WHEN we stop to consider, there can be no doubt that, among the beings in the three evil paths of existence, numerous as the dust particles in the worlds of the ten directions, there are at times a few, few as the particles of dust that can be placed on a fingernail, who happen to escape from the evil realms and to be born in the land of Japan in the continent of Jambudvīpa. And there are others who abandon their existence in the land of the rising sun in the continent of Jambudvīpa, where they were as few as the particles that can be placed on a fingernail, and take on an existence in the three evil realms, where beings are as numerous as the dust particles in the worlds of the ten directions.

But the cause that impels them to leave life as a human being and to sink down into the evil realms is not always the same in all cases. Some do so because of their pity and fondness for their wives and children or their other household members; some because of the grave karma they have created by killing living beings or committing other evil deeds; some because, having become rulers of a nation, they fail to heed or understand the afflictions of the populace; some because they do not distinguish between the correct doctrine and one that is erroneous; and some because they put their trust in evil teachers.

Among these various causes, those that pertain to the rights and wrongs of everyday behavior are readily apparent, and even a foolish person can judge what is proper conduct. But when it comes to determining what is correct or incorrect in matters of Buddhist doctrine or distinguishing between good teachers and evil ones, even a sage who has gained enlightenment as a result of extended religious practice will be at a loss, and how much more so an ordinary person in this latter age!

Moreover, since the Buddha, like the sun, has sunk from sight beyond the western hills, leaving his last rays to shine upon those of us in the eastern regions, the torch of wisdom held up for us by the four ranks of sages has grown daily dimmer, and the doctrinal teachings of the Tripiṭaka masters have become more corrupt with each passing month. Scholars, confused in their understanding of the true teaching, interpose themselves like clouds before the moon of Truth, and translators of sacred scriptures who are dedicated to the provisional sūtras smash to pieces the jewels of the true sūtras and reduce them to the rubble of provisional sūtras.

Furthermore, there can hardly fail to be errors in the doctrinal principles
expounded by the Buddhist teachers of the various schools of China, and it is even more likely that, among the latter-day scholars in this far-off land of Japan, mistakes are manifold and the truth seldom to be found. As a result of all this, though the persons who devote themselves to the study of the teachings are more numerous than the scales of a dragon, those who truly attain the way are rarer than the horn of a ch'i-lin.

Some persons err because they rely upon the provisional teachings, some because they rely on teachings that do not accord with the time or the capacities of the persons addressed. Some go astray because they fail to distinguish between the teachings of sages and those of mere ordinary mortals, some because they fail to distinguish between the provisional teachings and the true teaching, some because they mistake provisional teachings for the true teaching, and some because they do not understand the level of the persons to whom the teachings are directed. Thus these various types of persons in their capacity as ordinary mortals seek the Buddhist teachings but instead only increase the karma that will keep them bound to the sufferings of birth and death, but the exact cause in each case is not necessarily the same.

Some years ago there appeared an eminent priest of erroneous wisdom who, for the sake of the ignorant people of this latter age, cast aside all the doctrinal principles and wrote a work entitled The Nembutsu Chosen above All. Borrowing ideas from three earlier teachers, T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o, and Shan-tao, he divided all the teachings of the Buddha's lifetime into two categories, took note of the true sutras but classified them with the provisional sutras, closed the direct road to enlightenment propounded by the Lotus Sutra and the True Word teachings and instead opened up the narrow path indicated in the three Pure Land sutras.

Moreover, he did not abide by the principles laid down in the three Pure Land sutras, but committed slander of the Law by turning against both the provisional and the true sutras; he cut off for all time the seeds that lead to the four noble worlds of voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas, and set forth erroneous views that could only condemn him to fall into the depths of the Avīci hell. And yet the people of the time bowed before his pronouncements like the branches of little trees blown by a great wind, and his disciples looked up to him with awe as though he were the god Shakra of the heavenly realm.

Many writings appeared that attempted to refute these evil doctrines, such as On Resolving Doubts regarding the Pure Land, A Refutation of "The Nembutsu Chosen above All," or A Refutation of Erroneous Doctrines. Although the authors of such works were all men of eminent virtue whose names were known throughout the land, they have not, I fear, as yet succeeded in making clear the roots from which spring these slanders of the Law set forth in Nembutsu Chosen above All, and as a result its evil teachings flourish even more than before. The effect of such writings is like a little rain falling in a time of prolonged drought, which only makes the plants and trees more parched than before, or like dispatching one's weakest forces to lead the attack on a powerful opponent, which only makes the enemy more confident than ever.

Grieved by this situation, I have written a work in one volume entitled On the Protection of the Nation in which I have attempted to clarify the cause and origin of these slanders of the Law found in Nembutsu Chosen above All. I hope that all persons, whether they belong to the clergy or the laity, will take time off from worldly affairs to heed what I have said and thereby plant
good roots that will affect their future for endless kalpas to come. I have relied solely on the sutras and treatises in determining what is correct and what erroneous, and on the pronouncements of the Buddha in making clear what is trustworthy and what is slanderous. I have not ventured to put forth any private theories of my own.

I have divided my work into seven sections. In the first section I discuss the sutra teachings of the Thus Come One, making clear the distinction between the two types of teachings, the provisional and the true. In the second section I clarify the rise and fall of the successive eras of the Former, Middle, and Latter Days of the Law. The third section reveals the origin of the slanders of the Law contained in Nembutsu Chosen above All. The fourth shows through passages of proof what steps are to be taken in dealing with those who put forth such slanders. The fifth discusses how difficult it is to encounter the true Law or doctrine and good friends who will aid one in understanding it. In the sixth section I have discussed the cautions and attitudes of mind to be observed by persons who would practice the teachings of the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, and in the seventh I have answered various questions that arise with regard to these matters.

In the first section of the work, as I have said, I discuss the sutra teachings of the Thus Come One and make clear the distinction between the two types of teachings, the provisional and the true. This is done in four steps.

First I clarify the order in which the major works were produced and the categories to which they and the various other works that make up the canon belong. Second I make clear the relative profundity of the various sutras. Third I show whether they are to be classified as Mahayana or Hinayana works. And fourth I make clear why one should set aside the provisional sutras or teachings and adhere to the true teachings.

First I clarify the order in which the major works were produced and the categories to which they and the other various works that make up the canon belong, as I have just said.

Question: What was the very first sutra that the Buddha preached?

Answer: The Flower Garland Sutra.

Question: What proof do we have of that?

Answer: The "Non-secular Pure Eye" chapter of the sixty-volume version of the Flower Garland Sutra states: "This is what I heard: At one time the Buddha was in the kingdom of Magadha, in the place of meditation, and there for the first time he gained correct enlightenment."

In the "Introduction" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, when the Buddha had emitted an auspicious beam of light from between his eyebrows, and the bodhisattva Maitreya could see the Buddhas of the worlds in the ten directions expounding one after another the teachings of the five periods, he queried the bodhisattva Manjushrī, saying, "We can also see Buddhas, those sage lords, lions, expounding and preaching sutras that are subtle, wonderful, and foremost. Their voices are clear and pure, issuing in soft and gentle sounds, as they teach bodhisattvas in numberless millions."

And again, in the "Expedient Means" chapter, where the Buddha himself describes the time when he first achieved enlightenment, he says, "When I first sat in the place of meditation and gazed at the tree and walked around it, . . . At that time the Brahmā kings, along with the heavenly king Shakra, the four heavenly kings who guard the world, and the heavenly king Great Freedom, in company with the other heavenly beings and their hundreds and thousands and ten thousands
of followers, reverently pressed their palms together and bowed, begging me to turn the wheel of the Law.”

These passages in the Lotus Sutra all refer to the time when the Flower Garland Sutra was preached. Therefore the first volume of the Flower Garland Sutra says that it was preached to “the heavenly king Vaishravana, . . . the god of the moon, . . . the god of the sun, . . . Shakra Devānām Indra, . . . Brahmā, . . . Maheshvara, and others.”

The Nirvana Sutra describes the time when the Flower Garland Sutra was preached in this way: “After the Buddha had attained enlightenment, the god Brahmā made an earnest request of him, saying, ‘I beg that the Thus Come One now for the sake of living beings will open wide the gates of the doctrine of sweet dew!’ . . . The god Brahmā spoke once more, saying, ‘World-Honored One, all living beings fall into three categories, those of keen capacity, those of middling capacity, and those of dull capacity. Those of keen capacity are capable of receiving the doctrine, so I beg you to expound it for them.’

“The Buddha said, ‘Brahmā, listen carefully! For the sake of all living beings I will now open the gates to the doctrine of sweet dew.’”

And volume thirty-three of the Nirvana Sutra refers to the time when the Flower Garland Sutra was preached in these words: “For the sake of the bodhisattvas I already in the past expounded the work that is the most subtle in meaning among all the twelve divisions of the sutras.”

All these passages provide proof of the fact that when a Buddha appears in the world, among all the various sutras, he invariably preaches the Flower Garland first.

Question: In the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra it is stated: “In the beginning I preached the four noble truths. . . . Then I preached the twelve divisions of the correct and equal sutras, the teaching of great wisdom, and the Flower Garland teaching of the ocean-imprint meditation.” This passage says that the Flower Garland Sutra was expounded after the Wisdom sutras. How do you account for this discrepancy?

Answer: This probably refers to the order in which the sutras are ranked in terms of profundity. Or perhaps it refers to some later version of the Flower Garland Sutra. The “Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra is speaking of the order in which the sutras preached in the course of the Buddha’s lifetime are to be ranked in terms of profundity when it says: “[The Thus Come Ones have only a single Buddha vehicle . . .] They do not have any other vehicle (that is, the Flower Garland Sutra), a second one (the Wisdom sutras), or a third one (the Correct and Equal sutras).”

Question: What sutra or sutras did the Buddha preach after the Flower Garland Sutra?

Answer: He preached the Āgama sutras.

Question: How do we know this?

Answer: The “Introduction” chapter of the Lotus Sutra refers to the sutras preached after the Flower Garland Sutra when it says: “If a person should encounter troubles, loathing old age, sickness, and death, the Buddhas preach to him on nirvana, [explaining how he may put an end to all troubles].” And the “Expedient Means” chapter says: “I set out at once for Vārānasī. . . . to preach to the five ascetics.”

The Nirvana Sutra indicates what sutra was preached after the Flower Garland Sutra when it says: “Then in the country of Vārānasī I turned the wheel of the Correct Law, expounding the Middle Way.” These sutra passages indicate that the Āgama sutras were preached after the Flower Garland Sutra.
Question: What sutras did the Buddha preach after the Ågama sutras?
Answer: The Correct and Equal sutras.

Question: How do we know this?
Answer: The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra says: “In the beginning I preached the four noble truths . . . Then I preached the twelve divisions of the correct and equal sutras.” And the Nirvana Sutra says: “From among the sutras he brought forth the correct and equal sutras.”

Question: The term “correct and equal” is a translation of an Indian word [vaipulya]. In this country we refer to these sutras as Mahayana, or the great vehicle. The Flower Garland Sutra, the Wisdom sutras, the Lotus Sutra, the Nirvana Sutra—all these are correct and equal sutras. Why then single out a certain number of these sutras and call them by the name “Correct and Equal sutras”?
Answer: In fact, of course, the Flower Garland, the Wisdom sutras, the Lotus, and the others are all correct and equal sutras. But this practice of singling out a certain number of them and calling them Correct and Equal sutras is not something that originated with me. The passages just cited from the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra clearly follow the same practice.

The fruit of enlightenment attainable in the Ågama sutras is classified simply as Hinayana, or lesser vehicle. Following the Ågama, the Buddha preached the Mahayana, or great vehicle, sutras. Hence all the sutras preached from the Correct and Equal sutras and thereafter are called Mahayana, or great vehicle. However, because the sutras in the Correct and Equal category represent the beginning of the Mahayana [or correct and equal] teachings, they are referred to as Correct and Equal sutras. It is like the case of the eighteen realms or elements. Only the first ten and a half of these belong to the realm of form [the remaining belonging to the realm of mind], but because they come first, we refer to the entire set of eighteen as “the realm of form.”

Question: What sutras did the Buddha preach after the Correct and Equal sutras?
Answer: He preached the Wisdom sutras.

Question: How do we know this?
Answer: The Nirvana Sutra says, “From the correct and equal sutras he brought forth the doctrine of wisdom.”

Question: What sutra or sutras did the Buddha preach after the Wisdom sutras?
Answer: He preached the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra.

Question: How do we know this?
Answer: The Benevolent Kings Sutra speaks of the “period of twenty-nine years” [during which the Buddha preached the Wisdom sutras], and the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra says, “But in these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth.”

Question: In the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra the Flower Garland Sutra is listed after the Wisdom sutras, and in the Nirvana Sutra the Nirvana Sutra is listed after the Wisdom sutras. But in the order of the sutras that you are proposing, the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra comes after the Wisdom sutras. How do you explain this discrepancy?
Answer: If you look at the passage in volume fourteen of the Nirvana Sutra, you see that it is listing the sutras preached prior to the Nirvana Sutra in order and discussing them in terms of their relative worth in comparison to the Nirvana Sutra. And it does not mention the Lotus Sutra. In volume nine of the Nirvana Sutra it is made clear that the Lotus Sutra was preached before the Nirvana Sutra. And if we look at the “Introduction” chap-
ter of the Lotus Sutra, we see that the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra was preached as an introduction to the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, although the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra lists the Flower Garland Sutra as having been preached after the Wisdom sutras, if we assign the Flower Garland Sutra to the initial period of the Buddha’s preaching life, then we can say that after the Wisdom sutras the Buddha preached the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra.

Question: What sutra did the Buddha preach after the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra?

Answer: He preached the Lotus Sutra.

Question: How do we know this?

Answer: The “Introduction” chapter of the Lotus Sutra says: “And for the sake of the bodhisattvas he preached the great vehicle sutra entitled Immeasurable Meanings, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhhas.

“When the Buddha had finished preaching this sutra, he sat with his legs crossed in lotus position and entered into the meditation of the origin of immeasurable meanings.”

Question: What sutra did the Buddha preach after the Lotus Sutra?

Answer: He preached the Universal Worthy Sutra.

Question: How do we know this?

Answer: The Universal Worthy Sutra says, “The Buddha announced to the monks, ‘Three months from now I will enter nirvana.’ In the past I, the Thus Come One, on Mount Gridhrakūṭa and in other places have already widely explained in detail the way of the single truth. Now in this place…”

Question: What sutra did the Buddha preach after the Universal Worthy Sutra?

Answer: He preached the Nirvana Sutra.

Question: How do we know this?

Answer: The Universal Worthy Sutra says, “The Buddha announced to the monks, ‘Three months from now I will enter nirvana.’” And volume thirty of the Nirvana Sutra states: “Thus Come One, why will you enter nirvana in the second month of the year? … Thus Come One, your birth, your leaving of the household life, your attainment of enlightenment, your turning of the wheel of the Law—all these events took place on the eighth day of the month. Why then will the Buddha’s entry into nirvana alone take place on the fifteenth day of the month?!”

In general, the order in which the major sutras were preached is as I have outlined it here. As for the various Mahayana and Hinayana sutras other than those I have already mentioned, the order in which they were preached is uncertain. Some say that the Flower Garland Sutra was preached after the Āgama sutras, others say that the Correct and Equal and Wisdom sutras were preached after the Lotus Sutra. But in all cases the various sutras are assigned to one or another of the periods I have indicated on the basis of the principles they have in common with the major works of that period.

Second, in order to make clear the relative profundity of the various sutras, I note that the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra states: “In the beginning I preached the four noble truths (Āgama sutras). … Then I preached the twelve divisions of the correct and equal sutras, the teaching of great wisdom, and the Flower Garland teaching of the ocean-imprint meditation, describing the many kalpas of practice for bodhisattvas.” And the same sutra says, “But in these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth.” And it also says, “This Immeasurable Meanings Sutra is worthy of unsurpassed veneration.”

If we judge by these passages, then there can be no doubt that the various
sutras preached in the forty and more years prior to the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra are inferior to it.

Question: The Secret Solemnity Sutra states that “the Secret Solemnity Sutra is the greatest of all sutras.” The Great Cloud Sutra says, “This sutra is the wheel-turning king among all sutras.” The Golden Light Sutra says, “This is the king of sutras.” As we see from these passages, it is a regular practice for the various Mahayana sutras to make such statements. Why, then, on the basis of merely one such passage, are we to conclude that the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra is superior to all the sutras preached in the previous forty and more years?

Answer: If Shakayamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, had not laid down any distinctions as to which sutras were superior and which inferior, then we would not have the different categories of Mahayana and Hinayana or the distinctions between provisional teachings and true teachings. And if he had posited distinctions regarding the relative profundity of the sutras where such distinctions do not in fact exist, he would simply have been creating grounds for argument and dispute, causes for evil actions and the perpetration of faults.

One should understand that, when the term “foremost” is used in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, its meaning is not fixed but varies with the context. Thus it is sometimes used to mean first or foremost in contrast to the Hinayana sutras, at other times as foremost in revealing the life span of the Buddha of the reward body, and at still other times as foremost in propounding the worldly truth, the supreme truth, and the truth of the Middle Way. It does not mean that that sutra is foremost in every sense.

But now when the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra makes the kind of statement we have just seen, it means that it stands in first place when compared to the various sutras preached in the preceding forty and more years.

Question: Which is superior, the Lotus Sutra or the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra?

Answer: The Lotus Sutra.

Question: How do we know this?

Answer: Because in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra it is not yet clearly revealed that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood, or that the Buddha achieved enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past. Therefore in the Lotus Sutra the Buddha relegates it to an inferior position among the sutras he is “now” preaching [saying, “Among the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach, this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand”].

Question: Which is superior, the Lotus Sutra or the Nirvana Sutra?

Answer: The Lotus Sutra.

Question: How do we know this?

Answer: The Nirvana Sutra itself states, “[When this sutra was preached . . . the prediction had already been made] in the Lotus Sutra [that the eight thousand voice-hearers would attain Buddhahood, a prediction that was like a great harvest. Thus, the autumn harvest was over and the crop had been stored away for winter], and there was nothing left for it.” And the Lotus Sutra speaks of the Nirvana Sutra as a work that the Buddha “will preach,” but it does not say that it is “the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand.”

Question: If we examine the text of the Nirvana Sutra, we find that it says that all the sutras preached prior to the Nirvana Sutra represent erroneous views. How do you explain this?

Answer: The Lotus Sutra embodies the original intention for which the Thus Come One appeared in the world. Therefore in it the Buddha says,
“And what I long ago hoped for has now been fulfilled.”9 “But now is the very time when I must decisively preach the great vehicle.”10 “But good men, it has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood.”

With regard to the relative superiority and inferiority of the various sutras, however, the Buddha himself says, “The sutras I have preached number immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions.”12 And he then goes on to speak of all those that “I have preached, now preach, and will preach...” At that time the Buddha Many Treasures emerges from the ground and declares, “Shakymuni, World-Honored One, all that you have expounded is the truth!”13 and the Buddhas who are emanations of Shakymuni Buddha make a sign with their tongues, extending them up to the Brahma heaven. At that time the relative superiority and inferiority of the Lotus Sutra and the other sutras is clearly indicated.

In cases other than this, the Buddha is speaking in the person of a single Buddha, Shakymuni, and therefore it is not proper for him to discuss the relative superiority of the Lotus Sutra as it compares to the other sutras. Therefore in the Nirvana Sutra when it appears that the other sutras preached prior to the Nirvana Sutra are being rejected, the Lotus Sutra is not included among these. This hence makes it clear that the Lotus Sutra is superior to the other sutras.

With regard to the passage in the Nirvana Sutra that speaks of erroneous views, this observation is made by a group of persons who are not aware of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore they say that, now that they have heard the Nirvana Sutra, they have gained enlightenment. Thus Kāśyapa himself, along with those who are accompanying him, says that before they heard the Nirvana Sutra, they subscribed to erroneous views. This remark is not to be taken as a comment on the relative superiority or inferiority of the sutras.

Third, I clarify whether a work is to be classified as Mahayana or Hinayana.

Question: How does one distinguish between Mahayana, or great vehicle, and Hinayana, or lesser vehicle?

Answer: The ordinary way of speaking is to denote the Āgama sutras as Hinayana, and the Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, and Lotus and Nirvana sutras as Mahayana. Or one may say that the sutras that clarify the six lower worlds, or realms of existence, are Hinayana, and those that clarify the Ten Worlds are Mahayana. In addition to these views, if one is discussing the principles of the true teaching as they are revealed in the Lotus Sutra, then one may say that all the Mahayana sutras preached in the forty and more years before the preaching of the Lotus Sutra are to be designated as Hinayana, or lesser vehicle, and the Lotus Sutra as Mahayana.

Question: The various schools customarily designate the particular sutra that they themselves rely on as “true Mahayana,” and the sutras that other schools rely on as “provisional Mahayana.” A person of paltry learning such as myself thus finds it very difficult to determine the truth of the matter. But I have never heard of calling the other Mahayana sutras “Hinayana” in comparison to the Lotus Sutra. What passages can you cite to support this view?

Answer: In setting forth their doctrines, the various schools dispute with one another over what is right and what is wrong. And now in particular, in the Latter Day of the Law, both in secular and in clerical circles, one finds people putting what is wrong in first place and what is right in last, till one no longer can tell what is right or
wrong and the ignorant can do nothing but lament. However, let us employ what wisdom we have and examine the passage [in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra in which the Buddha] clearly states, “In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth.” If we find no statements that invalidate this passage, then we should put no faith in what others say about right and wrong. Moreover, with regard to the fact that, in comparison to the Lotus Sutra, the other Mahayana sutras are to be designated as Hinayana, I need not urge any answer of my own. The “Expeditious Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra states: “The Buddha himself dwells in this great vehicle, . . . He himself testifies to the unsurpassed way, the great vehicle, the Law in which all things are equal. If I used a lesser vehicle to convert even one person, I would be guilty of stinginess and greed, but such a thing would be impossible.”

The meaning of this passage is that all the sutras other than the Lotus are to be regarded as Hinayana, or lesser vehicle. And in the “Life Span” chapter the Buddha speaks of those “who delight in lesser teachings.” These passages are all saying that the sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, those preached “in these more than forty years,” are all to be regarded as Hinayana.

T’ien-t’ai and Miao-lo in their commentaries designate the sutras preached in the forty and more years before the preaching of the Lotus Sutra as Hinayana. But the leaders of the other schools may not be willing to take their word for it, and therefore I have cited these passages from the sutras themselves.

