

Letter to the Priests of Seicho-ji



LET us congratulate each other on the coming of the New Year! Since you paid me no visit last year, I have been worried that something unfortunate might have occurred. If you have a chance to call on me, would you borrow for me from the priest Ise-ko *The Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind, The Precious Key to the Secret Treasury, A Comparison of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism,* and the other commentaries of the True Word school? I need them in order to refute the True Word priests who have for some time been clamoring against me. Bring with you also volumes one and two of *Great Concentration and Insight*. I would also appreciate *Tung-ch'un* and *The Supplement to "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra,"* if they are available. Borrow *The Collection of Tendai Documents,* which is owned by Kanchi-bo, the disciple of Enchi-bo. I have heard people say that he possesses not only that, but other relevant writings. Please borrow them as well, and tell him that I will return them as soon as possible. This year the question of which Buddhist teachings are right and which are wrong will definitely be resolved.

Tell Joken-bo, Gijo-bo, and the other priests on my behalf: "Nichiren has often been on the verge of being killed. Twice he was exiled and once almost beheaded. This is not because of any worldly wrongs on his part. [As a

youth,] he received great wisdom from the living Bodhisattva Space Treasury. He prayed to the bodhisattva to become the wisest person in Japan. The bodhisattva must have taken pity on him, for he presented him with a great jewel as brilliant as the morning star, which Nichiren tucked away in his right sleeve. Thereafter, on perusing the entire body of sutras, he was able to discern in essence the relative worth of the eight schools as well as of all the scriptures."

The True Word school, among others, attempts to destroy the Lotus Sutra. It is essential to refute the True Word teachings, so in preparation I first attacked the errors of the Zen and Nichiren schools. I have good reason for my accusations. I will reserve discussion of the rights and wrongs of Buddhist schools in India and China for some other time, but as for Japan, all the people have discarded the correct teaching of the Lotus Sutra and are therefore without exception destined to fall into the evil paths. This is because, at each and every temple, the True Word school invariably exists side by side with the Lotus school, just as a shadow follows the body. Thus, to the practice of the Lotus Sutra that accords with the Law is added the eighteen paths,¹ and to the practice of repentance is added one based on the Amida Sutra. And in conferring titles upon priests of the Tendai

school, the True Word procedure predominates, while that of the Lotus Sutra is relegated to a secondary position.

In reality, the True Word sutras belong to the provisional teachings preached before the Lotus Sutra and are inferior even to the Flower Garland or the Wisdom sutras. Yet Jikaku and Kobo were confused on this point and held that the True Word sutras were equal or even superior to the Lotus Sutra. The eye-opening ceremony for a newly made image of the Buddha² is therefore conducted with the mudra of the Honored One Buddha Eye and the mantra of the Buddha Mahavairochana. As a result, all the wooden and painted images of the Buddha in Japan have been rendered soulless and sightless, and in consequence, have been possessed by the heavenly devil, bringing ruin upon their own worshipers. This is why the imperial court [in Kyoto] is about to perish. Now the evil teaching of the True Word school has made its appearance in Kamakura and threatens to destroy all of Japan.

The Zen and Pure Land schools also hold extremely perverted views. I knew that if I declared this it would certainly cost me my life. Yet I was determined to requite the favor of Bodhisattva Space Treasury. With this in mind, on the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month in the fifth year of Kencho (1253), I pointed out the errors of the various schools for the first time to a priest called Joen-bo and to some of the people on the southern side of the image hall in Dozen-bo's quarters at Seicho-ji temple in Tojo Village of Awa Province. During the more than twenty years since then, I have spoken out with unremitting zeal, and I have been either driven from my dwelling or exiled. In former days Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was beaten with staves; now Nichiren must face the sword.

All the people in Japan, both wise and foolish, from the sovereign on

down to the common people, say that the priest Nichiren is no match for the scholars, teachers, great teachers, and eminent priests of old. I waited for the right time to dispel their distrust of me. The time finally came when a great earthquake occurred in the Shoka era, followed by the appearance of a huge comet in the Bun'ei era.³ Observing these, I made this prediction: "Our country will suffer two terrible disasters: internal strife and foreign invasion. The former will take place in Kamakura in the form of internecine strife among the descendants of the acting administrator.⁴ The latter may come from any direction, but that from the west⁵ would be the most violent. This latter will occur solely because all the Buddhist schools in Japan are incorrect, and Brahma and Shakra will therefore command other countries to attack us. So long as the country refuses to heed me, it will certainly be defeated, even if it has a hundred, a thousand, or even ten thousand generals as brave as Masakado, Sumitomo, Sadato, Toshihito, or Tamura. If these words of mine prove false, then the people are free to believe in the distorted views of the True Word, Nembutsu, and other schools." This is the prediction that I have made known far and wide.

Above all, if the priests of Mount Kiyosumi treat me with less respect than they show their own parents or the three treasures, they will become wretched beggars in this life and will fall into the hell of incessant suffering in the next. I will explain why. The villainous Tojo Saemon Kagenobu once hunted the deer and other animals kept by Seicho-ji, and tried to force the priests in the various lodging temples to become Nembutsu believers. At that time I pitted myself against Tojo and supported the lord of the manor.⁶ I composed a fervent oath that read, "If the two temples Kiyosumi and Futama⁷ should come into Tojo's pos-

session, I will discard the Lotus Sutra!" Then I tied it to the hand of the object of devotion, to which I prayed continuously. Within a year, both temples had been freed from Tojo's grasp. Certainly Bodhisattva Space Treasury will never forget this, so how can those priests who make light of me avoid being forsaken by the heavenly gods? Hearing me say this, the more foolish of you may think that I am invoking a curse upon you. But that is not so. I am warning you simply because it would be a pity if you should fall into the hell of incessant suffering after your death.

