What It Means to Slander the Law

Nichiren, the shramana of Japan

The first section elucidates the causes that lead one to be reborn in the eight great hells. The second section makes clear the gravity of the offenses that lead one to fall into the hell of incessant suffering. The third section uses the dialogue form to clarify various points. The fourth section describes the attitude of mind that should characterize the votary of the Lotus Sutra when he strives to propagate its teachings.

First, to examine the causes that lead one to be reborn in the eight great hells. The first of the eight great hells is called the hell of repeated rebirth for torture. It is situated a thousand yojanas underneath the continent of Jambudvīpa. This hell is ten thousand yojanas in both length and breadth.

The persons being punished in this hell are intent upon doing harm to one another. Once they catch a glimpse of one another, they go after each other like dogs and monkeys, each using iron claws to snatch and tear at his opponent, until all their flesh and blood has been torn away and only bare bones remain. Or else the wardens of hell, taking iron clubs in their hands, pummel the offenders from head to foot until their bodies have been crushed to particles no bigger than grains of sand, or they use sharp knives to hack away the flesh chunk by chunk. But each time all this has happened, the offenders are restored to their original form, being reborn again and again in the same hell.

As to the life span of dwellers in this hell, fifty years of ordinary human life are equivalent to one day and one night in the life span of the four heavenly kings, and the four heavenly kings have a life span of five hundred years. But the five hundred years of the four heavenly kings is equivalent to no more than one day and one night in the life of the sufferers in the hell of repeated rebirth for torture, and they have a life span of five hundred such years.

The action that causes one to be reborn in this hell is the taking of life. Even if one kills no more than a tiny insect such as a mole cricket, an ant, a mosquito, or a gadfly, if one does not repent of the crime, one will invariably fall into this hell, as surely as a needle, no matter how small, will sink if it is placed on the surface of water. And even if one should repent, if one then goes on to commit the same offense again, then it will be very hard for one to escape punishment even though one should repent a second time. It is like the case of a man who has been sent to prison for stealing. Though he may in time be freed by the authorities and allowed to leave prison, if he once more steals and is sent to prison again,
it will be very hard for him to get out a second time.

This being the case, there is hardly a person in all of Japan at the present time, from the ruler on down to the common people, who can escape falling into this hell. Even Buddhist priests who follow the rules of discipline and are renowned for the strictness with which they observe the precepts can scarcely avoid killing an ant or a louse or doing injury to a mosquito or a gadfly. And how much more certain is the fate of those who day after day kill the birds and deer of the hills and meadows or the fish and shellfish of the rivers and seas, or even worse, those who go so far as to kill oxen, horses, or human beings!

The second hell is the hell of black cords. It is situated beneath the hell of repeated rebirth for torture and is the same length and breadth as that hell. Here the wardens of hell seize the persons to be punished and force them to lie down on the ground of white-hot iron, take cords of hot iron and, using the cords to mark lines on them as a carpenter would mark lines on a piece of wood, take hot iron axes and, following the lines marked by the cords, chop and hack up the victims, or use saws to saw them into pieces.

Again, to left and right there are huge mountains of iron. Iron flags are set up on these mountains and cords of iron strung from one flagpole to another. Then the sufferers are made to carry a mountain of iron on their backs, to mount the iron cords, and to walk across them from one mountain to the other. Many of them fall from the ropes and are smashed to pieces, or are pushed off so that they drop into iron caldrons where they are boiled alive. The sufferings endured in this hell are ten times more horrible than those of the hell of repeated rebirth for torture.

A hundred years in the life of an ordinary human being is equivalent to one day and one night in the life of those in the heaven of the thirty-three gods, the second of the six heavens in the world of desire, and the life span of such beings lasts for a thousand years. But these thousand years that represent the life span of beings in that heaven amount to no more than one day and one night in the lives of those in the hell of black cords, the second of the eight hells, and their lives last for a thousand such years.

Those who not only take life but steal and rob in addition fall into this hell. Thus those robbers in our age who, having committed a theft, go on to murder the owner of the goods, are certain to fall into this hell.

The third hell is the hell of crushing. It is situated underneath the hell of black cords and is the same length and breadth. Here there are many iron mountains lined up in pairs facing one another. The wardens of this hell, who have the heads of oxen or horses, take clubs and drive the offenders in between the mountains. At such a time, the two mountains come rushing together, so that the bodies of the sinners are crushed to pieces and their blood flows out and covers the ground. In addition, there are many other types of suffering to be endured.

Two hundred years in the life of a human being is the equivalent of one day and one night in the life of those who live in the Yama heaven, the third of the six heavens in the world of desire, and there the life span lasts for two thousand years. But these two thousand years are no more than one day and night in the life span of those in the hell of crushing, and their lives last for two thousand such years.