Fourth, I make clear why one should set aside the provisional sutras and adhere to the true sutras or teachings.

Question: What are your passages of proof?

Answer: There are ten passages of proof. The Lotus Sutra says: “desiring only to accept and embrace the sutra of the great vehicle and not accepting a single verse of the other sutras.”14 (This is the first passage.)

The Nirvana Sutra says: “Rely on sutras that are complete and final and not on those that are not complete and final.” (Those preached in the forty and more years before the Lotus Sutra are sutras that are not complete and final. This is the second passage.)

The Lotus Sutra says: “This sutra is hard to uphold; if one can uphold it even for a short while I will surely rejoice and so will the other Buddhas. A person who can do this wins the admiration of the Buddhas. This is what is meant by valor, this is what is meant by diligence. This is what is called observing the precepts and practicing dhūta.”15 (In the Latter Day of the Law there is no more observing of the precepts such as there was in the forty and more years before the Lotus Sutra. Upholding the Lotus Sutra constitutes the only “observing of the precepts.” This is the third passage.)

The Nirvana Sutra states: “One who is lax in regard to the vehicles [teachings] may be called lax indeed. But one who is lax in keeping the precepts is not to be called lax. If bodhisattvas and mahāsattvas are not slothful and indolent in mind in regard to the great vehicle, then they are to be called observers of the precepts. In order to guard the correct Law, they bathe themselves in the waters of the great vehicle. Therefore, although the bodhisattvas may appear to be violating the precepts, they are not to be called lax.” (This passage refers to the propagation and transmission of the Lotus Sutra precepts. This is the fourth passage.)

In the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra we read: “The Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law . . . all that you have expounded is the truth!”16 (This passage is the Buddha Many Treasures’
verification of the truth of the sutra. This is the fifth passage.)

In the eighth volume of the Lotus Sutra, Bodhisattva Universal Worthy takes a vow, saying: "And after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, I will cause it [the Lotus Sutra] to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvīpa and will see that it never comes to an end." 17 (This is the sixth passage.)

In the seventh volume of the Lotus Sutra it is stated: "After I have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off." 18 (This is the vow of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni. This is the seventh passage.)

In the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra, the reason why the Thus Come One Many Treasures and the Buddhas of the ten directions have come together is explained in these words: "Each . . . has come to this place on purpose to make certain the Law will long endure." 19 (This is the eighth passage.)

The seventh volume of the Lotus Sutra explains how the votaries of the Lotus Sutra should conduct themselves, stating: "After the Thus Come One has entered extinction, you must single-mindedly accept, uphold, read, recite, explain, preach and transcribe it, and practice it as directed. In any of the various lands, . . . wherever the sutra rolls are preserved, whether in a garden, a forest, beneath a tree, in monks' quarters, in the lodgings of white-robed laymen, in palaces, or in mountain valleys or the wide wilderness, in all these places one should erect towers and offer alms. Why? Because you should understand that such spots are places of religious practice. In such places have the Buddhas gained supreme perfect enlightenment." 20 (This is the ninth passage.)

And the ninth volume of the Nirvana Sutra, speaking of the propagation of the Lotus Sutra, states: "After I have entered nirvana, in the last eighty years before the correct teaching has passed into extinction, at that time this sutra will be widely propagated throughout Jambudvīpa. In that age there will be evil monks who will steal this sutra and divide it into many parts, losing the color, scent, and flavor of the correct teaching that it contains. These evil men will read and recite this sutra, but they will ignore and put aside the profound and vital principles that the Thus Come One has expounded in it and replace them with ornate rhetoric and meaningless talk. They will tear off the first part of the sutra and stick it on at the end, tear off the end and put it at the beginning, put the end and the beginning in the middle and the middle at the beginning or the end. You must understand that these evil monks are the companions of the devil. . . .

"For example, milkmaids sometimes add a great deal of water to their milk. And these evil monks do much the same. They mix in worldly sayings, thus presenting an erroneous version of the sutra and making it impossible for large numbers of living beings to expound the sutra correctly, copy it correctly, apprehend it correctly, pay it due honor, praise, offerings, and respect. Because these evil monks are concerned only in gaining profit and support, they are incapable of widely propagating this sutra. Few are the places they reach in their various preaching excursions, and these are not worth mentioning. The impoverished milkmaids go from place to place selling their watered milk, but although one may make gruel with it, it lacks the real flavor of milk. And this great vehicle scripture, this Great Nirvana Sutra, is like this. As it is passed from place to place it becomes increasingly thin and insipid until it has no flavor at all."
“But though it has no flavor, it is still a thousand times superior to the other sutras, just as the flavor of the watered milk is a thousand times superior to bitter tastes. Why is this? Because this great vehicle scripture, this Great Nirvana Sutra, is the finest of all the sutras that the Buddha preached for his voice-hearer disciples.” (This is the tenth passage.)

Question: We are told to discard sutras that are not complete and final and adhere to those that are complete and final. But what about sutras such as the Complete and Final Teaching on Perfect Enlightenment Sutra or the Great Crown of the Buddha’s Head Practice of the Thus Come One’s Secret Cause Complete and Final Teaching Sutra that are Mahayana and all include the words “complete and final” in the title? Are we to rely on these?

Answer: The words “complete and final” or “not complete and final” have different meanings depending on the context. In comparison to the pronouncements of persons of the two vehicles or of bodhisattvas, which are not complete and final, all the pronouncements made by the Buddha in the course of his preaching life are to be regarded as complete and final. Among the pronouncements of the Buddha, the Hinayana sutras are not complete and final, while the Mahayana sutras are complete and final. Among the Mahayana sutras, those preached in the forty and more years before the Lotus Sutra are not complete and final, while the Lotus Sutra, the Nirvana Sutra, and the Mahāvairocana Sutra are complete and final.

As for the sutras such as the Perfect Enlightenment Sutra and the Great Crown of the Buddha’s Head Sutra, in comparison to the Hinayana sutras or the sutras that depict Buddhahood as requiring countless kalpas of religious practice to achieve, which are not complete and final, these may be regarded as complete and final. But in comparison to the Lotus Sutra, they are not complete and final.

Question: The founders of the various schools other than the Tendai and True Word, such as the Flower Garland, Dharma Characteristics, and Three Treatises schools, all studied the particular sutra or sutras upon which they themselves relied and believed they had understood their profound meaning. Do you think they had?

Answer: In the case of the Flower Garland school, it uses the Flower Garland Sutra as a basis upon which to judge the other sutras, regarding them as a form of expedient means leading up to the Flower Garland Sutra.

The Dharma Characteristics school places the Āgama and Wisdom sutras in a low category and regards the Flower Garland, Lotus, and Nirvana sutras as on a level with the Profound Secrets Sutra, in that they all teach the doctrine of the Middle Way. But because the Lotus and Nirvana sutras reveal merely that one category of persons [those of the two vehicles of voice-hearer and cause-awakened one] can attain Buddhahood, they are regarded as not complete and final, while the Profound Secrets Sutra, because it discusses the five different categories into which beings, through their inborn nature, are to be divided, is regarded as complete and final.

The Three Treatises school divides all the sutras preached by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime into two categories [those propounded for persons of the two vehicles and those propounded for bodhisattvas]. But with regard to the works in the latter category, that of the Mahayana sutras, it does not attempt to determine their relative profundity, though it places great reliance upon the Wisdom sutras.

The founders of these various schools in all probability belonged to the four
ranks of bodhisattvas, and doubtless had reasons for making these decisions. It is thus not for me to pass judgment on how correct they are.

Having said that, I would like, in order to clear up my own doubts in the matter, to put aside for the moment the varying interpretations of these teachers and examine the various sutras upon which they base their teachings.

The Flower Garland Sutra exists in the two "old translation" versions in fifty and sixty volumes respectively, and the "new translation" versions in eighty and forty volumes. But in all these, unlike the Lotus and Nirvana sutras we find no passage indicating that all the other sutras preached by the Buddha in his lifetime are to be regarded as an expedient means leading up to the Flower Garland Sutra. Moreover, though the Flower Garland Sutra describes the four vehicles of voice-hearer, cause-awakened one, bodhisattva, and Buddha, with regard to the Buddha vehicle it nowhere propounds the doctrine of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds or reveals that the Buddha attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past. Later teachers have simply put forward the theory of the five categories of teachings, assigning all the other various sutras to one or another of the first four categories and treating them as an expedient means leading up to the Flower Garland Sutra.

In the case of the Dharma Characteristics school, when the scholars came to propound their theory of the teachings of the three periods, they placed the Lotus Sutra in the same category as the Profound Secrets Sutra [as a text that teaches the doctrine of the Middle Way]. But if we examine the five volumes of the Profound Secrets Sutra, we find no mention whatsoever of the Lotus Sutra as a text that expounds the Middle Way.

As for the Three Treatises school, when it posited its theory of the two categories into which the sutras are to be divided, it assigned the Flower Garland, Lotus, and other sutras to the second category, that of sutras preached for bodhisattvas, thus placing them in the same category as the Wisdom sutras. But when we examine the text of the old and new translations of the Great Wisdom Sutra, we find no passage indicating that this sutra belongs to the same category as the Lotus and Nirvana sutras.

As for assertions that the Flower Garland Sutra represents a teaching leading to "sudden" enlightenment and the Lotus Sutra one leading to "gradual" enlightenment, these are no more than wishful thinking on the part of later scholars. They do not represent the teaching of the Buddha.

In the case of the Lotus Sutra, however, the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, which serves as an introduction to the Lotus Sutra, states a definite period of time, "in these more than forty years," and mentions by name the major sutras, the Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom sutras, in which, as it is clearly stated, "I have not yet revealed the truth." And in the Lotus Sutra itself, which constitutes the main exposition of the doctrine, when the Buddha makes clear the relative superiority of the various sutras preached in the course of his lifetime, he puts forth these golden words, stating, "The sutras I have preached number immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions. Among the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach..." And when he then goes on to state that "this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand," the Buddha Many Treasures, emerging from the earth, testifies to the truth of Shakyamuni's words, saying, "The Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law... all that you have expounded is the truth!" And the
Buddhas of the ten directions who are emanations of Shakyamuni Buddha gather together in one spot and extend their tongues upward to the Brahma heaven [as proof of their agreement].

Now on the basis of these proofs I would like to venture my conclusion. Among the more than five thousand or seven thousand volumes of sutras that have been introduced to China and Japan, or among the others that may exist in India or in the palaces of the dragon kings or in the heaven of the four heavenly kings, or the sutras that were preached by the seven Buddhas of the past or that were not collected by Ānanda—of all these sutras that are as numerous as the particles of dust in the worlds of the ten directions, it is as clear to me which are superior and which inferior, which profound and which shallow, which easy and which difficult, as though they were all here in the palm of my hand. Could these “immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions” of sutras fail to include all the sutras preached by the Thus Come One Shakyamuni? And could there be any not covered by the period of time indicated in his pronouncement regarding the sutras “I have preached, now preach, and will preach”?

It is my wish that the people of this latter age will set aside the weak arguments and meaningless assertions put forth by the founders of the various schools and put their faith in the strong arguments and meaningful pronouncements of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. Why should they give precedence to the biased opinions of these latter-day scholars of the various schools, why put their trust in these ignorant leaders of our present age, why rely on persons who cast aside the sutras and commentaries?

Therefore when the Buddha in his final hours in the grove of sal trees preached the Nirvana Sutra, in which he called for the transmission of the Lotus Sutra, he addressed these last words to Bodhisattva Kāśyapa, saying: “Rely on the Law and not upon persons. Rely on the meaning of the teaching and not on the words. Rely on wisdom and not on discriminative thinking. Rely on sutras that are complete and final and not on those that are not complete and final.”

When I observe the situation in the world at present, I see that, though people claim that the leaders of their particular school are foremost in the wisdom gained through the attainment of enlightenment through meditation, these leaders do not urge the ordinary unenlightened members of their following to rely upon the true sutras and put faith in their teachings. Instead they seize upon sutras such as the Meditation Sutra that are not complete and final, declaring that they represent a teaching that is fitted for our age and for the capacities of the people; they cast aside the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, which are complete and final, speaking ill of them and claiming that they are too profound in their principles and too difficult to understand. They turn against the dying words of the Thus Come One, do they not, declaring in effect that one should “rely on persons and not on the Law, rely on the words and not on the meaning, rely on discriminative thinking and not on wisdom, rely on sutras that are not complete and final and not on those that are complete and final”?

I sincerely hope that persons of understanding will give careful thought to this matter.

It has now been some twenty-two hundred years since the Thus Come One entered extinction. After his disciples Manjushrī, Mahākāśyapa, and Ānanda had come together to put the sutras into order, the four ranks of bodhisattvas appeared one after another,
writing treatises to explain the meaning of the sutras, and now have come the scholars of this latter age who have bit by bit introduced errors into the tradition.

Moreover, among the translators of the sacred texts there have been those who were not thoroughly versed in Sanskrit or in Chinese, or those who, accustomed to the provisional teachings from their previous lives, distorted the meaning of the sutras and treatises pertaining to the true teaching so that it would accord with that of the provisional sutras and treatises. Similarly, among the Buddhist teachers in China there were those who, because they were accustomed to the provisional teachings they had known in their past lives, found the provisional sutras and treatises most congenial to their ways of thinking and declined to accept the principles of the true sutras. If they came on passages that differed even slightly from their own views in the matter, they twisted the logic of the passage and distorted it in interpretation so that it would accord with their own principles. Even if they later came to realize the truth of the matter, because they had considerations of reputation or profit in mind or did not wish to go against the inclinations of their lay supporters, they did not abandon the schools that adhered to the provisional teachings and join those that advocated the true teaching.

The people of the time, both clerics and lay believers, in their ignorance fail to discern the rights and wrongs of the matter, but simply rely upon persons rather than upon the Law. Though faced with an evil doctrine, they follow along with the erroneous principles of the majority rather than relying upon the true pronouncements of one person. As a result, the capacities of most people lead them only along the path to repeated transmigration in the lower realms of existence. Even though such people may hope to find a way to escape from these realms, most of them continue to rely on the provisional sutras. Regrettably, then, whether they endeavor to do right or to do wrong, their evil karma will weigh them down and they will find it difficult to escape from the sufferings of birth and death.

However that may be, the ordinary people of the world today, even if it were to cost them their lives in this lifetime, should rely upon the passage from volume nine of the Nirvana Sutra that I quoted earlier ["This great vehicle scripture, this Great Nirvana Sutra, is the finest of all the sutras that the Buddha preached for his voice-hearer disciples"] and put their faith in the Lotus and Nirvana sutras.

I say this because, even in trivial worldly matters, when something has been handed down over a long period of time, it will become replete with false assertions and the truth in it will be small. And how much more is this so in the case of something as profound in principle as the Buddha’s teachings? During the two thousand and more years since the Thus Come One entered extinction, so many erroneous ideas have crept into the Buddha’s teachings that hardly one assertion in ten thousand is sound in principle.

Moreover, there appear to be errors even in some of the sacred teachings expounded by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime. Thus, for example, the Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra speaks of “the seeds of the Dharma itself that is free of outflows.”24 In the Lotus Sutra of the Correct Law the “Entrustment” chapter comes at the very end of the sutra. The Great Commentary on the Abhidharma includes a sixteen-character passage in Chinese that was not in the original.25 The Summary of the Mahayana speaks in one version [by Hsüan-tsang] of the eighth level of consciousness and in another [by Paramārtha] of the ninth
level. There are discrepancies between The Treatise on the Lotus Sutra and the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law. The Treatise on the Nirvana Sutra speaks in one passage of “the Lotus Sutra defied by earthly desires.” The Dharma Characteristic school claims that persons belonging to the determinate group and those without the nature of enlightenment can never attain Buddhahood. And the Summary of the Mahayana school claims that the passage in the Lotus Sutra that says, “If persons once exclaim, ‘Hail to the Buddha!’ [then all have attained the Buddha way],” refers to attainment at some other time. All these are examples of errors introduced by translators or Buddhist leaders of later times.

In addition to these, there are many errors in the sutras preached by the Buddha in the forty and more years before he preached the Lotus Sutra. Whether or not there are errors in the Lotus and Nirvana sutras as well, it is clear that one should cast aside these other works preached in the forty and more years and rely upon the Lotus and Nirvana sutras. I have already cited above the proofs upon which I base this assertion. How can anyone who puts faith in those other erroneous sutras ever hope to escape from the sufferings of birth and death?

I come now to the second section of my work, in which I clarify the rise and fall of the Buddha’s teachings in the successive eras of the Former, Middle, and Latter Days of the Law. In this connection, there are two matters to be considered. First, we must clarify what will “long endure” and what will “not long endure” in the Latter Day of the Law as it is defined in the sutras preached in the forty and more years before the Lotus Sutra and in the three Pure Land sutras. Second, we must clarify what will “long endure” and what will “not long endure” according to the Lotus and Nirvana sutras and compare it with the three Pure Land sutras and the other sutras.

First, to clarify what will “long endure” and what will “not long endure” in the Latter Day of the Law as it is defined in the sutras preached in the forty and more years before the Lotus Sutra and in the three Pure Land sutras.

Question: With regard to the Buddha’s teachings, one would assume that, regardless of whether the particular teachings are Mahayana or Hinayana, shallow or profound, superior or inferior, if one simply takes into consideration the time and the capacities of the people when one practices them, they will invariably produce beneficial results. And yet if we examine various sutras such as the Wise Kalpa Sutra, the Great Means Sutra, and the Great Collection Sutra, we are told that when two thousand and more years have passed following the extinction of the Buddha, the Buddha’s teachings will disappear entirely. The scriptural teachings will remain, but there will be no more religious practice or attainment of enlightenment. Therefore the Great Teacher Dengyō in his Treatise on the Lamp for the Latter Day of the Law writes: “[From the time of the Buddha’s passing] until now, the twentieth year of the Enryaku era of our country, the year with the cyclical sign kanoto-mi [801], 1,750 years have passed.” (This is one theory.) And more than 450 years have now gone by since the twentieth year of Enryaku, so we have already entered the Latter Day of the Law. Thus, although the Buddha’s teachings may remain, practice and enlightenment no longer do. Hence it would seem that even if one were to practice the Buddha’s teachings, one would have no more than one chance in ten thousand of attaining the way, would one not?

Therefore we find the passage in the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra that reads:
“In the age to come, the scriptural path will perish. I [Shakyamuni], out of pity and compassion, leave this one sutra, which shall endure a hundred years. If there are living beings who encounter this sutra, then, in accordance with their wishes, they will all be able to attain the way.” When we examine this passage, we see that, after all the sacred teachings expounded by the Thus Come One Shakyamuni in the course of his lifetime have perished, the Nembutsu expounded in the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra alone will remain, and it will bring blessing and benefit to living beings.

If we examine the commentaries written by the leaders of the Pure Land school with this thought in mind, we will find there are none of them who fail to endorse it. Thus the Meditation Master Tao-ch’o writes, “This Latter Day of the Law we now face is an evil age stained by the five impurities. Only this single doctrine of the Pure Land offers a road by which one can gain admittance.” The Reverend Shan-tao proclaims, “Over the course of the ten thousand years [of the Latter Day of the Law], the three treasures of Buddhism will perish. This sutra alone will endure for a hundred years.” And the Great Teacher Tz’u-en assures us that “in the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law, all the other sutras will perish. Only this one teaching of Amida will bring ever greater benefit.”

In Japan the Supervisor of Priests Eshin, a former worthy of Mount Hiei, collected key passages from the sacred teachings preached by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime and compiled them in a work called The Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land so they could serve as a guide to persons in this latter age. In the preface to that work he states: “The teachings and practices that lead to rebirth in the Land of Perfect Bliss are the eyes and feet for those who live in this defiled latter age of ours. Clerics and lay believers, persons of high or low station, who will not turn to them? But the texts of the teachings, whether exoteric or esoteric, are not uniform, and there are many different active and meditative practices. For persons of keen wisdom and diligent practice these may present no difficulties, but how can a dull and stubborn fellow such as I venture in such matters?” And later on he says: “In the latter age, after the scriptural path has perished, it is above all these teachings regarding the Nembutsu alone that in all probability will serve to benefit the living beings of this defiled and evil time.”

Generally speaking, the scholars of all the various schools concur in this opinion. Among the scholars of the Tendai school in particular, are there any who challenge it?

Answer: The sutras preached in the forty and more years prior to the Lotus Sutra were in each case preached to accord with the particular time and capacities of the listeners and hence have a fixed period when they are appropriate and when they cease to be appropriate. It is likely, therefore, that they will go out of existence before the three Pure Land sutras do. This is because these sutras in many cases explain how persons in the three vehicles of voice-hearer, cause-awakened one, and bodhisattva can gain enlightenment in their present existence. But in the Latter Day of the Law, very few persons can gain enlightenment in their present existence.

The various pure lands situated in the ten directions, on the other hand, are in many instances well fitted for the capacities of persons in this latter age. This is particularly true of the Land of Perfect Bliss situated in the western direction, because it is closest to this sahā world of ours and is the lowest of the pure lands. Thus, as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, so many
of these sutras urge us to strive to attain rebirth in this western paradise.

Thus we find not only that the founders and patriarchs of the Pure Land teachings urge people to embrace this doctrine, but T’ien-t’ai and Miao-lo also, when they are dealing with the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, give temporary endorsement to this view. And this holds true not only for these teachers of China; Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu mention it as well, though only as one view among many.

Moreover, there are works such as the Benevolent Kings Sutra, which, it is said, will last far longer than the three Pure Land sutras, will endure for eight thousand of the ten thousand years that make up the Latter Day of the Law. Thus there is no fixed opinion as to how long the sutras preached previous to the Lotus Sutra will endure.

Second, with regard to the Lotus and Nirvana sutras and the three Pure Land sutras, I would like to consider which of these two groups of sutras will “long endure” and which will “not long endure.”

Question: As to the Lotus and Nirvana sutras and the three Pure Land sutras, which will go out of existence first?

Answer: The three Pure Land sutras will most likely go out of existence before the Lotus and Nirvana sutras.

Question: How do we know this?

Answer: The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, referring to the large number of sutras preached in the preceding forty and more years, says, “I have not yet revealed the truth.” Therefore, although the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra says, “I... leave this one sutra, which shall endure a hundred years,” these words are all a mere expedient means, a fabrication. The Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, Meditation, and other sutras describe the attainment of rebirth in another land or of Buddhahood quickly or after the passing of numerous kalpas. But if we examine these assertions in the light of the true principles laid down in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, then we will see that, as the sutra itself states, “Though immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable asamkhya kalpas may pass, they will in the end fail to gain unsurpassed enlightenment... Because they will travel perilous byways beset by numerous hindrances and trials.”

