

## The Letter of Petition from Yorimoto



ON the twenty-fifth day of the sixth month I respectfully read your official letter of the twenty-third, which I received through the intermediaries, the lay priests Shimada no Saemon and Yamashiro no Mimbu.<sup>1</sup> In the letter you state, “I am shocked to hear that all those present on that occasion are unanimous in saying that you behaved in a disorderly manner at the place where the priest Ryuzo was preaching. They say you interrupted with a group of your cohorts, all wearing weapons.”

That is a groundless falsehood. I do not know who told you so, but surely it would be fitting if, out of pity for me, you were to summon them to confront me in your presence and inquire into the truth or falsehood of their accusations.

Briefly, the root of this matter is as follows. On the ninth day of the sixth month, Sammi-ko, who is a disciple of the Sage Nichiren, came to my residence and said: “Recently a priest named Ryuzo-bo has arrived from Kyoto and settled in Kuwagayatsu, west of the gate of Daibutsu-den temple.<sup>2</sup> He preaches day and night, urging those who have questions about Buddhism to come and hold discourse with him in order to settle their doubts about this life and the next. All the people in Kamakura, high and low, revere him as they would Shakyamuni

Buddha. However, I hear that no one has ever actually debated with him. I want to go to Kuwagayatsu to debate with him and clarify whatever doubts the people might have about their next life. Won’t you come and listen?”

At that time I was busy with official matters, so I did not originally intend to accompany him. However, I had heard that it concerned the Buddhist teachings, and I have often gone to hear preaching on that subject. Being a lay believer, however, I never said a single word. Therefore, I believe that a strict investigation on your part should be sufficient to reveal that I was not in any way abusive.

In any event, during his sermon, Ryuzo-bo said, “If anyone among you has a question about the Buddhist teachings, please do not hesitate to ask.” Thereupon Sammi-ko, the disciple of the priest Nichiren, raised the following question: “That death is inevitable from the time of birth is certainly no cause for surprise; in addition, especially in recent times, countless people in Japan have perished in calamities. No one can fail to realize this transience, which lies before our very eyes. Under these circumstances I heard that you, a respected priest, had come from Kyoto to dispel the doubts of the people, so I came to listen. I was feeling hesitant, thinking it rude to ask a question in the

middle of your sermon, so I am happy that you have invited anyone who has doubts to speak freely.

“What puzzles me first of all is this: I am a lowly person, born in the Latter Day of the Law in a remote land [far from the birthplace of Buddhism]. Yet fortunately Buddhism, which originated in India, has already been introduced to this country. One should embrace it by all means. However, the sutras amount to no less than five thousand or seven thousand volumes. Since they are the teachings of a single Buddha, they must essentially be one sutra. But Buddhism is divided into eight schools, if one includes Flower Garland and True Word, or ten schools, if one includes Pure Land and Zen. Although these schools represent different gates of entry, I would presume that their truth must ultimately be one.

“However, the Great Teacher Kobo, the founder of the True Word school in Japan, said, ‘The Lotus Sutra, when compared with the Flower Garland and Mahavairochana sutras, not only represents a different gate but is a doctrine of childish theory, and the Buddha who expounded it is still in the region of darkness.’<sup>3</sup> He also stated, ‘The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of the Lotus school and others vied with one another to steal the ghee [of the True Word school].’ The Great Teacher Tz’u-en, the founder of the Dharma Characteristics school, said, ‘The Lotus Sutra is an expedient means while the Profound Secrets Sutra represents the truth; those sentient beings without the nature of enlightenment can never attain Buddhahood.’<sup>4</sup>

“Ch’eng-kuan of the Flower Garland school said, ‘The Flower Garland Sutra represents the root teaching, and the Lotus Sutra, the branch teachings.’<sup>5</sup> He also said, ‘The Flower Garland Sutra is the teaching of enlightenment for the people of the sudden teaching, and the Lotus Sutra, the teaching of

enlightenment for the people of the gradual teaching.’<sup>6</sup> The Great Teacher Chia-hsiang of the Three Treatises school said, ‘Of all the Mahayana sutras, the Wisdom sutras are supreme.’ The Reverend Shan-tao of the Pure Land school said, ‘[If people practice the Nembutsu continuously until the end of their lives,] then ten persons out of ten and a hundred persons out of a hundred will be reborn in the Pure Land. . . . However, not even one person in a thousand can be reborn there’<sup>7</sup> through the Lotus and other sutras. The Honorable Honen urged people to ‘discard, close, ignore, and abandon’ the Lotus Sutra in favor of the Nembutsu, and also likened the votaries of the Lotus Sutra to ‘a band of robbers.’<sup>8</sup> And the Zen school declares itself to represent ‘a separate transmission outside the sutras, independent of words or writing.’<sup>9</sup>

“Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, said of the Lotus Sutra, ‘The World-Honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth.’<sup>10</sup> And Many Treasures Buddha declared, ‘The Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law . . . all that you [Shakyamuni] have expounded is the truth!’<sup>11</sup> The sutra also states that the Buddhas of the ten directions, who were emanations of Shakyamuni, extended their tongues to the Brahma heaven.<sup>12</sup>

“The Great Teacher Kobo wrote that the Lotus Sutra is a doctrine of childish theory. Yet Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Treasures Buddha, and the Buddhas of the ten directions unanimously declared that all its teachings are true. Which of all these statements are we to believe?