Those who not only take life and steal, but in addition commit acts of sexual misconduct such as having an affair with another man's wife will fall into this hell.

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Many priests, nuns, laymen, and laywomen of the world today commit sins of this type; among priests this sort of offense is particularly frequent. Ordinary husbands and wives can usually keep watch on one another, and it is difficult for them to evade the eyes of others, and so they are not likely to commit such offenses. Moreover, since priests are unmarried, they do not have much opportunity to indulge what licentious desires they may have. However, although they may not commit any offense with an unmarried girl, since if she should become pregnant, she would be pressed to confess who her baby's father is and the whole affair would come to light, still they may contrive to have relations with another man's wife. Once having done so, they of course will take care to keep the matter strictly secret. So we may surmise that, among the eminent priests of our time, there are many who have committed an offense of this kind. If so, then a large number of such eminent priests of our time are destined to fall into this hell.

The fourth hell is the hell of wailing. It is situated beneath the hell of crushing and is the same length and breadth. Here the wardens of hell, emitting horrible cries, shoot at the offenders with bows and arrows, or club them over the head with iron bars and force them to race over the ground of burning iron, or turn the sinners over and over on heated iron racks and in this way roast them. At other times they force open their mouths and pour in a stream of molten copper, so that their five vital organs are burned up and immediately drop out of their bodies.

Four hundred years in the life of a human being is the equivalent of one day and one night in the lives of those who inhabit the Tushita heaven, the fourth of the six heavens in the world of desire, and there the life span lasts for four thousand years. But these four thousand years are no more than one day and night in the life span of those in the hell of wailing, and their lives last for four thousand such years. Those who not only take life, steal, and commit sexual misconduct, but also drink intoxicants, will fall into this hell, these being the causes that condemn one to it. Among the priests, nuns, and men and women lay believers of our time, those who are great drinkers of intoxicants will find it particularly hard to escape the sufferings of this hell.

The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom lists thirty-six faults that are traceable to intoxicants, and the Brahmā Net Sutra says that anyone who urges one cup of liquor upon another will for five hundred lifetimes be born with an armless body. According to a commentary by a Buddhist teacher, this means he will be born as an earthworm or something of that sort. And if this is the case, how much worse will it be for those who sell liquor to others for a price, or worse, who sell watered down liquor to others! There must be many persons among the laymen and laywomen of our age who will have difficulty avoiding the sufferings of this hell.

The fifth hell is the hell of great wailing. It is situated beneath the hell of wailing and is the same length and breadth. In this hell, sufferings are inflicted upon the offenders that are ten times as great as those of all the preceding four hells put together.

As to the life span there, eight hundred years in the life of a human being is equivalent to one day and one night in the lives of those who live in the Heaven of Enjoying the Conjured, the fifth of the six heavens in the world of desire, and there the life span lasts for eight thousand years. But these eight thousand years are no more than one day and night in the life span of those in the hell of great wailing, and their
lives last eight thousand such years.

Those who are not only guilty of the major offenses of taking life, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, and drinking intoxicants, but who also tell falsehoods and lies will fall into this hell.

The people of today, even those who are noted for their worthiness or outstanding virtue, can perhaps go an hour without lying, but they cannot go a day without doing so. Or perhaps they can go a day without lying, but they cannot go a month; they may go a month but they cannot go a year; or they may go a year but they cannot go a whole lifetime. And if such is the case, then it will be hard for even a single person in the world today to escape falling into this hell.

The sixth hell is the hell of burning heat. It is located beneath the hell of great wailing and is of the same dimensions. In this hell, there are many different kinds of suffering. If one were to take a spark of fire no bigger than a pea from this hell and place it in the continent of Jambudvīpa, it would burn up the whole continent in an instant. How much more devastating, then, must be its effect upon the bodies of the offenders, which are as soft as cotton. The persons confined to this hell look upon the fires of the preceding five hells as though they were so much snow. In terms of the human world, the fire of this hell is as much greater in intensity as is the heat of molten iron or copper when compared with the heat of a stick of burning firewood.

As for the life span there, sixteen hundred years in the life of a human being is equivalent to one day and one night in the lives of those who inhabit the Heaven of Freely Enjoying Things Conjured by Others, the sixth of the six heavens in the world of desire, and there the life span is sixteen hundred years. But these sixteen hundred years are no more than one day and night in the life span of those in the hell of burning heat, and their lives last sixteen hundred such years.

As for the causes that condemn one to this hell, those persons who not only take life, steal, commit sexual misconduct, drink intoxicants, and lie, but who are also guilty of erroneous views, denying the law of cause and effect, will fall into this hell.