The rebirth in another land and attainment of Buddhahood described in these sutras are all something to be attained at some other time. 38

With regard to these sutras such as the Great Collection and the Buddha Infinite Life, the question of which will endure and which will go out of existence first is a mere assertion put forth to accord with the capacities of the listeners. These sutras were preached before the appearance of the Lotus Sutra, and in this sense they are like the pronouncements of the non-Buddhist teachers. They are comparable to rivers that do not flow into the sea, or to subjects that are not obedient to their sovereign. Though one may inflict great pain upon oneself in carrying out their practices, if one does not wait for the coming of the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, then such practices will not bring one particle of benefit, but will be like the exacting but fruitless practices of the non-Buddhist teachers.

Such practices, whether carried out when the Buddha is in the world or after he has passed away, exist as doctrines but with no one to carry them out, exist as practices but with no proof that they are effective.

But although all the other trees may shed their leaves, the pine and cypress retain their green, and although the other plants may wither, the bamboo remains unchanged. And the Lotus Sutra is like these. Shakyanuni Buddha stated that it is foremost among the sutras preached in the past, present, and
future; Many Treasures Buddha testified to its truth; and the other Buddhas made a sign with their tongues solely “to make certain the Law will long endure.”

Question: What proof do you have that, after the other sutras have all gone out of existence, the Lotus Sutra alone will remain?

Answer: In the “Teacher of the Law” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakymuni Buddha himself, speaking of the transmission of the sutra, says, “The sutras I have preached number immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions. Among the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach, this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand.”

This passage means that, among all the sutras preached in the three periods of past, present, and future of the fifty years of the Buddha’s preaching life, this sutra is the foremost of all. The Buddha is saying that, among all his eighty thousand sacred teachings, he is particularly desirous that this one be preserved for future ages.

Therefore, in the chapter that follows, the Thus Come One Many Treasures emerges from the earth, and the various Buddhas in the ten directions who are emanations of Shakymuni Buddha all come together in one place. Then the Thus Come One Shakymuni, dispatching these Buddhas as his messengers, sends them to speak to the bodhisattvas, persons of the two vehicles, human beings, gods, and eight kinds of nonhuman beings who fill four hundred ten thousand million nayutas of worlds in the eight directions, saying, “The reason that the Thus Come One Many Treasures has emerged from the earth and these Buddhas of the ten directions have gathered here is solely that they can make certain that this Law will long endure. After the various other sutras preached in the past, present, and future have all passed out of existence, in the world of the five impurities that will surely come then, when it will be difficult to believe, I want you to take a vow that you will work to disseminate this sutra.” At that time the twenty thousand bodhisattvas and the eight hundred thousand million nayutas of bodhisattvas all took a vow, saying, “We care nothing for our bodies or lives but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way.”

And bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds, along with Manjushri and others, all said, “After the Buddha has entered extinction, . . . we will preach this sutra far and wide.”

After that, the Buddha set forth the ten similes for the Lotus Sutra. In the first of these, he compared the sutras preached in the preceding forty and more years to the rivers and streams and the Lotus Sutra to the ocean. He explained that in the evil and confusion of the latter age, a time of great drought when the world is without shame or conscience, the rivers and streams that are comparable to the first four of the five flavors may dry up, but the Lotus Sutra, which is comparable to the great ocean, will not suffer the slightest diminution. He then concluded by stating in clear terms, “After I have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it [the Lotus Sutra] abroad widely throughout Jambudipa and never allow it to be cut off.”

If we carefully consider the wording of the above statement, we will see that the word “last” in the phrase “last five-hundred-year period” means the period after the sutras preached in the first forty and more years of the Buddha’s preaching life have all gone out of existence. Therefore the Nirvana Sutra, which is concerned with the transmission of the Lotus Sutra teachings, states: “The unsurpassed Buddhist
teaching should be entrusted to the bodhisattvas. The bodhisattvas are skilled at questions and answers, and for that reason the treasure of the Law will be able to endure for long. Over countless thousands of ages it will thrive and grow ever more brilliant, bringing benefit and peace to living beings.”

These various passages all indicate that the Lotus and Nirvana sutras are sutras that will never go out of existence though countless hundreds of years may pass. But certain scholars in the world today, who fail to understand the meaning of these passages, suppose that the fifth five-hundred-year period [in which the pure Law will become obscured and lost] mentioned in the Great Collection Sutra, a work of the provisional teachings, refers to the same period, and that the Lotus and Nirvana sutras will go out of existence at the same time as the Great Collection Sutra. They therefore maintain that these sutras will do so before the three Pure Land sutras go out of existence. But to put forth such an assertion is to forget what the Buddha has said regarding the Lotus Sutra and the length of time it will endure in comparison to the other sutras.

Question: With regard to what you have just been saying, scholars such as T’ian-luan, Tao-ch’o, Shan-tao, and Eshin all maintain that the sutras of the Lotus and True Word teachings are not suitable for this latter age of ours. Thus, basing themselves on this interpretation, Genkū and the disciples he has converted refer to the Lotus and True Word teachings as “sundry practices” and shun them as a difficult-to-practice way, reviling their devotees by calling them a band of robbers, an evil mob, persons of evil views. They say that such teachings are to be likened to the shoes of one’s grandfather (the opinion of Shōkō-bō) or claim that they are of less worth than songs and the music of stringed instruments (the opinion of Namu-bō). If one inquires why they hold such an opinion, one finds that it is due entirely to the fact that they regard these teachings as unsuited to the time and the capacities of persons of this age. What is your view regarding this interpretation put forward by such scholars?

Answer: The Thus Come One Shakyamuni put forth various teachings during the fifty years of his preaching life. These golden words of this one Buddha are divided into two categories, the provisional teaching and the true teaching. And the words of the Buddha clearly indicate that one is to cast aside the provisional sutras and embrace the true sutras.

In this connection, the Buddha said, “If I merely praised the Buddha vehicle, then the living beings, sunk in their suffering, [would be incapable of believing in this Law].” And because he was afraid of such a situation, in the first forty-two years of his preaching life he expounded the provisional sutras. As he also said, however, “If I used a lesser vehicle to convert even one person, I would be guilty of stinginess and greed.” And so, in order to avoid such an error, he declared that “my basic aim is to lead them [living beings] into the great vehicle,” and he thereupon preached the Lotus Sutra for them.

When the Buddha came to preach the Nirvana Sutra, however, he promised that, although he himself would pass into extinction, he would without fail send the four ranks of sages into the world to propagate the doctrines of the provisional and true teachings.

Hence, eight hundred years after the passing of the Thus Come One, Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna appeared in the world and wrote his Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra and other treatises on the provisional teachings, describing the ideas of the Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom sutras, and
also wrote *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* to make clear the distinction between the Wisdom sutras and the Lotus Sutra.

Nine hundred years after the passing of the Thus Come One, Bodhisattva Vasubandhu appeared in the world and wrote *The Dharma Analysis Treasury* to set forth the ideas of the lesser vehicle, *The Treatise on the Consciousness-Only Doctrine* to describe the doctrines of the Correct and Equal sutras, and finally *The Treatise on the Buddha Nature*, which deals with the ideas of the Lotus and Nirvana sutras and makes clear the distinction between sutras that are "complete and final" and those that are "not complete and final." Thus none of these persons ventured to go against the promise made by the Buddha just before his passing.

When we come to the scholars of later ages and the translators of the Buddhist works, however, we find that many of them adhere solely to the provisional sutras. Therefore they distort the meaning of the sutras of the true teaching and lump them together with the provisional sutras, committing the error of confusing and jumbling together the provisional and true teachings.

Moreover, when we come to the mediocre teachers of later times, we find that each tends to regard the particular sutra he relies upon as the foundation of the doctrine and to treat all the other sutras as provisional works, a procedure that leads him to go farther and farther astray from the Buddha's true intention.

One should note, however, that of the three Pure Land scholars, T'an-luan, Tao-ch'ō, and Shan-tao, the former two, basing themselves on *Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra*, established the dual categories of difficult-to-practice and easy-to-practice teachings, the Sacred Way and the Pure Land doctrines. If in doing so they had gone against the intention of *Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra* and had included the Lotus Sutra and True Word doctrines in the difficult-to-practice or easy-to-practice categories, then one could say that their assertions were not worth putting faith in. But if we examine T'an-luan's *Commentary on "The Treatise on the Pure Land"* and Tao-ch'ō's *Collected Essays on the World of Peace and Delight*, we find that on the whole they do not go against the intention of *Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra*.

The Reverend Shan-tao based himself on the three Pure Land sutras and advocated the practice of calling on the name of Amida Buddha, the one practice and one vow that he said would lead to rebirth in the Pure Land.

At this time the scholars of the Summary of the Mahayana school of the Liang, Ch'en, Sui, and T'ang dynasties all insisted that the mention of rebirth in the Pure Land in the various sacred teachings put forth by the Buddha during his preaching life referred to rebirth at some other time in the future. But this ran counter to the Reverend Shan-tao's view on the matter, and therefore when he launched his attacks on these scholars of the Summary of the Mahayana school, he likened them to a band of robbers because they steal from believers the blessing of being reborn in the Pure Land in their very next existence. He also referred to the practices advocated by the Summary of the Mahayana scholars as a difficult-to-practice way because it appeared that one would invariably have to carry out ten thousand different practices before one could achieve one's original goal of rebirth in the Pure Land.

Thus, when Shan-tao was berating these scholars, he complained that "not even one person in a thousand" could ever gain rebirth through their doctrines. But it should be noted that, when the Reverend Shan-tao referred
to these sundry practices of the other schools, he never ventured to include the Lotus Sutra and True Word doctrines among them.

The Supervisor of Priests Genshin of Japan was a disciple of the Great Teacher Jie, the eighteenth chief priest of Mount Hiei, and wrote many works, all intended to disseminate the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

When he wrote the work known as *Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land*, his intention was to point out that in the various sutras set forth in the first forty and more years of the Buddha’s preaching life, two goals were established, that of rebirth in another land, and the attainment of Buddhahood. In contrast to the attainment of Buddhahood, which is difficult to achieve, he pointed out that rebirth in a pure land is easily achieved. Among the actions leading to the achievement of such a rebirth, he regarded the Nembutsu, or meditation on the Buddha Amida with a mind aspiring toward enlightenment, as of the highest worth.

Thus in the tenth large section of *Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land*, entitled “Questions and Answers for Clarification,” in the seventh chapter, which deals with the relative superiority of the various religious practices, he designates the Nembutsu as the most superior. But later, when he comes to compare [the blessings of] the Nembutsu, the most superior of the practices described in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, with the blessings to be gained through one instant of belief and understanding in the Lotus Sutra and to decide on their relative superiority, he points out that the blessings gained through one instant of belief and understanding in the Lotus Sutra are a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand times greater than those gained through complete concentration on the Nembutsu.

Therefore one should understand that the purpose of *Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land* is to point out how [the blessings of] the Nembutsu, the most superior practice set forth in the earlier sutras, compare to the blessings to be gained through the most inferior practice of the Lotus Sutra. The book was written in order to guide people to the practice of the Lotus Sutra. Hence, after Genshin completed the writing of *Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land*, he wrote *The Essentials of the One Vehicle Teaching*, in which he described his own personal enlightenment and indicated that it was based upon the Lotus Sutra.

But Genkū and the followers he converted failed to understand these facts. As a consequence, they lumped the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings with the difficult-to-practice way, the Sacred Way, the sundry practices—the categories of teachings refuted by the three Chinese Pure Land scholars, T’an-luan, Tao-ch’o, and Shan-tao—and with the exoteric and esoteric teachings referred to in the preface to Genshin’s *Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land*. Thus they made it appear that the three Chinese scholars and Genshin were slanderers of the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings.

Moreover, they have converted all the clerics and lay believers of the country of Japan to their way of thinking, indoctrinating them in the belief that the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings are not suited to the times or to the capacities of the people, thus preventing lay believers and those who have left the household life from establishing a relationship with the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings.

Are these not precisely the type of persons that the Buddha predicted would appear when he said, “In that evil age there will be monks with perverse wisdom and hearts that are fawning and crooked”? Can they escape being accused of the error the Buddha...
referred to when he said, “Immediately he will destroy all the seeds for becoming a Buddha in this world.”

In addition to this, Genkū likened the men of the Mountain and Temple branches of the Tendai school, of the Tō-ji and the Tendai [esoteric] teachings, and all others throughout Japan who practice the Lotus Sutra and True Word doctrines, to a band of robbers, an evil mob, persons of evil views. How many kalpas must he suffer before he has made atonement for such a grave offense?

In the “Teacher of the Law” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha describes the offense committed by those who revile the upholders of the sutra, saying, “If there should be an evil person who, his mind destitute of goodness, should for the space of a kalpa appear in the presence of the Buddha and constantly curse and revile the Buddha, that person’s offense would still be rather light. But if there were a person who spoke only one evil word to curse and defame the lay persons or monks or nuns who read and recite the Lotus Sutra, then his offense would be very grave.” And if the offense is this grave for merely reviling an upholder of the sutra, what of the offense of one who writes a book that turns all the people of Japan into revilers?

Or what of the offense of someone who declares that not one person in a thousand has ever been saved through this sutra and who thus implants doubts in the minds of the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra? Or the offense of someone who slanders the Law by saying that one should cast this sutra aside and instead put one’s faith in provisional sutras such as the Meditation Sutra?

My plea is that all these monks, nuns, and lay men and women believers who have converted to Genkū’s doctrines will summarily cast aside the erroneous teachings set forth in Nembutsu Chosen above All and transfer their faith at once to the Lotus Sutra so that they may in future escape the flames of the Avīci hell!

Question: What passages can you cite as proof that Genkū is guilty of slandering the Lotus Sutra?

Answer: In the second volume of the Lotus Sutra it says: “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.” And one gives evidence of such a lack of faith when one causes others to cast aside the Lotus Sutra.

Therefore Bodhisattva Vasubandhu in the first volume of his Treatise on the Buddha Nature states: “To hate and reject the Mahayana teachings will make one an ichchantika, or person of incorrigible disbelief, because in doing so one causes living beings to cast aside these teachings.” The evidence that one is slandering the Law is found in the fact that one causes this Law or these teachings to be cast aside.

And is Nembutsu Chosen above All not a book that causes people to cast aside the Lotus Sutra? Are not Genkū’s injunctions to “ignore and abandon” the Lotus Sutra the same as the words “to hate and reject” in the passage from Treatise on the Buddha Nature that I have just cited?

Moreover, it is further evidence that one is slandering the Lotus Sutra when one asserts that that sutra’s explanation of how small acts of goodness may lead to the attainment of Buddhahood is like similar statements in the sutras preached in the previous forty and more years in that they refer to the attainment of Buddhahood at some other time. Therefore T’ien-t’ai in his commentary states: “If one does not have faith that small acts of goodness can lead to the attainment of Buddhahood, then one will destroy the seeds for becoming a Buddha in this world.”
Miao-lo repeats the same idea when he says: "This [Lotus] sutra opens the seeds of Buddhism inherent in the beings of each of the six paths. But if one slanders the sutra, then the seeds will be destroyed."  

Thus if we go by the meaning of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures Buddha, and the Buddhas of the ten directions, and by that of Vasubandhu, T'ien-t'ai, and Miao-lo, then Genkū must be recognized as a person who slanders the Law. When all is said, his intention in writing Nembutsu Chosen above All was clearly to encourage people to cast aside the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings. Hence there can be no doubt that he has slandered the Law.

I come now to the third section of my work, in which I will discuss the origin of the slanders of the Law contained in Nembutsu Chosen above All.

Question: What proof do you have that Genkū deserves to be called a slanderer of the Law?

Answer: If we examine the statements made in Nembutsu Chosen above All, we find that all the sacred teachings of the Buddha's preaching life are divided into two categories. One is called the Sacred Way teachings, the difficult-to-practice way, or sundry practices. The other is called the Pure Land teachings, the easy-to-practice way, or correct practices. Of these two categories, that called the Sacred Way, difficult-to-practice, or sundry practices refers to the teachings set forth in the Flower Garland, Āgama, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, Lotus, Nirvana, and Mahāvairochana sutras, while that called Pure Land, easy-to-practice, or correct refers to the Nembutsu, or the invocation of Amida's name, and the other practices described in the three Pure Land sutras.

Pointing out the faultiness of the Sacred Way, difficult-to-practice, or sundry practices, the text states that if ordinary people in this latter age of ours carry out such practices, if a hundred of them do so, no more than one or two will even in rare cases achieve salvation; if a thousand do so, not more than three or five will in rare cases achieve salvation; and sometimes when a thousand do so, not one will be saved. The text hence refers to such persons as a band of robbers, an evil mob, persons of evil views and erroneous and sundry practices.

Regarding the effectiveness of the Pure Land, easy-to-practice, or correct practices, the text asserts that if ordinary people in this latter age carry them out, then if ten persons do so, ten will gain rebirth in the Pure Land, and if a hundred do so, a hundred will gain rebirth. These are the erroneous assertions that constitute the slander of the Law.

Question: The idea of dividing the sacred teachings of the Buddha's lifetime into two categories, the Sacred Way and the Pure Land, the difficult-to-practice and the easy-to-practice, the sundry practices and the correct practices, and condemning the Sacred Way, the difficult-to-practice, and the sundry practices as unsuited to the age and the capacities of the people, was not original with Genkū. It was put forth earlier by the three Chinese scholars T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o, and Shan-tao. And it was not something simply concocted arbitrarily by these three scholars, but rather had its origin in Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra of Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna. Therefore, if Genkū is to be branded as a slanderer of the Law, then should not Nāgārjuna and the three Chinese scholars likewise be called slanderers of the Law?

Answer: Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna and the three Chinese scholars stated that in the various sutras preached in the forty and more years prior to the Lotus Sutra there were to be found the difficult-to-practice and easy-to-practice ways. But it was Genkū who first bor-
rowed these categories put forward earlier by Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna and the three Chinese scholars and added the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings to the difficult-to-practice, sundry practices category. And the disciples who had been converted to his views, unaware of the error of their teacher, proceeded to put forward this erroneous interpretation as though it were correct, spreading it throughout the country. As a result, the ordinary people of our country have all come to believe that the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings are not by their nature suited to the present age and to the capacities of the people.

On top of this, certain Tendai and True Word scholars, greedy for worldly recognition, have gone along with the trend of the times, spewing out evil assertions to the effect that the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings are in fact not suited to the age and the capacities of the people, thus helping to bolster the erroneous doctrines of *Nembutsu Chosen above All*. Because of their momentary surrender to desire, they have turned against the truthful words of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions, who called upon the world to “make certain the Law will long endure” and “spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa,” and have caused all living beings to be guilty of the crime of cutting off the tongues of the Buddhas of the three existences and the ten directions. It is truly as the sutra has said, “in that evil age there will be monks with perverse wisdom and hearts that are fawning and crooked who will suppose they have attained what they have not attained.”56 “Evil demons will take possession of others,”57 so that they “fail to understand the Buddha’s expedient means, how he preaches the Law in accordance with what is appropriate.”58

Question: You say that Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna and the three Chinese scholars did not include the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings in the category that they called the Sacred Way, difficult-to-practice, or sundry, but that Genkū took it upon himself to do so. How do we know this?

Answer: One need not search very far to find proof of that. It is found right in *Nembutsu Chosen above All*.

Question: In what passage of that work?

Answer: In the first chapter of *Nembutsu Chosen above All* we find a theme stating: “Regarding the passage in which the Meditation Master Tāo-ch’o distinguished between the Sacred Way teachings and the Pure Land teachings and urged people to abandon the former and immediately embrace the latter.” The author, Genkū, first quotes from *Collected Essays on the World of Peace and Delight*, and then, in a passage that gives his own personal opinion in the matter, he states: “First of all, there are two kinds of Sacred Way teachings: one is the Mahayana and the other is the Hinayana. Within the Mahayana there are various categories such as the exoteric and the esoteric teachings, and the provisional and the true teachings. But from the point of view of this treatise [*Collected Essays on the World of Peace and Delight*], only the exoteric Mahayana and the provisional Mahayana are taken into consideration, and these require countless kalpas of religious practice before one can attain enlightenment. Judging from this, we may assume that the esoteric Mahayana teachings and the true Mahayana teachings are both included in the Sacred Way.” This is a passage from *Nembutsu Chosen above All*.

The meaning of this passage is that, while the Meditation Master Tāo-ch’o in his *Collected Essays on the World of Peace and Delight* divides the Mahayana and Hinayana sutras preached in the forty and more years prior to the Lotus
Sutra into two categories, the Sacred Way and the Pure Land teachings, Genkū, on the basis of his own private opinion, regards the true Mahayana of the Lotus Sutra and the esoteric Mahayana of the True Word teachings as the same as the provisional Mahayana set forth in the sutras preached in the earlier forty years and more, dubbing them a part of the Sacred Way teaching. As Genkū puts it, “Judging from this, we may assume...”

Because Genkū takes this approach to the matter, when he discusses the two categories of difficult-to-practice and easy-to-practice teachings set forth by T’an-luan, he likewise, on the basis of his private opinion, puts the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings in the difficult-to-practice category. And when he comes to discuss the two categories of correct and sundry practices set forth by the Reverend Shan-tao, he similarly, on the basis of his private opinion, puts the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings in the sundry practices category.

The incalculable slander of the Law that is to be found throughout the sixteen sections of Nembutsu Chosen above All springs entirely from the error expressed in this one brief passage in which the author says, “Judging from this, we may assume...” What a fearful thing indeed!

Let me note here that Genkū’s disciples, in an effort to rescue their teacher from the consequences of his erroneous view, have offered this explanation. It is customary in the various Buddhist schools, they say, even where there is no definite passage in the sutras or treatises to cite as proof, to gather together practices or pronouncements that are of a similar nature and put them together in a single category. Hence, when Nembutsu Chosen above All places the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings in the category called sundry practices, contrasting them with the correct practices and counseling one to abandon them, it is in no way expressing disapproval of the teachings themselves. It is simply that, in this latter age, when there is little inclination toward religious striving, most living beings are ordinary persons who are constantly drowning in delusion and suffering. If one is to find a type of religious practice that is easy to carry out and suited to the capacities of such persons, then one would have to recommend the Nembutsu, or the invocation of Amida’s name, as suited to their capacities, easy to practice, and in this sense superior to the practices recommended by other doctrines.

