutra* and the *Benevolent King Sutra* are both considered provisional teachings from an earlier period of the Buddha's life. The *Nirvana Sutra*, from the point of view of the T'ien-t'ai school, carries more weight since it is held to be more definitive than the earlier teachings. Aside from that, Nichiren points out that the intention of the passages he cited is not to punish or persecute the Buddha's disciples, but rather to punish the act of slandering the Dharma.

In the 1278 version of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, Nichiren makes a further clarification. According to his interpretation, the passages from the *Great Collection Sutra* and the *Benevolent Kings Sutra* are referring to monastics that hold right views and should be supported even if they have not received the precepts or are imperfectly keeping them. The *Nirvana Sutra*, on the other hand, is referring to the punishment of those who hold wrong views, regardless of

whether or not they uphold the precepts. The passages are therefore not contradictory. Rather, they are talking about two different situations. Taken altogether, the Buddha seems to be teaching that supporting those who hold right views and preventing the ascendancy of wrong views is the most crucial issue, even more important than whether the monks and nuns are able to observe the rules and regulations of monastic life.

Nichiren was far from unique as a teacher in East Asian Buddhism who did not view the observation of the rules and regulations of the monastic precepts as a high priority. This was because the monastic precepts had been formulated in a time and culture very different from that of medieval China or Japan. In China, very few monastics took the full monastic precepts. The vast majority of Chinese “monks” and “nuns” in Nichiren’s day were content to take only the more generalized, and therefore more adaptable, 10 novice precepts. Four centuries before Nichiren’s time, Saicho, the founder of the Tendai school in Japan, established a Mahayana precept platform at Mt. Hiei where the bodhisattva precepts of the *Brahma Net Sutra* (a sutra possibly originating in China rather than India) replaced the full monastic precepts for monks and nuns. It is only natural that Nichiren would be more concerned with the upholding of right views rather than monastic standards from India, an attitude that contributed to his later criticism of the Ritsu or Precept School and its attempted revival by monks like Ryokan (1217-1303) of the Shingon-Ritsu school at Gokurakuji Temple in Kamakura.

At any rate, Nichiren’s concern was to reign in the activities of Buddhist teachers holding wrong views, people like Honen who were turning people away from the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren believed that the solution was for the government and the people to withhold their patronage from them, and to instead support those who did uphold the True Dharma as found in the *Lotus Sutra*. He states that while King Sen’yo and King Possessor of Virtue may have killed slanderers of the Dharma in the past, since the appearance of Shakyamuni Buddha the correct method is to simply deny them offerings. The *Nirvana Sutra* told those

stories of the previous lives of Shakyamuni Buddha in order to emphasize the gravity of slandering the True Dharma and the great virtue of defending the True Dharma but resorting to violence is not being advocated in the present. Instead, it is Shakyamuni Buddha's actual guidance to Chunda regarding who should or should not be given alms that should now be followed.

Nichiren's 1278 addition to this section of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* are, however, more troubling. Referring to the killing of slanderers he wrote:

Nevertheless, this is a special method applicable only to certain occasions. King Shiladitya of ancient India was a sage who protected Buddhism. Punishing only the ringleader, the king spared the lives of all other members who rebelled against him, banishing them from his kingdom. Emperor Hsuan-tsung of T'ang China was a wise ruler who protected Buddhism. He executed 12 Taoist masters, eliminating enemies of the Buddha and restoring Buddhism. These examples in India and China are of non-Buddhist and Taoist masters trying to destroy Buddhism. Their sins were comparatively light. On the contrary today in Japan, a disciple of the Buddha is about to destroy Buddhism. His sin is extremely grave; he must be strictly punished without delay.

Nichiren seems to be saying that there are occasions when capital punishment in defense of the True Dharma is justified, calling it a "special method applicable to certain occasions" and then cites two historical examples from after the time of Shakyamuni Buddha. The first is King Shiladitya (r. 606-647) who conquered much of northern India and later converted to Buddhism. The other is Emperor Hsuan-tsung (810-859), the last emperor of the T'ang dynasty who helped Buddhism revive somewhat after the persecution by his predecessor in 845. As Nichiren mentions, he executed several of the Taoists who had instigated that persecution. Nichiren insists that what is currently happening in Japan is even worse than what those rulers were opposing, because it is not non-Buddhists slandering the True Dharma but those who are disciples of the Buddha who are doing it. In the *Senji Sho*, Nichiren referred to a declaration he made on the night of his arrest prior to the Tatsunokuchi Persecution and the Sado Exile, September 12, 1271, to Hei no Saemon, the

Kamakuran government's police commissioner and head of military affairs, that revealed who Nichiren had in mind: "Unless all the temples of the Pure Land and Zen schools such Kenchoji, Jufukuji, Gokurakuji, Dabutsu-den, and Chorakuji are burned down and their priests all beheaded at Yuigahama Beach, Japan will be bound to be destroyed." (WNS:D1, p. 243) Taken together with this later attempt in the 1278 version of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* to justify the execution of slanderers as a "special method applicable to certain occasions" it seem evident that this statement to Hei no Saemon was made in earnest and that Nichiren in fact saw this as a matter of national security. In his view, Japan's welfare depended on the forceful and even violent suppression of the kind of slander of the True Dharma that he believed would be the ruin of the nation.

This is very troubling, because if Nichiren's suggestion to Hei no Saemon, (a person in position to act on those suggestions and who in fact that very night attempted to have Nichiren beheaded) was serious, and if his 1278 addition to the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* is in fact a justification of the death penalty in the name of the True Dharma, then Nichiren had himself committed a serious breach of the both the monastic precepts and even the bodhisattva precepts of the *Brahma Net Sutra*. Deliberately bringing about the death of another person, for any reason, even through a third party, is considered an offense classified as a "defeat," wherein a monk or nun is permanently expelled from the monastic Sangha; and a bodhisattva can no longer be considered as such if they kill or encourage others to kill until they have repented and renewed their compassionate aspiration. Here is the wording of the bodhisattva precept against killing from the *Brahma Net Sutra*:

The Buddha said, "Disciples of the Buddha, should you yourself kill, willfully cause another to kill, encourage someone to kill, extol killing, take pleasure in seeing killing take place, deliberately wish someone dead, intentionally cause death, supply the instrument or means for killing, cut off a life even when sanctioned by law, that is, participate in any way in killing, you are committing a serious offense warranting exclusion. Pray, do not intentionally kill anything whatsoever which has life. As a Bodhisattva, awaken within yourself a heart that is unending in its mercy and compassion,

respect and dutifulness, and use your skillful means to help and protect all sentient beings. Hence, should you act from a selfish, indulgent, or reckless heart and thereby intentionally and willingly take a life, you are a Bodhisattva who is committing a serious offense warranting exclusion.” (*Buddhist Writings on Meditation and Daily Practice*, pp. 127-128)

It has already been pointed out, however, that Nichiren was not concerned with the precepts, but only with right views. In his view, upholding right views is more important than upholding any of the precepts. But is that view itself a right view or a wrong view? Is the value of upholding the True Dharma and suppressing slander of the True Dharma more important than the value of human life, and particularly when the True Dharma is itself concerned with the supreme dignity of life? It seems to me that, if nowhere else, the precept against killing is where right views and right actions intersect. It seems to me that someone who holds the view that all beings can attain buddhahood and in fact are in some sense even now embraced by the Eternal Buddha would not ever kill or endorse killing. This is especially true in regard to human beings who are capable of reflection and growth and who might slander the Dharma at one point in their lives but later might repent of their earlier views or actions. Killing someone or otherwise bringing about a person’s death is a final irretrievable act. Putting someone to death, whether a cold-blooded murder or a government sanctioned execution, is to irrevocably deny any possibility of change or growth on the part of the other person. As such, it is an act of monumental presumption. It is tantamount to the denial of the other person’s buddha-nature or capacity for enlightenment that can never be taken back.

Fortunately, Nichiren’s recommendations to Hei no Saemon were never acted upon. So even if Nichiren had been making a serious suggestion, it would only be considered by the monastic rules an act of wrongdoing that must be acknowledged as such and not a full-fledged defeat requiring expulsion because no deaths actually resulted. The bodhisattva precepts against killing is stricter because it does not say that an actual death must result from requesting or encouraging killing, but it also leaves the door open for the offender to later

repent of their actions, statements, or intentions, and then to renew their compassionate aspiration to work for the benefit of all beings. One could also give Nichiren the benefit of the doubt and regard his statement to Hei no Saemon as metaphorical, or sarcastic, or an expression of exasperation and frustration in response to the many attempts on his own life and not a recommendation to be taken seriously. Likewise the 1278 addition to the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* could be considered an attempt to underscore the gravity of the offense of slandering the Dharma and not a justification for executing slanderers. Regardless of Nichiren's intentions however, those of us who follow him today should not make the mistake of using his words to rationalize the use of force or violence, let alone killing, in the name of the Dharma.

Whatever Nichiren's intention in bringing up the examples of King Shiladitya and Emperor Hsuan-tsung, he does end his response to the guest by calling for a boycott rather than for executions:

Therefore, if all the countries in the world and the four kinds of Buddhists (monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen) all stop giving offerings to the evil priests who slander the True Dharma, putting all their faith instead in the defenders of the True Dharma, how can anymore calamities arise or disasters confront us?