Concerning erroneous views, one man has said, “If a person dies of starvation, he will be born in heaven.” Generally speaking, those who are ignorant of the law of cause and effect may be described as holding erroneous views. In terms of worldly conduct, persons of erroneous views may be defined as those who are lacking in compassion. There are many persons in the world today who will find it hard to escape this hell.

The seventh hell is the hell of great burning heat. It is situated underneath the hell of burning heat and is of the same dimensions. Here offenders are subjected to sufferings that are ten times as great as those of the preceding six hells. The life span is half of a medium kalpa. Anyone who not only takes life, steals, engages in sexual misconduct, drinks intoxicants, lies, and subscribes to erroneous views, but in addition forces nuns who are ordinarily strict in observing the precepts to engage in sexual relations, will fall into this hell. Similarly, priests who use liquor to ply women of the laity who observe the precept against sexual misconduct, thereby tricking them into misconduct, or who give them goods and valuables to entice them to have sexual relations, will likewise fall into this hell.

Among the priests of our time, there are many who are guilty of heinous crimes such as these. The Great Compassion Sutra says that, in the latter age, there will be many men and women of the laity who will be reborn in the
realm of heaven, and many priests and nuns who will fall into hell. The sutra
is no doubt speaking about persons of the type I have mentioned above.
Anyone with a conscience would be ashamed at the very thought of such
conduct!

On the whole, if we consider the causes that condemn one to suffer in
these seven great hells as they are described in the various sutras and trea-
tises, and then look at the four types of Buddhist believers—priests, nuns,
laymen, and laywomen—in Japan in the present age, we will discover no
one who is likely to escape from these seven great hells, nor will we even
hear reports of such a person.

The Nirvana Sutra states: “When we enter that latter age, those who are
born as human beings will be as few in number as the specks of dirt that can
be placed on a fingernail, while those who fall into the three evil paths will
be as numerous as the dust particles of the worlds of the ten directions.” If this
is so, then those who have died among our fathers and mothers, our brothers
and sisters, must all have fallen into one of these seven great hells. Appalling
is the only way to describe it.

Dragons, serpents, evil spirits, Buddhas, bodhisattvas, sages—we have
never seen such beings, we have only heard reports of them. In the world
today, a man or woman who does not do the kind of deeds that will lead
to rebirth in one of the seven great hells—we have never seen such a per-
son, nor have we even heard reports of such a one. And yet there is not a sin-
gle person who thinks that he himself, along with all other living beings, will
in fact fall into the seven great hells. Even though he may say in so many
words that he will probably fall into hell, in his heart he does not really
think that it will happen.

Again, although there are priests and nuns, laymen and laywomen who be-
lieve that they have committed the kind of acts that will condemn them to
hell, they will put their faith in Earth Repository or some other bodhisattva,
or depend upon Amida or one of the other Buddhas to save them. Or, if
there are those who have followed various practices that produce good roots,
they will all conclude that, with such good roots, they will never be in dan-
er of falling into hell. Or there will be those who, following the practices of
their respective schools, will trust to the wisdom taught by their school and
believe that they are doing nothing that would condemn them to hell.

And yet the faith that such persons put in the Buddhas and bodhisattvas is
nothing like the love that they feel for their darling children or their husbands
or wives, or nothing like the respect they feel for their parents or their sov-
ereign. In quality, the two types of emotions are worlds apart. In fact such
persons think very lightly of the Bud-
dhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore, it is a grave error for the people of our time
to believe that, just because they put
their faith in the Buddhas and bodhi-
sattvas, or just because they carry out the teachings of this school or that,
they will be able to escape the suffer-
ings of hell. People of understanding
and good conscience should give care-
ful consideration to this matter.

The eighth hell is the great Avīci hell, also called the hell of incessant
suffering. It is situated beneath the hell
of great burning heat, at the very bot-
tom of the world of desire. This hell
measures eighty thousand yojanas in
length and breadth and is surrounded
by seven iron walls.

I will not describe in detail the extreme suffering that marks this hell,
but if all the sufferings of the seven
great hells described above, along with all other sufferings known elsewhere,
were to be taken as a unit, then the sufferings of the Avīci hell would be
a thousand times greater. In the eyes of the offenders who suffer in this hell, those who suffer in the hell of great burning heat seem in fact to be enjoying the delights of the Heaven of Freely Enjoying Things Conjured by Others, the highest heaven in the world of desire.

This hell gives off such a foul odor that, if the beings in the four continents of the world or the heavenly beings in the six heavens of the world of desire were to sniff it, they would all die. There are two mountains, however, called Emerging Mountain and Sinking Mountain, that hold in the stench from this hell and prevent it from reaching human beings. Therefore the beings of our world are spared from death.