This does not mean that we are attempting to decide on the relative superiority of the provisional and true teachings or to comment on their relative shallowness or profundity. When we speak of sundry practices, the term “sundry” is not meant to be derogatory. The word “sundry” simply means that these practices are “not pure,” or are mixed, in nature.

Pronouncements of this kind are not unknown even in the sutras and treatises or in the writings of the various Buddhist scholars. Thus, for example, Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land, a work by an eminent sage of Mount Hiei, expresses this very same idea.

Hence, in the introduction to Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land, the author states: “The texts of the teachings, whether exoteric or esoteric, are not uniform, and there are many different active and meditative practices. For persons of keen wisdom and diligent practice these may present no difficulties, but how can a dull and stubborn fellow such as I venture in such matters? Therefore I rely on this one method of the Nembutsu.”

In this passage from the introduction, the sage of former times Eshin is not attempting to refute the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings. He is
simply saying that for persons who are dull and stubborn in capacity such as himself, they are difficult to learn about and difficult to practice. But being a person of witless nature, he does not venture to criticize the teachings themselves.

Moreover, in addition to the introduction, the main body of the work contains ten sections, and in the eighth of these large sections it is stated: “In recommending the practice of the Nembutsu as I am doing now, I do not mean to put an end to the various other excellent religious practices. I am merely saying that, whether one is a man or a woman, an eminent or a humble person, whether one is walking, standing still, sitting, or lying down, regardless of the time or place, this practice is not difficult to carry out. At the final hour, when one is concentrating upon the desire for rebirth in the Pure Land, there is no practice more convenient and effective than the Nembutsu.”

If we examine these passages, we see that, although Genkū’s Nembutsu Chosen above All is a work in one volume, while Genshin’s Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land is in three volumes, they are alike in selecting from among the sacred teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime this easy-to-practice Nembutsu and recommending it as suitable for foolish persons in this latter age who desire to gain salvation. If the Reverend Genkū is to fall into the evil paths of existence because he put the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings in the difficult-to-practice category, then the sage of former times Eshin can hardly escape being penalized for the same sort of error.

To these disciples of Genkū I reply as follows: In order to rescue your teacher from the charge of slandering the Law, you drag in Genshin’s Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land. But in doing so, you are in danger of call-
lishing an easy-to-practice category, then if we go by the “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter of the Lotus Sutra and take all the benefits gained from practicing the five pāramitās described in the earlier sutras, that is, almsgiving, the keeping of the precepts, forbearance, assiduousness, and Nembutsu concentration over a period of eight hundred thousand million kalpas, and compare these to the benefits gained by one moment of belief in and understanding of the Lotus Sutra, then the benefits gained by belief and understanding are a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million times greater than the benefits gained by Nembutsu concentration and the others of the five pāramitās preached earlier.

Whether we speak in terms of which practices are difficult or easy, inferior or superior, or in terms of which practices, though simple, bring the greater benefits, then it is clear that, in comparison to the Lotus Sutra, the Nembutsu concentration described in the Meditation Sutra and similar sutras is the most difficult of all difficult practices, the most inferior among all those labeled inferior.

Furthermore, the degree to which the teachings can assist evil or foolish persons depends upon how profound they are.

According to the teachings on the precepts that were put forth in the twelve years represented by the Āgama sutras, no persons who have committed the four major offenses or the five cardinal sins can hope to gain enlightenment in their present existence.

The teachings set forth in the Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, and Buddha Infinite Life sutras are more profound than those of the Āgama sutras. Therefore, when these sutras are setting forth teachings to encourage the search for enlightenment, they include persons guilty of grave offenses among those who can hope to achieve such enlightenment. But when they are dealing with the teachings relating to the precepts, they do not permit persons guilty of the seven cardinal sins to undergo the ceremony of acceptance of the precepts in their present existence. Moreover, neither the teachings of encouragement nor those of prohibition set forth in these sutras admit the possibility of attaining enlightenment to persons who by their nature are destined to follow the two vehicles of voice-hearer and cause-awakened one, or those who are inherently ichchantikas, or persons of incorrigible disbelief, and are without the nature of enlightenment.

According to the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, however, not only are persons who have committed the five cardinal sins or the seven cardinal sins or have slandered the Law included among those who can hope to gain salvation, but those destined by their nature to follow the two vehicles and those who are inherently of incorrigible disbelief and lack the nature of enlightenment are included in that group.

The fact is that, in the Latter Day of the Law, such persons of incorrigible disbelief who are constantly sunk in delusion and suffering are very numerous. How can the Meditation Sutra and the other sutras preached in the first forty and more years of the Buddha’s preaching life assist such persons? Only the Lotus and Nirvana sutras can help those who by nature are constantly sunk in delusion and suffering or by nature are destined for the two vehicles.

When Buddhist teachers who base their teachings on the sutras preached in the first forty and more years claim that such sutras are fitted to the capacities of the people, they do so because they have not yet understood the true nature of the Buddha’s teachings.

To be sure, when we look at the passage cited earlier from the introduc-
tion to Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land, it would appear as though the author is lumping the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings with the other exoteric and esoteric teachings and declaring that for the most part they are not suited to the capacities of persons in this latter age. If we carefully examine from beginning to end the three volumes that make up this work, however, we see that in the tenth large section, that entitled “Questions and Answers for Clarification,” in the latter part, where he passes judgment on the relative superiority of the various religious practices, he quotes passages from various pre-Lotus sutras such as the Meditation on the Buddha, Meditation to Behold the Buddhas, Accumulated Treasures, and Great Collection sutras, and from treatises such as Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra, and declares that, of all the ten thousand different religious practices, the Nembutsu concentration is to be judged as the king of all concentration practices. But later there is a passage in question and answer form in which he says that the Nembutsu concentration or meditative practice described in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra is a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million times less effective than one instant of belief in and understanding of the Lotus Sutra.

Questioned further as to just what this means, he explains that when he says that the Nembutsu concentration is the most superior of all the ten thousand practices, he is speaking only of the practices set forth in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus.

One should understand, therefore, that Eshin’s purpose in writing Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land was to train the dull capacities of persons of this latter age and guide them into an understanding of the Lotus Sutra. It is similar to the case of the Buddha, who in the sutras preached in the first forty and more years of his preaching life trained the capacities of his listeners through the provisional teachings and thus guided them to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

Therefore, in the final years of his life Eshin wrote Essentials of the One Vehicle Teaching. In the introduction to this work he states: “From times past the various schools of Buddhism have argued over the question of which teachings are provisional and which true, citing the different sutras and treatises that they rely upon and insisting on the correctness of their own views and the incorrectness of the views of others. In the winter, the tenth month of the year of the Kankō era with the cyclical sign hinoe-uma [1006], when I was ill, I sighed to myself and said, ‘Though I have encountered the Buddhist teachings, if I should fail to understand the Buddha’s true meaning and end my life empty-handed, how could I ever free myself from regret?’ Therefore I began delving into the meaning of the sutras and treatises and the commentaries of the worthies and wise men, in some cases asking others to assist me, in other cases carrying out my own research, setting aside all the partisan and one-sided interpretations of my own school and the other schools and concentrating on discovering the ultimate meaning of the provisional wisdom and the true wisdom. In the end I came to the conclusion that the one vehicle represents the true principle, while the five vehicles outlined for human beings, heavenly beings, voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, and bodhisattvas were preached by the Buddha as expedient means. And now that I have dispelled the ignorance that beset me in this present existence, I may die anytime without feelings of regret!”

This passage in the introduction reveals to the fullest Eshin’s true view of the matter. When he says he is set-
ting aside the partisan and one-sided interpretations of his own school and the other schools, he means he is setting aside the Pure Land doctrine, does he not? And when he says he has realized that the one vehicle is the true principle, he is basing himself on the Lotus Sutra, is he not?

The Supervisor of Priests Genshin began his Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land in the winter, the eleventh month of the second year of the Eikan era [984], the year with the cyclical sign kino-e-saru. And he wrote Essentials of the One Vehicle Teaching around the winter, the tenth month of the second year of the Kankō era,59 the year with the cyclical sign hino-e-uma. Thus the two works are separated by an interval of over twenty years. In setting forth provisional teachings first and the true teaching later, he is doing just as the Buddha himself did, or as such teachers as Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, and T’ien-t’ai did.

You [the disciples of Genkū] cite Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land in an attempt to excuse your teacher from the charges of slandering the Law. But in doing so, you are deliberately putting in the same category works that in fact do not belong in the same category.

If, as you say, you are putting in one category works that actually belong together, then on what points are they similar?

Works such as the Flower Garland Sutra deny that persons of the two vehicles can achieve full enlightenment. Therefore we may say that they lack the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. The Correct and Equal and Wisdom sutas likewise do not recognize the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. And when the Meditation Sutra and similar sutas speak of rebirth in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss, they are describing a rebirth that is an expedient means. None of these achievements of Buddhahood or births are comparable to the type of rebirth described in the Lotus Sutra. All of these are referring to a rebirth and achievement of Buddhahood that is to occur at some other time.

Moreover, if you say that the Supervisor of Priests Genshin called the Nembutsu an easy-to-practice way because it is easy to practice in the course of the four activities of daily life, namely, walking, standing still, sitting, and lying down, and called the Lotus Sutra a difficult-to-practice way because it is difficult to practice in the course of the four daily activities, then Genshin must have been going against the interpretation put forth by T’ien-t’ai and Miao-lo.

The reason is that the Great Teacher Miao-lo declared that if people of dull capacities or those lacking in wisdom in this latter age carry out the practice of the Lotus Sutra, they will find it easy to practice, for Bodhisattva Universal Worthy and Many Treasures and the Buddhas of the ten directions will appear before them. Thus he states: “Chant the Lotus Sutra with your ordinary distracted mind. You do not have to enter into a state of mental concentration. Whether sitting, standing, or walking, just fix your whole mind on the words of the Lotus Sutra.”60

The purpose of this passage of commentary is to assure foolish persons of this latter age that they are included among those who can carry out the practice. The term “the ordinary distracted mind” is used in contrast to the term “the mind fixed in concentration.” Chanting the Lotus Sutra means chanting all eight volumes, one volume, one word, one phrase, one verse, or the daimoku, or title, and includes responding to the sutra with joy for a single moment and continual propagation to the fiftieth person. The words
“whether sitting, standing, or walking” mean that there is no objection to [fixing your whole mind on the words of the Lotus Sutra while] carrying out the four activities of daily life. The term “whole mind” does not mean the mind that is concentrated in meditation, nor does it mean the mind that observes the truth. It is the mind that is found within the ordinary distracted mind of daily life.

The practice of fixing the mind on the words of the Lotus Sutra is not like fixing the mind on the words of the other sutras. Though one may chant only one word of the Lotus Sutra, within this one word are contained all the words of the eighty thousand precious doctrines of Shakyamuni, and it holds within it the blessings or benefits of all the Buddhas.

The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai states in volume eight of The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra: “Though you do not hold in your hand a scroll of the sutra, yet you are constantly reading the sutra; though your mouth utters no words, you are chanting all the many sacred texts; though no Buddha is preaching the Law, at all times you can hear his pure sounds; though you do not ponder in your mind, everywhere you illumine the entire realm of phenomena.”

The meaning of this passage is that, although you may not hold in your hand the eight scrolls that make up the Lotus Sutra, if you are a person who has faith in the sutra, then all twenty-four hours of the day you are one who “upholds the sutra.” Though your mouth may not utter the sounds of one who is reciting the sutra, if you have faith in the Lotus Sutra, then every day, every hour, every instant you are one who reads all the sutras.

Though over two thousand years have already gone by since the Buddha passed into extinction, where there is a person who has faith in the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha’s voice still lingers there, and hour by hour, minute by minute, instant by instant that person hears the Buddha assuring him that he, the Buddha, has never died. Even though that person may not in his mind be meditating upon the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, he will everywhere illumine the entire realm of phenomena in ten directions. All these virtues pertain solely to the persons who practice the Lotus Sutra.

For this reason, when one who has faith in the Lotus Sutra approaches one’s final hour, one will enjoy these benefits. Though one’s mind is not fixed in concentration on the Buddha, though one’s mouth does not recite the sutras, and though one may not be in a place of religious practice, without employing one’s mind one will illumine the entire realm of phenomena, without uttering a sound one will recite all the sutras, and without taking a single scroll in hand one will grip all eight scrolls of the Lotus Sutra.

Is this not an easy practice that is a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million times superior to that of the believer in the Nembutsu practice of the provisional teachings who, endeavoring to rectify his thoughts in his final hour, attempts to carry out the ten recitations of the Buddha’s name?

Therefore the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai in volume ten of The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra says: “It is because it is superior to all the other teachings that the chapter describing it is called ‘The Benefits of Responding with Joy.’”

The Great Teacher Miao-lo explains that the Lotus Sutra is more suited than the other sutras to persons of shallow capacities. Thus he refutes the view of the other Buddhist teachers who fail to understand this but suppose that the Lotus Sutra is suitable only for persons whose capacities are profound. He
states: “Probably those who are mistaken in their understanding fail to realize how great is the benefit gained even by a beginner [in the practice of the Lotus Sutra]. They assume that benefit is reserved for those who are far advanced in practice and disparage beginners. Therefore, the sutra here demonstrates its power by revealing that though their practice is shallow, the benefit that results is profound indeed.”

The words “the sutra here demonstrates its power by revealing…” in this passage of commentary mean that the Lotus Sutra is superior to the Meditation Sutra and other provisional sutras. Therefore, though the practice is shallow, the benefits are profound, and this indicates that persons of shallow capacity are included among those for whom the Lotus Sutra is suitable.

If the sage of former times Eshin had really declared that the Lotus Sutra is more difficult to practice than the Nembutsu and that it is not suitable for dull and stubborn persons, then he would have been guilty of the same kind of offense as the Anti-Lokāyas, would he not? He would be among those whom Miao-lo has in mind when he speaks of “those who are mistaken in their understanding.”

It may be stated categorically that the three major works of T’ien-t’ai and the commentaries on them by Miao-lo all make clear that the Lotus Sutra is intended to extend salvation to foolish persons, evil persons, women, and persons of incorrigible disbelief who are constantly sunk in delusion and suffering, persons who were overlooked by the other sutras.

But because the other Buddhist teachers fail to understand the Buddha’s intention, they think that the Lotus Sutra is just the same as the other sutras. Or they assert that it is designed for persons whose capacities place them in the ten stages of development or the ten stages of security, or they assert that, though the sutra seems to be offering assurance of the attainment of Buddhahood to ordinary people, this is in fact an attainment that will take place at some other time.

T’ien-t’ai, however, has refuted all these erroneous interpretations, and shown that all beings in the human and heavenly realms and the four evil realms of existence have the capacity to attain enlightenment through the Lotus Sutra. And he points out that both the good and evil deeds a person has done in past existences can become the seeds of enlightenment when viewed in terms of the seeds of similar species and the seeds of opposites, and that if they have been born into the human or heavenly realms, it is impossible to suppose that they did not in their past existences observe the five precepts and the ten good precepts.

If Eshin in fact contradicted these principles of doctrine, how could he be said to have understood the teachings of the Tendai school? But Genkū was profoundly confused in his understanding of these principles, and thus he read his own mistaken views into Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land, falling into error himself and leading others astray as well.

Because he happened to have some good karma from his past, he was able to learn of the true teaching. But then he turned about and tried to convert all living beings to the provisional teachings, and even caused others to denounce the true teaching. Was he not an evil teacher?

The persons who had received the seeds of Buddhahood in the inconceivably remote past or those who had formed a relationship with one or another of the sixteen sons of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence suffered in the evil paths for a period of numberless major world system dust particle kalpas or of major world system dust particle kalpas,
respectively. This is because they cast aside the great doctrines of the Lotus Sutra and instead returned to the provisional and Hinayana teachings of the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra. And later they cast aside the provisional sutras and returned to transmigration through the six lower realms of existence. Those persons who despised and abused the bodhisattva Never Disparaging fell into the Avichi hell for a period of a thousand kalpas because they put faith in the teachers of the provisional teachings and spoke slanderously of the person who propagated the true sutra.

Genkū did not merely cast aside the true sutras and turn to the provisional sutras himself, but he encouraged others to cast aside the true sutras and turn to the provisional sutras. And he not only prevented persons who believed in the provisional sutras from turning to the true sutras, but he went a step farther by heaping abuse on those who practiced the teachings of the true sutras. Such is his offense that it will be many long kalpas before he can hope to emerge from hell!

Question: Commentay on the Ten Stages Sutra is a comprehensive treatise dealing with all the teachings of the Buddha's lifetime. Why then, in its discussion of the two categories of easy-to-practice and difficult-to-practice ways, are the Lotus Sutra, True Word teachings, and Nirvana Sutra not included?

Answer: Among the various Mahayana sutras set forth during the Buddha's lifetime, there are works such as the Flower Garland Sutra, which is made up of the section preached immediately following his enlightenment and the section added later. In the section of the Flower Garland Sutra preached immediately following his enlightenment, it is not stated whether persons of the two vehicles can or cannot attain Buddhahood.

The various sutras in the Correct and Equal category uniformly deny that persons of the two vehicles or those of incorrigible disbelief who are without the nature of enlightenment can attain Buddhahood, and the sutras in the Wisdom category take the same position.

Generally speaking, then, the Mahayana sutras preached in the forty and more years prior to the Lotus Sutra do not, as do the Lotus, Nirvana, and Mahāvairocana sutras, admit that persons of the two vehicles and those of incorrigible disbelief who lack the nature of enlightenment can attain Buddhahood. Examined in this light, then, we see that the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra and the Lotus Sutra itself are as mutually opposed in nature as water is to fire.

In the period following the passing of the Buddha, the scholars Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu both produced as many as a thousand treatises. The treatises they produced fall into two categories, the comprehensive treatises that deal with a number of sutras or other works, and the special treatises that deal with one particular sutra or work. The comprehensive treatises also fall into two categories, namely, those that deal comprehensively with the sutras preached in the first forty and more years of the Buddha's preaching life, and those that deal with all the works of his fifty-year preaching life. Depending on whether a particular treatise admits or denies the possibility of attaining Buddhahood to those persons who are destined by their nature to follow the two vehicles or those of incorrigible disbelief who lack the nature of enlightenment, it is assigned to the provisional teaching or to the true teaching category.

As an example, Great Perfection of Wisdom was written by Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna and translated into Chinese by the Tripitaka Master Kumārajīva.
[When this treatise is relying on the Wisdom sutras, it denies that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood, but when it follows the Lotus Sutra, it declares that persons of the two vehicles may do so. Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra was also written by Bodhisattva Nāgarjuna and translated into Chinese by the Tripitaka Master Kumārajīva.] This treatise, Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra, also denies that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood. Thus we may understand that this treatise is setting forth the opinion stated in the various Mahayana sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra.

Question: Where in Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra is it stated that persons of the two vehicles cannot attain Buddhahood?

Answer: Volume five of Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra says: “If one falls into the realm of the voice-hearer or the realm of the pratyekabuddha, this spells death to the bodhisattva practice, for in doing so, one loses every kind of benefit. If one falls into hell, one need not have such fears. But if one falls into the realm of the two vehicles, one should be greatly terrified. For although one has fallen into hell, in the end one can still achieve Buddhahood. But if one has fallen into the realm of the two vehicles, then in the end the path to Buddhahood is forever blocked.”

This passage denies the possibility of attaining Buddhahood to persons of the two vehicles. It is like the passage in the Vimalakīrti Sutra that says, “Within the Buddha’s teachings they are like seeds that have already been spoiled.”

Question: You say that when Great Perfection of Wisdom relies on the Wisdom sutras, it denies that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood, but when it follows the Lotus Sutra, it declares that persons of the two vehicles may do so. What are your passages of proof?

Answer: Volume one hundred of Great Perfection of Wisdom states: “Question: Is there a doctrine that is very profound and superior to the doctrines of the Wisdom sutras, so that, although the Wisdom sutras are entrusted to Ānanda, these other sutras are entrusted to the bodhisattvas? Answer: The prajñā-pāramitā teachings of the Wisdom sutras are not a secret doctrine. But the other sutras such as the Lotus Sutra contain bestowals of prophecy concerning the arhats’ future attainment of Buddhahood. Therefore the great bodhisattvas are the ones who are best qualified to receive these sutras and make use of them. These sutras are like a great physician who can change poison into medicine.”

And volume ninety-three of Great Perfection of Wisdom states: “The fact that arhats are capable of attaining Buddhahood is not something that can be understood by those who discuss principles of doctrine. Only the Buddhas are able to comprehend it.”

If we examine these passages, we see that what assigns the treatises of scholars to provisional or true teachings is none other than the provisional and true teachings of the Buddha.

Those teachers who rely on the provisional sutras, however, rashly assume that the Lotus Sutra is the same as the provisional teachings set forth in the Meditation Sutra and similar sutras. They borrow the principles of the Lotus and Nirvana sutras and number them among the virtues of the three Pure Land sutras, claiming that through these sutras persons who are by nature destined for the two vehicles or persons of incorrigible disbelief who lack the nature of enlightenment and are constantly sunk in delusion and suffering may gain rebirth in the Pure Land. If accused of confusing the provisional teachings with the true teachings, how
can they plead innocent? They are like the Confucians with their secular writings who steal ideas from the Buddhist texts and use them to adorn the non-Buddhist works. Such persons can hardly escape accusations of slandering the Law.

The Buddha himself has made clear the distinction between the provisional teachings and the true teachings. If we examine the matter, we find that the crucial question is whether persons destined by nature for the two vehicles and those who lack the nature of enlightenment may or may not attain Buddhahood.

Translators who fail to understand this point, when they come to translate the suttas preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, make it appear as though these suttas allow persons of the two vehicles to become Buddhas and those who lack the nature of enlightenment to attain Buddhahood. But translators who understand this point, when they translate the pre-Lotus suttas, do not grant the possibility of attaining Buddhahood to persons of the two vehicles or those who lack the nature of enlightenment.

Because of the situation I have just described, teachers who fail to understand the Buddha's meaning claim that it is made clear in the pre-Lotus suttas that persons destined for the two vehicles and those who lack the nature of enlightenment can attain Buddhahood, and they hence regard the Lotus Sutra and the pre-Lotus suttas as identical. Or if they encounter passages in the pre-Lotus suttas that speak disparagingly of persons destined for the two vehicles or those who lack the nature of enlightenment, they decide on this basis that this view is characteristic of "suttas that are complete and final," while the more lenient view found in the Lotus and Nirvana sutras is characteristic of "suttas that are not complete and final." Both these two positions I have just described represent a misunderstanding of the Buddha's meaning and a confusion of the provisional and the true teachings.