In this Nichiren shows that he is neither a nationalist nor an advocate of violence but a voice of reason calling all the people of the world (not just in Japan) to simply boycott those who are slandering and misrepresenting the True Dharma and instead to lend our support to those who uphold the True Dharma. In Nichiren's time, the government was the primary patron and sponsor of the Sangha, so it was the government's responsibility to discern who was worthy of patronage. Today, in Japan and the USA and many other countries, the separation of church and state means that government is no longer in a position to endorse particular religious teachings and practices over others. Instead, it is the responsibility of each of us to courageously and peacefully take a stand against that which threatens the dignity of life. Sometimes this can mean

boycotting the product of a company that exploits others or harms the environment, or voting for candidates who will work to reform the government, or taking part in non-violent demonstrations to protest war or injustice. More positively, we must decide for ourselves how to wisely and compassionately invest our time, energy, money, and other resources in worthy causes in order to create a world where all beings can live in peace and dignity and even more importantly have the opportunity to awaken to life's true potential. By living in this way, we bring to life the true intention of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, which is to make wise and compassionate choices that will enable all sentient beings to live in peace and prosperity and achieve enlightenment together.

Have the Gods Abandoned Japan?

IX Establishing the True Dharma

Kneeling on the Floor and Adjusting His Robe, the Traveler Respectfully Said to the Master:

WNSD1: pp. 137-138

WND: p. 23

At this point the guest is finally convinced by the argument of the host. While confessing to his doubts in the face of the complexity of the many Buddhist doctrines, he concedes that Honen's *Senchaku Shu* did indeed recommend that "all the Buddhas and sutras [including Shakyamuni Buddha, Lord Preacher of the Lotus Sutra,] bodhisattvas, and gods [such as Goddess Amaterasu and Bodhisattva Sho-Hachiman, Protectors of Japan] should be 'abandoned, closed, set aside and cast away. This is clearly stated in it." The guest now acknowledges the radical nature of the *Senchaku Shu* and how it dismisses the entire Buddhist tradition and by implication all other religious teachings and practices except for the nembutsu alone.

The guest goes on to say "As a result, sages and protective gods have abandoned our country, causing famine and epidemics to spread all over it." This statement would become one of the sources of great controversy within Nichiren Buddhism after Nichiren's passing. According to this statement, one can no longer appeal to the Shinto kami because they have abandoned the country that slanders the True Dharma. In other writings, however, Nichiren continues to appeal to the kami and other deities in his prayers. In the *Kangyo Hachiman-sho*, Nichiren identifies Hachiman as a manifestation in Japan of Shakyamuni Buddha and explicitly states that the kami are still available to those who uphold the *Lotus Sutra*.

Now, the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman's original substance, Shakyamuni Buddha, expounded the sole, true, *Lotus Sutra* in India. As he manifested himself in Japan, he summarized the sutra in two Chinese characters for honesty, and vowed to live in the

head of a wise man. If so, even if Hachiman burned his palace and ascended to heaven, whenever he finds a practitioner of the *Lotus Sutra* in Japan, he will not fail to come down to reside where this practitioner is and protect him. (adapted from WNS:D1, p. 279)

Later generations of Nichiren Buddhists would be divided by the question of whether Nichiren intended them to cease to venerate the kami because they were no longer available in a country that neglected and slandered the *Lotus Sutra*, or whether they could continue to have confidence in and pay respects to the kami at their shrines because they were still protectors of the *Lotus Sutra* and those who uphold and practice it. Considering that Nichiren included both Amaterasu and Hachiman on his calligraphic mandala, perhaps it can be said that Nichiren believed the kami could still be respected and appealed to, but only within the context of the practice of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Of course the whole idea that there may be Shinto deities at all is very far fetched to people in the modern world, especially those who have not grown up in Japan and who may have trouble believing in even one God, let alone a whole pantheon of gods from another culture such as the Shinto kami or the Vedic devas that Nichiren seemed to take for granted as actual beings who could be prayed to or even taken to task for not fulfilling their vows to protect the practitioners of the *Lotus Sutra*. Furthermore the idea that epidemics or famine are caused by the influence of divine beings must seem very quaint at the least, if not outright ridiculous. Even today, however, there are those who believe that there may be such things as guardian angels or other ineffable but benevolent forces at work in and through the circumstances that make up our lives. This may be an authentic intuition or a delusion to stave off our insecurities, nevertheless the existence of such benevolent spiritual beings was the common sense of people in past ages and even the Buddha asserted their existence.

Today, famines and epidemics can be traced back to purely natural causes, not to the presence, absence or interference of supernatural beings. Still, perhaps the quality of our human decisions and interactions with each other

and with the forces of nature can be personified in terms of such beings. Maybe we should consider approaching our fellow beings and the natural world with the same respect and even humility that people once approached the gods. Epidemics, famines, and other disasters may not be caused by divine wrath, but certainly the impact of human greed, carelessness, and even cruelty can contribute to natural disasters or exacerbate their effects. When wars and pollution devastate the environment, or shoddy construction standards bring about unnecessary deaths when earthquakes strike, or inadequate health care leads to epidemics, then it can be said that we have neglected the natural forces at work in the world and thereby brought disaster upon ourselves. Buddhism, on the other hand, teaches people to approach other beings and the natural world with a greater awareness of the complexity of causes and conditions and the need to consider the far-reaching consequences of our actions. In this way, we can work with, rather than against the forces of nature.

The guest then says, “Now, you have clearly shown me what is right and what is wrong by quoting many passages from a wide variety of sutras. Thanks to you, I am now free from my earlier prejudices, and can see and hear things clearly.” This is undoubtedly the response that Nichiren was hoping the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* would get from Hojo Tokiyori, the retired regent and head of the Hojo clan that were the de facto rulers of Japan. Nichiren hoped that his presentation of the teachings of the sutras would help them to see that something must be done about the state of Buddhism in Japan. Nichiren believed that only a return to the true spirit of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings as found in the *Lotus Sutra* would restore peace and prosperity to the land. The guest then proceeds to agree with the host’s call to withhold support from those who slander the True Dharma and to bestow it instead on the good monks and nuns in order to bring peace and stability to the land. By getting rid of the slanderers he even hopes to bring about a new golden age comparable to that enjoyed by China under the mythical sage-rulers Fu Hsi, Shen Nung, Yao and Shun.

## Evaluating Shingon

The guest than says, “After that we should compare the profoundness of doctrines held by the different schools of Buddhism, [both exoteric and esoteric, to find out which is superior between the Shingon and Lotus teachings] in order to decide on whom to honor as the leader of the Buddhist world and [in order for us to strive to spread the One Vehicle Lotus teaching].” Since the guest is now in agreement with the host, we can tentatively take this as an expression of Nichiren’s own priorities. Nichiren believed that the most pressing issue was the way in which the Pure Land movement begun by Honen was crowding out all other forms of Buddhism in Japan. That needed to be stopped first. Honen’s exclusive nembutsu was a blatant encroachment on the more profound teachings and practices of the Tendai and Shingon establishment by a radicalized version of a provisional teaching. It was Nichiren’s hope that the rulers of Japan, who were responsible for religious as well as secular affairs, would at least want to rein in the more shallow and unorthodox followers of Honen and restore the power and prestige of the established schools. Once that was done, Nichiren hoped that an investigation could proceed as to which among the established teachings was the most profound. Nichiren’s 1278 additions show that he was particularly concerned that the political and religious establishments realize that the *Lotus Sutra* should be viewed as superior to the esoteric practices of Shingon Buddhism.

By 1278, Nichiren had already begun criticizing the Shingon school and also the patriarchs of Mt. Hiei after Saicho who had turned the Tendai school into the Shingon school in all but name. Of his five major writings, two of them contain sustained critiques of the Shingon school: the *Senji Sho* written in 1275, and the *Ho’on Jo* written in 1276. Nichiren believed that the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* was far superior to the esoteric practices of the Shingon school, and he deplored the fact that the latter had come to overshadow the former. Nevertheless, he held off on criticizing the Shingon school until later in his career, though this passage implies (even without his 1278 gloss) that he may

have had his critique in mind from the very beginning.

Assuming that he did feel this way about Shingon from the start, why did he hold back? Why didn't Nichiren criticize Shingon explicitly in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*? I believe it was for the following reasons: (1) It would have been impolitic to criticize the powerful and established Shingon school from the very start. Nichiren would have made himself appear to be a radical in doing so, and at that time he wanted to make a reasonable appeal to the government to withdraw support from the radical exclusive nembutsu movement of Honen. (2) Nichiren himself drew upon esoteric lore and methods in his own teaching and practice, and I believe that he needed time to carefully research and reflect on the esoteric tradition so as to make a careful and nuanced critique of its excesses rather than a blanket condemnation. (3) For Nichiren, a critique of Shingon also meant a critique of the Tendai school itself, the school that Nichiren was a member of and hoped to reform. The Tendai school, as founded by Saicho, was supposed to be a school centered on the *Lotus Sutra*, but Saicho's successors on Mt. Hiei had emphasized the esoteric traditions they shared with the Shingon school and had even devalued the *Lotus Sutra* and compared it unfavorably with the sutras and practices valued by Shingon. Nichiren hoped that the Tendai school could be brought back in line with the teachings of Chih-i, Miao-lo, and Saicho and once again become a school whose teachings and practice was centered on the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren himself had no authority within the Tendai school, and so he probably hoped that his Tendai colleagues would rally around him in opposing Honen's exclusive nembutsu, and that they might later support him in reforming the Tendai school itself. If that was his hope, it never came to fruition, and by the time of the Sado Exile in 1271 Nichiren probably realized that he would never attract more than a few low-ranking sympathizers from within the Tendai school and so there was no longer any reason to hold back anymore. (4) Nichiren also may have hoped that the shogunate would grant him his wish of having an official debate with those who opposed his views. In those days, winning or losing a government sponsored debate often meant gaining a temple or even suffering government sanctions.