If the Buddha were to describe the sufferings of this hell in full, those who heard his words would spit up blood and die. Hence the Buddha does not speak of them in detail.

The life span in this hell is equivalent to the length of one medium kalpa. As to the length of a medium kalpa, the human life span may be of immeasurable length, but imagine that the life span diminishes by one year in every hundred years. It continues to diminish in this way until it has reached a life span of only ten years, and the period required for this process is called one period of decrease. The life span then begins to increase at the rate of one year every hundred years, and continues until it has reached a length of eighty thousand years. The period required for this process is known as one period of increase. One such period of increase, along with one such period of decrease, constitutes a small kalpa, while twenty such periods of increase and decrease constitute a medium kalpa. Thus those who fall into this hell of incessant suffering are destined to dwell there for a comparable length of time and to undergo great torture there.

As to the causes that condemn one to this hell, it may be said that those who commit any of the five cardinal sins will fall into this hell. The five cardinal sins are killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an arhat, causing a Buddha to shed blood, and causing disharmony among the members of the Buddhist Order. In our present age, however, since there is no Buddha now living, it is impossible to cause a Buddha to shed blood. Likewise, since there is no Buddhist Order, it is impossible to cause disharmony among its members. And since there are no arhats, it is impossible to kill an arhat. Thus the only offenses possible are those of killing one's father or killing one's mother. And since the laws of the sovereign are so strict in their prohibition of the killing of a parent, it is rare to find anyone who commits such an offense. Hence in our present age, one would expect that very few people would fall into the Avīcchī hell.

However, there are offenses that are similar in gravity to the five cardinal sins. There are many persons who burn the wooden or painted images of Buddhas or Buddhist halls and pagodas, who appropriate the lands donated to such Buddhist images, who hack down or burn the stupas, or who kill wise men. Such persons will fall into the sixteen separate places that are attached to the Avīcchī hell. Thus we may be certain that many of those living in the world today will fall into these sixteen separate places, and those who slander the Law will also fall into this hell.

Next, I would like to make clear the gravity of the offenses that lead one to fall into the hell of incessant suffering.

Question: Is there any offense other than the five cardinal sins that will cause one to fall into the hell of incessant suffering?

Answer: Yes, the grave offense of slandering the Law, or correct teaching.
Question: What passages can you cite as proof?

Answer: The second volume of the Lotus Sutra states, “If a person fails to have faith but instead slanders this sutra, . . . When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avīci hell.” From this passage we can see that slandering the Law is an action that leads one to the Avīci hell.

Question: Are the five cardinal sins and the sin of slandering the Law of similar gravity?

Answer: The Larger Wisdom Sutra records: “Śāriputra said to the Buddha, ‘World-Honored One, are the five cardinal sins and the sin of destroying the Law similar in nature?’

“The Buddha said to Śāriputra, ‘No, they are not similar. Why is that? Because if one destroys the perfection of wisdom, then one destroys the all-inclusive wisdom and the wisdom that understands every aspect of phenomena possessed by the Buddhas of the ten directions. When one destroys the treasure of the Buddha, then one destroys the treasure of the Law, and when one destroys the treasure of the Law, one destroys the treasure of the Buddhist Order. When one destroys the three treasures, one destroys all the correct views in the world, and when one destroys all the correct views in the world, then one is committing a crime that will bring one unlimited retribution. And when one has committed a crime that will bring unlimited retribution, then one must undergo pain and suffering for an unlimited period of time.’”

And elsewhere in the same sutra it says: “Because these persons have accumulated the causes that come from destroying the Law, they will fall into the great hell for a period of immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of years. These persons who destroy the Law will move from one great hell to another. And when the great fire comes that destroys the world at the end of the kalpa of decline, they will move to the great hell in some other world. Thus they will move here and there throughout the worlds of the ten directions. And during that time, though the fire will occur at the end of the kalpa of decline and they will die in one world, because they have not yet exhausted the evil karma acquired through the act of destroying the Law, they will return to the great hell in this world.”

In the seventh volume of the Lotus Sutra it says: “Among the four kinds of believers there were those who gave way to anger, their minds lacking in purity, and they spoke ill of him and cursed him, saying, ‘This ignorant monk . . .!’ Some among the group would take sticks of wood or tiles and stones and beat and pelt him. . . . For a thousand kalpas they underwent great suffering in the Avīci hell.”