“The Reverend Shan-tao and the Honorable Honen said of the Lotus Sutra that not even one person in a thousand can be saved by it, and that one should ‘discard, close, ignore, and abandon’ it. However, Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Treasures Buddha, and the Bud-

dhas of the ten directions who are emanations of Shakyamuni assert that, of those who hear the Lotus Sutra, 'not a one will fail to attain Buddhahood,'<sup>13</sup> and that all will achieve the Buddha way. Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and all the other Buddhas are in their statements as far apart from the Reverend Shan-tao and the Honorable Honen as fire and water, or clouds and mud.

"Which of them are we to believe? Which are we to reject?"

"In particular, of the forty-eight vows of the monk Dharma Treasury mentioned in the Two-Volumed Sutra, which both Shan-tao and Honen revere, the eighteenth one states that, if he attains Buddhahood, only those who commit the five cardinal sins and those who slander the correct teaching will be excluded [from salvation]. Surely this means that, even if Amida Buddha's original vow is true and enables one to attain rebirth in his Pure Land, those who slander the correct teaching are excluded from rebirth in the land of Amida Buddha?"

"Now the second volume of the Lotus Sutra reads, 'If a person fails to have faith [but instead slanders this sutra] . . . When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avichi hell.'<sup>14</sup> If these scriptural passages are true, then how can Shan-tao and Honen, who both regarded the Nembutsu school as representing the essence of Buddhism, escape falling into the great citadel of the Avichi hell? And if these two priests fall into hell, there can be no doubt that the scholars, disciples, and lay believers who follow in their footsteps will also as a matter of course fall into the evil paths. These are the matters that perplex me. What is your opinion, the Honorable Ryuzo?" In this manner, Sammi-ko posed his question.

The Honorable Ryuzo answered, "How could I doubt the worthies and learned men of antiquity? Ordinary priests such as myself believe them

with profound reverence." Then Sammi-ko retorted, saying: "These words do not impress me as those of a wise man. Everyone believes in those Buddhist teachers who were revered in their own time. But the Buddha enjoins us in the Nirvana Sutra as his final instruction, 'Rely on the Law and not upon persons.' The Buddha taught us to rely on the sutras if the Buddhist teachers should be in error. You say those teachers could not possibly be in error, but between the Buddha's golden words and your personal opinion, I am committed to the former."

The Honorable Ryuzo asked, "When you speak of the many errors of the Buddhist teachers, to which teachers do you refer?" Sammi-ko answered, "I refer to the doctrines of the Great Teacher Kobo and the Honorable Honen, whom I mentioned before." The Honorable Ryuzo exclaimed, "That is impossible! I would not dare discuss the Buddhist teachers of our nation. The people in this audience all follow them, and if angered, will surely create an uproar. That would be a fearful thing."

Then Sammi-ko said: "Because you asked me to specify which teachers were in error, I mentioned those whose teachings contradict the sutras and treatises.<sup>15</sup> But now you suddenly have reservations and refuse to discuss the matter. I think that you merely perceive your own dilemma. In matters of doctrine, to fear others or stand in awe of society's opinion and not expound the true meaning of the scriptural passages in accordance with the Buddha's teaching is the height of foolishness. You do not appear to be a wise or honorable priest. As a teacher of the Law, how can you not speak out when evil doctrines spread throughout the land, when the people fall into the evil paths and the country stands on the brink of ruin? That is why the Lotus Sutra reads, 'We care nothing for our

bodies or lives,'<sup>16</sup> and the Nirvana Sutra says, '... even though it costs him his life.'<sup>17</sup> If you are a true sage, how can you begrudge your life in fear of the world or of other people?

"Even in non-Buddhist literature we find mention of a man named Kuan Lung-feng, who was beheaded, and of the worthy Pi Kan, who had his chest torn open. But because Kuan Lung-feng remonstrated with King Chieh of the Hsia dynasty and Pi Kan admonished King Chou of the Yin dynasty, their names have been handed down in history as those of worthies.

"The Buddhist scriptures tell us that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was beaten with sticks and staves, the Venerable Aryasimha was beheaded, the priest Chu Tao-sheng was banished to a mountain in Su-chou, and the Tripitaka Master Fa-tao was branded on the face and exiled to the area south of the Yangtze River. Yet was it not because they propagated the correct teaching that they gained the name of sages?"

Then the Honorable Ryuzo replied, "Such people cannot possibly appear in the latter age. We are the sort who fear society and dread the opinions of others. Even though you speak so boldly, I doubt that you actually live up to your words."

Sammi-ko retorted: "How can you possibly know another's mind? Let me tell you that I am a disciple of the Sage Nichiren, who is now widely known throughout the country. Although the sage, my teacher, is a priest in the latter age, unlike the eminent priests of our day, he neither seeks invitations nor flatters people, nor has he earned the slightest bad reputation in secular matters.

"He simply declares, in light of the sutras, that because the evil teachings of such schools as the True Word, Zen, and Pure Land as well as their slanderous priests fill this country, and everyone from the ruler on down to the

general populace has taken faith in them, the people have all become arch-enemies of the Lotus Sutra and Shakyamuni Buddha. In this life they will be forsaken by the gods of heaven and earth, and suffer invasion by a foreign country, and in the next life they will fall into the great citadel of the Avichi hell.