When it became clear that he would not be given a chance to publicly debate his views in an official forum, he may have decided to take the risk of committing his critiques to writing for the sake of his contemporary followers and posterity. This was a risk because these were not critiques of a radical fringe movement such as Honen's exclusive nembutsu, but of the powerful Tendai and Shingon schools who formed the backbone of the religious establishment at that time. Nichiren's writings, if discovered, would have once more aroused the wrath of the political and religious authorities against Nichiren and his disciples. This is in fact what happened in 1284 when Nichiren's disciple Nissho (1221-1323) submitted his own revised version of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* that explicitly criticized Tendai and Shingon esotericism. An angry mob descended upon his hermitage in Hamado and tried to burn it down, and was only appeased when Nissho assured them that he was a loyal Tendai monk who was only trying to reform the Tendai school.

## Predictions of Foreign Invasion and Civil War

Delighted, the Master Said

WNSD1: pp. 138-142

WND: pp. 23-25

The host is gratified to hear the guest's change of heart and states, "If you put faith in my words dealing with the calamities and disasters confronting us today, there is no question that the winds will calm down, the waves will subside, and reaper years will return before long." In essence, Nichiren believes that if his advice is heeded peace and harmony will be restored to the land. Previous sections of this commentary have already dealt with the rationale for this conviction.

The host, however, is also concerned that the guest will lose his resolve and not follow through on his plan of action. The host urges the guest neither to backslide into his former complacency and false views nor to put off what needs to be done. He says, "If you wish to bring about peace in our country and pray for happiness in this life, as well as in the future, then waste no time. Think hard and take the necessary measures to thoroughly deal with slanderers of the True Dharma." Though this was directed to the ruler of a country in regard to the suppression of a movement that Nichiren believed was having a destructive effect on Buddhism and the national welfare of Japan, I believe Buddhist practitioners can take these admonitions to heart today. We also should have the courage of our convictions and the strength of our resolve. Instead of just reading or talking about the True Dharma we should put it into practice. This means acknowledging and rooting out our own false views and bad habits, and constantly endeavoring to live in accord with the teachings in our daily lives. We can do this by developing and sustaining a daily practice so that we keep our minds and hearts centered on the Wonderful Dharma. Empowered and refreshed by a consistent daily practice we can bring the spirit of our devotion to the Wonderful Dharma into every situation we face. With mindfulness and caring we can create peace in our relationships and our environment, and in this way

do our part to establish the Wonderful Dharma in the world.

The host impresses upon the guest the danger that he believes the nation is still facing. Harkening back to the dire prophecies found in the sutra passages the host cited towards the beginning of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*. The *Sutra of Golden Light*, *Great Collection Sutra*, *Benevolent Kings Sutra*, and the *Medicine Master Sutra* all predicted that portents of evil and grave disasters would appear in any land where the rulers failed to uphold the Dharma. Nichiren points out that two of the disasters spoken of in these sutras have not yet been fulfilled: invasion from abroad and revolt from within. Therefore, he predicts that unless something is done, Japan will soon be faced with war and disorder from external and internal threats.

The prediction of foreign invasion seemed on the verge of fulfillment on January 18, 1268 when envoys from Kublai Khan (1215-1294), the Mongol emperor of northern China and Korea, arrived in Japan. The envoys brought with them a letter requesting that Japan acknowledge Kublai Khan as the new emperor of China by sending him yearly tribute or else incur the displeasure of the Mongols. The imperial court took this as an invasion threat, but the shogunate refused to respond to it. Nevertheless, panic swept the nation for several months and Nichiren took the opportunity to resubmit the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* to the current regent Hojo Tokimune (1250-1284) and to 11 government officials reminding them that he had predicted such a threat eight years before and calling for a public debate in order to argue his point in an official forum. Nichiren's requests were ignored. Over the next several years more envoys came from the Mongol empire. They were also ignored. Finally, the Mongols attacked the island of Iki and Tsushima with a huge invasion fleet consisting of over 25,000 troops in 900 ships. The invasion failed when the fleet was struck by a seasonal typhoon that has subsequently been called the *kamikaze* or "divine winds." Over 200 ships sank with as many as 13,500 aboard and the rest of the invasion force limped back to Korea. When the Mongols sent more envoys in 1275 and 1279 to reiterate their demands and threats the shogunate had them

beheaded. In May of 1281 the Mongols again tried to invade Japan, this time with a larger fleet carrying over 100,000 troops. For a time they succeeded in their invasion of Kyushu, but once again their fleet was destroyed by the seasonal typhoons and up to 80% of the fleet sank beneath the waves. That was to be the last attempt by the Mongols to invade Japan. Nichiren, however, was not convinced that Japan would ever truly be out of danger until it returned to the *Lotus Sutra*. Some have even seen the invasion and occupation of Japan by the U.S. Army in 1945 as a fulfillment of Nichiren's prophecy in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, believing that Japan's defeat was a result of its misplaced faith in emperor worship rather than the *Lotus Sutra*. One of those who believed this was Josei Toda (1900-1958) the second president of the Soka Gakkai.

The prediction of civil disturbance came to be fulfilled in February 1272 when the regent Hojo Tokimuni had to quell an attempt to overthrow him led by his elder half-brother Hojo Tokisuke (1248-1272). Fighting broke out in both Kamakura and Kyoto between different factions of the Hojo clan. In the end, Tokisuke and his co-conspirators were all killed. Dissatisfaction within the Hojo regency continued however, especially because the Hojo vassals did not feel adequately rewarded for their efforts against the Mongol invaders, even as the rulers lavished support on the Shingon and other temples that had claimed credit for the victories due to their prayers and rituals. In 1333 the Emperor Godaigo (1288-1339) was able to overthrow the Kamakuran shogunate by taking advantage of this situation.

Nichiren's ability to predict foreign invasion and civil war was not based upon any form of psychic power to see the future. Rather, it was the result of reading the sutras and using the process of elimination to see which disasters they predicted had yet to occur. Nichiren had a total faith in the sutras, as they contained the word of the Buddha. Furthermore, Nichiren undoubtedly heard reports of the Mongols conquests in China and Korea, and also must have known about rivalries within the Hojo regency. Nichiren's role as a prophet was not due to an ability to forecast future events, but rather with his keen

understanding of current events and where they were leading, and his conviction that warfare and unrest could be avoided through devotion to the *Lotus Sutra*.

Does it make sense, however, to blame Mongol ambitions or the vagaries of the political fortunes of the ruling classes in Japan on Pure Land piety, or Zen aesthetics, or reliance on Shingon esotericism? Does it make sense to say that natural disaster and warfare can be averted simply by devotion to the correct sutra? If it is only a matter of who one prays to, or what set of beliefs one holds, or what kind of rituals one performs, than I would have to say that such an assertion is nothing more than superstition or religious fanaticism. If, however, these different teachings represent different value systems, and I believe they do, than I think that they can be seen as major contributing factors.

The Kamakuran shogunate can perhaps be said to have brought its troubles down upon itself. It is possible that they could have treated the envoys from the Mongols with more consideration and instead of just ignoring them they might have been able to negotiate with Kublai Khan and acknowledged him as the new sovereign of China, and that may have been all that he was seeking. Some historians interpret the intent of his first letter in this way. The Hojo regents might also have given more consideration to the legitimate needs of their own vassals and perhaps even done more to reconcile the imperial court with their rule. In short, the rulers alienated those abroad and those they ruled because of their arrogant and self-serving attitude. It could be said that their lack of consideration for the welfare of the people and the improvement of their own society was undermined by their hopes for an otherworldly paradise after death as promised by the Pure Land teachings. Their reliance on the magical benefits and protections supposedly conferred by Shingon rituals also contributed to their complacency. The new Zen teachers in Kamakura were also catering to the needs of the samurai, a warrior class in need of an amoral aesthetic that could make them more efficient in battle. Nichiren was convinced that what was needed to ensure that the rulers governed humanely and effectively in the face of the many challenges facing them was the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* that the

pure land can be found in this world and that all beings must be treated respectfully because in truth all beings are buddhas in the process of becoming buddhas.

Nichiren believed that the proper response of the rulers was to return to the spirit of mutual respect and care for all beings expressed in the *Lotus Sutra*. In that spirit everyone should pray for the welfare and peace of the whole country. “If you wish to have peace for yourself, you should first of all pray for the peace of the country.” Buddhism, according to Nichiren, cannot be about securing one’s own welfare apart from others, it must always be a practice that embraces all others.

## Choosing Hell or the Pure Land

Nichiren then laments that the people of his day are so anxious that they devote themselves to various teachings without stopping to examine them carefully. He praises their faith but criticizes their lack of discernment.

It seems to me that when people are in this world they all fear what their lot may be in the life to come. So it is that they put faith in distorted doctrines and pay honor to slanderous teachings. It distresses me that they should be so confused about right and wrong, and at the same time I feel pity that, having embraced Buddhism, they should have chosen the wrong kind. With the power of faith that is in their hearts, why must they recklessly give credence to distorted doctrines? If they do not shake off these delusions that they cling to but continue to harbor erroneous views, then they will quickly leave this world of the living and surely fall into the hell of incessant suffering.