It is not Genkū alone, however, who is guilty of putting forth such erroneous ideas. Others, ranging from the scholars and the translators of the suttas of India to the Buddhist teachers of China, have held similar ideas. Thus the teachers of the Treatise on the Ten Stages Sutra school and the Summary of the Mahayana school claim that the prospects of attaining Buddhahood immediately held out by the teachings set forth in the Buddha's lifetime actually refer to the attainment of Buddhahood at some very different time. And Shan-tao and Huai-kan claim that the passage in the Lotus Sutra that says, "If persons once exclaim, 'Hail to the Buddha!' [then all have attained the Buddha way]," likewise refers to the attainment of Buddhahood at some very different time.

All these views are errors that result from a failure to distinguish correctly between the provisional and the true teachings. If even bodhisattvas who composed treatises, Tripiṭaka masters who translated suttas, and teachers who had achieved enlightenment through meditation could still make errors such as these, then how much more open to error must be the mediocre teachers of this latter age!

Question: Since you yourself are a man of this latter age, have you any right to criticize the scholars and translators and teachers in this manner?

Answer: Ordinarily one ought not to venture such criticisms. But the commentaries written by the teachers of the Summary of the Mahayana school and by Shan-tao and the others fail to grasp the distinction between the provisional and the true teachings and rashly assert that the Lotus Sutra is promising the attainment of Buddhahood at some other time in the future.
Therefore they are as different from the commentaries of T’ien-t’ai and Miao-lo as water is from fire.

But when I set aside these contradictory assertions of the teachers and examine the sutras and treatises to determine the truth of the matter, I find that the distinction between the two teachings, the provisional and the true, is based upon the Buddha’s own pronouncements, and later Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu reiterated the distinction. Therefore those teachers who abide by this distinction I proceed to look up to, and those teachers who do not abide by this distinction I proceed to ignore. It is not as though I were putting forth any opinion of my own as to what is right in the matter. I am merely pointing out the discrepancies in the opinions offered by others.

I come now to the fourth section of my work, in which I offer passages showing what steps should be taken to deal with those who slander the Law.

These are of two kinds. First are those that make clear the fact that the Buddhist Law is entrusted first of all to the ruler of the nation and his high ministers, and to the four kinds of believers. Second are those that describe the correct steps to be taken to deal with those who slander the Law within the jurisdiction of the ruler.

With regard to the first type, the passages that make clear that the Buddhist Law is entrusted to the ruler, his high ministers, and the four kinds of believers, I note that the Benevolent Kings Sutra says: “The Buddha announced to King Prasenajit, ‘Thus I entrust my teachings to the ruler of the nation rather than to the monks and nuns or to men and women of pure faith.’ Why do I do so? Because they do not possess the kind of power and authority that the king has. . . . The three treasures of this sutra I thus entrust to the rulers of the nation and to my disciples of the four kinds of believers.’”

And the twenty-eighth volume of the Great Collection Sutra states: “Though for countless existences in the past the ruler of a state may have practiced the giving of alms, observed the precepts, and cultivated wisdom, if he sees that my teaching is in danger of perishing and stands idly by without doing anything to protect it, then [all the inestimable roots of goodness that he has planted through the practices just mentioned] will be entirely wiped out, and his country will become the scene of three inauspicious occurrences. . . . After his life has come to an end, he will be reborn in the great hell.”

The passage from the Benevolent Kings Sutra indicates that the Buddhist Law is entrusted first of all to the ruler of the nation, and only after that to the four kinds of believers. That is, the ruler who occupies the position of king and the ministers who implement his government are first of all charged with the task of using the Buddhist Law to bring order to the country.

The passage from the Great Collection Sutra points out that though, for the sake of the Buddhist Law, the ruler and his ministers over a period of countless kalpas may make offerings of their head or eyes, observe the eighty thousand precepts, and master countless numbers of Buddhist doctrines, if they do not take steps to insure that the correct rather than the incorrect teachings are propagated throughout the nation, then the nation will be visited by the three disasters of violent winds, prolonged drought, and torrential rains, the people will be forced to flee abroad, and the ruler and his ministers will invariably fall into the three evil realms of existence.

Again the Nirvana Sutra, preached by the Buddha in his final hours in the grove of sal trees, in the third volume
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states: “Now I entrust the correct teaching to the rulers, the ministers, the high officials, and the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. . . . Those who fail to guard the Law shall be known as shave-pated laymen.”

And it also says: “Good man, defenders of the correct teaching need not observe the five precepts or practice the rules of proper behavior. Rather they should carry knives and swords, bows and arrows, halberds and lances.”

And again it says: “Even if one does not observe the five precepts, if one defends the correct teaching, then one may be called a practitioner of the great vehicle. Defenders of the correct teaching ought to arm themselves with knives and swords, weapons and staves.”

During the first forty and more years of the Buddha’s preaching life, as is made clear by the precepts set forth in the Brahmā Net Sutra and other texts, the ruler of the nation, the ministers, and other persons were forbidden to carry or store up any kind of swords, staves, bows, arrows, spears, battle-axes, or other weapons of assault. If they carried or stored up such weapons, then in their present existence they would invariably lose their status as ruler of the nation or as a monk or a nun, and in their next existence they would fall into the three evil paths of existence.

And yet now in our present age we find both members of the clergy and ordinary lay persons carrying bows and arrows, swords and staves. If we went by the text of the Brahmā Net Sutra, we would say that without doubt they are destined to fall into the evil paths of existence. If we did not have the passages of the Nirvana Sutra quoted above, there would be no hope of salvation for such persons.

But if we go by these various passages from the Nirvana Sutra, we see that those who carry bows and arrows, swords and staves, and use them to control monks who follow erroneous teachings and to guard and protect monks who uphold the correct teaching will be able to wipe out the bad effects of the four major offenses and five cardinal sins that they committed in past existences and will certainly and without fail gain understanding of the unsurpassed way.

Again, in volume six of the Golden Light Sutra we read: “Though this sutra exists in the nation, the ruler has never allowed it to be propagated. In his heart he turns away from it, and he takes no pleasure in hearing its teachings. He neither makes offerings to it, honors it, nor praises it. Nor is he willing to honor or make offerings to the four kinds of Buddhists who embrace the sutra. In the end, he makes it impossible for us and the countless other heavenly beings who are our followers to hear this profound and wonderful teaching. He deprives us of the sweet dew of its words and cuts us off from the flow of the correct teaching, so that our majesty and strength are drained away. Thus the number of beings who occupy the evil paths increases, and the number who dwell in the human and heavenly realms decreases. People fall into the river of the sufferings of birth and death and turn their backs on the road to nirvana.

“World-Honored One, we, the four heavenly kings, as well as our various followers and the yakshas and other beings, observing this state of affairs, have decided to abandon this nation, for we have no heart to protect it. And it is not we alone who cast aside this ruler. All the great benevolent deities who guard and watch over the countless different regions of the country will also invariably reject him. And once we and the others abandon and desert this nation, then many different types of disasters will occur in the country, and the ruler will fall from power. Not a single person in the
entire population will possess a heart of goodness; there will be nothing but binding and enslaving, killing and injury, anger and contention. People will slander each other or fawn upon one another, and the laws will be twisted until even the innocent are made to suffer. Pestilence will become rampant, comets will appear again and again, two suns will come forth side by side, and eclipses will occur with unaccustomed frequency. Black arcs and white arcs will span the sky as harbingers of ill fortune, stars will fall, the earth will shake, and noises will issue from the wells. Torrential rains and violent winds will come out of season, famine will constantly occur, and grains and fruits will not ripen. Marauders from many other regions will invade and plunder the nation, the people will suffer all manner of pain and affliction, and no place will exist where one may live in safety.”

Examining this sutra passage, we realize that, though one may pray for the peace and safety of the times, the three calamities may occur in the nation, and this will be because evil teachings are propagated there.

At the present time, numerous prayers are offered for the peace and safety of the nation. And yet in the first year of the Shōka era [1257] there was a severe earthquake, and in the second year of the same era, torrential rains and violent winds occurred and the rice plants failed to ripen. It would appear to me that there is some evil teaching in this country that is bringing about the destruction of the nation.

Nembutsu Chosen above All states at one point: “Concerning the first of the sundry practices, that of reading and reciting sutras, with the exception of the recitation of the Meditation on the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra and the other sutras that preach rebirth in the Pure Land, the embracing, reading, and recitation of all other sutras, whether Mahayana or Hinayana, exoteric or esoteric, is to be regarded as a sundry practice.”

After making this statement, Nembutsu Chosen above All goes on to say: “Next, concerning the question of whether these two types of practices [correct and sundry] are effective or ineffective, it is my opinion that the sundry practices, those set forth in the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings, are ineffective, while [the correct practices described in] the three Pure Land sutras are effective.”

Nembutsu Chosen above All then takes up the statement made by the Reverend Shan-tao in his Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land to the effect that through the correct practices ten persons out of ten and a hundred persons out of a hundred will be reborn in the Pure Land but that through the sundry practices not one person in a thousand will be saved.

Nembutsu Chosen above All then remarks: “In the light of his [Shan-tao’s] statement, I declare that one should abandon such sundry practices and concentrate upon the practice of the Pure Land teachings. What reason would we have to abandon the correct practices of the Pure Land teachings, which insure that out of a hundred persons all one hundred will be reborn in the Pure Land, and cling instead to the various sundry practices and procedures, which could not save even one person in a thousand? Followers of the way should ponder this carefully.”

When we read passages such as these, we may ask how the clergy and lay believers of the world today can be expected to have faith in the sutras [other than the three Pure Land sutras].

Later on, Nembutsu Chosen above All, discussing the question of which is superior and which is easier to practice, the sundry practices of the Lotus Sutra or the correct practices of the Nembutsu teaching, states: “First, as
to which is superior, and second, as to which is easier to practice, I may state that first, as to superiority, the Nembutsu is superior and the other practices are inferior. Second, as to which is easier to practice, the Nembutsu is easier to practice and the others are difficult to practice.”

Then, declaring that the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings are in error, the text says: “Therefore we should understand that religious practices other than the Nembutsu do not accord with the people’s capacities. They are not appropriate for the times. Only the Nembutsu practice for rebirth in the Pure Land is suited to the people’s capacities and the times.”

Further on, the text speaks of how the Buddha ceased to teach the sundry practices of the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings, stating: “[You should understand that] when the Buddha was preaching according to the capacity of his various listeners, he for a time taught the two methods of concentrated meditation and unconcentrated meditation. But later, when he revealed his own enlightenment, he ceased to teach these two methods. The only teaching that, once revealed, shall never cease to be taught is the single doctrine of the Nembutsu.”

Finally Nembutsu Chosen above All states this conviction: “If one wishes to escape quickly from the sufferings of birth and death, one should confront these two superior teachings and then proceed to put aside the teachings of the Sacred Way and choose those of the Pure Land. And if one wishes to follow the teachings of the Pure Land, one should confront the correct and sundry practices and then proceed to abandon all of the sundry and devote one’s entire attention to the correct.”

The disciples of Genkū have taken this book of his, Nembutsu Chosen above All, and spread it all over the sixty and more provinces of Japan. Thus these disciples, addressing the uninformed persons of the time, say, “This reverend priest of ours is a man of foremost wisdom and understanding. He has written this book in order to define the true principles in the matter. He has shut the door on the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings, showing that there is no reason ever for it to be opened again, showing that such teachings are to be abandoned, and there is no reason ever to return to them again.”

When they put forth such ideas, both clergy and lay believers alike nod their heads in assent. When persons ask to learn more about these ideas, the disciples disseminate the teachings through summaries of Nembutsu Chosen above All written in simplified syllabary style, or write works describing the life of the Honorable Hōnen [Genkū]. In this way they spread their criticisms of the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings, saying that they are as useless as last year’s calendar or one’s grandfather’s shoes, or claiming that recitation of the Lotus Sutra is of less worth than the mere music of flutes and strings.

Evil writings of this kind fill the whole nation. Though the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings continue to exist in the land, no one makes any effort to heed them. Though there are still persons who practice these teachings, no one shows any respect or reverence for them. Moreover, because those who pay sole reverence to the Nembutsu tell them that, if they establish a relationship with the Lotus Sutra, this will prevent them from being reborn in the Pure Land, their only thought is to cast away and abandon the Lotus Sutra.

For this reason, the heavenly beings, unable to hear the wonderful teachings of the Lotus Sutra, deprived of all opportunity to savor the taste of the Law, have lost the majesty and strength
they once possessed. The four heavenly kings, along with their followers, have abandoned this country, and the benevolent deities who guard and watch over the land of Japan have already cast it aside and taken their leave.

As a result, in the first year of the Shōka era there was a major earthquake, and in the second year of the same era torrential rains occurred in the spring and the rice plants suffered damage; in the summer there was a severe drought that withered the plants and trees; and with autumn came violent winds and the grain and fruit failed to ripen. Famine swept the land and the people were forced to abandon their homes and wander abroad.

All this is just as the passage in the Golden Light Sutra predicted. And is it not all due to the errors of Nembutsu Chosen above All? The Buddha’s words are not spoken in vain. Evil teachings have been spread abroad, and as a result the three calamities have already arisen to afflict the nation. If steps are not taken to combat these evil doctrines, can those who follow them fail, as the Buddha has predicted, to fall into the three evil paths of existence?

In recent years, however, as I have pondered the passage in the Lotus Sutra that reads, “We care nothing for our bodies or lives but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way,” I have become of one mind with the boy Snow Mountains and Bodhisattva Ever Wailing, determined to give up my life for the propagation of the great vehicle, speaking out strongly and declaring, “Those who put faith in Nembutsu Chosen above All, hoping it will help them in their future lives, will fall into the hell of incessant suffering!”

At such times the disciples of the Honorable Hōnen, hoping to disguise the evil doctrines of his that I mentioned earlier, declare that one may gain rebirth in the Pure Land through religious practices other than the Nembutsu, or maintain that Nembutsu Chosen above All does not refute the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings. Or, in order to prevent lay believers from becoming aware of the erroneous doctrines of Nembutsu Chosen above All, they make up lies, saying, “Nichiren states that those who practice the Nembutsu will fall into the three evil paths of existence!”

Question: Are the disciples of the Honorable Hōnen wrong, then, to declare that one may gain rebirth in the Pure Land through practices other than the Nembutsu?

Answer: If the disciples of the Reverend Hōnen declare that one may gain rebirth in the Pure Land through practices other than the Nembutsu, then they are behaving like the members of the Anti-Lokāyata school who betrayed the teachings of their own master. There are indeed today those who say that one may gain rebirth in the Pure Land through other practices. But in their hearts they believe that one may do so solely through the Nembutsu. They profess otherwise simply so they may avoid charges of speaking slanderously about the other religious practices.

In the end, those who speak in this way are convinced that Nembutsu Chosen above All has revealed the error of the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings, that one should “discard, close, ignore, and abandon” such teachings, that those who propound them are “a band of robbers, persons of erroneous views, of evil views, persons of erroneous and sundry practices,” and that through such teachings “not even one person in a thousand” can be saved, are they not?

We come now to the second kind of passages of proof, those that describe the steps to be taken to deal with persons who slander the Law within the jurisdiction of the ruler. Volume three
of the Nirvana Sutra says: “If anyone should be lazy and indolent, violate the precepts, and vilify the correct teaching, then the rulers, the ministers, and the four kinds of Buddhists should reprimand him and bring him to order. Good man, are the rulers and the four kinds of Buddhists guilty of any fault in doing so, or are they not? I say they are not, World-Honored One. Good man, the rulers and the four kinds of Buddhists are not guilty of any fault.”

Again, volume twelve of the same work states: “When I recall the past, I remember that I was the king of a great state in this continent of Jambudvīpa. My name was Sen’yo, and I loved and venerated the great vehicle scriptures. My heart was pure and good and had no trace of evil, jealousy, or stinginess…. Good man, at that time I cherished the great vehicle teachings in my heart. When I heard the Brahmanas slandering these correct and equal sutras, I put them to death on the spot. Good man, as a result of that action, I never thereafter fell into hell.”

Question: If we consult the Brahmapīta Net Sutra, we see that speaking critically of monks or other persons who belong to the four types of Buddhist believers is one of the so-called pāρājaika offenses, offenses that call for expulsion from the order. When you expose Genkū’s errors in slandering the Law, are you not committing an act that will condemn you to the Avichi hell?

Answer: The Nirvana Sutra states: “Bodhisattva Kāshyapa said to the World-Honored One, ‘Thus Come One, why did you predict that this man [Sunakshatra] will fall into the Avichi hell?’

‘Good man, this monk Sunakshatra has many followers, and all of them believe that Sunakshatra is an arhat and one who has attained the fruits of the [Buddha] way. Therefore I want to dispel these evil and erroneous ideas from their minds. I have for that reason prophesied that Sunakshatra will fall into hell because of his unrestrained and self-indulgent ways.”

In this passage, the term “unrestrained and self-indulgent” is another name for slander of the Law. Genkū, like Sunakshatra, is guilty of slandering the Law, and therefore he will fall into the hell of incessant suffering. The various persons that he has converted are not aware that his teachings are in error, and hence they all refer to Genkū as a man of all-penetrating wisdom or claim that he is a reincarnation of the bodhisattva Great Power or a reincarnation of Shan-tao.

Because I want to wipe these evil and erroneous ideas out of their minds, I have exposed the source from which spring his slanders of the Law. The passage in the Brahmapīta Net Sutra that you refer to deals with criticisms leveled at persons of the four types of believers other than those who slander the Law.

The Buddha himself has delivered a warning, saying, “If someone sees a person slandering the Law and fails to expose that person’s error, he is no disciple of mine!”

Therefore the Nirvana Sutra says: “If, after I have entered nirvana, there are monks who observe the precepts that accord with the customs and manners of their respective areas, are correct in all their modes of behavior, and guard and protect the correct Law, when they see someone attempting to destroy the Law, they should immediately oust him, reproach him, and subject him to punishment. And you should understand that if they do so, they will reap such good fortune that it is beyond all calculation.”

And it also 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. But if he ousts the
destroyer of the Law, reproaches him, or punishes him, then he is my disciple and a true voice-hearer.”

Because I hope to be counted among the Buddha’s disciples, I am writing this work in order to circulate it in the world today and expose the errors of those who slander the Law. My wish is that the Buddhas of the ten directions will assist this work of mine with their power and help me to put an end to the great evil teachings that are being spread abroad, so that I may rescue all living beings from the fault of slandering the Law.

I come now to the fifth section of my work, in which I discuss how difficult it is to encounter good friends and to encounter the true Law.

There are three stages to my discussion. First I make clear how difficult it is to be born a human being and how difficult it is to encounter the Buddhist Law. Second, I show how, although one may be fortunate enough to be born a human being and to encounter the Buddhist Law, one may encounter evil friends and as a result fall into the three evil paths of existence. Third, I make clear what sort of persons can serve effectively as good friends to an ordinary person in this latter age of ours.

First I will make clear how difficult it is to be born a human being and how difficult it is to encounter the Buddhist Law.

Volume thirty-three of the Nirvana Sutra states: “At that time the World-Honored One picked up a bit of dirt from the ground, placed it on top of his fingernail, and said to Kāśyapa, ‘Which are more numerous, these bits of dirt or the dirt in all the worlds in the ten directions?’

“Bodhisattva Kāśyapa replied to the Buddha, ‘World-Honored One, the specks of dirt on a fingernail could not possibly compare to the dirt in all the worlds in the ten directions!’

“The Buddha said, ‘Good man, those who, after one existence as a human being, are able to be born again as human beings; or those who, after having lived in the three evil paths of existence, are able to be born as human beings; who are born with all their faculties in good order, are born in a central land where they can learn of the true faith, are able to acquire the Buddhist way, to practice the way, and after that are able to acquire the correct way and practice the correct way to emancipation, and then are able to gain emancipation, and after gaining emancipation are able to enter nirvana—they are as few as the specks of dirt on a fingernail. But those who, after one existence as a human being, are born in the three evil paths, and having lived there, are once again born in the three evil paths; whose faculties are not in good order, who are born in a remote land where they put faith in erroneous and distorted views, who practice an erroneous way, and who never attain emancipation or the eternal bliss of nirvana—they are as numerous as the dirt in all the worlds in the ten directions.’”

This passage sums up in one paragraph a number of different teachings. It is saying that, after living one existence as a human being, those who are born again as a human being are as few as the particles of dirt on a fingernail. But those who, having lived once as a human being, then fall into the three evil paths, are like the dust particles of the worlds in the ten directions.

Those who, having lived in the three evil paths, are reborn as a human being, are as few as the particles of dirt on a fingernail. But those who, having lived in the three evil paths, are reborn in the three evil paths, are like the dust particles of the worlds in the ten directions.

Those who are born as human beings and whose six faculties are all
unimpaired are as few as the particles of dirt on a fingernail. But those who, though they are born as human beings and their six faculties are unimpaired, are born in a remote land are as numerous as the dust particles of the worlds in the ten directions.

Those who are born in a central land are as few as the particles of dirt on a fingernail. But even if those who are born in a central land were as numerous as the dust particles of the worlds in the ten directions, those who encounter the Buddhist Law would still be as few as the particles of dirt on a fingernail.

The Nirvana Sutra further states: “Those who do not act as an icchantika or cut off roots of goodness but thus are able to take faith in works such as this Nirvana Sutra are as few as the particles of dirt that can be placed on a fingernail. . . . But those who become icchantikas, cutting off all their roots of goodness and failing to take faith in this sutra, are as numerous as the dirt in all the worlds in the ten directions.”

Judging from this passage, those who fail to put faith in the Lotus and Nirvana sutras and become persons of incorrigible disbelief are like the dust particles of the ten directions, while those who do have faith in the Lotus and Nirvana sutras are as few as the particles of dirt on a fingernail. Reading this sutra passage, I can hardly hold back my tears.

Now, as I observe the people in this country of Japan, it seems to me that most of them practice the provisional teachings. Even though their mouths and bodies may appear to be practicing the true teachings, their minds are still occupied with the provisional teachings.

Therefore the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai in the fifth volume of his Great Concentration and Insight writes: “These foolish and dull-witted persons have deeply imbibed the poison fumes and have lost their original minds. Therefore they no longer have faith and do not reach out for help. . . . They are persons laden with great guilt. . . . Even those who turn their backs on the world amuse themselves with an inferior vehicle, clinging to mere branches and leaves. They are like dogs that tag after the servants [forgetting their master]. They pay honor to apes and monkeys, considering them like the god Shakra; they revere shards and rubble, looking on them as bright gems. With such ignorant and benighted persons, how can one discuss the way?”