"He has said that if he declares such a thing he will incur great enmity, but that if he does not he cannot escape the Buddha's condemnation. The Nirvana Sutra says, '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.' Realizing that, if in fear of the world's opinion he did not speak out, he would fall into the evil paths, my teacher has risked his life for more than two decades, from the Kencho era<sup>18</sup> through this third year of the Kenji era (1277), without slackening in the least. Therefore, he has undergone countless persecutions at the hands of individuals, and twice he has even incurred the ruler's wrath.<sup>19</sup> I myself was one of those who accompanied him when the wrath of the authorities fell upon him on the twelfth day of the ninth month in the eighth year of the Bun'ei era (1271),<sup>20</sup> and I was considered equally guilty and came close to being beheaded myself. Despite all this, do you still say that I hold my own life dear?"

As Ryuzo-bo closed his mouth and turned pale, Sammi-ko persisted: "With such paltry wisdom it is unwarranted for you to declare that you will dispel the people's doubts. The monks Shore of Suffering and Superior Intent thought they knew the correct teaching and intended to save the people, but they fell into the hell of incessant suffering along with their disciples and lay believers. If you, with your limited knowl-

edge of Buddhist doctrines, preach in an attempt to save people, then surely you and your followers will fall into the hell of incessant suffering. You had better reconsider such preaching from this day forth. I had not felt that I should speak in this way; but I, too, cannot be exempted from the Buddha's warning that, if one sees a misguided priest sending others into hell with his evil teachings and fails to reproach that priest and expose his errors, then one is oneself betraying the Buddha's teaching. Moreover, I feel pity that all those, both high and low, who listen to your preaching will fall into the evil paths. Therefore, I am speaking out in this way. Is not a person of wisdom one who admonishes the ruler when the country is endangered or corrects others' mistaken views? But in your case, no matter what error you may see, you will no doubt refuse to correct it for fear of society's reaction. Because of this, I am powerless to help you. Even if I had Manjushri's wisdom and Purna's eloquence, they would be wasted on you." So saying, Sammi-ko rose to leave; but the members of the audience, rejoicing, joined their palms together and implored him to stay and teach them the Buddhist doctrines for a little while. However, Sammi-ko left.

I have no further details to add, so you may surmise what really happened. How could a person who believes in the Lotus Sutra and aspires to the Buddha way possibly contemplate misbehavior or deliberately use foul language when the Buddhist teaching is being expounded? However, I leave this to your judgment.

Having declared myself to be a follower of the Sage Nichiren, I returned home and reported to you exactly what had happened during the debate. Moreover, no one was present on that occasion whom I did not know. What you heard must have been the fabrication of those who harbor jealousy

against me. If you quickly summon them to face me in your presence, the truth of the matter will be brought to light.

In your official letter you also state, "I revere the elder of Gokuraku-ji temple as the World-Honored One reborn," but this I cannot accept. The reason is that, if what the sutra states is true, the Sage Nichiren is the envoy of the Thus Come One who attained enlightenment in the remote past, the manifestation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the votary of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, and the great leader in the fifth five-hundred-year period [following the Buddha's passing]. In an attempt to have this sage executed, the Honorable Ryokan submitted a letter of petition to the authorities proposing that he be beheaded; but for some reason the execution was not carried out, and he was instead exiled far away to Sado Island. Was this not the doing of the Honorable Ryokan? I am sending you a copy of his petition together with this letter.

Even though the priest Ryokan preaches day and night on each of the six days of purification<sup>21</sup> against killing even a blade of grass, he actually proposed that the priest who propagates the correct teaching of the Lotus Sutra be beheaded. Has he not contradicted his own words? Is the priest Ryokan himself not possessed by the heavenly devil?

Let me explain how this situation came about. Whenever the priest Ryokan preached, he would lament: "I am endeavoring to help all people in Japan become 'observers of the precepts'<sup>22</sup> and to have them uphold the eight precepts so that an end can be put to all the killings in this country and the drunkenness in the entire land; but Nichiren's slander has prevented me from achieving my desire." Hearing of this, the Sage Nichiren declared, "Somehow I must overturn the delusion of his great

arrogance and save him from the agonies of the hell of incessant suffering.” Hearing this, I, Yorimoto, and his other disciples all anxiously advised him, saying, “Even though you speak out of profound compassion as a champion of the Lotus Sutra, since the Honorable Ryokan is revered throughout Japan, especially by the samurai in Kamakura, perhaps you should refrain from making strong statements.”

Then, at the time of the great drought, the government ordered the priest Ryokan to perform a ceremony for rain on the eighteenth day of the sixth month in the eighth year of the Bun’ei era (1271), cyclical sign *kanoto-hitsuji*, in order to save the people. Hearing this news, the Sage Nichiren said, “Although prayers for rain are a trifling matter, perhaps I should take this opportunity to demonstrate to everyone the power of the Law that I embrace.” He sent a message to the priest Ryokan, saying: “If the Honorable Ryokan brings about rainfall within seven days, I, Nichiren, will stop teaching that the Nembutsu leads to the hell of incessant suffering and become his disciple, observing the two hundred and fifty precepts. But if no rain falls, that will show clearly that the Honorable Ryokan is deliberately confusing and misleading others, though he appears to be observing the precepts. In ancient times there were many instances in which the supremacy of one teaching over another was determined through prayers for rain, such as the challenge between Gomyo and the Great Teacher Dengyo,<sup>23</sup> or between Shubin and Kobo.”<sup>24</sup>

The Sage Nichiren sent this message to the priest Ryokan through the intermediaries, the priest Suo-bo and the lay priest Irusawa, who are Nembutsu believers. In addition to being Nembutsu believers, this priest and lay priest are Ryokan’s disciples and do not yet believe in Nichiren’s teaching. So the

Sage Nichiren said to them, “We will decide whose teachings are correct through this prayer for rain. If it rains within seven days, you can believe that you will be reborn in the Pure Land by virtue of the eight precepts and the Nembutsu, which you already uphold. But if it does not rain, you should place your faith in the Lotus Sutra alone.” Delighted to hear this, the two delivered the message to the priest Ryokan at Gokuraku-ji temple.