People should give consideration to their futures and it is good if someone takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. However, faith must be balanced by wisdom, or at least some consideration and discernment. Blind belief is not warranted and in fact is quite dangerous as it can lead to disaster. In Buddhism, to have faith means to have trust and confidence in the teachings of the Buddha and in our own ability to put those teachings into practice so that we can realize the truth of them for ourselves. In the beginning we may have to take the Buddha's word for it, but even at that initial stage we should make sure that we are actually following the authentic teaching of the Buddha and not some other person's shallow or self-serving interpretations. We should also make sure that the teachings we are given are reasonable and not just a matter of dogma or superstition. Finally, we must judge the teachings by their actual results in our lives and not by what others want us to think. These are of course the three proofs that have been discussed earlier in connection with the evaluation of the Buddha's teaching. While Buddhism does begin with faith, it also must begin with critical thinking and our own ability to discern the truth and authenticity of the teachings we receive, and this is a process that does not end but continues as

we widen and deepen our understanding and practice of Buddhism.

Nichiren follows up this lament with a new series of citations from various sutras emphasizing the gravity of eliminating slander and upholding the True Dharma:

*Great Collection Sutra*: warns that a king must defend the Dharma as well as cultivating generosity, discipline, and wisdom. If he fails to do so he will sicken and die and then be reborn in hell as will his people.

*Benevolent Kings Sutra*: recounts how those who destroy Buddhism will have disharmony within their families, will lose the protection of the gods, and will fall into the lower realms. It also makes the following statement that is worthwhile to think about in relation to the ways in which our actions deeply imprint themselves in our lives and carry over from moment to moment, and lifetime to lifetime: “Retribution will follow as an echo follows a sound, or a shadow follows a form. Someone writing at night may put out the lamp, but the words he has written will still remain. It is the same with the effect of the deeds we perform in the threefold world.”

*Lotus Sutra*: warns in chapter three that those who do not put their faith in the *Lotus Sutra* but slander it instead are thereby attempting to kill the seed of buddhahood in all people in the whole world. For this they will fall into the Avichi Hell for many ages and suffer many other punishments after that. The 20<sup>th</sup> chapter is also cited, wherein those who persecuted Bodhisattva Never Despair fall into the Avichi Hell because they persecuted a practitioner of the *Lotus Sutra*.

*Nirvana Sutra*: warns that those who avoid good teachers but seek out false teachings will end up in the Avichi Hell.

The expanded version of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* supplied some additional citations from the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, the *Six Perfections*

*Sutra*, and *Great Collection Sutra* that all make the same point. After the citations Nichiren states, “Examining many sutras, we thus see they all regard slandering the True Dharma as the most serious crime.” Nichiren then comes to his final conclusion, that by turning away from such slander and by embracing the True Dharma it is possible to make this world into a pure land.

You should promptly discard your false beliefs and take up the true and righteous teaching of the One Vehicle. Then this world will become the Buddha-land and the Buddha-land will never decay. All the worlds in the universe will become treasure worlds and the treasure worlds will never be destroyed. When our world does not decay and is not destroyed, our bodies will be safe and hearts tranquil. Believe these worlds and revere them.

These words express the whole purpose of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*. It could even be said that they express the whole purpose of Nichiren’s entire mission. He endeavored from beginning to end to turn people back to the truth so that this world could become peaceful, all people live in safety and prosperity, and this world be recognized as the true pure land and all those within it respected as buddhas. In the *Shugo Kokka Ron*, Nichiren makes this point very clear:

Question: Which pure land should practitioners of the *Lotus Sutra* pray to be reborn in?

Answer: It is stated in the sixteenth chapter on “The Life Span of the Buddha,” the essence of the *Lotus Sutra* consisting of 28 chapters, “I will always stay in this Saha World;” “I reside here always;” and “This world of mine is at peace.” According to these statements, the Eternal True Buddha, the origin of all buddhas in manifestation, is always in this Saha World. Then why should we wish to be anywhere other than this Saha World? You should know that there is no pure land other than the very place where the practitioner of the *Lotus Sutra* resides. Why should we concern ourselves seeking a pure land in any other place? (WNSD1, pp. 67-68)

“Saha” means “endurance” and so the Saha World is the World of

Endurance which is this world where we must endure many kinds of suffering. But according to Nichiren it is also the true pure land where the Eternal Buddha revealed in chapter 16 of the *Lotus Sutra* abides. In this and in his statement in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, Nichiren expressed his conviction that it is here in this world and in this lifetime that we all have a chance to attain buddhahood and that peace, prosperity, and enlightenment are not just possible but are of the true nature of this world.

Conversion and Altruistic Determination

X Confession and Conversion

Finally Convinced, the Traveler Said:

WNSD1: p. 142

WND: pp. 25-26

The *Rissho Ankoku Ron* concludes with the words of the guest who again states his conversion to the way of thinking of the host. It is a recapitulation of the entire argument in summary form and as such does not really require much explanation. There are a few points worth noting however.

The first is that the guest laments his setting aside all buddhas except for Amitabha Buddha and all sutras except for the Pure Land sutras. He says, "But this was not due to any distorted ideas of my own conception. I was simply obeying the words of the eminent men of the past. And the same is true of all the other persons in the ten direction." Nichiren has the guest say this to make it clear that he does not blame his contemporaries, including the Hojo rulers, for what is going on except insofar as they have uncritically accepted the interpretations of Honen (and by extension Kukai and others) who has come to be revered and considered above reproach. Nichiren has just shown, however, that people should not simply accept the opinions of others, even revered teachers, without looking more deeply into them. If nothing else, Nichiren has demonstrated the value of taking the time to research and think for oneself.

The guest also says, "From now on, with your kind instructions to guide me, I wish to continue dispelling the ignorance from my mind." This is a significant statement because it shows that the dispelling of ignorance is not a one-time thing. In our Buddhist practice we must constantly be vigilant and not become complacent. We should also seek out the help of good spiritual friends who may have more learning and/or experience that we can take into consideration. Such good friends can be an encouraging and positive influence.

The guest goes on to say, “I hope we may set about as quickly as possible taking measures to deal with these slanderers against the Dharma and to bring peace to the world without delay, thus insuring that we may live in safety in this life and enjoy good fortune in the life to come.” The guest is now prepared and determined to act without any further equivocation or delay. This kind of decisiveness is also necessary in our own spiritual practice once we have carefully considered what we mean to do and what effect it will have for ourselves and others. In this case, the guest hopes to help create a peaceful world and to insure safety in this life and good fortune in the life to come. This wish is based upon the promises of the Buddha from chapter five of the *Lotus Sutra*, “Simile of the Herbs”:

“Having heard these teachings, they become peaceful in their present lives. In their future lives, they will have rebirth in good places, enjoy pleasures by practicing the Way, and hear these teachings again. After hearing these teachings again, they will emancipate themselves from all hindrances, practice the teachings according to their capacities, and finally enter the Way, just as the grasses and trees in the thickets and forests, which were watered by the rain from the large cloud, grew differently according to their species.” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 106)

As the full passage from the *Lotus Sutra* shows, the benefits of practice are not limited to worldly comforts or security, they ultimately lead to the Buddha Way for all beings in the manner best suited to each of them.

The guest ends with, “But it is not enough that I alone should accept and have faith in your words – we must see to it that others as well are warned of their errors.” Nichiren was not trying to create a privatized spirituality for an elite. As a Mahayana Buddhist, Nichiren wanted to help as many people overcome error and find truth as possible. It was Nichiren’s hope that all beings would endeavor to help each other and act in the world as bodhisattvas working to enlighten all beings so that all may attain buddhahood together.

## Glossary

Abbreviations: Chin = Chinese; Jpn = Japanese; Skt = Sanskrit

### A

**abandoned, closed, set aside, and cast away:** Nichiren's epitome of Honen's statements regarding all other sutras, buddhas, and Buddhist practices aside from the *Triple Pure Land Sutras* and the chanting of nembutsu.

**act of right assurance:** Shan-tao called the nembutsu the "act of right assurance" in contrast to what he called the "auxiliary acts" of Pure Land practice because he viewed it as the one practice that assured rebirth in Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land of the West.

**Agamas:** See Agama Sutras.

**Agama Sutras:** The sutras of the Sarvastivadin canon originally written in Sanskrit but now preserved in Chinese translation.

**Amaterasu Omikami:** The Japanese Sun Goddess who is also believed to be the ancestor of the imperial Yamato clan. Also called Tensho Daijin.

**Amitabha Buddha:** The Buddha of Infinite Light who resides in the Western Pure Land. An idealized celestial buddha representing the bliss of enlightenment.

**Amitayus Buddha:** The Buddha of Infinite Life. Another name for Amitabha Buddha.

**Ananda:** One of the ten major disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha. He was a cousin of the Buddha, his personal attendant, and the monk responsible for memorizing all of the Buddha's discourses or sutras. It is Ananda who says, "Thus have I heard..." at the beginning of every sutra.

**arhat:** (Skt) "noble one." A disciple (shravaka) who has achieved the goal of

Theravada (or Hinayana) Buddhism. An arhat is one who has extinguished the three poisons and broken free of the wheel of becoming, thereby attaining nirvana.

**Aryadeva:** (n.d.) The successor of Nagarjuna who lived during the third century in southern India.

**auxiliary acts:** According to Shan-tao the acts of chanting the Triple Pure Land Sutras, contemplating Amitabha Buddha and his Pure Land, worshipping Amitabha Buddha, and praising and making offerings to Amitabha Buddha are all “auxiliary acts” that support the “act of right assurance” which is the nembutsu.

