Nembutsu and the Hell of Incessant Suffering

NEMBUTSU is a practice that leads to the hell of incessant suffering. The Lotus Sutra is the direct road that leads to Buddhahood and the attainment of the way. As soon as possible one should therefore abandon the Pure Land school, embrace the Lotus Sutra, free oneself from the sufferings of birth and death, and gain enlightenment.

In the second volume of the Lotus Sutra the “Simile and Parable” chapter states: “If a person fails to have faith but instead slanders this sutra, immediately he will destroy all the seeds for becoming a Buddha in this world. . . . When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avīci hell, be confined there for a whole kalpa, and when the kalpa ends, be born there again. He will keep repeating this cycle for a countless number of kalpas.”

As may be seen from this passage, if one puts faith in the Nembutsu, an expedient means, and fails to have faith in the Lotus Sutra, which represents the truth, one will fall into the hell of incessant suffering.

Followers of the Nembutsu may say, “We do not have the innate capacities needed to embrace the Lotus Sutra and therefore we do not put faith in it, that is all. We do not go so far as to slander it. What fault are we guilty of that we should fall into hell?”

The proponent of the Lotus school should then say, “Do you admit, then, that you do not put faith in the Lotus Sutra? Slandering means none other than this failure to have faith. For faith may be called the source of the way and the mother of blessings.” The fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice have their basis in the first ten stages, the stages of faith. In these ten stages of faith, one begins by cultivating a mind of faith, for evil actions and earthly desires have their source in the lack of faith.

Therefore the fourteen slanders described in the “Simile and Parable” chapter represent the embodiment of a lack of faith. The Nembutsu doctrine taught today may be termed a lack of faith, and hence a form of slander. How then could the words of the Lotus Sutra, “He will enter the Avīci hell,” fail to apply to it?

Moreover, the Pure Land school abandons Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, who is the father of our present world, and instead puts faith in a stranger, Amida Buddha. It is therefore guilty of committing the five cardinal sins and its followers must inevitably fall into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering.

In the Lotus Sutra the Buddha says, “But now this threefold world is all my domain.” This indicates that he is our
sovereign. And he says, "And the living beings in it are all my children." This means that he is our father and we are his children. He further says, "Now this place is beset by many pains and trials. I am the only person who can rescue and protect others." This means that he is our teacher. And in the passage in which Shakyamuni Buddha speaks of entrustment, he says, "The Buddha wishes to entrust this Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law to someone so that it may be preserved." What capacities could be left out? Who could fail to have faith?

And yet the followers of the Pure Land school turn their backs on the entrustment of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, who is sovereign, teacher, and parent to us, and rely instead on the Thus Come One Amida, a stranger to us who resides in the World of Perfect Bliss in the west. Therefore they are turning their backs upon their sovereign and conducting themselves like the kind of evil rabble who commit the eight offenses. They can hardly say they are not guilty of violating their lord's command. They are enemies of the ruler—how can they be without blame?

Next, they have abandoned their father, Shakyamuni Buddha, and hence stand accused of the five cardinal sins. How can they escape falling into the hell of incessant suffering? And finally, they have turned their backs on their teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha, and thus are to be numbered among those who commit the seven cardinal sins. How could they fail to sink into the evil paths of existence?

Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, as we have already seen, possesses the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent in relation to the living beings of this sahā world. He is the Buddha to whom they are greatly indebted. Anyone who would abandon such a Buddha and put faith in the Buddha of some other realm, honoring and relying upon Amida or Medicine Master or Mahāvairocana, is guilty of committing the twenty cardinal sins and hence will surely fall into the evil paths of existence.

The three Pure Land sutras were preached in the third of the five periods into which the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha's lifetime are divided, the period of the Correct and Equal sutras. The four volumes that make up these three sutras do not in any way represent the true intention of Shakyamuni Buddha, nor do they represent the true reason for which the Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future make their appearance in the world. They are no more than an expedient means employed for a time in order to lead living beings onward.

They are, for example, like the scaffold that one erects when one is building a tower. The Nembutsu is the scaffold, while the Lotus Sutra is the treasure tower. The former is an expedient means employed before the Lotus Sutra is preached. But after the Lotus Sutra, which is the tower, has been preached, the Nembutsu, which is the scaffold, should be dismantled and discarded.