With tears of joy, the priest Ryokan, along with more than 120 of his disciples, offered prayers, the sweat of their faces rising up in steam and their voices resounding to the heavens. They chanted the Nembutsu, the Prayer for Rain Sutra,<sup>25</sup> and the Lotus Sutra, and the priest Ryokan preached on the eight precepts in an effort to produce rainfall within seven days. When no sign of rain appeared after four or five days, he grew frantic and summoned hundreds of his disciples from Taho-ji temple<sup>26</sup> to join him, exhausting all his powers of prayer. But within seven days not a drop of rain fell.

At that time, the Sage Nichiren sent a messenger to him on no less than three occasions, saying, “A wanton woman called Izumi Shikibu and a priest named Noin<sup>27</sup> who broke the precepts were each able to cause rain immediately with just a thirty-one-syllable poem that made little sense and was full of excess flourishes. Why is it, then, that the Honorable Ryokan—who observes all the precepts and rules, has mastered the Lotus and True Word doctrines, and is renowned as the foremost in compassion—cannot produce rainfall within seven days, even when assisted by hundreds of his followers? Consider this: if one cannot cross a moat ten feet wide, can one cross a moat that is twenty or thirty feet wide? If you cannot bring about rainfall, which is easy, how can you attain rebirth in the pure land and achieve

Buddhahood, which is difficult?

“Accordingly you should from this point on revise your prejudiced views, which lead you to hate Nichiren. If you fear for your next life, come to me immediately as you have promised. I will teach you the Law that causes rain to fall and the path that leads to Buddhahood. Have you not failed to produce rain within seven days? The drought intensifies and the eight winds<sup>28</sup> blow all the more violently, while the people’s grief grows deeper and deeper. Stop your prayers immediately.” When the messenger conveyed the Sage Nichiren’s message word for word at the hour of the monkey (3:00–5:00 P.M.) on the seventh day, the priest Ryokan wept, and his disciples and lay believers also cried aloud in their chagrin.

When the Sage Nichiren incurred the wrath of the government authorities and was asked about this matter, he told the story as it really happened. So he said: “If the priest Ryokan had had any sense of shame, he would have disappeared from public view and retired to a mountain forest. Or if he had become my disciple as he had promised, then he would have shown at least a little seeking spirit. But in actuality, he made endless false accusations against me in an attempt to have me executed. Is this the conduct of a noble priest?” I, Yorimoto, also personally observed the situation. Where other affairs are concerned, I would not dare to address my lord in this fashion, but in this matter alone, however I may consider it, I find I cannot remain silent.

You state in your official letter, “After meeting the priest Ryuzo and the elder of Gokuraku-ji temple, I look up to them as I would to Shakyamuni or Amida Buddha.” Addressing this statement, too, with the utmost respect, I must point out that, while in Kyoto, the priest Ryuzo was feeding morning and evening on human flesh;

and when this became known, the priests of Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei rose up against him, saying, “The world has entered the latter age, and evil demons are rampant throughout the country. We must subdue them with the power of the Mountain King.”<sup>29</sup> They burned down his dwelling and intended to punish him, but he quickly escaped, and no one knew of his whereabouts. At this point he suddenly appeared in Kamakura and was again eating human flesh, causing right-minded people to tremble in fear. Nevertheless, you say you respect him as a Buddha or a bodhisattva. How can I, as your retainer, refrain from pointing out my lord’s error? I wonder what the level-headed people in our clan think about this matter.

In the same letter you also state, “To defer to one’s lord or parents, whether they are right or wrong, is exemplary conduct according with the will of Buddhas and gods and also with social propriety.” As this matter is of the utmost importance, I will refrain from expressing my own opinion and instead cite authoritative works [of sages and worthies]. *The Classic of Filial Piety* states, “[In a case of moral wrong,] a son must admonish his father, and a minister must admonish his lord.” Cheng Hsüan<sup>30</sup> says, “If a lord or a father behaves unjustly and his minister or son fails to remonstrate with him, then the state or the family will come to ruin.” *The New Narrations*<sup>31</sup> states, “If one fails to remonstrate against one’s ruler’s tyranny, one is not a loyal minister. If one fails to speak out for fear of death, one is not a man of courage.”

The Great Teacher Dengyo states, “In general, where unrighteousness is concerned, a son must admonish his father, and a minister must admonish his lord. Truly one should know this: As is the case with lord and minister, or with father and son, so it is with

teacher and disciple. A disciple must speak out when his teacher goes astray.”<sup>32</sup> The Lotus Sutra states, “We care nothing for our bodies or lives but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way.” The Nirvana Sutra reads, “For example, it is like a royal envoy skilled in discussion and clever with expedient means who, when sent on a mission to another land, would rather, even though it costs him his life, in the end conceal none of the words of his ruler. Wise persons too do this.” The Great Teacher Chang-an says, “[A royal envoy . . . would rather], even though it costs him his life, in the end conceal none of the words of his ruler’ means that one’s body is insignificant while the Law is supreme. One should give one’s life in order to propagate the Law.”<sup>33</sup> He also states, “One who destroys or brings confusion to the Buddha’s teachings is betraying them. If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy. But one who reprimands and corrects an offender . . . rids the offender of evil is acting as his parent.”<sup>34</sup> My fellow samurai may think that I, Yorimoto, am lacking in propriety toward you, but in all other worldly affairs, I will resolutely heed the words of my lord and my parents.