**auxiliary right practices:** Another way of referring to the auxiliary acts.

**Avatamsaka Sutra:** See Flower Garland Sutra

**Avichi Hell:** The hell of uninterrupted suffering which is the lowest of the hells.

## B

**band of robbers:** In Shan-tao’s parable of the white path they represent people of false views. Honen identified them with the teachers of other schools of Buddhism besides the Pure Land school.

**bodhi:** (Skt) “enlightenment” or “awakening.”

**bodhichitta:** (Skt) “enlightened mind.” The aspiration to attain enlightenment for oneself and others.

**bodhisattva:** (Skt) “enlightening being.” A being dedicated to attaining buddhahood or enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

**Bodhisattva Never Despise:** A past life of Shakyamuni Buddha in which he greeted all those he met by telling them that they would become buddhas.

**bodhisattvas from underground:** The bodhisattvas and their four leaders who appear from beneath the earth in the 15th chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* who are the original disciples of the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha.

**Brahma:** (Skt) The supreme god of the Brahmanistic pantheon. In Buddhism, he is considered a protector of the Dharma.

**brahman:** (Skt) The highest caste in Brahmanism. Also, a priest of Brahman.

**Brahmanism:** The main-stream religion of India at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha. Later developed into what is today known as Hinduism.

**buddha:** (Skt) “awakened one.” Someone who has awakened to the true reality of all existence and is therefore able to free all beings from suffering.

**Buddha Dharma:** The true nature of reality. Also, the teachings of the Buddha.

**buddha-nature:** The potential that all beings have to become buddhas. In Skt, this is called “buddhata” or “tathagata-garbha.”

**Busshin:** The Buddha Mind, another name for the Zen school.

## C

**Ch’eng T’ang:** The feudal prince who rose up against the corrupt and evil Emperor Chieh and became the founder of the Shang or Yin dynasty (c. 1751-1112 BCE) in China.

**Chia-ts’ai:** (c. 620-680) A Chinese monk who is regarded as a master of Pure Land Buddhism.

**Chieh, Emperor:** The corrupt and evil last emperor of the Hsia dynasty (c. 2205-1751 BCE) in China who was overthrown by Ch’eng T’ang.

**Chih-i:** (538-597) The founder of the T’ien-t’ai school. Also known as T’ien-t’ai.

**Chisho:** See Enchin.

**Chou Hsin, Emperor:** The corrupt and evil last emperor of the Shang or Yin dynasty (c. 1751-1112 BCE) in China who was overthrown by Wu Wang.

***Collection of Passages on the Land of Peace and Bliss:*** A treatise on Pure Land Buddhism by Tao-ch'o.

***Commentary on the Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life:*** A commentary written by Shan-tao.

***Commentary on the Ten Stage Sutra:*** Commentary attributed to Nagarjuna on a sutra that is actually a chapter in the *Flower Garland Sutra*.

***Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth in the Pure Land:*** A commentary by T'an-luan on the *Treatise on Rebirth in the Pure Land* attributed to Vasubandhu.

**Confucius:** (551-479 BCE) The ethical teacher and political theorist who founded the system known as Confucianism in China.

**contemplative practices:** According to Shan-tao the first 13 visualizations of Amitabha Buddha and his attendants and the Pure Land of the West found in the *Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* are known as "contemplative" practices because they involve focused contemplation.

**correct practices:** See right practices.

**Counterfeit Age of the Dharma:** See Middle Age of the Dharma.

## D

***Dan Senchaku:*** (*Denouncing the Collection of Passages on the Nembutsu*) A critique of the Senchaku Shu by the Tendai monk Josho.

**Dengyo:** See Saicho.

**devas:** (Skt) The Vedic gods who reside in the heavens.

**dharani:** (Skt) A term that means “retention” and refers to Sanskrit incantations that are said to enable practitioners to retain their memory of the Dharma and receive the blessings conferred by the Dharma and the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities who uphold the Dharma and protect its practitioners.

**Dharma:** (Skt) A term meaning Truth, Law, Reality, or the teachings of the Buddha.

**dharma:** (Skt) The lower case form of Dharma which is used when the word refers to “phenomena,” “realities,” “entities,” or “events.”

**Dharma-realm:** Reality as experienced by a buddha. In Skt, this is called the “dharmadhatu.”

**189dhyana:** (Skt) (Chin ch’an; Jpn zen) A term meaning “concentration” or “absorption” and refers to deepening levels of mental concentration.

***Discourse on the Pure Land:*** The auto-commentary on the *Hymns of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land* attributed to Vasubandhu.

**distractive practices:** According to Shan-tao the practices associated with the high, middle, and lower grades of spiritual aspirants found in the *Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* are known as “distractive practices” because they can be done even when distracted.

**Duke of Chou:** The brother of King Wu who ruled as regent until King Wu’s son came of age.

## E

**Eagle Peak:** One possible translation of Mt. Grdhrakuta, where the Buddha taught the *Lotus Sutra*.

**Eighteenth Vow:** See Original Vow.

**eightfold path:** The Middle Way consisting of right views, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation.

**eight teachings:** Chih-i's categorization of the teachings of the Buddha into four teachings by content and four by method. Altogether the eight teachings are: Tripitika, Common, Specific, Perfect, Sudden Gradual, Secret, and Indeterminate.

**emptiness:** The lack of a static, independent selfhood in any entity or phenomena. In Skt, this is called "shunyata."

**Enchin:** (814-891) also known as Chisho Daishi. Fifth abbot of Enryakuji, the main temple of the Tendai school.

**Ennin:** (794-866) also known as Jikaku Daishi. Third abbot of Enryakuji, the main temple of the Tendai school.

**Enryakuji:** Main temple of the Tendai school on Mt. Hiei.

**esoteric:** A type of Buddhism that uses mudras, mantras, and mandalas in order to attain buddhahood in this lifetime.

**Eternal Buddha:** See Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha

**Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha:** The unity of the historical, ideal, and universal aspects of the buddha in the person of Shakyamuni Buddha as revealed in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. Also called the Original Buddha since all other buddhas are emanations of the Eternal Buddha.

**exclusive nembutsu:** Honen's teaching that the only practice that should be done is the nembutsu.

**exclusive practice:** the exclusive practice of nembutsu.

**exoteric:** Those forms of Buddhism that are not esoteric.

**Expansive Sutras:** (Skt. Vaipulya; Jpn Hodo) The Mahayana sutras that encompass the Consciousness Only, Pure Land, and esoteric sutras according to the T'ien-t'ai categorization. T'ien-t'ai also teaches that they were taught during the 13 to 20<sup>th</sup> years of the Buddha's teaching career.

## F

**Fa-tsang:** (643-712) The founder of the Flower Garland (Chin Hua-yen) school in China.

**Fa-yun:** (467-529) one of many early Chinese monks who held that the *Nirvana Sutra* was superior to the *Lotus Sutra*.

**final nirvana:** (Skt parinirvana) the passing away of a buddha or arhat. It means that not only are the three poisons of greed, anger and ignorance extinguished, but so the body and all its weaknesses and infirmities.

**five aggregates:** The components of a sentient being – form, sensation, perception, volition, and consciousness. In Skt, these are called the “skandhas.”

**five classics:** The five classics of Confucian learning. They are: the Book of Changes, the Book of Poetry, the Book of History, the Book of Rites, and the Spring and Autumn Annals.

**five constant virtues:** Five virtues that Tung Chung-shu taught were the most important in Confucianism. They are: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness.

**Five Emperors:** In Confucianism the legendary emperors who ruled China after the Yellow Emperor: Shan-hao, Chuan-hsu, Ti-hung, Yao (r. 2356-2347 BCE), and Shun (r. 2244-2205 BCE).

**five flavors:** Chih-i's division of the Buddha's teachings into five different kinds depending on the mixture of the ingredients which are the four teachings by

content: the Flower Garland that combines the Perfect teaching with the Specific teaching, the Deer Park that excludes all but the Tripitika teaching, the Expansive that uses all four teachings as they correspond to the needs of the audience, the Perfection of Wisdom that includes the Common and Specific with the Perfect teaching, and the Lotus/Nirvana that has only the Perfect teaching. See the five periods.

**five grave offenses:** Five acts that Buddhism teaches are so heinous that one who commits them is said to be reborn in hell immediately upon dying. They are: (1) killing one's father, (2) or mother, (3) or an arhat, (4) injuring the Buddha (it is believed that a buddha cannot be killed due to accident or foul play but only injured), (5) creating a schism in the Sangha.

**five guides for propagation:** Nichiren's taught that five things must be taken into account by a teacher of the Dharma: the teaching, the time, the capacity, the country, and the sequence of the teachings.

**five major precepts:** The five precepts for lay people: not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to lie, and not to indulge in intoxicants.

**five major writings:** The five most important works of Nichiren Shonin. The five major writings are: *Rissho Ankoku Ron (Treatise on Spreading Peace Throughout the Country by Establishing the True Dharma)*, *Kaimoku Sho (Opening the Eyes)*, *Kanjin no Honzon Sho (Spiritual Contemplation and the Focus of Devotion)*, *Senji Sho (Selection of the Time)*, and *Ho'on Jo (Essay on Gratitude)*.