Genkū and those he has converted have all become drunk on the wine of the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness and have forgotten their original minds, which had formed a bond with one or another of the sixteen sons of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence. They have rejected faith in the Lotus and Nirvana sutras and become persons of incorrigible disbelief. They rely upon the inferior vehicle set forth in the Meditation Sutra and similar sutras, they amuse themselves with tiles and shards such as the expedient means known as the Nembutsu, they honor apes and monkeys such as the priest Hōnen [Genkū] and believe he is a man of foremost wisdom, a Shakra. They cast aside the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, veritable wish-granting jewels, and misjudge the sacred teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime, because they fail to distinguish correctly between the provisional and the true teachings.

Therefore the first volume of The Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight” states: “The reason that people hear of this teaching of perfect and immediate enlightenment but fail to respect it is that in recent times there is much confusion and misunderstanding among those who practice the Mahayana doctrines.”
The words “confusion and misunderstanding” here refer to the fact that, with regard to the Mahayana doctrines, people fail to distinguish between the provisional and the true teachings. Therefore in this latter age of ours, those who have faith in the Lotus Sutra are as few as the particles of dust on a fingernail, while those who fail to have faith in the Lotus Sutra and fall into the realm of the provisional teachings are as numerous as the dust particles of the worlds in the ten directions.

Hence Miao-lo in his On “Great Concentration and Insight” laments in this manner: “The situation is even worse because in the Middle and Latter Days of the Law people have little feeling and little faith. Though the teaching of perfect and immediate enlightenment may overflow the storehouses and its scrolls more than fill the sutra boxes, people give it not a moment’s consideration but rather turn away with closed eyes. How painful it is to think of them, being born in vain, dying in vain!”

Reading this passage of commentary, it would seem as though the Great Teacher Miao-lo, a reincarnation of a bodhisattva, were gazing into the future at the Japan of our own time and predicting what the situation today would be.

Question: Among the disciples of the Honorable Hōnen there are some who keep copies of all the sacred scriptures and who practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. How can you say that all his disciples are slanderers of the Law?

Answer: Though they open the various scriptures and read the Lotus Sutra, they do so merely to confirm the erroneous assertion made in Nembutsu Chosen above All that these constitute a “difficult-to-practice way.” The more they consult the sutras and treatises, the more they are slandering the Law. It is like the case of Sunakshatra and his reading of the twelve divisions of the scriptures, or like Devadatta, who had committed to memory sixty thousand sacred texts. They called themselves wise men, but their wisdom served only to puff them up and to abet their evil teachings.

Second, I show how, although one may be fortunate enough to be born a human being and to encounter the Buddhist Law, one may encounter evil friends and as a result fall into the three evil paths of existence.

The Buddha Treasury Sutra says: “After the Buddha Great Adornment had passed away, there were five monks, one of whom understood the correct way and saved many millions of people. But the other four entertained erroneous views. When the life span of these four came to an end, they fell into the Avīci hell. They lay face up, they lay face down, they turned on their left side, turned on their right side, each of them suffering thus for nine hundred ten thousand million years. . . . The lay believers and clerics who were on friendly terms with these monks, along with their supporters among the laity, numbered six hundred forty thousand million persons. They were born in the same realm as these four monk teachers and died along with them, being reborn in the great hell, where they were burned and boiled for the space of a major kalpa. After that, these six hundred forty thousand million people, along with the four evil monks, all emerged from the Avīci hell and were reborn in another great hell.”

Volume thirty-three of the Nirvana Sutra states: “At that time in the city there was a follower of the non-Buddhist teacher Nirgranthā who was named Painfully Acquired. . . . Sunakshatra questioned Painfully Acquired and the latter said to him, ‘I have been reborn as a spirit who eats what others have vomited. Sunakshatra, listen
carefully!’ ... At that time Sunakshatra returned to where the Buddha was and [telling a lie] said, ‘World-Honored One, when the life of Painfully Acquired, the follower of Nirgrantha, came to an end, he was reborn in the heaven of the thirty-three gods!’ ... At that time the Thus Come One and Kāśyapa went to where Sunakshatra was. The monk Sunakshatra saw them coming from afar and immediately evil thoughts arose in his mind. And because of this evil in his mind, he fell alive into the Avīchi hell.”

The monk Sunakshatra was a son of Shakyamuni Buddha from the time when the latter was still a bodhisattva. Following his father, he left the household life and became a monk and studied the twelve divisions of the sacred texts. He rid himself of the earthly passions of the world of desire and was able to master the four stages of meditation. But because he encountered this evil friend, the follower of non-Buddhist teachings Painfully Acquired, he ceased to have faith in the correct doctrines of the Buddhist Law. Hence he lost the benefits he had acquired by accepting the precepts of a monk and studying the twelve divisions of the scriptures and fell alive into the Avīchi hell.

[As mentioned in the Buddha Treasury Sutra], the six hundred forty thousand million people who were intimately associated with the four evil monks including Shore of Suffering were repeatedly reborn in the Avīchi hells of the ten directions, along with their four teachers. And now the clerics and lay believers of our present age, because they prize Nembutsu Chosen above All, bow before images of Genkū and read this work of the erroneous doctrine that all the sutras [except the Pure Land sutras] represent a “difficult-to-practice way.” They are like the followers of the non-Buddhist teacher Nirgrantha who made obeisance to Nirgrantha’s remains and hence fell into the three evil paths.

My wish is that the clerics and lay believers of our present age will first understand whether the teachings of Nembutsu Chosen above All are correct or erroneous before they go about making offerings and showing respect. If not, I am afraid they will surely have regrets later on.

Therefore the Nirvana Sutra states: “Bodhisattvas and mahāsattvas, have no fear of mad elephants. What you should fear are evil friends! Why? Because a mad elephant can only destroy your body; it cannot destroy your mind. But an evil friend can destroy both body and mind. A mad elephant can destroy only a single body, but an evil friend can destroy countless good bodies and countless good minds. A mad elephant merely destroys an impure, stinking body, but an evil friend can destroy both pure body and pure mind. A mad elephant can destroy the physical body, but an evil friend destroys the Dharma body. Even if you are killed by a mad elephant, you will not fall into the three evil paths. But if you are killed by an evil friend, you are certain to fall into them. A mad elephant is merely an enemy of your body, but an evil friend is an enemy of the good Law. Therefore, bodhisattvas, you should at all times keep far away from evil friends.”

My wish, therefore, is that the clerics and lay believers of our present age, even though they may think that this writing of mine embodies erroneous ideas, will put aside such thoughts for the moment and instead will open up Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra and look to see whether that work places the Lotus Sutra in the “difficult-to-practice” category or not, and will carefully consider the passage in Nembutsu Chosen above All that reads, “Judging from this, we may assume [that the esoteric Mahayana teachings
and the true Mahayana teachings are both included in the Sacred Way].” Having done that, they may then decide what is right and what is wrong. I hope they will not make the mistake of putting faith in evil friends, lending an ear to erroneous teachings, and thus living out their present lives to no good purpose.

Third, I make clear what sort of persons can serve effectively as good friends to an ordinary person in this latter age of ours.

Question: The boy Good Treasures encountered more than fifty good friends, among them Universal Worthy, Manjushrī, Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, and Maitreya. Ever Wailing, Spotted Feet, King Wonderful Adornment, and King Ajātashatru were able to break free from the sufferings of birth and death through the help of Dharmodgata, Universal Brightness, Jivaka, and King Wonderful Adornment’s wife and two sons. But all these persons were great sages.

Since the Buddha departed from this world, however, it has become difficult to find teachers such as these. Men like Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, who lived after the Buddha’s passing, are no longer with us, and it is impossible for us to meet men like Nan-yüeh or T’ien-t’ai either. How then can we free ourselves from the sufferings of birth and death?

Answer: In this latter age there are true good friends to be found. They are none other than the Lotus and Nirvana sutras.

Question: It is very common for a person to act as a good friend. But is there any proof that the Law can be such a friend?

Answer: It is common enough for a person to act as such a friend. But in this latter age, no true friend is to be found, and thus there is ample proof that the Law can act as such a friend.

Great Concentration and Insight says: “At times following a friend, and at times following the sutra scrolls, one hears the one true teaching of enlightenment that has been described above.”

The meaning of this passage is that one should take the sutra scrolls as one’s good friend.

The Lotus Sutra states: “If when the Lotus Sutra is propagated throughout Jambudvīpa there are those who accept and uphold it, they should think to themselves: This is all due to the authority and supernatural power of Universal Worthy!”

This passage means that when ordinary people in this latter age put faith in the Lotus Sutra, they are relying upon the power of their good friend Universal Worthy.

The sutra also says: “If there are those who accept, uphold, read, and recite this Lotus Sutra, memorize it correctly, practice and transcribe it, you should know that such persons have seen Shakyamuni Buddha. It is as though they heard this sutra from the Buddha’s mouth. You should know that such persons have offered alms to Shakyamuni Buddha.”

Reading this passage, we can see that the Lotus Sutra is none other than Shakyamuni Buddha himself. For persons who do not have faith in the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha has passed into extinction. But for those who put faith in the sutra, although Shakyamuni Buddha may seem to have passed into extinction, he is still present in the world.

Again the sutra states: “If, after I [Many Treasures] have become a Buddha and entered extinction, in the lands in the ten directions there is any place where the Lotus Sutra is preached, then my funerary tower, in order that I may listen to the sutra, will come forth and appear in that spot to testify to the sutra.”

This passage tells us that when we chant the name of the Lotus Sutra, the
Thus Come One Many Treasures, because of this original vow he has taken, will invariably appear before us.

And the sutra further states: "If there should be those who wish me [Many Treasures] to show my body to the four kinds of believers, then let the various Buddhas who are emanations of that Buddha [Shakayamuni] and who are preaching the Law in the worlds in the ten directions all return and gather around that Buddha in a single spot."82

Shakayamuni, Many Treasures, and the various other Buddhas of the ten directions, the bodhisattva Universal Worthy and the others are our good friends. If we rely upon this understanding, then with the good karma we have accumulated from past existences we can fare even better than did the boy Good Treasures, Ever Wailing or Spotted Feet, and the rest. They encountered good friends of the provisional sutras, but we will encounter good friends of the true sutras. Hence, though they encountered merely bodhisattvas of the provisional sutras, we will be fortunate enough to encounter the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the true sutras.

The Nirvana Sutra says: "Rely on the Law and not upon persons... Rely on wisdom and not on discriminative thinking."

To rely on the Law means to rely on the constantly abiding Law of the Lotus and Nirvana sutras. Not relying on persons means not relying on persons who do not themselves rely on the Lotus and Nirvana sutras. Even though they may be Buddhas or bodhisattvas, if they are Buddhas and bodhisattvas who do not rely on the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, they cannot serve as good friends. And how much more is this so if they are merely scholars, translators of the sacred texts, or ordinary teachers!

To rely on wisdom means to rely on the Buddha. Not relying on discriminative thinking means that one does not rely on those who are on the level of near-perfect enlightenment or below.

Many of the clerics and lay believers in the world today, hoping to hide the slander of the Law committed by Genkū, praise his virtue throughout the land, claiming that he is a reincarnation [of the bodhisattva Great Power]. But such claims are not to be heeded.

There are those among the non-Buddhist believers who have gained the five transcendental powers and can topple mountains and make the seas run dry, but they cannot measure up to ordinary mortals who embrace the Āgama sutras but do not possess such transcendental powers. There are persons of the two vehicles who have attained the state of arhat and can manifest the six transcendental powers, but they cannot measure up to ordinary mortals who embrace the Flower Garland Sutra or the Correct and Equal and Wisdom sutras. There are bodhisattvas who have attained the level of near-perfect enlightenment through the Flower Garland Sutra or the Correct and Equal and Wisdom sutras, but they cannot measure up to ordinary mortals who have only attained the stage of hearing the name and words of the truth and the stage of perception and action in the practice of the Lotus Sutra. Though a person may possess supernatural powers and great wisdom, if he is a good friend who expounds the provisional teachings, you must not heed him.

When we ordinary mortals, persons of incorrigible disbelief who are constantly drowned in delusion and suffering, desire to take faith in the Lotus Sutra, this is a sign that the Buddha nature within us is beginning to manifest itself.

Therefore the Great Teacher Miaoluo says: "If there is no perfuming by
the true reality within us, then how can enlightenment come about? Hence one should understand that the power that brings about enlightenment is this true reality. That is why the perfuming carried out by the inner true reality manifests itself as a form of ‘outside protection.’" 

The sutras preached in the forty and more years before the Lotus Sutra contain no mention of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. And if the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is not enunciated, then we have no way of understanding the Buddhahood that is within our own minds. And if we do not understand the Buddhahood within our own minds, then the other Buddhas who are outside ourselves will not manifest themselves. Therefore those who carry out the provisional practices set forth in the sutras preached in the first forty and more years are unable to see the Buddha [within their minds]. Even if they should see the Buddha, it is a Buddha who is external to themselves. Persons of the two vehicles also fail to see the Buddha within themselves and hence are unable to attain Buddhahood.

The bodhisattvas of the sutras preached in the first forty and more years likewise are unable to see the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds in their own lives, and therefore they cannot see that persons of the two vehicles are capable of attaining Buddhahood. Therefore, although they have taken a vow, saying, “Living beings are numberless—I vow to save them!” they cannot fulfill their vow. Hence these bodhisattvas too fail to see the Buddha.

Ordinary people likewise fail to understand the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds and thus are unable to manifest the Buddhahood that is within them. Therefore the Thus Come One Amida does not come to welcome them, and the other Buddhas and Thus Come Ones do not favor them with protection. They are like blind persons who cannot see their own shadows.

But when we come to the Lotus Sutra, we find that the Buddha world that exists within the nine worlds is now revealed, and hence the bodhisattvas, persons of the two vehicles, and ordinary people in the six paths of existence can for the first time after the forty and more years see the Buddhahood that is within themselves. Now for the first time the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and persons of the two vehicles appear before ordinary people [who believe in the Lotus Sutra]. Now for the first time persons of the two vehicles and bodhisattvas are able to attain Buddhahood, and ordinary people too are for the first time able to be reborn in the Pure Land. That is why, for all beings who live when the Buddha is in the world and after he has passed into extinction, the Lotus Sutra is truly a good friend.

Some average scholars of the Tendai school maintain that a certain degree of attainment of the way can be achieved even through the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra. According to the true doctrine of the school, no such qualified attainment of the way is possible through these sutras. However, in this present work of mine I will not go into this matter in detail, but will note it here as something to be taken up at another time.

I come now to the sixth section of my work, in which I discuss the cautions and attitudes of mind to be observed by persons who would practice the teachings of the Lotus and Nirvana sutras.

In the earlier sections I have already discussed which among the teachings put forth by the Buddha in his lifetime are superior and which inferior, which are shallow and which profound, which are difficult to practice
and which easy. In this section I offer advice for ordinary uninformed people in this latter age, such as committers of the five cardinal sins, slanderers of the Law, and persons of incorrigible disbelief, who are all forever drowned in delusion and suffering, but who think constantly of their next existence.

I have divided my treatment into three parts. First, I show how persons living the household life, by guarding and upholding the correct teaching, may remove themselves from the sufferings of birth and death, or how, by adhering to evil teachings, they will destine themselves to fall into the three evil paths. Second, I show that, by merely chanting the name of the Lotus Sutra, one may escape being reborn in the three evil paths. Third, I demonstrate that the Nirvana Sutra was preached in order to insure the transmission and propagation of the Lotus Sutra.

First, I will show how persons living the household life, by guarding and upholding the correct teaching, may remove themselves from the sufferings of birth and death, or how, by adhering to evil teachings, they will destine themselves to fall into the three evil paths of existence.

The third volume of the Nirvana Sutra states: “The Buddha replied to Kāśyapa, ‘It is because I was a defender of the correct teaching that I have been able to attain this diamond-like body.’”

And it further states: “At this time the ruler of the kingdom was named Possessor of Virtue. He received reports of what was happening, and, in order to defend the teaching, he went at once to the place where the monk was preaching the Law and fought with all his might against the evil monks who broke the precepts... At that time, the king had already heard the teaching, and he felt great joy in his heart. Thereupon his life came to an end, and he was reborn in the land of the Buddha Akshobhya.”

These passages demonstrate that persons living the household life, though they may have no particular wisdom or carry out any particular religious practices, can, through the benefits gained by combating and suppressing those who slander the Law, remove themselves from the sufferings of birth and death.

Question: How do persons who are living the household life go about guarding and upholding the Buddhist Law?

Answer: The Nirvana Sutra says: “If there are living beings who are greedy for riches and possessions, I will proceed to give them riches, and after that I will urge them to read this great vehicle Nirvana Sutra. [If there are persons of distinguished rank], I will speak pleasing words and ingratiate myself with them and then little by little encourage them to read this great vehicle Nirvana Sutra. If there are ordinary commoners, I will use a show of authority to make them read the sutra. If there are haughty and arrogant persons, I will act as a servant to them, doing their bidding and thus pleasing and satisfying them, and then I will teach and guide them to this great vehicle Nirvana Sutra. If there are those who slander the great vehicle sutras, I will use force to compel them to change their ways, and after I have subdued them in this way, I will encourage them to read the great vehicle Nirvana Sutra. And if there are those who love and delight in the great vehicle sutras, I will go to them in person, offering them alms and reverence, honoring and praising them.”

Question: In the world today the clerics and lay believers adhere solely to Nembutsu Chosen above All and believe that the Lotus and Nirvana sutras are not suited to them. Hence they have no inclination to guard and cherish
these sutras. And if they encounter someone who declares that *Nembutsu Chosen above All* is based on erroneous principles, they claim that he is guilty of slandering the Nembutsu and spread evil reports about him throughout the country. What is your opinion of this?

Answer: Rather than give my own answer, I will report what the Buddha himself has said of such a situation. The Benevolent Kings Sutra says: "Great King, after I have passed into extinction, the four types of Buddhist disciples in the ages to come, the rulers, crown princes, and other princes of the various small countries, those persons who should uphold and guard the three treasures of Buddhism, will on the contrary become the destroyers of the three treasures, just as it is the worms that are born from the body of a dead lion that will feed on the lion’s flesh. It will not be the non-Buddhists but in most cases the Buddha’s own disciples who will destroy this Buddhist Law of mine and thereby commit a very grave offense. The correct teaching will wither and fade, there will be no more people who carry out the correct practices, but evil practices will more and more prevail, so that the life span of the people will grow shorter each day, until they live no more than a hundred years.

“If persons destroy the teachings of the Buddha, they will have no filial sons, no harmony with their six kinds of relatives, and no aid from the heavenly deities. Disease and evil demons will come day after day to torment them, disasters will descend on them incessantly, and misfortunes will dog them wherever they go. And when they die, they will fall into the realms of hell, hungry spirits, and animals.”

And later on it says: “Great King, in future ages the kings of the various small countries and the four types of Buddhist disciples will of their own initiative commit faults of the type that bring about the destruction of their own nation.... Evil monks, hoping to gain fame and profit, will in many cases appear before the ruler, the crown prince, or the other princes, and take it upon themselves to preach doctrines that lead to the violation of the Buddhist Law and the destruction of the nation. The ruler, failing to perceive the truth of the situation, will listen to and put faith in such doctrines.... When this happens, it will not be long before the correct teaching passes into extinction.”

If we examine *Nembutsu Chosen above All*, we see that it does not differ in the slightest from these predictions in the sutra. *Nembutsu Chosen above All* states definitively that the correct teaching embodied in the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings represents a “sundry practice,” a “difficult-to-practice way”; that for those of us in this latter age it is not suitable either in terms of the time or of our own capacities; that of those who practice it, not “even one in a thousand” will be saved. Although the Buddha had preached the Lotus Sutra and other works, *Nembutsu Chosen above All* says, he shut the door on the practices set forth in the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings and endorsed only one practice, the Nembutsu. Thus, the work, branding those who carry out other practices in this latter age as “a band of robbers,” has caused all people in the world today, both clerics and lay believers, to have faith in it and to look on these teachings as though they were golden words of the Thus Come One himself.

As a result, the clerics and lay believers in the world today make no effort to establish the true Buddhist doctrine, and the Dharma waters of the correct teaching set forth in the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings have summarily dried up. Human and heavenly beings decrease in number, while those
in the three evil paths of existence grow more numerous each day. All of this is solely because of the erroneous views propounded in the evil teachings of *Nembutsu Chosen above All*.

In the sutra passage I cited earlier, the Buddha says in his prediction, "After I have passed into extinction." This must refer to the last eighty years of the Former Day of the Law, the last eight hundred years of the Middle Day of the Law, or the last eight thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law. *Nembutsu Chosen above All* appeared at the end of the Middle Day of the Law and the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, and so it falls within the eight-hundred-year period, which puts it in accord with the predictions made in the Benevolent Kings Sutra.

The "rulers of the various small countries" refers to the ruler of Japan. These are rulers who do good actions of the middling and inferior category, whose states are as numerous as scattered grains of millet.

"The worms that are born from the body of a dead lion" refers to the Buddha's disciples such as Genkū, and "evil monks" refers to those followers who have been converted to his teachings.

The words "preach doctrines that lead to the violation of the Buddhist Law and the destruction of the nation" refer to the pronouncements set forth in *Nembutsu Chosen above All* that I have cited earlier. And the words "The ruler, failing to perceive the truth of the situation, will listen to and put faith in such doctrines" refer to the fact that the clerics and lay believers in the world today, failing to perceive that these are erroneous doctrines, rashly put their faith in them.

My sincere wish is that these clerics and lay believers will come to realize the difference between correct and erroneous teachings, and that thereafter they will adhere to the correct teaching and take thought for their next existence. If they wait until they have lost the human form they now have and fallen into the three evil paths to regret what they have done, what good will it do them?

Second, I will show that, by merely chanting the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, one may escape being born in the three evil paths.

Volume five of the Lotus Sutra states: "Manjushrī, as for this Lotus Sutra, throughout immeasurable numbers of lands one cannot even hear its name."86

And volume eight says: "If you can shield and guard those who accept and uphold the mere name of the Lotus Sutra, your merit will be immeasurable."87

The "Devadatta" chapter says: "If there are good men or good women who, on hearing the 'Devadatta' chapter of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, believe and revere it with pure hearts and harbor no doubts or perplexities, they will never fall into hell or the realm of hungry spirits or of beasts."

And the "Merits of the Sutra's Name" chapter of the Nirvana Sutra states: "If it is said that there are good men or good women who, after hearing the name of this sutra, are born in the evil paths of existence, you may be certain that there could be no such thing." (The Nirvana Sutra serves to propagate the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, and therefore I quote it here.)