I can only lament when I see my lord, to whom I am so profoundly indebted, being deceived by those who embrace evil teachings and in danger of falling into the evil paths. Because King Ajatashatru took Devadatta and the six non-Buddhist teachers as his mentors and opposed Shakyamuni Buddha, all the people of the kingdom of Magadha became enemies of Buddhism, and the 580,000 clansmen of the king also opposed the Buddha’s disciples. Among them, only Minister Jivaka was the Buddha’s disciple. The great king disapproved of his minister’s devotion to the Buddha just as my lord disapproves of me, Yorimoto. But in

the end he discarded the erroneous doctrines of the other six ministers and took faith in the correct teaching that Jivaka espoused. Perhaps, in the same way, I will save you in the end.

When I speak this way, you may wonder how I dare to compare you to Ajatashatru, who committed the five cardinal sins. But it is clear in the light of the sutra that your offense is a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand times graver than his, though I hesitate to say such a thing.

The Lotus Sutra states, “Now this threefold world is all my domain, and the living beings in it are all my children.”<sup>35</sup> If this scriptural statement is correct, Shakyamuni Buddha is the father and mother, teacher and sovereign to all living beings in Japan. Amida Buddha does not possess these three virtues. However, you ignore the Buddha of the three virtues and invoke the name of another Buddha [Amida] day and night, morning and evening, sixty thousand or eighty thousand times a day. Is this not an unfilial deed? It was the Thus Come One Shakyamuni himself who originally taught that Amida had vowed to save all people; but in the end he regretted it and said, “I am the only person [who can rescue and protect others].” After that, he never again taught that there are two or three Buddhas who can save the people. No one has two fathers or two mothers. What sutra says that Amida is the father of this country? What treatise indicates him as its mother?

The teachings of Nembutsu, such as the Meditation Sutra, were expounded provisionally in preparation for the Lotus Sutra. They are like the scaffolding used when building a pagoda. Some think that, because the Nembutsu teachings and the Lotus Sutra are both a part of Buddhism, they differ only in that one was expounded earlier and one later; but these people are laboring under a profound misconception. They

are like someone foolish enough to prize the scaffolding even after the pagoda has been completed, or like someone who says that the stars are brighter than the sun. Concerning such persons, the sutra states, "Though I teach and instruct them, they do not believe or accept my teachings . . . When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avichi hell."<sup>36</sup>

All the inhabitants of Japan at present are people who reject Shakyamuni Buddha while invoking the name of Amida Buddha, who discard the Lotus Sutra and believe in the Meditation and other sutras. Or they are lay men and women who make offerings to these slanderers, or the renowned priests and even the ruler of the country who revere as wise men those who in fact commit the five or seven cardinal sins<sup>37</sup> or the eight offenses. Of such people, the sutra states that they "will keep repeating this cycle [of rebirth in the Avichi hell] for a countless number of kalpas."<sup>38</sup>

Being aware to some small degree of these errors, I have ventured to bring them to your attention. Among those in service, despite their differences in rank, there is none who does not honor his lord, each according to his station. If, knowing that my lord will fare badly in both this life and the next, I were to remain silent in fear of my fellow samurai or of the world at large, then would I not be guilty of complicity in your offense?

No one can deny that the Nakatsukasa of two generations, my father and myself, have dedicated our lives in service to our lords. When your father<sup>39</sup> incurred the wrath of the authorities, his hundreds of retainers all shifted their allegiance; among them, my late father Yorikazu alone remained faithful to the end, accompanying him into exile to the province of Izu. Shortly before the battle that took place in Kamakura on the twelfth day of the

second month in the eleventh year of the Bun'ei era,<sup>40</sup> I, Yorimoto, was in the province of Izu, but no sooner had I received word at the hour of the monkey on the tenth day than I hastened alone over the Hakone pass and joined with seven others who vowed before you to put an end to their lives. But the world at length grew calm again, and my lord now lives in peace. Since that time, you have included me among those who enjoy your trust in all matters, whether trifling or significant. How, then, could I estrange myself from you? I would obediently follow you even into the next life. If I should attain Buddhahood, I would save my lord as well, and if you were to attain Buddhahood, I expect you would do the same for me.

So I listened to the sermons of various priests and inquired into which teaching leads to Buddhahood. And I came to believe that, according to the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the Sage Nichiren is the sovereign of the three-fold world, the father and mother of all living beings, and the emissary of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni—Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

More than four hundred years have now passed since the evil teaching called the True Word school was introduced to Japan. The Great Teacher Dengyo brought it from China in the twenty-fourth year of the Enryaku era (805), but he considered it undesirable for this country, and therefore did not allow it to be designated as a school in its own right, defining it merely as an expedient teaching of the Tendai Lotus school. Later, when the Great Teacher Dengyo had passed away, the Great Teacher Kobo, not to be outdone by him, took advantage of the opportunity to establish the True Word teaching as an independent school, but Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei would not accept it. However, Jikaku and Chisho were of limited insight,

and although they lived on Mount Hiei, their hearts inclined toward Kobo of To-ji temple. Perhaps for this reason, they turned against their teacher Dengyo and for the first time established the True Word school at Enryaku-ji. This marked the beginning of our country's ruin.