**five periods:** Miao-lo taught that Chih-i's five flavors corresponded to different periods of the Buddha's teaching career: the Flower Garland was taught in the first three weeks after the Buddha's enlightenment, then the Deer Park teachings were given for 12 years, then the Expansive teachings for 8 years, then the Perfection of Wisdom teachings for 22 years, and then the Lotus and Nirvana teachings were taught in the last 8 years.

**five precepts:** See five major precepts.

**five virtues:** See five constant virtues.

**Flower Garland school:** (Chin Hua-yen; Jpn Kegon) Mahayana school of Buddhism founded in China by Fa-tsang based on the teachings of the *Flower Garland Sutra*.

**Flower Garland Sutra:** (Skt *Buddha-avatamsaka-nama-mahavaipulya Sutra* or just *Avatamska Sutra*; Chin *Hua-yen Ching*; Jpn *Kegon Kyo*) A Mahayana Buddhist sutra that is the main sutra of the Flower Garland school. According to the T'ien-t'ai school it was the sutra the Buddha taught for the sake of advanced bodhisattvas in the weeks immediately following his enlightenment.

**Former Age of the Dharma:** The first and second five hundred year periods after the death of the Buddha. During this period the true spirit of the Dharma flourishes and people are able to practice and attain enlightenment.

**four elements:** The four physical components of life which are earth, air, fire, and water that represent the qualities of density, movement, temperature, and cohesiveness.

**four heavenly kings:** the four heavenly generals who guard the four directions of the slopes of Mt. Sumeru.

**four noble truths:** The truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the means of ending suffering, which is the eightfold path.

**four seals of the Dharma:** The three marks of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness which characterize all phenomena; and the perfect peace of nirvana. Any teaching which conforms to the four seals of the Dharma can be considered authentic Buddha Dharma.

**four standards:** four standards for judging the relative merits and profundity of Buddhist teachings set forth in the *Nirvana Sutra*: "Rely on the Dharma and not upon persons; rely on the meaning and not upon the words; rely on wisdom and not upon discriminative thinking; rely on sutras that are final and definitive and

not upon those which are not final and definitive.”

**four teachings by content:** Chih-i’s division of the Buddha’s teaching into four different types by content: the Tripitika, Common, Specific, Perfect.

**four teachings by method:** Chih-i’s division of the Buddha’s teaching into four different types of presentation: the Sudden Gradual, Secret, and Indeterminate.

**Four Treatise school:** Mahayana school in China based on the Madhyamika treatises of Nagarjuna and Aryadeva.

**Fu Hsi:** (c. 2852 BCE) The first of the legendary Three Sovereigns of China Fu who allegedly invented cooking, hunting, and the domestication of animals while his wife “discovered” marriage and family.

## G

**Gateway of the Holy Path:** According to Tao-ch’o this is the path of self-cultivation leading to enlightenment.

**Gateway of the Pure Land:** According to Tao-ch’o this is the path of relying on the Original Vow of Amitabha Buddha.

**Genshin:** (942-1017) A Tendai monk who wrote the *Ojo-yoshu*.

**Gishin:** (781-833) Successor of Saicho and the first abbot of Enryakuji, the main temple of the Tendai school.

**Gohonzon:** (Jpn) “Essential Focus of Devotion.” In Nichiren Buddhism, the Gohonzon is the transmission of the Wonderful Dharma by the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha to all sentient beings, especially the bodhisattvas from underground, during the Ceremony in the Air. This is often, but not always, depicted in the form of a calligraphic mandala.

**Great Arrogant Brahman:** An arrogant brahman in India who believed he was wiser than the gods or even the Buddha and used statues of the gods and the

Buddha as pillars to support his teaching platform.

***Great Concentration and Insight***: The magnum opus of Chih-i.

**Gyogi**: (668-749) An early teacher of the nembutsu among the common people in Japan.

## H

**Hachiman Daibosatsu**: Shinto kami who was granted the title “Great Bodhisattva” and later became the tutelary deity of the Kamakuran shogunate.

**Hinayana**: (Skt) “Small Vehicle.” A Mahayana term for those who only wish to attain liberation for themselves and do not try to benefit others by striving for buddhahood.

**Holy Path**: See Gateway of the Holy Path.

**Honen**: (1133-1212) The founder of the Pure Land school in Japan and author of the Senchaku Shu.

**Ho'on Jo**: (Jpn) *Essay on Gratitude* is one of Nichiren's five major writings, written in 1276.

**Hosso**: The Japanese name of the Consciousness Only school that had been founded by Hsuan-tsung.

**Hsuan-tsang**: (596-664) Chinese monk who brought back many sutras and commentaries from India, translated them, and founded the Consciousness Only school.

**Huai-kan**: (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries) Disciple of Shan-tao.

**Hunag-ti**: (c. 2607 BCE), The third of the legendary Three Sovereigns of China, also known as the Yellow Emperor, who invented pottery, houses, carts, and boats while his wife discovered how to gather and weave silk. A member of the

court of the Yellow Emperor is even credited with the creation of the Chinese ideograms. The Yellow Emperor also organized the first army and used it to conquer the fertile land around the Yellow River.

**Hui-yuan:** (334-416) Regarded as the founder of the Pure Land tradition in China.

***Hymns in Praise of Rebirth:*** Treatise on Pure Land Buddhism written by Shantao.

***Hymns of Aspiration for Birth [in the Pure Land]:*** A commentary on the *Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life* attributed to Vasubandhu.

## I

**icchantika:** (Skt) “incorrigible disbeliever.” Someone who has no potential for enlightenment. the *Lotus Sutra*, however, teaches that even an icchantika can attain enlightenment.

***Ichidai Shogyo Tai-i:*** (*Outline of All the Holy Teachings of the Buddha*) Written by Nichiren in 1258.

***Ichidai Goji Keizu:*** (*Genealogical Chart of the Buddha’s Lifetime Teachings in Five Periods*) Written by Nichiren in 1275.

**Ippen:** (1239-1289) The founder of the Ji or Timely school of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan. A grand-disciple of Honen.

## J

**Jikaku Daishi:** See Ennin.

**Jiron:** (Jpn) (Chin Ti-lun) The Treatise on the Ten Stages school, based on the treatise of that name by Vasubandhu.

**Jodo:** (Jpn) The name of Honen's Pure Land school in Japan.

**Jodo Ketsugi Sho:** (Jpn) *Discerning the Meaning of the Pure Land* written by Koin.

**Jokakubo Kosai:** (1163-1247) A disciple of Honen who taught that nembutsu need only be recited once in order to be reborn in the Pure Land.

**Josho:** (c. 13<sup>th</sup> century) Tendai monk who wrote the *Dan Senchaku*.

## K

**Kaimoku Sho:** (Jpn) Opening of the Eyes is one of Nichiren's five major writings, written in 1272.

**Kakuban:** (1095-1143) A Shingon monk who provided an esoteric explanation for the nembutsu and set the stage for the later development of the Shingi (New Doctrine) school of Shingon in the late 13th century.

**kalpa:** (Skt) An aeon.

**kami:** The Japanese gods.

**karma:** (Skt) "action." Karma means an action and its consequences. It is also called the "law of cause and effect."

**Kegon:** The name of the Flower Garland school in Japan. See Flower Garland school.

**Ken Hobo-sho:** (Jpn) *A Clarification of Slandering the True Dharma* written by Nichiren.

**Ken Senchaku:** (Jpn) *Revealing the Collection of Passages on the Nembutsu* written by Ryukan as a response to Josho's *Dan Senchaku*.

**King Possessor of Virtue:** A king in the *Nirvana Sutra* who dies while defending

a Buddhist monk named Realization of Virtue from hostile brahmins. This king was supposed to have been a past life of Shakyamuni Buddha.

**King Sen'yo:** A king in the *Nirvana Sutra* who puts several brahmins to death after they slander Buddhism. This king was supposed to have been a past life of Shakyamuni Buddha.

**King Wen:** The father of Wu Wang.

**Kobo Daishi:** See Kukai.

**Koin:** (1145-1216) Tendai monk who wrote the *Jodo Ketsugi Sho*.

**Kukai:** (774-835) The founder of the Shingon school of esoteric Buddhism in Japan.

**Kuya:** (903-972) One of the early teachers of nembutsu among the common people in Japan.

**Kyo Ki Ji Koku Sho:** (Jpn) *Treatise on the Teaching, Capacity, Time and Country* written by Nichiren in 1262.

## L

**Lao-tzu:** (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE?) The legendary founder of Taoism in China.

**Latter Age of the Dharma:** (Jpn mappo) The fifth five hundred year period after the death of the Buddha. During this period the true spirit of the Dharma is completely lost and all that is left is sectarianism and bickering.

**Lotus Sutra:** (Skt *Saddharma-pundarika Sutra*; Chin *Miao-fa Lien-hua Ching*; Jpn *Myoho Renge Kyo*) A Mahayana Buddhist sutra that is the main sutra of the T'ien-t'ai school. According to T'ien-t'ai Buddhism it was taught in the last 8 years of the Buddha's life.

## M

**Madhyamika:** (Skt) “Middle Way school.” The school founded by Nagarjuna which emphasizes the dialectics of emptiness.

**Mahayana:** (Skt) “Great Vehicle.” The school of Buddhism which emphasizes the bodhisattva path wherein one strives to become a buddha for the liberation of all sentient beings.