This passage indicates that, if one curses the votary of the Lotus Sutra or beats him with sticks, though one may later repent of such actions, one cannot completely absolve oneself of the offense but will fall into the Avīci hell for a period of a thousand kalpas. The sin of slandering the Law, even though one later repents of it, is a thousand times graver than the five cardinal sins. And how much worse is the fate of one who slanders the Law without ever repenting? Can such a person ever hope to be released from the Avīci hell?

Therefore it is stated in the second volume of the Lotus Sutra: “If this person . . . on seeing those who read, recite, copy, and uphold this sutra, should despise, hate, envy, or bear grudges against them . . . When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avīci hell, be confined there for a whole kalpa, and when the kalpa ends, be born there again. He will keep repeating this cycle for a countless number of kalpas.”
In this third section I will employ the dialogue form to clarify certain points.

Question: I understand now that the sin of slandering the Law is even graver than the five cardinal sins. But just what does it mean to slander the Law?

Answer: The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai Chih-che in his commentary on the Brahmā Net Sutra says, “To slander’ means to turn against.” Thus one who turns against the Law is slandering the Law. Vasubandhu in his Treatise on the Buddha Nature says, “To hate a thing is to turn against it.” The meaning of this passage is that one who hates the Law and causes others to reject it is slandering the Law.

Question: I would like to know more about the exact nature of this offense. Could you give a rough description of it?

Answer: Volume five of the Nirvana Sutra says: “Suppose there were a person who said that the Thus Come One is transient in nature. Could such a person escape having his tongue fall out?” The meaning of this passage is that anyone who presumes to say that the Buddha is transient in nature will have his tongue fall out.

Question: The various Hinayana sutras state that the Buddha is transient in nature, and in addition, all the followers of the Hinayana sutras likewise declare that the Buddha is transient. If that is so, then do the tongues of the Buddha and his followers all fall out as a result?

Answer: When the believers in the Hinayana sutras state that the Buddha of the Hinayana sutras is transient, it is unlikely that their tongues fall out. But if they address themselves to the Mahayana sutras and say that the Buddha revealed there is transient, or if they attempt to use the Hinayana sutras to refute the Mahayana sutras, then their tongues will fall out.

If we consider this fact, then we can see that, although one may simply be following the teachings of the sutra that one believes in, if one attempts to use that sutra to refute a sutra that is superior to it, then one will be slandering the Law. And if this is the case, then those persons who put their faith in provisional Mahayana sutras such as the Meditation Sutra and the Flower Garland Sutra, though they may carry out the practices prescribed in the text of the sutra, if they fail to set aside such sutras and put their faith in the sutras that are superior to them, or if they dare to assert that their own sutras are superior, then they will in effect be slandering the Law. Thus, for example, though one may understand the teachings as they are taught in the Meditation and the other sutras, if a sutra appears that refutes those teachings and yet one fails to accept that sutra, then one is slandering the Law. The principle here is the same as in the case of the Hinayana sutras discussed above.

Question: The Two-Volumed Sutra describes the ten recitations and the immediate attainment of rebirth in the Pure Land. According to the teachings of this sutra, those who perform ten recitations of Amida’s name will be re-born in the Pure Land. Now if one uses the teachings of some later sutra to refute these assertions, does this not constitute a case of slandering the Law?

Answer: The Buddha, speaking of the Meditation Sutra and the other various sutras that he expounded during the first forty and more years of his preaching life, declared that “I have not yet revealed the truth.” In the light of this statement, therefore, we would have to say that, in spite of the teachings concerning the ten recitations and the immediate attainment of rebirth, such rebirth is in fact difficult to count on. But if we did not have the Buddha’s own statement in the sutra that
he had "not yet revealed the truth," then in rejecting the teachings concerning rebirth in the Pure Land, we would be guilty of slandering the Law.

Question: There are some persons who say that the statement "In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth" that appears in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra does not mean to imply that the truth has not yet been revealed in any of the various sutras preached in the preceding forty and more years, or not revealed in a single one of their numerous passages or sentences. It merely means that in various places in the various sutras preached in the preceding forty and more years, the Buddha speaks disparagingly of those who are destined for the two vehicles of voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones, declaring that such persons are forever incapable of attaining Buddhahood, and he also speaks as though the Thus Come One Shakyamuni had attained enlightenment for the first time in his present lifetime. It is these statements alone that the Buddha had in mind when he said that he had "not yet revealed the truth" and not any of the other passages in the earlier sutras. Thus, anyone who sees the passage "In these more than forty years..." and recklessly declares, for example, that the passage in the Meditation Sutra that promises nine grades of rebirth in the Pure Land to ordinary believers does not in fact assure one of rebirth at all, is in fact an outrageous slanderer of the Law. What is your opinion of such an argument?