Let me say a few words about the lay nun, the wife of the lord of the manor. Being a woman and foolish, when threatened by others, she must have thought that what they were saying was true. I pity her because, having forgotten her debt of gratitude, she will fall into the evil paths in her next existence. Despite that, however, she treated my parents with kindness, so I am praying that I may somehow be able to save her from that fate.

The Lotus Sutra is none other than the scripture that reveals that Shakyamuni became a Buddha numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago. It also predicts that Shariputra and the other disciples will become Buddhas in the future. Those who do not believe the sutra will fall into the hell of incessant suffering. Not only did Shakyamuni himself declare all this, but Many Treasures Buddha also testified to its truth, and the Buddhas of the ten directions extended their tongues by way of verification. Furthermore, the Lotus Sutra teaches that the votary of this sutra will receive the protection of

the bodhisattvas who emerged from the earth as numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds, the bodhisattvas Manjushri and Perceiver of the World's Sounds, Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, the four heavenly kings, and the ten demon daughters. Thus there is no other way to attain Buddhahood. It is in the true Lotus Sutra that matters of the past and future are spoken of correctly.

I have never seen Tsukushi, nor do I know anything about the barbarians [of the west]. Yet the prediction I made in light of the entire body of sutras [concerning foreign invasion] has already come true. Hence, when I say that you will all fall into the hell of incessant suffering because of your ingratitude, how can my words prove false? You may be safe for the time being, but wait and see what happens later. All of Japan will be reduced to the same miserable state in which the islands of Iki and Tsushima now find themselves. When vast numbers of Mongol hordes close in on the province of Awa, those of you priests who cling to prejudiced views will cringe in terror and finally fall into the hell of incessant suffering, saying, "Now I know that the priest Nichiren was right." What a pity! What a pity indeed!

Nichiren

The eleventh day of the first month
To the priests of Seicho-ji in the
province of Awa

This letter is to be read aloud by the priest Sado and Acharya Suke⁸ before the statue of Bodhisattva Space Treasury for all the priests of Seicho-ji to hear.



Background

This letter was written in the first month of the second year of Kenji (1276), while Nichiren Daishonin was living at Minobu. As the title indicates, it was addressed to the priests of Seicho-ji on Mount Kiyosumi, the temple to which the Daishonin had been sent as a child to study.

Seicho-ji was founded in 771 by a priest named Fushigi, who enshrined there an image of Bodhisattva Space Treasury that he had carved from an oak tree. Bodhisattva Space Treasury was believed to possess wisdom and good fortune as vast as the universe.

Seicho-ji, which belonged to the Tendai school, at first became a center for the study of the Lotus Sutra. Then

it fell under the influence of the True Word school, which promoted esoteric rituals, and later adopted Pure Land teachings, which relied on Amida Buddha. Nichiren Daishonin was formally ordained at the age of sixteen and later left the temple to visit the great centers of Buddhist learning so as to further his study of Buddhism. The Daishonin says in this letter that he had obtained “a great jewel,” meaning that he attained Buddha wisdom. He then went on to deepen his understanding of the sutras and other works in the Buddhist tradition. Eventually, in 1253, twenty years after he had entered Seicho-ji, he proclaimed the teaching of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo for the first time.

Notes

1. The eighteen paths refer to the True Word school's mandala worship. The school's Womb Realm and Diamond Realm mandalas each contain nine primary objects of devotion. True Word practitioners join their fingers in eighteen different ways when they meditate on these eighteen objects of devotion.

2. This refers to the ceremony for imbuing a newly made Buddha image with spiritual properties, thus making it an object of devotion. The honored one Buddha Eye, described in the esoteric True Word teaching, represents the virtues of the five types of vision (*see* Glossary).

3. References are to the earthquake that struck Kamakura in 1257 and to the comet that appeared in 1264.

4. Reference is to Hojo Yoshitoki (1163–1224), the second regent of the Kamakura government, who defeated the imperial forces during the Jokyu Disturbance (1221) and established the regency's control over western Japan. “Internecine strife” refers to

the uprising in the second month of 1272, when Hojo Tokisuke staged an ill-fated rebellion against his younger half brother, the regent Hojo Tokimune.

5. Indicates the Mongol empire.

6. “The lord of the manor” refers to Hojo Tomotoki, a younger brother of Hojo Yasutoki, the third regent of the Kamakura government. His wife was called the lay nun of Nagoe, or Oama (literally, elder nun). She became a lay supporter of the Daishonin, but later abandoned her faith.

7. These were temples located in Tojo Village, Awa Province. Kiyosumi is another name for Seicho-ji, but little is known about Futama.

8. Sado is another name for Niko (1253–1314), one of the six senior disciples of the Daishonin. Acharya Suke is believed to have been a follower of the Daishonin and a confidant of the lord of Tojo Village. According to another view, he was one of the priests of Seicho-ji temple.