**mandala:** (Skt) Diagrams or paintings used to focus the mind and express the ultimate truth.

**Mandate of Heaven:** The Confucian concept of a divine commission is given to a nobleman worthy enough to serve as the emperor of China and in doing so unite Heaven and Earth by fulfilling the will of Heaven in this world through benevolent leadership and the performance of the proper rituals and sacrifices. However, if the rulers do not fulfill their obligations and maintain their virtue, the Mandate of Heaven can be rescinded.

**mantra:** (Skt) Chants or invocations used to invoke protective powers and the ultimate truth.

**Mara:** The devil king of the sixth heaven. He is the entity whose mission is to entice or threaten beings into remaining within the cycle of birth and death.

**Maudgalyayana:** One of the ten major disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha. He was well known for his supernatural abilities developed through meditation.

**Medicine Master Buddha:** (Skt Bhaishajyaguru; Jpn Yakushi) The buddha of the Pure Land of the East.

**Mencius:** (372-289 BCE) The second greatest teacher of Confucianism after Confucius.

**Middle Age of the Dharma:** The third and fourth of the five hundred year periods after the death of the Buddha. During this period the true spirit of the

Dharma is gradually lost and while people are able to cultivate themselves they are no longer able to attain enlightenment in this world.

**Middle Way:** Refers to the Middle Way of selflessness that avoids self-indulgence and self-denial. Also refers to right view that avoid the extreme views of existence and non-existence.

**miscellaneous practices:** According to Shan-tao these are all other practices of Buddhism aside from those of Pure Land devotion and piety.

**Mt. Hiei:** The mountain in Japan where Dengyo established the Tendai school.

**mudra:** (Skt) Hand gestures used to signify the ultimate truth.

**Myoe Koben:** (1172-1232) A monk of the Kegon school.

## N

**Nagarjuna:** (c. 150-250) The founder of the Middle Way school.

**Namu Myoho Renge Kyo:** (Jpn) "Devotion to the Wonderful Dharma of the Lotus Flower Teaching." The Sino-Japanese pronunciation of the two Chinese characters which are used to transliterate the Skt word "Namas" which means "devotion" and the five Chinese characters which are used to translated the Skt title "Saddharmapundarika-sutra" which means "Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra."

**nembutsu:** (Jpn) Term that refers to the chanting of the name of Amitabha Buddha but could mean either "calling on" or "being mindful of the Buddha."

**Nichiren Shonin:** (1222-1282) The Japanese reformer and teacher who propagated the *Lotus Sutra* by refuting false teachings and introducing the Three Great Secret Dharmas.

**nirvana:** (Skt) "extinction." The extinction or extinguishing of the fire of the defilements.

**Nirvana Sutra:** A Mahayana Buddhist sutra that purports to be the last teachings of the Buddha's life given on his deathbed.

**non-returner:** In Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism, someone who has sufficiently cut-off greed, anger, and ignorance so that they can attain liberation from birth and death in the pure abodes without having to return to this world.

## O

**Odaimoku:** (Jpn) "Great Title." Refers to the practice of chanting the title of the *Lotus Sutra* in the form of *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*.

**Ojo-yoshu:** (Jpn) *Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land* written by Genshin.

**once-calling:** Theory that one need only recite the nembutsu once to be reborn in the Pure Land. This was taught by some followers of Honen.

**One Vehicle:** The one vehicle that leads to buddhahood and subsumes all other vehicles, such as the two vehicles.

**Original Vow:** The eighteenth of the 48 vows of Amitabha Buddha that states that anyone who calls upon his name even ten times can be reborn in the Pure Land of the West except for those who have committed the five grave offences or slandered the Dharma.

**Other-power:** (Jpn tariki) The power of a transcendent buddha who enables us to attain enlightenment.

## P

**Pali Canon:** The complete canon of the Buddha's teachings according to the Theravada school. It is written in the Pali language.

**parable of the white path:** Shan-tao's parable of a man who crosses a white

bridge across a river of fire and raging waters in order to get to the western shore and escape from a band of robbers and wild animals. It represents the power of the nembutsu to enable people to escape the afflictions and attain rebirth in the Pure Land of the West.

**parinirvana:** (Skt) “total extinction.” The total extinguishing of all defilements and even physical needs upon the death of the body.

**Path of Rebirth in the Pure Land:** See Gateway of the Pure Land.

**Path of Sages:** See Gateway of the Holy Path.

**Perfection of Wisdom Sutras:** (Skt Prajna Paramita Sutras) A class of Mahayana sutras consisting of many versions of various lengths that teach the six perfections and the doctrine of emptiness. According to the T’ien-t’ai teachings they were taught during the 21<sup>st</sup> to 42<sup>nd</sup> years of the Buddha’s teaching.

**Prajna Paramita Sutras:** See Perfection of Wisdom Sutras.

**202pratyekabuddhas:** (Skt) “private buddha.” The solitary contemplatives who attain enlightenment independent of the Buddha Dharma and who do not try to liberate others.

***Pratyutpanna Samadhi Sutra:*** (Skt) *Sutra on the Meditation to Behold the Buddhas* is a Mahayana sutra that teaches various ways of visualizing Amitabha Buddha.

**Provisional:** A term for sutras and teachings that lead to but do not reveal the ultimate truth of the Buddha Dharma.

**provisional:** The provisional nature of contingent phenomena which are empty of static, independent existence.

**pure abodes:** The highest of the heavens of the realm of form.

**pure land:** A transcendent realm or world created by a buddha or bodhisattva where people are at ease and able to attain enlightenment without hindrance.

**Pure Land Buddhism:** Forms of East Asian Mahayana Buddhism centered on devotion to Amitabha Buddha and rebirth in his Pure Land of the West, the most popular practice of which is nembutsu.

**Pure Land of the West:** The pure land of Amitabha Buddha where people who call upon his name are reborn in accord with his 18<sup>th</sup> vow.

**Pure Land of Tranquil Light:** The true nature of this world as seen by the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha.

## Q

## R

**Real:** Those sutras and teachings that do reveal the ultimate truth of the Buddha Dharma.

**Realization of Virtue:** A monk in the *Nirvana Sutra* who is protected by King Possessor of Virtue. This king was supposed to have been a past life of a Kashyapa Buddha.

**realm of desire:** The realm of rebirth that encompasses the hells, hungry ghosts, animals, fighting demons, humans, and the first six heavens. The beings in this realm are dominated by their desires.

**realm of form:** the heavens above the realm of desire wherein the beings contemplate form but have temporarily transcended all but the most subtle kinds of desire.

**realm of formlessness:** the heavens above the realm of form wherein the beings contemplate the formlessness of space, consciousness, nothing, and the state of neither perception nor non-perception.

**rebirth:** the process whereby when a sentient being dies their consciousness and karmic tendencies contribute to the birth of a new being.

**rightly established act:** See act of right assurance.

**right practices:** According to Shan-*tao*, these are the practices of chanting the *Triple Pure Land Sutra*, contemplating Amitabha Buddha and his Pure Land, worshipping Amitabha Buddha, chanting the Buddha's name (the nembutsu), and praising and giving offerings to Amitabha Buddha. These are in contrast to the miscellaneous practices.

**Rissho Ankoku Ron:** Nichiren's *Treatise on Spreading Peace Throughout the Country by Establishing the True Dharma* written in 1260 and submitted to the rulers of Japan in an attempt to bring Japan back to the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*.

**Ryochu:** (1199-1287) Tendai monk who became a disciple of Shokobo Bencho and became the third patriarch of the Jodo school.

**Ryokan:** (1217-1303) A monk of the Shingon-Ritsu school, an esoteric school that also attempted to revive the observance of the precepts.

**Ryonin:** (1072-1134) Tendai monk who developed the Yuzu Nembutsu.

**Ryukan:** (1148-1227) A disciple of Honen who wrote the *Ken Senchaku*.

## S

**Saha:** (Skt) "Endurance." The Buddhist name for this world where one must endure many forms of suffering.

**Saicho:** (767-822) The founder of the Japanese Tendai school. Known posthumously as Dengyo.

**Sainan Koki Yurai:** (Jpn) *The Cause of Misfortunes* written by Nichiren in 1260.

**Sainan Taiji Sho:** (Jpn) *Treatise on the Elimination of Calamities* written by Nichiren in 1260.

**Sangha:** (Skt) “assembly.” The community of those who uphold the Buddha Dharma.

**Sanron:** (Jpn) The Three Treatise school, a Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism founded in China and brought to Japan based on the teachings of Nagarjuna and Aryadeva.

**San Sanzo Kiu no Koto:** (Jpn) *Concerning the Prayer Services for Rain by Three Tripitika Masters* written by Nichiren in 1275.

**Sarvastivada:** One of the various schools of Buddhism in India. Considered a Hinayana school by Mahayana Buddhism.

**self-power:** The power of the individual to attain enlightenment through his or her own efforts. In Jpn, this is called “jiriki.”

**Senchaku Hongan Nembutsu Shu:** (Jpn) Honen’s *Collection of Passages on the Nembutsu and the Original Vow*.

**Senchaku Shu:** See *Senchaku Hongan Nembutsu Shu*.

**Senji Sho:** (Jpn) *Selection of the Time* written by Nichiren in 1275.

**seven disasters:** seven disasters of a human, natural, and astronomical nature predicted in the *Benevolent Kings Sutra* if the Dharma is not upheld: (1) irregularities of the sun and moon, (2) irregularities of the stars and planets, (3) fires, (4) floods, (5) tornadoes, (6) drought, (7) warfare brought about by foreign invasion or revolt. Can also refer to the set of seven predicted in the *Medicine Master Sutra*: (1) disease, (2) invasion, (3) revolt, (4) strange celestial omens, (5) eclipses of the sun and moon, (6) unseasonable storms, (7) drought.