Those who persistently cling to the Nembutsu after the Lotus Sutra has been preached are thus like persons who, after the tower has been erected, cling to the scaffold and make no use of the tower. How could they fail to be guilty of going against the builder's wishes?

Hence in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, which serves as an introductory teaching to the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha declares, "In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth," a pronouncement that effectively wipes out the doctrine of the Nembutsu. And in the Lotus Sutra itself, he says, "Honesty discarding ex-
pedient means, I will preach only the unsurpassed way,” by which he means that he has abandoned the Nembutsu meditation. With this, the Venerable Shāriputra, the elder member of the assembly addressed in the Amida Sutra, proceeded to discard the Amida Sutra, put his faith in the Lotus Sutra instead, and in time became the Thus Come One Flower Glow. The Venerable Ānanda, who earlier had been a successor to Amida’s forty-eight vows, likewise put aside the three Pure Land sutras, accepted and upheld the Lotus Sutra, and thus became a Buddha named Mountain Sea Wisdom Unrestricted Power King.

Shāriputra, the elder who headed the assembly that heard the Amida Sutra, was known as foremost in wisdom among all the twelve hundred arhats, the leader of the Buddha’s major disciples, the wisest person in the continent of Jambudvīpa, with no one to rival him. The Venerable Ānanda was a great sage, the foremost in hearing the Buddha’s teachings, a wise man of wide learning who could recite from memory all the teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime. And yet even these great arhats, who held the loftiest possible positions, failed to achieve their hope of being reborn in the Pure Land and attaining Buddhahood there.

As this was true of the patriarchs and teachers who lived when the Buddha was in the world, then those who follow in their footsteps should abandon the three Pure Land sutras, put their faith in the Lotus Sutra, and thus attain unsurpassed enlightenment.

After the Buddha passed away, though many patriarchs and teachers of outstanding virtue appeared, there were none who surpassed the Reverend Shan-tao of Yang-chou in China in the time of the T’ang dynasty. He was known as the foremost Buddhist leader of all China.

In the beginning he studied under a sage named Ming-sheng of Yang-chou, from whom he received training in the Lotus Sutra. Later, however, when he met the Meditation Master Tao-ch’o, he changed his affiliation to the Pure Land school, discarding the Lotus Sutra and instead becoming an advocate of the Nembutsu.

Shan-tao classified all the sacred teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime into two categories, the Sacred Way teachings and the Pure Land teachings. The Lotus Sutra and the other Mahayana sutras he assigned to the category called Sacred Way teachings and criticized because they teach that enlightenment is achieved through one’s own power. He claimed that if people practiced the Sacred Way teachings in hopes of attaining Buddhahood, not more than one or two persons in a hundred, or three or five persons in a thousand, could on rare occasions do so. Indeed, it was more likely that not even one in a thousand could actually attain the way.

The Meditation Sutra and the other works that make up the three Pure Land sutras he labeled the Pure Land teachings. He maintained that if people practiced these Pure Land teachings, depended upon the power of another, namely, on the original vows of Amida Buddha, and sought to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, then, “out of ten, all ten, out of a hundred, a hundred”—that is, ten persons out of ten or a hundred persons out of a hundred were certain to attain such rebirth.

He wrote a commentary on the Meditation on the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra in four volumes made up of four divisions entitled, respectively, “Profound Meaning Section,” “Meaning of the Introduction,” “Meaning of the Meditative Good Acts,” and “Meaning of the Unconcentrated Acts.” In addition he wrote Hymns for Services in two volumes, Praising the Meditation to Behold the Buddha, Praising Rebirth in the
Pure Land, and The Teaching on Meditation Sutra, works that are known as the nine volumes of commentary.

It is said that when Shan-tao performed the Nembutsu, Buddhas emerged from his mouth. And that each time he recited the Nembutsu the three Buddha bodies came out of his mouth. Every day without fail he recited the Amida Sutra sixty times and performed the Nembutsu one hundred thousand times. He observed all the precepts without violating a single one; the three robes of a monk were like his own skin, never leaving his body; his begging bowl and water flask were as inseparable as his two eyes; and he was assiduous and pure in conduct, all his life never so much as looking at a woman. He even claimed that he went for thirty years without sleeping.

According to the rules of conduct laid down by Shan-tao, one should never so much as taste or touch sake, meat, or the five strong-flavored foods, and he decreed that in the future all monks should abide by these rules. He warned that if one so much as once drank sake or ate meat or the five strong-flavored foods and then performed the Nembutsu, that person would fall into hell for a period of three million kalpas.