Answer: This interpretation is very like the one put forward by Tokuitsu of the eastern region. Tokuitsu, in explaining the statement "I have not yet revealed the truth," stated that the Buddha in the sutras that preceded the Lotus Sutra had asserted that those who were predestined for the two vehicles could never attain Buddhahood, and it was this assertion that the Buddha was taking exception to when he said that he had not yet revealed the truth. The Buddha did not intend his statement to apply to all the teachings of the first four flavors that he had revealed in the past. The Great Teacher Dengyō, on the other hand, insisted that the statement "I have not yet revealed the truth" was meant to apply to all the passages and sentences in the teachings of the first four flavors that had preceded the Lotus Sutra. So you can see that the opinion you mention is very much like that of Tokuitsu, who was a slanderer of the Law in ages past. Let me take some time here, however, to pose a question so that we may examine and shed light on this opinion [and then I will go on to refute other erroneous views].

Question: In the sutras that precede the Lotus Sutra it is denied that the people of the two vehicles can ever attain Buddhahood, and then the Buddha states that "I have not yet revealed the truth." If that is so, then the passages in the various sutras in which the Buddha previously stated that those predestined for the two vehicles can never attain Buddhahood, must be lies told by the Buddha who states that "I have not yet revealed the truth." Is that what we are to assume? If so, then of course we must admit that the Buddha tells lies. And if a person tells lies, then whether he asserts that a thing exists or that it does not exist, we cannot believe him in either case. You may say that only the statement denying that those predestined for the two vehicles can ever attain Buddhahood is a lie, while the assertion that those of the other vehicles, such as bodhisattvas and ordinary human beings, are reborn in the pure land and attain Buddhahood is a true statement, but we find that difficult to believe. If a man lies and tells us that east is in fact west, then he is just as likely to tell us that west is east. And if the Buddha is capable of stating that
the people of the two vehicles can never attain Buddhahood, then when he tells us that those of the other vehicles such as bodhisattvas can attain Buddhahood, how do we know that that too is not a lie? All those of the five vehicles alike possess the Buddha nature. To conceal the fact that those of the two vehicles, voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones, possess the Buddha nature and reveal that those of the bodhisattva vehicle and the humanity vehicle possess it will on the contrary have the effect of concealing the Buddha nature present in bodhisattvas and ordinary human beings.

Someone has asserted that the Buddha’s statement “In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth” refers simply to the truth regarding the path to attainment of Buddhahood. It does not mean that he has not yet revealed the truth regarding rebirth in the Pure Land. I can criticize this view as follows: If we assume that, in the statements that the Buddha made during the forty and more years concerning the attainment of Buddhahood, he did not yet reveal the truth, then are we also to assume that, when he stated in the Two-Volumed Sutra that the monk Dharma Treasury would not accept the correct enlightenment [and become a Buddha unless all other beings could be reborn in his Pure Land], and that in fact ten kalpas had already passed since he became the Buddha Amida, he was likewise not revealing the truth? If so, then, on the basis of the various sutras preached during the forty and more years, the monk Dharma Treasury could never have become the Buddha Amida, and hence it is simply a falsehood to say that Dharma Treasury attained Buddhahood. And if it is a falsehood to say that Dharma Treasury attained Buddhahood, then what Buddha is going to welcome the practitioners of the Nembutsu to the Pure Land?

The person may try to get around these difficulties by saying, “During the more than forty years, there was no attainment of Buddhahood. But Amida’s attainment of Buddhahood did not take place in this era; he attained Buddhahood in the past.”

I can raise objections to this, however, with these words: If the various sutras preached during the forty and more years do not in fact make it possible for ordinary persons to attain Buddhahood, then likewise in the far distant kalpas of the past it could not have been possible for one to attain Buddhahood merely on the basis of the provisional sutras preached during the forty-year periods of the Buddhas of those past ages. We know this because all the various Buddhas of past, present, and future follow the same order in preaching the teachings.

The person may point to the passage in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra that says, “One is not able to quickly attain unsurpassed enlightenment,” and argue that this means that, although one cannot quickly attain Buddhahood through the sutras preached during the forty and more years, one can do so after spending kalpas working at it. But I can criticize this view by pointing out that, a little farther along in the same text, Great Adornment and the other bodhisattvas express their understanding of the Buddha’s teachings by saying, “Though immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable asamkhyā kalpas may pass, they will in the end fail to gain unsurpassed enlightenment.” If this statement is correct, then even though kalpas were to pass, one could never attain Buddhahood on the basis of the sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra.