**Shakyamuni Buddha:** The historical Buddha who taught in India 2,500 years ago. Also see Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha.

**Shan-tao:** (613-681) One of the patriarchs of Pure Land Buddhism in China.

**Shariputra:** One of the ten major disciples. He was well known for his wisdom.

**Shen Nung:** (c. 2737 BCE) The second of the legendary Three Sovereigns of China who is credited with the invention of the plow and agriculture, tea drinking, and herbal medicine.

**Shingon:** (Jpn) The True Word school of Japanese esoteric Buddhism founded by Kukai.

**Shinran:** (1173-1262) The founder of the Jodo Shinshu or True Pure Land School in Japan.

**Shogei:** (1340-1420) The seventh successor of Honen in the Jodo school.

**Shoka era:** The period in Japan from 1257 to 1259 during which there were many disasters.

**Shokobo Bencho:** (1162-1238) The second patriarch of the Jodo school after Honen.

**Shoron:** A school of Buddhism in China, it was based on the Consciousness Only teachings of Mahayana Buddhism.

**206shravakas:** (Skt) "voice-hearers." The disciples of the Buddha who were able to hear his teachings.

**Shugo Kokka Ron:** (Jpn) *Treatise on Protecting the Nation* written by Nichiren in 1259.

**Shun** (r. 2244-2205 BCE): The last of the legendary Five Emperors who ruled ancient China.

**six classics:** The five classics of Confucianism with the addition of the Book of

Music that is was lost during the persecution of Confucianism by the Ch'in dynasty (221-206 BCE).

**six forms of consciousness:** According to Buddhism the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind all have a corresponding form of consciousness.

**six lower worlds:** The six worlds of the hells, hungry ghosts, animals, fighting demons, humans, and the heavens.

**six objects of consciousness:** The sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles and mental events that are the objects of the six forms of consciousness.

**six organs of sense:** The eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind that are receptive of sensations.

**six perfections:** The six practices of a bodhisattva consisting of generosity, discipline, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom.

**six worlds:** The worlds of the hells, hungry ghosts, animals, fighting demons, humanity, and the heavens.

**slander:** The abuse, denigration, or misrepresentation of the Dharma.

**stage of non-retrogression:** A stage reached by bodhisattvas wherein they will never again backslide in their progress towards buddhahood.

**sutra:** (Skt) "thread of discourse." A Buddhist scripture.

## T

**T'an-luan:** (476-542) A patriarch of Pure Land Buddhism in China.

**Tao-ch'o:** (562-645) A patriarch of Pure Land Buddhism in China.

**207tathagata:** (Skt) "thus come one" or "thus gone one." Another title for a buddha. It refers to one who comes from and goes to ultimate reality.

**Tendai:** (Jpn) The Japanese version of the T'ien-t'ai school founded by Saicho.

**Theravada:** The school of Buddhism found in Southeast Asia that relies upon the Pali Canon and does not recognize the Mahayana sutras.

**three ages of the Dharma:** The three ages during which the Buddha Dharma at first flourishes, then declines, and then disappears. They are the Former, Middle, and Latter Ages of the Dharma. Also called the True, Counterfeit, and Corrupt Ages of the Dharma.

**three calamities:** famine, war, and epidemics predicted in the *Great Collection Sutra* that will occur if the Dharma is not upheld.

**Three Kings:** The Three Kings were the founders of the first three dynasties to rule China. They were Yu, the founder of the Hsia dynasty (c. 2205-1751 BCE); Ch'eng Tang, the founder of the Shang or Yin dynasty (c. 1751-1112 BCE); and King Wu Wang, the founder of the Chou dynasty (c. 1111-249 BCE).

**three evil realms:** The worlds of the hells, hungry ghosts, and fighting demons.

**threefold world:** The realms of desire, form, and formlessness. The realm of desire extends from the hells up to the more concrete heavens. The realms of form and formlessness include the higher heavens of increasing refinement.

**three kinds of activities:** Mental, verbal, and physical activity.

**three kinds of faith:** discussed in the *Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life Sutra* as essential for rebirth: sincere faith, deep faith, and the faith that aspires to rebirth in the Pure Land.

**three powerful enemies:** According to Miao-lo's interpretation of chapter 13 of the *Lotus Sutra* these are (1) the ignorant laity who are deceived by the false and hypocritical monks and elders and will abuse the true monks, (2) the false monks who are deceitful and claim to be enlightened when in fact they are not, and (3) the respected elder monks who are revered as *arhats* ("worthy ones" who are

liberated from birth and death) but who in fact are simply better at hiding their ulterior motives of greed and contempt.

**three proofs:** The first “proof” is that a teaching must be accord with what the Buddha taught. The second is that a teaching must be reasonable and in accord with what we know about our own lives. The third is that a teaching must actually lead away from harm and suffering and lead to welfare and happiness.

**three refuges:** Another name for the three treasures.

**Three Sovereigns:** The mythical prehistoric tribal rulers credited with the beginnings of civilization in China. They were Fu Hsi (c. 2852 BCE), Shen Nung (c. 2737 BCE), and Hunag-ti (c. 2607 BCE).

**three treasures:** The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha which every Buddhist takes refuge in.

**three truths:** Emptiness, provisionality, and the Middle Way.

**three vehicles:** The vehicles are the Buddha’s teachings for the shravakas, pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas that are united as the One Vehicle in the *Lotus Sutra*.

**T’ien-t’ai:** The Chinese school of Buddhism founded by Chih-i and based on the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*. Also, the name by which Chih-i is often known.

***Treatise Explaining the Ten Stages:*** See *Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra*.

***Treatise on Rebirth in the Pure Land:*** See *Discourse on the Pure Land*.

***Triple Pure Land Sutras:*** the sutras that expound on the most popular buddha and pure land of all – Amitabha Buddha (aka Amitayus) and the Pure Land of the West. These sutras are: the *Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life*, the *Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life*, and the *Pure Land Sutra*.

**True Age of the Dharma:** See Former Age of the Dharma.

**True Dharma:** The authentic and ultimate teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha and the ultimate reality that the Buddha is awakened to.

**Tsung-mi:** (780-841) A patriarch of both the Flower Garland and Zen schools in China.

**Tung Chung-shu:** (179-104 BCE) Confucian teacher during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE).

**twelve links of dependent origination:** The twelve links that describe the process of birth and death over many lifetimes.

**two vehicles:** The teachings for the disciples and the solitary contemplatives which lead to individual liberation but not to buddhahood. Another term for Hinayana Buddhism.

**Tz'u-en:** (632-682) Disciple of Husan-tsang and one of the founders of the Consciousness Only school in China.

## U

## V

**Vaipulya Sutras:** See the Expansive Sutras.

**Vasubandhu:** (c. 320-400) Co-founder of the Consciousness Only school along with his older brother Asanga.

**Vedic:** That which relates to the Vedas, which were the divinely revealed hymns of Brahmanism in ancient India.

**Vijnanavada:** (Skt) "Consciousness Only school." The Mahayana school founded by Vasubandhu, Asanga, and Maitreyanatha which emphasized the role

of consciousness in shaping our experience of reality.

**Vimalamitra:** A scholar of the Sarvastivadin school who tried to refute the teachings of Vasubandhu

## W

**Way of Difficult Practice:** The way of gradual self-cultivation in order to attain enlightenment.

**Way of Easy Practice:** The way of relying on the assistance of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and especially Amitabha Buddha, in order to attain enlightenment.

**Wonderful Dharma:** The True Dharma, esp. as expressed in the *Lotus Sutra*.

**Wu Wang:** The king who rose up against the corrupt and evil Emperor Chou Hsin and became the founder of the Chou dynasty (c. 1111-249 BCE) in China.

## X

## Y

**Yao:** (r. 2356-2347 BCE) The fourth of the Five Emperors who ruled ancient China.

**Yellow Emperor:** See Huang-ti.

**yang:** The dynamic and creative element.

**Yen-hui:** (511-480 BCE) The favorite disciple of Confucius.

**yin:** The receptive and nourishing element.

**Yogachara:** (Skt) "Yoga school." Another name for the Consciousness Only school due to that school's emphasis on meditation.

**Yokan:** (1033-1111) Pure Land practitioner of the Sanron school in Japan.

**Yu:** The successor of the Yellow Emperor and founder of the Hsia dynasty (c. 2205-1751 BCE). He was an engineer who was the first to succeed in bringing the flooding of the Yellow River under control.

**Yuzu Nembutsu:** (Jpn) The Nembutsu of Mutual Interpenetration wherein it is taught that the nembutsu contains the merits of all other practices and one person's practice becomes the practice of all

## Z

**Zaijarin:** (Jpn) *Refuting the Evil Dharma* is a critique of the Senchaku Shu written by Myoe Koben.

**Zaijarin Shogonki:** (Jpn) *Supplementary Writing to Refuting the Evil Dharma* is a critique of the Senchaku Shu written by Myoe Koben.

**Zen:** (Chin Ch'an) The Japanese name for the Mahayana school of Buddhism founded by Bodhidharma and based on the practice of silent meditation called "zazen" or sometimes "Zen meditation."

**Zenne Shoku:** (1177-1247) A disciple of Honen who brought about the acceptance of Honen's teaching among the aristocracy in Kyoto and for founding the more Tendai oriented Seizan branch of the Jodo Shu.

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