As the priest Hōnen notes in his written invocation, the rules of conduct laid down by Shan-tao are even severer than those that originally existed in Buddhism. Everyone in the regions in the four directions looked up to this Reverend Shan-tao as their good friend and teacher, and eminent and humble, high and low, all became converts to the Nembutsu teachings.

The Lotus Sutra, the king of all the sacred teachings propounded by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime and the embodiment of the original aim of the Buddhas of the three existences, declares that “if there are those who hear the Law, then not a one will fail to attain Buddhahood.”9 Shan-tao on the other hand asserts that of those who practice the Lotus Sutra, not one in a thousand will ever succeed in attaining the way. Now which assertion are we to accept?

The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra indicates that the Nembutsu belongs to the period when the Buddha had “not yet revealed the truth,” and hence is not a true teaching, and the Lotus Sutra reports that the Buddha said, “Honestly discarding expedient means, I will preach only the unsurpassed way,” indicating that one should honestly discard the Meditation Sutra of the Nembutsu teachings and embrace the unsurpassed way of the Lotus Sutra. But this view and the one put forward by Shan-tao are as incompatible as fire and water. Which are we to accept?

Should we put our faith in Shan-tao’s words and discard the Lotus Sutra? Or should we trust the Lotus Sutra and set aside Shan-tao’s assertions?

This Lotus Sutra, which declares that all living beings can attain the Buddha way, this wonderful text that states emphatically that if one once hears the Lotus Sutra, one will be certain to attain enlightenment—Shan-tao would demolish it with a single word, asserting that it is a false and empty teaching by which “not even one person in a thousand”10 can be saved. He says it is a teaching that will never allow one to attain the way, pronouncing the vast benefits to be won through this great wisdom of equality to be false and empty. He would have us believe that the testimony given by the Thus Come One Many Treasures when he declared, “All that you [Shakya-muni Buddha] have expounded is the truth!”11 was in fact a lie. He would reject the evidence given when the Buddhas of the ten directions extended their long broad tongues until they reached the Brahma heaven.

He is a deadly enemy to all the Bud-
dhas of the three existences. He has committed a grave offense, that of grossly slandering the Law, for he would destroy the seeds by which the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions attain Buddhahood. He will suffer the direst punishment, for he has committed acts that condemn him to the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering.

Because this was the case, Shan-tao suddenly went mad and, climbing a willow tree in front of the temple where he was residing, tied a rope around his neck and threw himself down, thus ending his life. The curse of his erroneous teachings met with its destined and inescapable punishment in this form.

Just before he met his end, he said, "This body is hateful to me! I am tormented by pain and have not a moment of rest!" And when he had climbed the willow in front of the temple where he resided, he faced to the west and said, "May the Buddha through his divine might receive me, and may Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds and Bodhisattva Great Power come to aid me!" And when he had finished reciting these words, he threw himself down and ended his life.

It was the seventeenth day of the third month when he put the rope around his neck and jumped down. But, perhaps because the rope broke or the limb of the willow tree snapped, he fell down upon the ground, which was hardened from a severe drought, and shattered his hip bone. For seven days and seven nights, till the twenty-fourth day of the month, he remained in the utmost torment, dragging himself this way and that and crying out in pain, until at last he died. Thus it would appear that even so eminent a patriarch as this was unable to be among those who gain rebirth in the Pure Land.

These things are by no means mere slander invented by the other schools of Buddhism, nor are they falsehoods spread by members of the Lotus school. They are recorded in the section on the Reverend Shan-tao in The Biographies of the Patriarchs. Those who choose to follow a particular line of teaching should not forget how it originated, and those who practice a particular doctrine should follow in the footsteps of its earlier leaders. Are we to conclude, therefore, that those who embrace the Pure Land doctrine are to follow in the footsteps of their leader and conduct themselves as Shan-tao did in his last hours by committing suicide? For if the Nembutsu practitioners fail to hang themselves by the neck, they will be guilty of going against the example of their leader, will they not?

In Japan the founder of the Pure Land school is the Honorable Hōnen. At the age of seventeen he studied all the Buddhist scriptures, worked his way through the sixty volumes of the T'ien-t'ai doctrines, studied the doctrines of all the eight schools of Buddhism, and was acclaimed as one who had mastered the essential meaning of the sacred teachings of the Buddha's lifetime. He became known as a man whose wisdom was unmatched throughout the world, the foremost scholar of Mount Hiei.