For the more than three hundred years that followed, some insisted on the superiority of the True Word teaching over the Lotus Sutra; others, on the superiority of the Lotus Sutra over the True Word teaching; and still others, on the equality of both teachings. As the dispute continued unresolved, the imperial rule remained unaffected and did not come to an end. However, in the time of the Retired Emperor Goshirakawa, the seventy-seventh sovereign, the chief priest of the Tendai school, Myoun, became exclusively committed to the True Word teaching and was killed by Yoshinaka.<sup>41</sup> This is an example of the passage that states, "Their heads will split into seven pieces."<sup>42</sup>

Then, in the time of the Retired Emperor of Oki, the eighty-second sovereign, the Zen and Nembutsu schools appeared and spread throughout the land, as had the great evil True Word teaching. So the vows made by the Sun Goddess and the god Hachiman to protect one hundred sovereigns throughout one hundred reigns were broken, and the imperial authority came to an end.<sup>43</sup> Through the workings of the Sun Goddess and the god Hachiman, affairs of state then came to be entrusted to the Acting Administrator Yoshitoki of the Kanto region.<sup>44</sup>

These three evil teachings spread to Kanto, where they gained support within the ruling clan to a surprising degree. Therefore, the two heavenly lords Brahma and Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings were enraged and admonished the rulers by means of unprecedented disturbances in the heavens and calamities on earth.

When their admonitions went unheeded, they commanded a neighboring country to punish those who slandered the Lotus Sutra. The Sun Goddess and the god Hachiman were powerless to help. The Sage Nichiren alone was aware of all this.

Such being the strictness of the Lotus Sutra, I have set aside all trivial concerns and served you devotedly until this day in my desire to lead my lord to enlightenment. Are not those who accuse me falsely thereby disloyal to you? If I were to leave the clan and abandon you now, you would immediately fall into the hell of incessant suffering. Then, even if I myself were to attain Buddhahood, I could only grieve, feeling that I had done so in vain.

As for the Hinayana precepts,<sup>45</sup> the two hundred and fifty precepts were expounded for the heavenly gods by the great arhat Purna, but the layman Vimalakirti reprimanded him, saying, "You should not place impure food in a jeweled vessel."<sup>46</sup> Angulimala reproached Manjushri, saying, "You will never realize the truth of emptiness expounded in the Mahayana teachings through [Hinayana] practices, which are as insignificant as mosquitoes and gadflies."<sup>47</sup> Manjushri later set forth seventeen flaws in the Hinayana precepts,<sup>48</sup> and the Thus Come One likewise repudiated them with the eight analogies.<sup>49</sup> The Great Teacher Dengyo denounced them as donkey's milk and likened them to a toad.<sup>50</sup> The later disciples of Ganjin<sup>51</sup> accused the Great Teacher Dengyo of calumny and appealed directly to Emperor Saga, but because what Dengyo had said is clearly indicated in the sutras, their efforts were to no avail. The petition submitted to the emperor by the schools of Nara proved futile, and the great ordination platform [for conferring the Mahayana precepts] was erected at Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei. Thus the Hinayana precepts have already long since been

discarded. Even if I, Yorimoto, should compare the priest Ryokan to a mosquito, a gadfly, or a toad, because such assertions are clearly based on the sutras, you would have no reason to find fault with me.

Now it is unimaginably grievous to me that you would order me to submit a written oath [discarding my faith in the Lotus Sutra]. If I, Yorimoto, were to follow the trend of the times, which goes against the Buddhist teachings, and write such an oath, you would immediately incur the punishment of the Lotus Sutra. When the Sage Nichiren, the envoy of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, was exiled because of the false charges leveled against him by the priest Ryokan, fighting broke out within one hundred days,<sup>52</sup> just as he had predicted, and a great number of warriors perished. Among them were the

scions of the Nagoe clan.<sup>53</sup> Is not the priest Ryokan solely to blame for their deaths? And if you now pay heed to the views of Ryuzo and Ryokan and force me to write this oath, will you not be equally guilty?

I am not sure whether those who slander me are simply ignorant of this causal principle, or whether they are intentionally trying to do you harm. In any event, I urge you to summon those who are plotting to use me in order to provoke some major incident, and have them confront me in your presence.

With my deep respect.

The twenty-fifth day of the sixth month in the third year of Kenji (1277), cyclical sign *hinoto-ushi*

Submitted by Shijo Nakatsukasa-no-jo Yorimoto.



## Background

This petition was written by Nichiren Daishonin in the sixth month of 1277 on behalf of his loyal follower Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo Yorimoto, or Shijo Kingo, who had been served an official letter of reprimand from his lord, Ema Chikatoki. The petition, addressed to Lord Ema, asserts that Shijo Kingo was being subjected to unjustified slander.

On the ninth day of the sixth month, 1277, a religious debate took place at Kuwagayatsu in Kamakura, in which Sammi-ko (also known by the more commonly used name Sammi-bo), a disciple of Nichiren Daishonin, soundly defeated Ryuzo-bo, a Tendai priest who had been expelled from Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei and had later come to Kamakura where he won the patronage of Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple. The audience was so pleased

that they begged Sammi-bo to remain and preach for them.

Shijo Kingo had been present at this debate merely as a member of the audience. His enemies, however, told Lord Ema that he had forcibly disrupted the debate and shown contempt for Ryuzo-bo and Ryuzo-bo's teacher, Ryokan—whom Lord Ema revered. About two weeks later, he was suddenly served an official letter from his lord accusing him of these things. The letter further charged Kingo with disobeying his lord, in defiance of both Buddhist and secular custom, and ordered him to write an oath to the effect that he would discard his faith in the Lotus Sutra. If he refused to do so, Lord Ema threatened, his fief would be confiscated and he would be banished.