There are also persons who say that, according to the understanding of the Flower Garland school, the Flower Garland Sutra alone is not numbered among the sutras preached during the forty and more years. Already in the
Flower Garland Sutra the way to achieve rebirth and attain Buddhahood is expounded. Therefore, if one follows the practices advocated by the Flower Garland Sutra, how can one fail to achieve rebirth and attain Buddhahood?

To this I would reply that the assertion that the Flower Garland Sutra is not to be counted among the sutras preached during the forty and more years is a doctrine taught by the teachers of the Flower Garland school. But the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, when speaking of the sutras preached during the forty and more years, specifically mentions the Flower Garland teaching of the ocean-imprint meditation by name, indicating that that sutra is to be included among the sutras preached during the forty and more years. If one accepts the assertions of the Flower Garland teachers, therefore, one must turn one's back on the words of the Buddha.

Question: If it is impossible to achieve rebirth and attain Buddhahood through any means other than the Lotus Sutra, then when the Buddha appeared in the world, why did he not just preach the Lotus Sutra alone? Why did he spend forty and more years preaching all those other sutras?

Answer: I will let the Buddha answer that objection in his own words by citing the passage of the Lotus Sutra that reads: "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 they rejected the Law and failed to believe in it, they would fall into the three evil paths." 14

Question: If that is so, then why will the people not likewise reject and slander the sutras that were preached before the Lotus Sutra?

Answer: The sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra vary in countless ways. But taken as a whole, we may say that they were preached in such a way as to accord with the minds of others [rather than the Buddha's own mind] and speak in terms of the listeners' hearts. Therefore there is nothing in them to rouse the opposition of the listeners. It is like the case of stones thrown into water—the water offers no resistance to them. Moreover, though there are many different doctrines put forward in these sutras, they do not lead the minds of the people out of the nine worlds. The minds of the people continue to reside in the realm of delusion, now following good, now following evil, and therefore they can never attain the realm of Buddhahood.

Question: You say that the Buddha, because he was afraid that people would slander it, did not preach the Lotus Sutra at the beginning of his teaching life, but waited until forty and more years had passed to preach it. Now why is it that you do not in like manner preach the provisional sutras, but instead proceed without any hesitation to preach the Lotus Sutra, thus causing people to slander it and to fall into the evil paths of existence?

Answer: When the Buddha was in the world and was seated beneath the bodhi tree, he gauged the capacities of the people of his time. He perceived that if he preached the Lotus Sutra immediately, then people would slander it and would fall into the evil paths. If he waited for forty and more years before preaching it, however, they would not slander it, but instead would advance to the first of the ten stages of security, where there is no more retrogression, and would continue to advance until they had reached the stage of perfect enlightenment. But he also realized that, in the muddy age of the Latter Day of the Law, the capacities of the people would be such that not one person in ten thousand would be capable of reaching the first of the ten
stages of security. Likewise he knew that those who would preach the teachings in that time, not being Buddhas, would have great difficulty correctly gauging the capacities of the people. Therefore the Buddha gave permission for such persons to preach the Lotus Sutra from the very beginning so that people could establish some connection with the sutra, whether it was one of rejection or of acceptance.

At the same time, he indicated that even after his passing, if there were persons who possessed the proper capacities, then it was all right to begin by preaching the provisional teachings to them. Again, those concerned primarily with compassion [or bringing happiness to people] might begin by preaching the provisional sutras, as Shakyamuni Buddha himself had done. Or, those primarily moved by pity [or relieving the sufferings of people] might begin by preaching the true sutra, as Bodhisattva Never Disparaging had done.  

Moreover, he knew that for ordinary people in the latter age it will be a difficult thing indeed to avoid falling into the evil paths of existence. But he felt that, if they must fall into the evil paths in any case, it was far better that they should do so as a result of slandering the Lotus Sutra than as a result of some worldly crime. For, as a certain text tells us, “Those who hear the Law, speak slanderously of it, and fall into hell as a result, are still superior to those who offer alms to Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.”

The meaning of this passage is that, even if one slanders the Lotus Sutra and falls into hell as a result, one will acquire a hundred, thousand, ten thousand times more merit than if one made offerings and paid homage to Shakyamuni, Amida, and as many other Buddhas as there are sands in the Ganges.

Question: If what you have said is true, then the patriarchs and teachers of the Flower Garland, Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, True Word, Pure Land, and other schools must all be relegated to the category of slanderers of the Law. The Flower Garland school, for example, claims that the Flower Garland Sutra is so vastly superior to the Lotus Sutra that they are as far apart as clouds and mud, and the Dharma Characteristics and Three Treatises schools maintain the same view. The True Word teaching in Japan is divided into two branches. The True Word represented by Tō-ji temple holds that the Lotus Sutra is inferior to the Flower Garland Sutra, and of course even more inferior to the Mahāvairocana Sutra. The type of True Word embraced by the Tendai school teaches that the Mahāvairocana and Lotus sutras are on an equal level with regard to the principles expounded, but that the former excels in the matter of mudras and mantras. All those who preach views such as these must be condemned to rebirth in the evil paths of existence, must they not?