But the heavenly devil took possession of his body and, rendering useless all the wisdom gained through his broad studies and vast learning, led him to reject the Tendai school, the crown of all the schools of Buddhism, and instead become a teacher of the Nembutsu doctrine, which stands outside the teachings of the eight schools. It was as though one were to cast aside one's position as a high minister or court noble and instead become a mere commoner.

He wrote a work entitled The Nembutsu Chosen above All in which he rejected the sacred teachings put forward by the Buddha in the five periods
of his preaching life and instead pronounced the single doctrine of the Nembutsu and rebirth in the Pure Land.

In the Decline of the Law Sutra, the Buddha states: "[After I have entered nirvana], in the troubled times when the five impurities\textsuperscript{14} prevail, the way of the devil will flourish. The devil will appear in the form of Buddhist monks and attempt to confuse and destroy my teachings. . . . Those who do evil will become as numerous as the sands of the ocean, while the good will be extremely few, perhaps no more than one or two persons." This passage, according to a statement issued by the Mount Hiei monastery, refers to the priest Hōnen.

Hōnen asserts that the single practice advocated by the Pure Land school represents the five correct practices,\textsuperscript{15} whereas the various other Mahayana teachings, whether provisional or true, exoteric or esoteric, are to be labeled as the five sundry practices. Therefore, like Shan-tao, he urges that the correct practice of the Pure Land teachings be regarded as the certain way of gaining rebirth in the Pure Land.

Setting aside the Meditation Sutra and the other works that make up the three Pure Land sutras, he claims that all the exoteric and esoteric Mahayana sutras propounded in the Buddha's lifetime, beginning with the Great Wisdom Sutra and ending with the Eternity of the Law Sutra, all the 637 works in 2,883 volumes listed in The Chen-yüan Era Catalog of the Buddhist Canon—that all these are useless writings by which "not even one person in a thousand" could ever hope to attain the way. He therefore urges that one close the door on, discard, ignore, and abandon these difficult practices, these Sacred Way teachings, and instead embrace the teachings of the Pure Land school.

Thereupon both the eminent and the humble throughout the land bowed their heads before him, both clerics and lay believers within the four seas pressed their palms together, hailing him as a reincarnation of Bodhisattva Great Power, looking up to him with reverence as Shan-tao reborn. There was not even a tree or plant throughout the land within the four seas that did not bow before him.

His wisdom shone like the sun and moon, lighting the whole world; no one could match him, it was claimed. His brilliant virtue filled the land, he surpassed Shan-tao, was greater than T’an-luan or Tao-ch’o. Eminent and humble, high and low alike, all believed his work Nembutsu Chosen above All to be a shining mirror of the Buddhist Law, and clerics and lay believers, men and women, paid reverence to the priest Hōnen as an incarnation of Amida himself.

In fact, however, those who paid him such elaborate respect and offered him alms were the mere foolish and misled among the lay population, and those who converted to his teachings and idolized him were unwise and reckless persons who were prone to erroneous views. Those in positions of power had no use for his doctrines, and none who were truly wise or worthy were to be found among his followers.

The priest Myōe of Togano’s\textsuperscript{16} was a man whose wisdom was unparalleled throughout the world, an outstanding teacher of wide learning and experience. He wrote a work in three volumes entitled A Refutation of Erroneous Doctrines, in which he demolished the erroneous views of Nembutsu Chosen above All.

The General Administrator of Priests Jitsuin,\textsuperscript{17} the chief official of Mii-dera temple, was a scholar of rare ability, one of the most renowned and talented men of his time. He wrote a work in three volumes, On Resolving Doubts regarding the Pure Land, in which he
criticized the exclusive reliance on the Nembutsu as an evil practice. The Dharma Bridge Butchō-bō Ryūshin of Mount Hiei\textsuperscript{18} was a scholar whose learning was unmatched in his time, the discussion supervisor and pillar of the monastic community of Mount Hiei. He wrote a work in two volumes entitled \textit{A Refutation of \textquotedblleft The Nembutsu Chosen above All\textquotedblright} condemning the erroneous teachings of the priest Hōnen.