Shijo Kingo immediately wrote a re-

port of the entire affair and sent it with Lord Ema's official letter to Nichiren Daishonin at Minobu. In his report he expressed his firm resolve never to write an oath discarding his faith, even if his fief were to be confiscated.

Kingo's messenger left Kamakura on the afternoon of the twenty-fifth and arrived at Minobu on the evening of the twenty-seventh. Nichiren Daishonin was delighted to learn that his disciple was determined to uphold his faith and propagate the Law even at the cost of his life. He also perceived the machinations of Ryokan and Ryuzo-bo behind this incident. He therefore

wrote this letter of petition to encourage Kingo and sent it addressed to Lord Ema in which he defended Kingo. This petition, however, was apparently never submitted.

In it the Daishonin sought to correct Lord Ema's misunderstanding about Kingo's behavior during the debate, and to expose the real intentions of the priests Ryokan and Ryuzo-bo and enable Lord Ema to understand the error of their teachings. The petition also clarifies what true loyalty from a vassal to his lord really means—in both Buddhist and secular terms.

## Notes

1. Shimada no Saemon and Yamashiro no Mimbu were apparently two of Lord Ema's retainers, who, as messengers, carried his official letter to Shijo Kingo. Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter, a petition from Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo Yorimoto, or Shijo Kingo, to his lord, Ema Chikatoki, on behalf of his disciple. "I" refers to Shijo Kingo, "you" to Lord Ema.

2. "Temple of the Great Buddha Image." One of the seven major temples of Kamakura, which enshrines a huge image of Amida Buddha.

3. This and the following quotation summarize Kobo's views as expressed in his *Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind, Precious Key to the Secret Treasury, and Comparison of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism*. Ghee means the finest clarified butter, or the last of the five flavors (milk, cream, curdled milk, butter, and ghee). Ghee is used as a metaphor for the highest of all the sutras.

4. On the basis of the *Profound Secrets Sutra*, the Dharma Characteristics school divides people into five categories called the five natures. "Those sentient beings without the nature of enlightenment" is one of these five. See five natures in Glossary.

5. The Flower Garland school divides the perfect teaching, the highest of the five teachings, into the root teaching and the branch teachings, and asserts that the Flower Garland Sutra is the root, and the Lotus Sutra, the branches.

6. Views from Ch'eng-kuan's *Profound Discourse on the Flower Garland Teachings*. "The sudden teaching" means those teachings in which the Buddha directly expounded his enlightenment without preparatory instruction. "The gradual teaching" means those teachings that the Buddha expounded to gradually elevate the people's capacity. Ch'eng-kuan asserted that the Flower Garland Sutra represented the perfect teaching within the sudden teaching, and that the Lotus Sutra represented the perfect teaching within the gradual teaching.

7. Views from Shan-tao's *Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land*.

8. Views from Honen's *Nembutsu Chosen above All*.

9. The Zen school asserted that the essence of Buddhism was transmitted from mind to mind, claiming that the Buddha's enlightenment was transferred in this way to Mahakashyapa and then to each successive Zen patriarch.

10. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

11. Ibid., chap. 11.

12. Ibid., chap. 21.

13. Ibid., chap. 2.

14. Ibid., chap. 3.

15. "Treatises" here indicates the works of great bodhisattvas such as Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu.

16. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

17. The entire passage appears on page 810.

18. Nichiren Daishonin first proclaimed the teaching of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo in the fifth year of Kencho (1253).

19. This refers to the Izu Exile in 1261, and to the Tatsunokuchi Persecution in 1271 and the Sado Exile that immediately followed it.

20. This refers to the Tatsunokuchi Persecution.

21. The six days of purification are six days each month on which lay followers purify body and mind by observing the eight precepts (see Glossary). They are the 8th, 14th, 15th, 23rd, 29th, and 30th days of the month.

22. The "observers of the precepts" refers here to those who observe the eight precepts, that is, followers of Ryokan's Precepts school.

23. Gomyo (750-834) was a priest of the Dharma Characteristics school. According to *The Record of the Precepts of the One Mind*, in 818, when people were enduring the hardships of a great drought, Dengyo, in response to Emperor Saga's command, offered prayers employing the Lotus, Golden Light, and Benevolent Kings sutras. On the third day rain began to fall. Gomyo prayed for rain with his forty disciples using only the Benevolent Kings Sutra, and rain did not fall until the fifth day.

24. Shubin was a ninth-century priest of the True Word school. In 823 he was given Sai-ji (West Temple) by Emperor Saga, while Kobo was given To-ji (East Temple). In the spring of 824, during a drought, Shubin competed with Kobo in praying for rain. He brought about rainfall on the seventh day, while Kobo could not make rain fall even after twenty-one days.

25. This sutra, translated by Pu-k'ung, details the ritual of the prayer for rain and the proper conduct to be observed by the one performing it.

26. A temple, no longer extant, in Kamakura. In light of the text, it would appear to have been a large temple and under the supervision of Ryokan.

27. Izumi Shikibu (b. c. 976), a court lady-in-waiting, and Noin (b. 988), a poet-priest, whose works include poems that express prayers for rain.

28. Eight kinds of gales including rainstorms, tornados, and storms. Explanations vary according to the source, but in any event they indicate actual violent weather conditions. When Ryokan offered his

prayers, no rain fell; instead, destructive winds arose.