Question: If one merely hears the daimoku, or title, of the Lotus Sutra but lacks an understanding mind, how can one escape the three evil paths?

Answer: If one is born in a country where the Lotus Sutra is propagated and, on hearing the daimoku of the sutra, one is moved to take faith in it, this is because one has accumulated a rich store of good actions in the past. Thus, even though one may be an evil person lacking in wisdom in one's
present existence, when one hears the name of the sutra, one will take faith in it and hence will not fall into the evil paths.

Question: What do you mean by good actions done in the past?

Answer: Volume two of the Lotus Sutra says: “If there is someone who believes and accepts the Law of this sutra, that person has already seen the Buddhas of the past, has respectfully offered alms to them and listened to this Law.”

The “Teacher of the Law” chapter states: “In addition, if after the Thus Come One has passed into extinction there should be someone who listens to the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, even one verse or one phrase, and for a moment thinks of it with joy, . . . you should understand that such persons have already offered alms to a hundred thousand million Buddhas.”

And the Nirvana Sutra, which is concerned with the propagation of the Lotus Sutra, says: “If there are living beings who, in the presence of Buddhas numerous as the sands of the Hiranyavatī River, have conceived the desire for enlightenment, then when they are born in an evil age such as this, they will be able to accept and uphold a sutra like this and will never slander it. Good man, if one has conceived the desire for enlightenment in the presence of Buddhas, World-Honored Ones, as numerous as the sands of a Ganges, then thereafter, when living in an evil age, one will never speak slanderously of this Law, but will love and respect a sutra such as this.”

If we go by what these passages tell us, then although one does not at first have an understanding mind, the fact that one can listen to this Lotus Sutra and never slander it is a result of the great good acts done in the past.

Those who are born in the three evil paths are more numerous than the dust particles of the great earth, while those who are born as human beings are fewer than the particles of dirt one can put on a fingernail. Those who encounter the sutras preached in the first forty and more years of the Buddha’s life are more numerous than the dust particles of the great earth, while those who encounter the Lotus and Nirvana sutras are fewer than the particles of dirt on a fingernail. And as we have seen in the passage from volume thirty-three of the Nirvana Sutra that I quoted earlier, those who can take faith in the sutra, even one word or one phrase, are persons who have acquired many blessings through actions in the past.

Question: Even though one may have faith in the Lotus Sutra, if one is influenced by evil friends, how can one avoid falling into the three evil paths?

Answer: One who lacks an understanding mind may encounter evil friends who are advocates of the provisional teachings and be persuaded to give up one’s devotion to the true teaching. If one does so, then because one has erred by putting faith in evil teachers, one will invariably fall into the three evil paths.

The many persons who abused and looked with contempt on the bodhisattva Never Disparaging were followers of the provisional teachings. And those persons who were related through the teachings to the sixteen sons of Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Buddha but who had to pass a period of major world system dust particle kalpas before attaining enlightenment—this happened because they abandoned the Lotus Sutra and transferred their faith to the provisional teachings.

But if one is numbered among those who have faith in the Lotus Sutra, then unless one abandons faith in the Lotus and follows those who advocate the provisional teachings, one will never fall into the three evil paths, for the
evil actions of ordinary worldly life have no power to counteract the blessings bestowed by the Lotus Sutra.

Question: Is Japan a country that has some particular connection with the Lotus and Nirvana sutras?

Answer: Volume eight of the Lotus Sutra states: “And after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, I will cause it to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvīpa and will see that it never comes to an end.”

And volume seven says: “[After I have passed into extinction . . . ] you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off.”

In volume nine of the Nirvana Sutra we read: “This great vehicle sutra, the Great Nirvana Sutra, is like this. For the sake of the bodhisattvas of the southern region it must be widely propagated.”

Although the major world system is broad indeed, the Buddha himself has decreed that the Lotus and Nirvana sutras be propagated in the southern region. And among the countries of the southern region, Japan in particular is a place where the Lotus Sutra should be propagated.

Question: What proof is there of that?

Answer: In Seng-chao’s Afterword to the Lotus Sutra Translation it is stated that when Kumārajīva met the Tripi-taka Master Shūryasoma and received the Lotus Sutra from him, the latter stated: “The sun of the Buddha has gone into hiding in the west, but its lingering rays shine over the northeast. This text is destined for the lands of the northeast. You must make certain that it is transmitted there!”

The word “northeast” refers to Japan, because Japan is situated to the northeast of India, which is in the southwest. Therefore Eshin’s Essentials of the One Vehicle Teaching states: “Throughout Japan, all people share the same capacity to attain Buddhahood through the perfect teaching. Whether at court or in the countryside, whether far or near, all alike turn to the single vehicle; and whether priests or lay believers, whether eminent or humble, all can hope to attain Buddhahood.”

It is my hope that the members of the clergy and lay believers in Japan will cast aside Nembutsu Chosen above All, which they have followed for so long, and will rely on these clear passages of proof from the Lotus and Nirvana sutras so that, in accordance with the predictions for Japan made by Seng-chao and Eshin, they may find peace of mind in the practice of the Lotus Sutra.

Question: What kind of pure land can the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra look forward to?

Answer: The “Life Span” chapter, which is the heart and core of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra, states: “I have been constantly in this sahā world.” And it says: “I am always here.” And again: “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil.”

If we go by these passages, then the Buddha of the perfect teaching, who in his original state attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past, is here in this world. Why would we wish to abandon this land and seek to go elsewhere? Therefore practitioners of the Lotus Sutra should think of the place where they are as the pure land. Why worry about trying to go somewhere else?

Hence it is stated in the “Supernatural Powers” chapter: “Wherever the sutra rolls are preserved, whether in a garden, a forest, beneath a tree, in monks’ quarters, in the lodgings of white-robed laymen, in palaces, or in mountain valleys or the wide wilderness . . . you should understand that such spots are places of religious practice.”
The Nirvana Sutra says: "Good man, you should understand that wherever this wonderful sutra of the Great Nirvana is propagated, that land is made of diamond, and the people who live there are like diamonds."

Those who have faith in and practice the Lotus and Nirvana sutras should never seek some other place. The place where those who have faith in these sutras are is the pure land.

Question: Examining such sutras as the Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, Âgama, and Meditation Sutra, we see that one is urged to seek rebirth in the Tushita heaven, the pure land of the western region, or the pure lands of the ten directions. Moreover, we find passages in the Lotus Sutra as well that urge one to seek the Tushita heaven, the pure land of the western region, or the pure lands of the ten directions. Why then do you go against such passages and urge that we be satisfied simply with this defiled land of shards and rubble, thorns and briars?

Answer: The pure lands described in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, pure lands in which the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, the true Buddha who gained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past, manifested himself, are all of them defiled lands.

[The important parts of] the Lotus Sutra are the two chapters, chapter two, or "Expedient Means," and chapter sixteen, or the "Life Span." It is not until the "Life Span" chapter that the identity of the true pure land is made clear. At that time it is stated definitively that this sahâ world is the pure land.

As for your objection that the Tushita heaven, the Land of Peace and Sustenance, and the pure lands of the ten directions are mentioned in the Lotus Sutra, these designations are simply taken over without change from the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, but in the Lotus Sutra these names, such as Tushita or Peace and Sustenance, are applied to this sahâ world of ours.

In the Lotus Sutra, for example, although we find the names of the three vehicles of voice-hearer, cause-awakened one, and bodhisattva, we know that there are not three vehicles [but only one vehicle]. As Miao-lo explains in his commentary, "One should understand that this does not refer to [the land of the Amida of] the Meditation and other sutras."

Living beings in the world today who have not formed a relationship with the Lotus Sutra, when they long for rebirth in the pure land of the western region, are longing for a land of tiles and shards. Living beings who do not have faith in the Lotus Sutra in truth do not even have a pure land from one of the categories mentioned above.

Third, I will demonstrate that the Nirvana Sutra was preached in order to insure the transmission and propagation of the Lotus Sutra.

Question: Two very eminent priests, the Dharma Teacher Fa-yin of the temple called Kuang-che-ssu and Hui-kuan of Tao-ch'ang-ssu temple, both maintained that the Lotus Sutra is a sutra that belongs to the fourth period of the Buddha's preaching life and that it embodies the fourth flavor, that of butter, which is still characterized by impermanence. The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-che, on the other hand, held that both the Lotus Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra embody the same flavor [that of ghee], but that the Nirvana Sutra represents a kind of gleaning [carried out after the great harvest of the Lotus Sutra].

Both these great teachers, Fa-yin and T'ien-t'ai, are reincarnations of bodhisattvas and renowned for their outstanding religious practice, and persons such as I are perplexed in mind as to
which of them is correct. Could you dispel our doubts?

Answer: Even though someone may be a scholar or a translator of the sacred texts from India, if he goes against the teachings of the Buddha and fails to distinguish properly between the provisional and the true teachings, then one should view him with suspicion. And how much more wary should one be when dealing with the commentaries of Chinese teachers such as T’ien-t’ai, Nan-yüeh, Fa-yün, Hui-kuan, Chih-yen, Chia-hsiang, or Shan-tao! But though one may simply be a student of this latter age, if one observes the principle of relying on the Law and not upon persons, and if one does not go against the basic sutras and the basic treatises, then one can be fully trusted and one’s advice heeded.

Question: If we examine volume fourteen of the Nirvana Sutra, we find that it compares the various great vehicle sutras expounded by the Buddha in the fifty years of his preaching life to the first four of the five flavors, and compares the Nirvana Sutra to the fifth flavor, that of ghee. It thus declares that the other great vehicle sutras are a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand times inferior to the Nirvana Sutra.

In addition, the bodhisattva Kāśyapa in his enlightenment and understanding declares, “World-Honored One, today I have learned the correct view for the first time. World-Honored One, up till today we all have been people of mistaken views.”

The meaning of this passage is that the Lotus Sutra and the other sacred texts that precede the Nirvana Sutra are all representative of mistaken views. Thus we are to understand that the Lotus Sutra is a sutra of mistaken views that fails to make clear the true view of the Buddha nature. Therefore, when Bodhisattva Vasubandhu in his Treatise on the Nirvana Sutra defined the relative superiority of the Nirvana Sutra and the other sutras, he declared that the Lotus Sutra is the same as the Wisdom sutras and belongs to the same fourth period of the five periods of teachings. How can the Nirvana Sutra, which represents the correct view, serve to transmit and propagate the Lotus Sutra, which embodies mistaken views?

Answer: If we examine the actual text of the Lotus Sutra, we find that it sets forth the true intent of the Buddha without leaving anything unrevealed. Thus the “Expeditious Means” chapter states: “But now is the very time when I must decisively preach the great vehicle.” The “Life Span” chapter reads: “At all times I think to myself: How can I cause living beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?” And in the “Supernatural Powers” chapter we read: “To put it briefly, all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One,... all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra.”

In passages such as these, the Thus Come One Shakyamuni’s inner enlightenment is fully and completely set forth in this sutra. Moreover, when Many Treasures and the Buddhas of the ten directions came together in the assembly, they testified to the truth of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni’s declaration that the Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and understand of all the sutras “I have preached, now preach, and will preach,” and that no other sutra can equal it. Who could believe then that, after Many Treasures and the other Buddhas had returned to their own lands, Shakyamuni, this one Buddha alone, had a change of heart and proceeded to preach the Nirvana Sutra in which he denigrated the Lotus Sutra?

Let us give careful thought to the principles involved here. Thus we will see from the ninth volume of the Nirvana Sutra that the sutra speaks of the
transmission and propagation of the Lotus Sutra when it says: "When this [Nirvana] sutra was preached, it was as though the crop had brought great profit to all people and they all felt safe and secure, for they could now see that living beings possess the Buddha nature. The prediction had already been made in the Lotus Sutra that the eight thousand voice-hearers would attain Buddhahood, a prediction that was like a great harvest. Thus, the autumn harvest was over and the crop had been stored away for winter [when this Nirvana Sutra was expounded], and there was nothing left for it."

If we go by this passage, then if the Lotus Sutra embodies mistaken views, how can the Nirvana Sutra not embody mistaken views as well? Hence it is apparent that the Lotus Sutra represents a great harvest, while the Nirvana Sutra represents the gleaning that comes after. The Nirvana Sutra is itself declaring that it is inferior to the Lotus Sutra. And when the Buddha in the Lotus Sutra speaks of the sutras "I will preach," he is referring to nothing other than this Nirvana Sutra.

But the comparison of the sutras in the fourteenth volume of the Nirvana Sutra and the passage regarding Kāśyapa’s enlightenment and understanding are not really intended to place the Lotus Sutra on an inferior level. They are simply saying that Kāśyapa and the other monks who have become his followers [now that they have heard the Nirvana Sutra], have for the first time come to understand the principles of the everlasting Buddha nature and the true Buddha who attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past that were expounded in the Lotus Sutra. Thus, speaking of themselves, they say that in the past they held mistaken views.

The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, which was preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, had spoken disparagingly of the other sutras [when the Buddha said, "I have not yet revealed the truth"]. The Nirvana Sutra is merely repeating this disapproval of them; it is not attempting to disparage the Lotus Sutra.

Finally, with regard to Treatise on the Nirvana Sutra, it is recorded that this treatise was written by Bodhisattva Vasubandhu and translated into Chinese by Bodhiruci. [Treatise on the Lotus Sutra was also written by Bodhisattva Vasubandhu and translated by Bodhiruci.] There are many places in treatises such as these that contradict the sutra texts. Treatise on the Nirvana Sutra likewise speaks in a manner that contradicts the sutra it is based upon, the Nirvana Sutra. You should realize that these are due to errors of the translator and that such passages are not to be trusted.

Question: If the term “transmission and propagation” is taken to mean that persons who were left out in an earlier exposition of the teachings are taken up in a later exposition and are thereby enabled to attain the way, then can we say that the Āgama sutras represent a transmission and propagation of the Flower Garland Sutra? Or does the Lotus Sutra represent a transmission and propagation for the earlier sutras that correspond to the first four of the five flavors?

Answer: In the sutras that correspond to the first four flavors, it was stated that bodhisattvas and human and heavenly beings may attain the way, but it was denied that persons who are destined to follow the two vehicles or those of incorrigible disbelief, who lack the nature of enlightenment, could ever attain Buddhahood. Moreover, if we examine the Buddha’s intentions carefully and consider them in the light of truth, we will see that bodhisattvas and human and heavenly beings as well can never attain the way. This is because in such sutras the principle of the mutual possession of the
Ten Worlds is never expounded, nor is it taught that the Buddha in reality gained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past.

Question: What passages can you cite as proof?

Answer: The "Expedient Means" chapter of the Lotus Sutra states: "If I used a lesser vehicle to convert even one person, I would be guilty of stinginess and greed, but such a thing would be impossible."

My purpose in this present exposition, however, is to refute the erroneous doctrines set forth in Nembutsu Chosen above All, and hence I do not wish to go into other matters in detail. For that reason I will not take up here the question of whether or not the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra can actually enable one to attain the way. I will consider that question on some other occasion. But I would simply note that the sutras expounded in the first forty and more years of the Buddha's preaching life do not in fact enable ordinary people to attain the way. Therefore the Lotus Sutra cannot act as a transmission and propagation of these earlier sutras. But in the Lotus Sutra the doctrines of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds and of the true Buddha who attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past are clearly set forth. Therefore the Nirvana Sutra may be said to represent a transmission of the Lotus Sutra.

In this, the seventh section of my work, I will answer questions that may be raised. If ignorant persons of this latter age, having read the first six sections of my work, should by chance take faith in the Lotus Sutra, then the followers of the provisional schools, perhaps because of their own confused state of mind or because they cling to biased views, will, in an attempt to refute the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, cite passages from the sutras expounded in the first forty and more years of the Buddha's preaching life or from the Nirvana Sutra and level criticisms at them.

There are many persons who put faith in the provisional teachings, and they will voice criticisms as a way of showing their power and authority, or to advance their worldly interests, or because they are influenced by others, or see this as a convenient way of getting along in the world. There are many scholars who subscribe to the provisional teachings and few wise persons among those upholding the true teaching. When it comes to deciding which side is right, possibly there will be no one to make the case for faith in the true teaching. Therefore I have written this last section of my work in order to provide a defense against these erroneous criticisms leveled by those who support the provisional teachings.

Question: The scholars of the various other schools voice criticisms such as the following. They say: "The Flower Garland Sutra was preached by the Thus Come One of the reward body. In its seven locations and eight assemblies the sutra sets forth a doctrine that in all cases assures sudden attainment of the ultimate goal, sudden enlightenment. The Lotus Sutra was preached by the Thus Come One of the manifested body. And since the expounder or lord of teachings is superior in the case of the former and inferior in the latter, then how can the doctrines that they expound not differ in their degree of profundity? Thus, in the case of the Flower Garland Sutra, the teachings are addressed to a group made up of the bodhisattvas Dharma Wisdom, Forest of Merits, Diamond Banner, and others, a group that never included any persons of the two vehicles. The Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, was addressed to a group that included Shāriputra and the other voice-hearers." (This is the type of criti-
cism made by members of the Flower Garland school.)

The followers of the Dharma Characteristics school base their teachings on the Profound Secrets Sutra, and they will voice criticisms such as this: "The Profound Secrets Sutra is addressed to a group that includes the bodhisattvas Manjushrī and Perceiver of the World's Sounds. In that sutra, when Bodhisattva Superlative Truth Appearing expounds his 'understanding,' he divides the doctrines preached by Shakyamuni Buddha in the course of his lifetime into the three categories of teachings, teachings on being, teachings on non-substantiality, and teachings on the Middle Way. The teachings on the Middle Way are thus found in the Flower Garland, Lotus, Nirvana, and Profound Secrets sutras. But the 'understanding' expounded in the 'Belief and Understanding' chapter of the Lotus Sutra, which represents the doctrine of the five periods of teachings, is expounded by the four great voice-hearer disciples. Thus the Profound Secrets Sutra describes the understanding of bodhisattvas, while the Lotus Sutra describes that of voice-hearers, a difference in their relative superiority as great as that between heaven and earth.'"

The proponents of the Pure Land school will try to sound reasonable, saying: "We are not attempting to slander the Lotus Sutra or the other sutras. It is just that these sutras were intended first of all for persons of great stature, and only incidentally for ordinary people. They embody teachings that are profound in principle and are designed to put an end to delusion and enable one to gain enlightenment. But if we of this latter age try to practice them, not one person in a thousand is found to have the capacity to do so. Most lay believers are unable to read; they have never even heard of the Flower Garland and Dharma Characteristics teachings, much less being able to understand their doctrines.

"The aim of the Pure Land school is simply to teach such persons to open their mouths and recite the six characters that make up the invocation Namu Amida Butsu. If they do this, then in this present existence the Thus Come One Amida will send his twenty-five bodhisattvas and, as shadows follow a form, they will surround and protect the practitioners in a hundred encirclements, a thousand encirclements. As a result, in this present existence the seven disasters will be wiped out and the seven blessings will appear. And when the time of death approaches, the practitioners will invariably be greeted by the welcoming host [Amida Buddha] and, seated on the lotus seats of Perceiver of the World's Sounds, in an instant transported to the Pure Land. There, depending upon what their past deeds were, the lotus flowers will open and these persons will listen to the Lotus Sutra and come to understand the true aspect of all phenomena. What need is there to bother carrying out any other religious practices in this defiled land of ours? What meaning can they have? So we cast aside all other concerns whatsoever and devote ourselves solely to the recitation of the Nembutsu!"

The men of the Zen school say: "The teachings of the Buddha's lifetime are simply a finger pointing at the moon. Heaven and earth, the sun, the moon—all these are merely products of the deluded mind, and the pure lands of the ten directions are shadows and images projected by a mind that clings to things. Shakyamuni and the Buddhas of the ten directions are manifestations of the enlightened mind. Those who cling to the written word are like the foolish man who stood guard at the stump. Our Great Teacher Bodhidharma did not rely on words, made no use of expedient
means, but transmitted the Law that
the Buddha bestowed on Mahākāśyapa
with a holy gesture, a Law that is
outside the teachings of the Buddha’s
lifetime. Thus the Lotus Sutra is not
able to convey to others the real truth.”

These criticisms of the various
schools are not of one type only. How
can they fail to have a damaging effect
on the faith of those who believe in
the Lotus Sutra?

Answer: Practitioners of the Lo-
tus Sutra should keep in mind such
passages as: “But in these more than
forty years, I have not yet revealed
the truth,” “Among the sutras I have
preached, now preach, and will preach,
this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to
believe,” “All that you have expounded
is the truth!” and “Rely on the Law
and not upon persons,” but should not
speak of them at the outset. Instead, in
response to criticisms, one should ask
the other party what sutra the doc-
trines of his school are founded upon.

When the other party replies with
the name of the sutra, then ask him
this question: “Among the various
sutras expounded by the Buddha dur-
ing the fifty years of his preaching life,
was this sutra preached before the
Lotus Sutra, or after it, or at the same
time, or is it uncertain whether it came
before or after?”

If the person replies that it was
preached previous to the Lotus Sutra,
then confront him with the passage
“But in these more than forty years, I
have not yet revealed the truth” and
base your attack on that, but do not try
to go into the question of what doc-
trines are preached in that particular
sutra.

If he replies that it was preached
after the Lotus Sutra, then use the pas-
sage on “the sutras I will preach” to
attack him. If he says it was preached
at the same time, then confront him
with the part about “the sutras I now
preach.”

If he says that the date of the sutra is
uncertain, then point out to him that
such sutras of uncertain date are not to
be counted among the major works of
the canon but were preached simply
for one particular time or one particu-
lar occasion and are not texts of real
importance. Moreover, even if they are
of uncertain date, they must be includ-
ed in one or another of the three cate-
gories of sutras preached in the past, at
present, or in the future. Although a
work may set forth a hundred, a thou-
sand, ten thousand doctrines, unless it
is among those that are not invalidated
by the statement “In these more than
forty years, I have not yet revealed
the truth,” then it is not to be relied upon.
This is because the Buddha himself
has left instructions that we are “not to
rely on sutras that are not complete
and final.”

Your opponent may quote from
Chih-yen, Chia-hsiang, Tz’u-en, Shan-
tao, or others, praising the virtue of
these men and basing his criticisms
on their writings. But you should reply
that if such teachers go against the pro-
nouncements of the Lotus and Nirvana
sutras, they are not to be heeded. This
is because the Buddha has left us these
golden words “Rely on the Law and
not upon persons.”

For ordinary uninformed persons
who wish to take faith in the Lotus
Sutra, there are two types of believ-
ing mind that they may acquire. One,
they may base their faith on a Buddha.
Or, two, they may base their faith on
a sutra.