In addition to this, the temples of Nara, the monastery on Mount Hiei, and Mii-dera temple several times submitted reports to the throne stating their opinion that \textit{Nembutsu Chosen above All} was a work of erroneous doctrine that could lead to the downfall of the nation. As a result, in the reign of the eighty-third sovereign, Emperor Tsuchinikado, in the first third of the second month of the first year of the Shōgen era [1207], the priests Anraku and Jūren,\textsuperscript{19} advocates of the exclusive practice of the Nembutsu, were arrested and summarily beheaded, and the priest Hōnen, otherwise known as Genkū, was charged with grave faults and exiled to a distant region.

At that time Konoe Iezane held the position of regent and minister of the left. The above incident is recorded in \textit{The Record of the Reining Emperors}, so no one could doubt that it actually happened.

But this is not all. After the priest Hōnen died, further petitions were sent from Mount Hiei. As a result, in the reign of the eighty-fifth sovereign, Emperor Gohorikawa, in the third year of Karoku [1227], copies of the priest Hōnen’s \textit{Nembutsu Chosen above All}, along with the wood blocks from which it was printed, were seized from six different places in Kyoto. They were brought to the courtyard in front of the great lecture hall of the Mount Hiei monastery, where the three thousand members of the monastery were assembled, and were there burned as an expression of gratitude for the kindness shown by the Buddhas of the three existences.

The grave of the priest Hōnen was placed in the custody of shrine menials, who had orders to dig it up and cast the remains of its occupant into the Kamo River.

An imperial edict, an edict from the retired emperor, and a letter of instruction from the prime minister were sent down to the five provinces of the capital area and the seven circuits ordering that all practitioners of the Nembutsu in the sixty-six provinces of the nation should not for a single day longer be permitted to remain as they were but should be exiled to the island of Tsushima. These orders were sent to the governors of the various provinces.

Clear evidence of the above action may be found in the documents of inspection issued by the two Rokuhara governors of the capital\textsuperscript{20} and the letter of acknowledgement from the governor of Sagami in Kanto.

Imperial edict sent to the monastery on Mount Hiei on the fifth day of the seventh month in the third year of Karoku [1227]:

Devotion to the exclusive practice of the Nembutsu leads to the weakening and decay of the various schools of Buddhism. For this reason the sovereigns of reign after reign have repeatedly issued strict commands that particular measures be taken to prohibit and suppress it. But in recent years it has begun to flourish once more, and Mount Hiei has accordingly submitted petitions of complaint.

As indicated earlier, orders have already been issued to suppress this practice. And it has been learned that, to prevent further deterioration of the Buddhist teachings and to appease the distressed complaints of the monastic assembly, an edict will shortly be hand-ed down calling for the exile to a dis-
tant region of Ryūkan, Jōkaku, and Kūamidabutsu, persons who are at the root of the movement. The remaining offenders will be sought out, wherever they may be, and driven out of the imperial realm. In addition, orders have also been given to take steps as soon as possible to appease the agonized complaints from Mount Hiei and forestall disorderly action from that quarter.

Such were the august instructions given by the sovereign. Yoritaka submits this statement with bowed head and utmost sincerity.

The fifth day of the seventh month, hour of the cock [5:00–7:00 P.M.]
Presented by the middle counselor of the right, Yoritaka
Forwarded to the office of the general administrator of priests, the Tendai chief priest

Imperial edict sent to the monastery on Mount Hiei, same year, seventh month, thirteenth day:
An edict has been issued to the five provinces of the capital area and the seven circuits instructing them to put a stop to the activities of those who advocate the exclusive practice of the Nembutsu. You have been duly informed of this. The august instructions of the sovereign are in full as stated above.

Yoritaka submits this statement with bowed head and the utmost sincerity.

The thirteenth day of the seventh month
Presented by the middle counselor of the right, Yoritaka
Forwarded to the office of the general administrator of priests, the Tendai chief priest

Letter of instruction from the prime minister:
Some days ago an edict was issued to the five provinces of the capital area and the seven circuits with instructions to halt for all time the exclusive practice of the Nembutsu. Nevertheless, it has been learned that such activities are still being carried on in the provinces. A complaint has been received from Mount Hiei urging that the stewards and constables of the various regions be ordered to comply with the instructions contained in the imperial edict. You are hereby informed of the matter. It is the prime minister's wish that the edict be strictly complied with. You will proceed as indicated above.