29. A deity said to be the guardian god of Mount Hiei and the Tendai school.

30. Cheng Hsüan (127-200) was a scholar of the Later Han dynasty, who wrote commentaries on *The Classic of Filial Piety*, *Analects*, and other texts.

31. A collection of the anecdotes that appeared from the Spring and Autumn period through the Former Han dynasty. Written by Liu Hsiang (77-6 B.C.E.), it consists of ten fascicles.

32. *An Essay on the Protection of the Nation*.

33. *The Annotations on the Nirvana Sutra*.

34. Ibid.

35. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3. This passage indicates the virtues of sovereign and parent. A passage at the end of this paragraph, "I am the only person who can rescue and protect others," indicates the virtue of teacher.

36. Ibid.

37. According to *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight"*, the seven cardinal sins are the five cardinal sins (see Glossary) plus the offenses of killing a monk of high virtue and killing a teacher.

38. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

39. "Your father" here is thought to refer to Ema Mitsutoki. Nakatsukasa Yorikazu, Yorimoto's father, served Ema Mitsutoki. After Yorikazu's death, Yorimoto served both Mitsutoki, who had by that time become a lay priest, and his son Chikatoki, to whom this letter is addressed. In 1246 Mitsutoki came under suspicion of plotting a rebellion against the regent Hojo Tokiyori and was exiled to Ema in Izu.

40. Reference is to an unsuccessful attempt by Hojo Tokisuke, an elder half brother of the regent Hojo Tokimune, to seize power. It actually occurred in the ninth year of Bun'ei (1272). "The eleventh year of the Bun'ei era (1274)" (the year of invasion by the Mongol forces) is probably an error. Among the chief conspirators in the rebellion were Ema Mitsutoki's younger brothers, Noritoki and Tokiakira, who plotted to have Hojo Tokisuke assume the regency. These two, along with Tokisuke, were eventually executed for their part in this affair. Their nephew, Ema Chikatoki, was the lord of the Ema clan at the time of the attempted coup and fell under suspicion of complicity. It would appear that Chikatoki's faithful retainers vowed to com-

mit suicide should their lord be executed.

41. Yoshinaka is Minamoto no Yoshinaka (1154–1184). Also known as Kiso Yoshinaka. A general of the Minamoto clan. He beheaded Myoun, the fifty-fifth and fifty-seventh chief priest of Enryaku-ji, when he attacked Mount Hiei during the struggle between the Minamoto and the Taira clans.

42. Lotus Sutra, chap. 26.

43. During the Jokyu Disturbance of 1221, the imperial forces were defeated in an attempt to overthrow the shogunate government based in Kamakura. This defeat strengthened the Kamakura government's hold upon the nation and effectively broke the power of imperial rule. The Retired Emperor Gotoba, who had planned the attempted overthrow, was exiled by the regent Hojo Yoshitoki to Oki, an island in the Sea of Japan.

44. Hojo Yoshitoki (1163–1224) was the regent of the Kamakura shogunate during the Jokyu Disturbance. The Kamakura shogunate made Kanto (eastern Japan) its base, while the imperial court was located in Kyoto in the western part of the country.

45. The Hinayana precepts are divided into several categories, such as the five precepts, the eight precepts (both being for lay believers), the ten precepts for both male and female novices of the Buddhist Order, the two hundred and fifty precepts for fully ordained monks, and the five hundred precepts for fully ordained nuns. Ryokan, whom Lord Ema revered, took great pride in observing the two hundred and fifty precepts.

46. Vimalakirti Sutra. This means that one should not exhort those of superior capacity to observe the Hinayana precepts. It also refers to the inferiority of the Hinayana in comparison to the Mahayana teachings.

47. Presumably a rephrasing of a passage in the Angulimala Sutra.

48. The "seventeen flaws" refers to the reasons why the Hinayana precepts are inferior to the Mahayana precepts, according to the Pure Monastic Rules Sutra. For example, the Hinayana precepts reflect abhorrence of the threefold world, the realm inhabited by unenlightened beings, while the Mahayana precepts do not; the Hinayana precepts show disdain for benefits, while the Mahayana precepts encompass them all.

49. Comparisons by which Shakyamuni Buddha emphasized the superiority of the Mahayana precepts over the Hinayana, according to the Pure Monastic Rules Sutra. For example, the Hinayana precepts practiced by voice-hearers do not even produce benefit as small as the print of a cow's hoof, while the Mahayana precepts upheld by bodhisattvas produce benefit as vast as the ocean.

50. Donkey's milk is said to be too distasteful to drink, while cow's milk (the Mahayana precepts) appeases people's thirst and nurtures life. With this metaphor, Dengyo indicates that the Hinayana precepts do not lead to enlightenment. In addition, he employs the simile of a toad to denounce the blindness of attachment to the Hinayana precepts, using an analogy similar to "a frog in a well." Jikaku cites these analogies in his *Treatise Clarifying and Praising the Mahayana Precepts*.

51. This refers to the leaders of the six schools of Nara, who upheld the Hinayana precepts that the Chinese Precepts priest Ganjin (688–763) had established in Japan.

52. The rebellion led by Hojo Tokisuke in the second month of 1272. See also n. 40.

53. The scions of the Nagoe clan refer to Tokiakira and Noritoki, who were Ema Mitsutoki's younger brothers and Chikato-ki's uncles. Since Tomotoki, the father of Mitsutoki, lived at Nagoe in Kamakura, his clan was called the Nagoe clan.