If they base their faith on a Buddha,
then the scholars of the provisional
schools will criticize them, saying: “The
Reverend Shan-tao was a teacher who
attained enlightenment through medi-
tation, a reincarnation of the Buddha
Amida. The Great Teacher Tz’u-en was
a reincarnation of the Eleven-faced
Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, and
relics of the Buddha rained from the
tip of his writing brush. These men both based themselves on one or another sutra and both thereby attained enlightenment. Why then do you not base yourself on the sutras they upheld? And why will you not heed the doctrines of these teachers?"

One should reply in these words: "Listen to me! Even if all the great teachers and eminent predecessors of the provisional schools, along with Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, Universal Worthy, Manjushrī, Perceiver of the World's Sounds, and even the Thus Come Ones Amida, Medicine Master, and Shakyamuni, should gather together before us and the other people of the ten directions and say, 'The Lotus Sutra is not suitable for your capacities. You should carry out the Nembutsu and the other practices of the provisional sutras and seek rebirth in the Pure Land, and after that you can come to understand the Lotus Sutra!'—even if they should preach to us in this manner, we would never heed or obey them. The reason is that nowhere in the sutras expounded in the first forty and more years of the Buddha's preaching life is so much as the title of the Lotus Sutra ever mentioned. And where in those sutras is there any discussion of whether or not such a sutra is fitted for our capacities?

"In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions gathered in one place and declared themselves in favor of the Lotus, saying they would 'make certain the Law will long endure,' and, 'After the Thus Come One has entered extinction, I will cause it to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvīpa and will see that it never comes to an end.'

"If now some other Buddha should appear and declare that the Lotus Sutra is not suitable for persons in this latter age of ours, he would obviously be contradicting the sutra itself. We know, therefore, that he would be the sort of 'devil Buddha' that the Nirvana Sutra has predicted will appear after the Buddha has entered extinction and hence not worthy to be trusted. And, needless to say, the same applies of course to the sort of bodhisattvas, voice-hearer disciples, and monks previously mentioned. These would without doubt be devils appearing in the form of bodhisattvas, and so forth, just as the Nirvana Sutra predicted they will after the Buddha has passed into extinction.

"This is because, when the assembly of the Lotus Sutra took place, it embraced not only this major world system, but four hundred ten thousand million asamkhayas of other worlds as well. And the various bodhisattvas, persons of the two vehicles, human and heavenly beings, and eight kinds of nonhuman beings all received the command of the Thus Come One, and each one vowed to propagate the Lotus Sutra in the land where he or she resided.

"If Shan-tao and the others are reincarnations of Buddhas or bodhisattvas, then why do they not, like Nāgarjuna and Vasubandhu, first propagate the provisional teachings and after that propagate the Lotus Sutra? Are they not included among those who were commanded to do so by the Lotus Sutra? Why do they not, like the Buddha himself, first propagate the provisional teachings and after that propagate the Lotus Sutra?

"If anyone preaches doctrines other than these, then even though he may be a Buddha, he is not to be trusted."

Thus one puts one's faith in the Buddha who appears in the Lotus Sutra. Hence this is what I mean when I speak of basing one's faith on a Buddha.

Question: If it is true, as the Thus Come One Shakyamuni states, that the other Buddhas testified to the truth of the Lotus Sutra, then should we not
put faith in the Amida Sutra [which contains a similar passage]?

Answer: The Amida Sutra does not have any testimony to its truth such as is found in the Lotus Sutra, and therefore one should not put faith in it.

Question: If we examine the Amida Sutra, it states that, when the Thus Come One Shakyamuni described the Nembutsu to be carried out over a period of one to seven days, the Buddhas of the six directions extended their tongues to cover the major world system as a testimony to its truth. How then can you say that there is no testimony to its truth?

Answer: In the Amida Sutra there is no testimony to the truth of the sutra such as that found in the Lotus Sutra. A single Buddha, Shakyamuni, preaches to Shāriputra, saying, “It is not I alone who expound this Amida Sutra. The Buddhas of the six directions extend their tongues to cover the major world system, preaching the Amida Sutra.” This is simply a pronouncement made by a single Buddha, Shakyamuni. But it does not go so far as to say that these Buddhas have come to take part in the assembly.

In these texts of the provisional teachings, the Buddha is the lord of teachings of the first forty and more years, a Buddha who has attained enlightenment for the first time in this life, the enlightenment of a provisional Buddha. Because he is a provisional Buddha, the doctrines he sets forth are likewise provisional in nature. Therefore one must not put faith in the prechings of this provisional Buddha of the first forty and more years.

The Lotus and Nirvana sutras, on the other hand, represent the true pronouncements of the Buddha of the perfect teaching, who attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past. They are true words that describe the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. Moreover, Many Treasures and the Buddhas of the ten directions came to the assembly to testify to their truth. Therefore we should have faith in them.

The pronouncements of the Amida Sutra were completely nullified by the statement in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra that “I have not yet revealed the truth.” They are in their entirety the words of one single Buddha, Shakyamuni, and the other Buddhas never testified to their truth.

Second, as I have said, one may base one’s faith on a sutra.

The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, referring to the sutras preached in the preceding forty and more years, says, “I have not yet revealed the truth.”

The Nirvana Sutra states: “Though the Thus Come One does not speak untruths, if I knew that by speaking falsely I could help living beings gain the benefits of the Law, then for their sake I would go along with what is best and speak such words as an expedient means.”

And the same sutra says: “Rely on sutras that are complete and final and not on those that are not complete and final.”

There is more than one such passage, and they all indicate that the sutras preached by the Buddha in the first forty and more years may be termed untrue, an expedient means, works that are not complete and final, expositions of the devil. These passages are all intended to lead people to cast aside such sutras and replace them with the Lotus and Nirvana sutras. What reason could there be to continue to rely on sutras made up of false words, to carry out the practices they recommend, and to expect thereby to attain the way? So all those who cling to the provisional teachings should now cast them aside and put their faith entirely in the true sutras. This is what it means to base one’s faith on a sutra.

Question: The Reverend Shan-tpo
likewise declares that we should put our faith in a certain person and put our faith in a certain practice. How is this different from what you are saying?

Answer: He calls on people to base their faith on the Amida Sutra and the other works that make up the three Pure Land sutras. But in doing so, he fails to understand which of the sutras preached in the Buddha’s lifetime are complete and final and which are not complete and final. Therefore, if we examine his pronouncements critically in the light of the doctrines set forth in the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, we find that they are utterly discredited.

On the Protection of the Nation

Background

It is generally believed that Nichiren Daishonin wrote On the Protection of the Nation in 1259, the year before he submitted On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land to Hōjō Tokiyori, the de facto ruler of Japan. Both works explain from the viewpoint of Buddhism the fundamental cause of the great disasters that had plagued the country for the past several years.

In On the Protection of the Nation, the Daishonin writes, “At the present time, numerous prayers are offered for the peace and safety of the nation. And yet in the first year of the Shōka era [1257] there was a severe earthquake, and in the second year of the same era, torrential rains and violent winds occurred and the rice plants failed to ripen. It would appear to me that there is some evil teaching in this country that is bringing about the destruction of the nation.” He regards this “evil teaching” as The Nembutsu Chosen above All, written by Hōnen, the founder of the Pure Land school in Japan. The Daishonin describes the purpose of his own work, saying, “I have attempted to clarify the cause and origin of these slanders of the Law found in Nembutsu Chosen above All.”

As the Daishonin explains, On the Protection of the Nation consists of seven sections.

In the first section, the Daishonin clarifies the distinction made by Shakyamuni Buddha between the provisional and the true teachings. He then points out the error of those who, as Hōnen did, teach a Buddhism that is based upon the provisional teachings. For the purposes of argument, the Daishonin refers to the Lotus Sutra, the Nirvana Sutra, and the Mahāvairochana and other sutras of the True Word teaching as the “true sutras,” or the sutras of the true teachings. His intention is to focus on the refutation of Nembutsu Chosen above All, which not only is based on provisional sutras, but rejects the true sutras.

In the second section, he raises the issue of which sutra or teaching is the correct teaching for the Latter Day of the Law, reviewing the rise and fall of the various teachings, provisional and true, during the Former, Middle, and Latter Days of the Law.

In the third section, he makes clear why Hōnen’s Nembutsu Chosen above All contradicts the correct teaching of Buddhism. He says it rejects the true teaching and promotes the practice of Nembutsu (recitation of the name of Amida Buddha) based on the three Pure Land sutras that belong to the provisional teachings. For this reason, he declares the work to be a serious slander of the correct teaching.
In the fourth section, he cites sutra passages to show what steps are to be taken in dealing with those who put forth such slanders. The Buddha taught that one must refute doctrines that slander the correct teaching, stating that the Buddha's disciples are charged with this important duty.

In the fifth section, the Daishonin emphasizes how difficult it is to encounter the true teaching that will lead one to the attainment of Buddhahood, and good friends who will aid one in understanding it. In the Latter Day of the Law, when persons who can serve as good friends are scarce, one should regard the Lotus Sutra itself as a good friend, for it is the direct way to Buddhahood.

In the sixth section, he explains that simply chanting the daimoku, or title, of the Lotus Sutra will enable people to free themselves from the three evil paths of existence. He refutes the "easy-to-practice way" of Nembutsu that Hōnen argues will lead to rebirth in the Pure Land. The Daishonin says Japan is a country whose people have strong connections to the Lotus Sutra, and that the true Pure Land (in contrast to the imaginary one expounded in Nembutsu Chosen above All) is the place where practitioners of the Lotus Sutra dwell.

In the final section, the Daishonin addresses a number of doubts regarding the efficacy of faith in the Lotus Sutra put forth by various Buddhist schools that base themselves upon provisional teachings. Resolving each of these doubts, he closes by admonishing people to take faith in the correct teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

The word "nation" in the title On the Protection of the Nation refers to Japan, which at this time was suffering from a succession of calamities. In the earlier Nara and Heian periods the rulers of Japan patronized Buddhism because they believed it could insure the safety of the nation as a political entity. But the Daishonin uses the term "nation" to refer rather to the people of the country. In his usage, it encompasses the social and natural environments that support the population as a whole. In principle, therefore, it is not limited in meaning to Japan, but applies to the world at large.

The original manuscript of this work was preserved at Kuon-ji temple at Mount Minobu, but was destroyed in a fire in 1875. Today, only copies are extant.

Notes

1. Moved by pity for impoverished relatives, for example, a person may commit theft.
2. The Sacred Way teachings and the Pure Land teachings. See Glossary.
3. The introductory chapter of the sixty-volume version of the Flower Garland Sutra. The same chapter of the extant version of the sutra is entitled the "Pure Eye of the World" chapter.
4. The words "correct and equal" are another term for Mahayana. The sutras at the beginning of the Mahayana teaching are referred to as "Correct and Equal" in order to clarify the distinction between them and the Hinayana sutras they follow.
5. The eighteen elements comprise the six sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind), the six objects they perceive (colors and forms, sounds, odors, tastes, textures, and phenomena), and the six consciousnesses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and thought) arising through contact between the six sense organs and their respective objects. According to The Dharma Analysis Treasury, the first five of the six sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body) and the five objects they perceive (colors and forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and textures) belong to the realm of form. These are the first ten of the eighteen realms. The remaining half is one of the two categories of phenomena perceived by thought, that is, unmanifested phenom...
en. “Unmanifested phenomena,” in contrast to “manifested phenomena,” refers to internal and invisible objects that are regarded as material. Hence “the first ten and a half of the eighteen realms.”

6. According to the T’ien-t’ai school, the preaching of the Flower Garland Sutra, the first sermon, lasted only three weeks, the preaching of the Ágama sutras lasted twelve years, and the preaching of the Correct and Equal sutras and the Wisdom sutras lasted thirty years, and then the preaching of the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra followed. Thus the period of preaching before the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra totals forty-two years and three weeks. Hence the sutra says, “in these more than forty years.” While the T’ien-t’ai school regards the period of the Correct and Equal sutras and the Wisdom sutras as thirty years, the Benevolent Kings Sutra refers to it as “twenty-nine years.” Why this discrepancy? The T’ien-t’ai school explains that in the thirtieth year the Benevolent Kings Sutra, or more precisely the Benevolent Kings Wisdom Sutra, was preached as the concluding sutra of the Wisdom sutras.

7. Following the “Introduction” chapter, the “ Expedient Means” chapter begins with these words “At that time the World-Honored One calmly arose from his meditation and addressed Śāriputra . . . ”

8. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.
9. Ibid., chap. 2.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., chap. 16.
12. Ibid., chap. 10.
13. Ibid., chap. 11.
14. Ibid., chap. 3.
15. Ibid., chap. 11. Dhūta means the rules of discipline.

16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., chap. 28.
18. Ibid., chap. 23.
19. Ibid., chap. 11.
20. Ibid., chap. 21.
21. Also known as the Great Crown of the Buddha’s Head Sutra.

22. This concept is referred to as the five natures. See five natures in Glossary.

23. Here, the old and new translations of the Great Wisdom Sutra refer to the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra (also known as the Larger Wisdom Sutra) translated by Kumārajīva in the early fifth century and the Great Wisdom Sutra (also known as the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra) translated by Hsüan-tsang in the middle seventh century, respectively.

24. This refers to an assertion by Eshin, a learned priest of the Tendai school, that when the priest Reisen, who traveled from Japan to Ch’ang-an in China in 803, participated in the translation of the Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra in 810, he inserted the words “the seeds of the Dharma itself that is free of outflows,” which did not exist in the Sanskrit text.

25. The Great Commentary on the Abhidhamma is a two hundred volume work translated by Hsüan-tsang. It is said that in its 138th volume he added a passage that was not in the Sanskrit text.

26. In Hsüan-tsang’s Chinese version of The Summary of the Mahayana the eighth level of consciousness is set forth, while in Paramārtha’s Chinese version the ninth level of consciousness is set forth.

27. It is known that the Lotus Sutra cited in Vasubandhu’s Treatise on the Lotus Sutra, which was translated by Bodhiruci and others, is different in many respects from Kumārajīva’s Chinese translation of the sutra, or the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law.

28. “The determinate group” refers to two of the five natures into which the people are divided according to the Dharma Characteristics school. These two are those predestined to be voice-hearers and those predestined to be cause-awakened ones. According to the school, neither of them can become Buddhhas.

“Those without the nature of enlightenment” refers to one of the five natures. They are people who lack the nature to attain the enlightenment of voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, or bodhisattvas. Because Buddhahood is the enlightenment of bodhisattvas, those people are said to lack the nature to attain Buddhahood. See also five natures in Glossary.

29. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.
30. These sutras are cited in Dengyō’s Treatise on the Lamp for the Latter Day of the Law. No sutra titled Great Means exists but this is understood to refer to the Māyā Sutra.

31. In Dengyō’s work this is one of the two theories; the other theory regards the twentieth year of the Enryaku era as 1,410 years after the Buddha’s death.

33. Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land.
34. On Resolving Doubts regarding Rebirth in the Western Paradise.
35. Eshin (942–1017) is also known as Genshin. In On the Protection of the Nation, both names are used. See Genshin in Glossary.
36. The eyes represent the teachings and the feet represent practice.
37. “Active” practices refer to those such as the six pāramitās, while “meditative” practices refer mainly to observing the mind or truth as in T’ien-t’ai’s practice of meditation.
38. The Buddha, with the intention of encouraging people to practice harder, declares that they can attain rebirth in a pure land or achieve Buddhahood now, though in fact they can do so only at some other time.
40. Ibid., chap. 21.
41. Genkū is another name for Hōnen, the founder of the Pure Land school in Japan.
42. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.
43. Ibid.
44. The “one practice” is that of calling on the name of Amida Buddha and the one vow is the eighteenth of the forty-eight vows made by Amida as the bodhisattva Dharma Treasury. Shan-tao said that invoking the name of this Buddha and wishing to be reborn in his Pure Land alone would lead everyone to rebirth therein.
45. Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land.
46. This refers to the initial stage in the practice of the Lotus Sutra, that is, the earlier-mentioned “one instant of belief and understanding.”
47. See the preface of this work quoted on page 107.
48. T’an-luan, Tao-ch’o, Shan-tao, and Genshin did not include the Lotus Sutra and the True Word teachings in the difficult-to-practice way, the Sacred Way; or the sundry practices. Therefore, they did not slander the Lotus Sutra and the True Word teachings the way Genkū did.
49. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.
50. Ibid., chap. 3.
51. The Mountain branch of the Tendai school is a group based at Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei. The Temple branch is a group based at Onjō-ji temple in Otsu.
52. The Tō-ji and the Tendai teachings refer to the esoteric teachings of the True Word and the Tendai schools.
53. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.
54. The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra.
55. The Annotations on “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra.”
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. “The second year of the Kankō era” seems to be a mistake. The year with the cyclical sign hinoe-uma corresponds to the third year of the Kankō era (1006), which is generally accepted as the year in which this work was produced.
60. Here the Daishonin is saying that Genshin’s Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land and Genkū’s Nembutsu Chosen above All are not alike in content and so do not belong to the same category.
61. The Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight.”
62. Here “you” refers to the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra who observe the true nature of their minds. This passage appears where T’ien-t’ai explains the last of three kinds of sutras: (1) the Buddha’s voice of preaching during his lifetime, (2) his teachings recorded after his death (i.e., the sutras), and (3) the Dharma, or the Law, that becomes one with the meditating mind, indicating one’s Buddha nature.
63. On “The Words and Phrases.”
64. The believers of the Anti-Lokāyata school, a non-Buddhist school in ancient India that is thought to have arisen in opposition to the Lokāyata school. The “Anti-Lokāyatas” later came to be cited as an example of betrayers of their teachers.
66. Here, the “seeds of similar species” refers to the Buddha nature that is inherent in all living beings. Specifically, the inherent seeds refer to the three inherent potentials of the Buddha nature, that is, the innate Buddha nature, the wisdom to perceive it, and the good deeds to develop this wisdom and cause the Buddha nature to emerge. The “seeds of opposites” refers to the three paths, that is, earthly desires, karma, and suffering. T’ien-t’ai asserts that the three paths of earthly desires, karma, and suffering are none other than the three virtues of the Dharma body, wisdom, and emancipation.
67. This passage does not appear in the Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshū, though it is found in extant copies of this text. The next question in the text apparently refers to this passage; hence it is inserted here in the translation.

68. A rephrasing from the Vimalakīrti Sutra.

69. The teachings of the perfection of wisdom.

70. Refers to laymen and laywomen.

71. A summary of a passage from Nembutsu Chosen above All.

72. Rather than refuting the practice of Nembutsu, Nichiren Daishonin refuted the erroneous doctrine of Nembutsu Chosen above All that one should abandon all the teachings except the Pure Land sutras. Hōnen’s disciples tried to prevent lay believers from recognizing this erroneous doctrine of Hōnen and made up lies, treating the Daishonin as one who would destroy Buddhism by slandering Amida Buddha and the Nembutsu practice.

73. “All-penetrating wisdom” is the wisdom of the Buddha that understands the nature of all phenomena.

74. This statement seems to be a summary of the quotations from the Nirvana Sutra that follow.

75. A “central land” refers to the center of Buddhism, while a “remote land” in this sutra passage refers to a land that is far away from the center of Buddhism.

76. A summary of the sutra passage.

77. Founder of Jainism, who sought liberation through rigorous asceticism.

78. Shakayamuni Buddha told Kāshyapa that Sunakshatra, who had read and recited the twelve divisions of the scriptures, had developed erroneous views such as that there was no Buddha, no Law, and no nirvana. He also told Kāshyapa that when he instructed Sunakshatra, the renegade said that, even though the Buddha had taught him, he did not believe in the law of cause and effect. When the Buddha saw that Kāshyapa found his story hard to accept, he urged Kāshyapa to go and visit Sunakshatra with him on the Nairanjana River. This they did.

79. Lotus Sutra, chap. 28.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., chap. 11.

82. Ibid. This statement is a vow of the Buddha Many Treasures, “That Buddha” in this passage refers to a Buddha who preach-

83. On “Great Concentration and Insight.”

84. Nichiren Daishonin addressed this matter in such works as On the Ten Worlds and What It Means to Slander the Law.

85. The six kinds of relatives refer to a father, a mother, an elder brother, a younger brother, a wife, and a son or daughter. According to another classification, a father, a son or daughter, an elder brother, a younger brother, a husband, and a wife.


87. Ibid., chap. 26.

88. Ibid., chap. 3.

89. On “The Words and Phrases.” In this commentary Miao-lo refers to the passage from the “Medicine King” chapter of the Lotus Sutra that reads, “If in the last five-hundred-year period after the Thus Come One has entered extinction there is a woman who hears this sutra and carries out its practices as the sutra directs, when her life here on earth comes to an end, she will immediately go to the World of Peace and Delight where the Buddha Amida dwells.” What Miao-lo means is that Shakayamuni Buddha is not encouraging people to go to the Pure Land of Amida Buddha of the Meditation Sutra.

90. The “fourth period” refers to the fourth of the five periods of the Buddha’s preaching life. According to these priests’ view, the Lotus Sutra is inferior to the Nirvana Sutra, and the latter is the highest sutra that belongs to the final and fifth period. “The fourth flavor,” which is mentioned subsequently, means the fourth of the five flavors. The fifth flavor, or the ghee, represents the highest sutra, that is, the Nirvana Sutra in this context.

91. Though this passage does not appear in the Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshū, it does appear in some extant copies of On the Protection of the Nation.

92. This statement comes from the fact that T’ien-t’ai set forth the doctrine of the five periods of teachings on the basis of the parable of the wealthy man and his impoverished son related in the “Belief and Understanding” chapter. The parable of the wealthy man and his impoverished son itself is related by the four great voice-hearers to express their understanding, that is, to show that they have understood the
teaching of replacing the three vehicles with the one vehicle.

93. The “seven blessings” means averted or eradicating the seven disasters. See seven disasters in Glossary.

94. According to a Chinese folktale, a rabbit, running across a farmer’s field, bumped into a stump and broke its neck. The farmer then stopped work and waited by the stump, hoping to get another rabbit in the same way.

95. “Holy gesture” here refers to the action of the Buddha who picked up a flower and showed it to the assembly. Mahākāśyapa alone understood its meaning and smiled.

96. A devil who pretends to be a Buddha. The Nirvana Sutra says, “After I have passed into nirvana . . . this devil king Pāpiyas will in time try to destroy the correct teaching of mine. . . . He will change his form into that of an arhat or a Buddha, and will try to destroy the correct teaching of mine.”