The tenth day of the tenth month in the third year of Karoku
From the hand of the consultant Norisuke
To the lord of Musashi

Letter submitted by the Interpreter of Doctrines, Yōson:
On the eleventh day the priests of Mount Hiei, after examining the matter, concluded that Nembutsu Chosen above All, written by the priest Hōnen, is a work that slanders the correct teachings and that it should not be permitted to exist anywhere in the realm. Accordingly copies of the work, along with the wood blocks from which it was printed, were gathered from various locations and brought to the great lecture hall, where they were burned as an expression of gratitude for the kindness shown by the Buddhas of the three existences. In addition, the grave of the Honorable Hōnen was placed in the custody of the menials of Kanjin-in Shrine and was duly destroyed.

The fifteenth day of the tenth month in the third year of Karoku
As the Dharma Bridge Ryūshin has stated, there is clear evidence, documentary and theoretical, that the exclusive practice of the Nembutsu can lead to the downfall of the nation.
Letter sent from Mount Hiei to Ungeois temple:

The erroneous teacher Genkū, while he was alive, was for a long period sentenced to severe punishment, and now, after his demise, his dead bones have been hacked to pieces. His erroneous associates Jūren and Anraku have been put to death in the wilderness, and Jōkaku and Sashō have been sentenced to exile in a distant region as their penalty. If this is the punishment these persons received in their present existence, one may surmise what fate awaits them in their next.

Alas! In terms of the laws of the secular world, these persons have violated the imperial edicts. They have been condemned by the ruler of the nation, and even now there is no sign that they have been forgiven for their actions. How can anyone among the consciences vassals of the ruler and common people of the nation bear to give alms and lend support to the people of this Pure Land school?

In terms of the Buddhist teachings, they are guilty of slandering the correct teachings, an action that destined them for the hell of incessant suffering. How could anyone think of honoring and paying obeisance to these Nembutsu doctrines?

It is my sincere hope that now in this latter age the followers of the Pure Land school will, like the patriarchs Śāriputra and Ānanda, who lived when the Buddha was in the world, cast aside the Pure Land school and embrace the Lotus Sutra, and in that way fulfill their long-cherished desire for enlightenment.

Nichiren

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Background

Written by Nichiren Daishonin in 1255, two years after he preached his teaching for the first time, this document appears to be directed to his followers in general. Since he declared his teaching on the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month in 1253, the Daishonin had criticized the doctrines of the Pure Land school in particular. The school promised rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha through repeated chanting of that Buddha’s name, a practice known as the Nembutsu. Hōnen, the founder of the Pure Land school in Japan, urged people to abandon all Buddhas except Amida, all sutras except the three Pure Land sutras, and all practices other than the Nembutsu. The Daishonin asserted that, because believers in the Nembutsu slandered the Lotus Sutra, which Shakyamuni Buddha declared to be the purpose of his preaching, they were destined for rebirth not in the Pure Land but in the hell of incessant suffering. In this document he presents the reasoning behind his refutation of the Nembutsu teaching, backed by citations from various Buddhist sources.

In the opening section, he says that, while belief in the Nembutsu forms a cause that will lead one to the hell of incessant suffering, the Lotus Sutra constitutes the path that leads directly to the attainment of Buddhahood. For that reason, he urges people to discard their practice of the Nembutsu, embrace the Lotus Sutra, and thereby gain unsurpassed enlightenment. He then explains that the teachings of the Pure Land school encourage disbelief in the Lotus Sutra—the teaching
Shakyamuni Buddha expounded for the enlightenment of all people. Thus the Pure Land doctrine represents a betrayal of Shakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, and disregards the three virtues the Buddha embodied in order to enlighten the people— those of sovereign, teacher, and parent. As a result of this rejection of the Lotus Sutra, Pure Land believers are condemned to fall into the evil paths of existence.

Further on in the text he cites the case of Shakyamuni's major disciples. Shāriputra and Ānanda bore some relationship to the Pure Land scriptures as key figures in the assembly when those sutras were expounded. But when they heard the Buddha state, “In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth,” they ultimately rejected those teachings and their reliance on Amida and took faith in the Lotus Sutra. At that time Shakyamuni predicted that they would become Buddhas. How could ordinary persons such as ourselves fail to follow the example of such esteemed disciples of the Buddha, the Daishonin asks.

Next, he condemns as false the teachings of Shan-tao, a leading Chinese patriarch of the Pure Land teaching, who asserted that not even one person in a thousand can attain enlightenment through the Lotus Sutra. He also cites a tragic account of Shan-tao’s attempt at suicide in his final days, which he interprets as proof that Shan-tao had destined himself for hell because of his slander of the Lotus Sutra. He then counters the assertions made by Hōnen in his principal work, *The Nembutsu Chosen above All*. The Daishonin mentions the fact that the Buddhist community of that time had appealed for a banning of the Nembutsu practice, as well as this work by Hōnen, considering that it would be destructive to Buddhism in general. He also cites the text of various official documents illustrating the response from the imperial court and the shogunate to those petitions, which was to issue orders outlawing propagation of the Nembutsu teaching.

In closing, he states that the Nembutsu teaching has, as the documents he listed demonstrate, been found to violate imperial edicts in terms of the secular law, while in Buddhism it violates the Buddha’s will. This is why he urges people to abandon this teaching and embrace the Lotus Sutra, as Ānanda and Shāriputra did, and thereby attain enlightenment.

**Notes**

1. This statement derives from the Flower Garland Sutra.
2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., chap. 11.
6. “The twenty cardinal sins” refers to the five cardinal sins, the seven cardinal sins, and the eight offenses.
7. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.
8. In the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra, when Bodhisattva Dharma Treasury makes forty-eight vows before becoming the Buddha Infinite Life, or Amida Buddha, Ānanda heads the assembly to which the sutra is being preached.
10. *Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land*.
11. Lotus Sutra, chap. 11.
12. Hōnen’s work.
13. The sixty volumes of the T’ien-t’ai doctrines refer to T’ien-t’ai’s three major works, *Great Concentration and Insight*, *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, and *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, consisting of thirty volumes, and Miao-lo’s three commentaries on them, which also consist of thirty volumes.
15. The five correct practices are (i) to
read and recite the three Pure Land sutras; (2) to meditate on Amida Buddha and his Pure Land; (3) to worship Amida Buddha; (4) to recite Amida Buddha’s name; and (5) to praise and give offerings to Amida Buddha. In contrast, when directed toward any Buddha other than Amida and any sutra other than the three Pure Land ones, these five practices are defined as the five sundry practices.

16. Myōe (1173–1232) was a priest of the Flower Garland school. In 1206 he was granted an estate in Togano’ō, Kyoto, by the imperial court. He rebuilt the old temple there and named it Kōzan-ji, establishing it as a temple of the Flower Garland school. He is viewed as a restorer of the Flower Garland school.

17. Jitsuin is thought to be another name for Kōin (1145–1216), an eminent priest of the Tendai school.

18. Butchō-bō Ryūshin, also known as Ryūshin, was a priest of the Tendai school in the early Kamakura period (1185–1333) who lived at Enryaku-ji, the head temple of that school on Mount Hiei. At Enryaku-ji he was appointed discussion supervisor, whose function was to select topics for and oversee Buddhist discussions among the priests. The Dharma Bridge was an official rank among priests.

19. Both Anraku and Jūren were disciples of Hōnen, the founder of the Pure Land school. In 1206, when the Retired Emperor Gotoba was away from Kyoto on a pilgrimage to Kumano Shrine, Anraku, Jūren, and other disciples of Hōnen held a Nembutsu ceremony in Kyoto. A number of court ladies in the service of Gotoba attended this ceremony and without Gotoba’s permission renounced secular life to become nuns. This angered the retired emperor, and in the following year, Hōnen was sent into exile, while Anraku and Jūren were executed.

20. The two Rokuhara governors were the chief of the two offices set up by the Kamakura government respectively in the north and south districts of Rokuhara in Kyoto to deal with the political affairs of the western provinces and protect the imperial court.

21. Fujiwara Yoritaka (b. 1202), a court noble.

22. Taira no Norisuke (1192–1235), a court noble and one of the six consultants.

23. The governor of Musashi Province. In the text, “the lord of Musashi” refers to Hōjō Yasutoki (1183–1242), the third regent of the Kamakura government.

24. A priest of the Tendai school. Later he was appointed the supervisor of priests. “The interpreter of doctrines” was one of those who were in charge of Buddhist discussions. His function was to elucidate and expand on subjects of discussion and answer questions from the other priests.

25. The old name of Yasaka Shrine, which is located at Gion in Kyoto.