Answer: When a school is established and passes judgment on the relative superiority of the various sutras, there are two ways in which it may approach the matter. One is called apparent rejection, the other actual rejection. In the case of apparent rejection, one in fact approves of the assertions of another school but appears to reject them, perhaps for the purpose of making clearer the truth of the matter. In actual rejection, one in truth fails to realize the superiority of another school’s teaching but in one’s delusion actually believes that one’s own views are superior and with all one’s heart rejects the other’s views. The patriarchs and teachers of the various schools in some cases adopted the course of apparent rejection and in others adopted that of actual rejection.
There are cases where a person in his heart believes that the Lotus Sutra is superior to all other sutras, but appears for a time to turn away from it and reject it, hoping in this way to make the teachings of the Lotus Sutra more apparent. In the same way, Devadatta, King Ajātashatru, and non-Buddhists played the role of enemies of the Buddha and then, after they had thereby made clear the Buddha’s virtue, they in the end became followers of his teachings. On the other hand, there are many who in fact are ignorant and who act as enemies of the Buddha and thus fall into the evil paths. Therefore, in the case of the patriarchs and teachers of the various schools, one should determine whether they wrote anything that would indicate they had recanted their views, or whether they continued to be slanderers of the Law and thus condemned themselves to rebirth in the evil paths. Chia-hsiang of the Three Treatises school, Ch’eng-kuan of the Flower Garland school, Tz’u-en of the Dharma Characteristics school, and Kōbō of Tō-ji temple, for example—did these men write anything recanting their views? This is a point you should look into very carefully.

Question: If one is truly determined to use one’s present existence to free oneself from the sufferings of birth and death, then what should one shun and what should one seek?

Answer: The various sutras say that one should shun the company of women, but I would point to the passage in the Nirvana Sutra, which the Buddha preached in the grove of sal trees just before his death: “Bodhisattvas! Though you can perceive the countless faults and ailings that attach to and beset your bodies, because you have made up your minds to accept and abide by the Nirvana Sutra, it will guide and protect you and will not cause you to be lacking. Bodhisattvas, 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…. 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.”

The meaning of this passage is that, if one cares about the next life, one should fear all kinds of causes that lead to rebirth in the evil paths. But even more than such causes, one should fear evil friends or teachers.

Thus, after the passing of Great Adornment Buddha, four of the monks who were his disciples, because they chose to follow evil teachings, were reborn in the Avīci hells of the ten directions. And not only that—they caused their six hundred million followers and supporters to be reborn in the hells of the ten directions as well. Angulimāla, following the instructions given him by Manibhadra, cut off the fingers of 999 persons, and in the end even plotted to do injury to his mother and to the Buddha. The monk Sunakshatru was a son of Shakyamuni Buddha and received and embraced the twelve divisions of the scriptures, practiced the four stages of meditation, and cut off all ties with the world of desire. But because he later adopted the teachings of the non-Buddhist leader Painfully Acquired, he fell into the Avīci hell while still alive. Devadatta had memorized the sixty thousand teachings of the non-Buddhist schools and the eighty thousand teachings of Buddhism, but he carried out the five ascetic practices in violation of the Buddha’s teaching and hence in living form fell into the hell of inces-
sant suffering. King Ajātashatru killed his father and planned to do injury to his mother, and he loosed a huge elephant, hoping thereby to destroy the Buddha, all because of the instructions of his evil teacher, Devadatta. The monk Kokālika slandered Shāriputra and Maudgalyāyana and thereby fell into the Avīci hell while still alive. King Mihirakula wiped out all traces of the Buddha, the Law, and the Buddhist Order from all the five regions of India; his younger brother became king of Kashmirā and proceeded to destroy 1,600 stupas and Buddhist temples in the kingdom of Gandhāra; the king of Karnasuvarna worked to destroy Buddhism; King Virūdhaka slaughtered 90,900,000 persons, and the blood flowed until it formed a lake; King Shashānaka destroyed Buddhism, cut down the bodhi tree, and dug out its roots; and King Yu-wen of the Later Chou dynasty in China destroyed more than 4,600 temples and caused more than 260,600 priests and nuns to return to secular life. All these deeds were done because these men put their trust in evil teachers and allowed evil demons to enter their bodies.

Question: In India and China, the non-Buddhist teachings have destroyed the Buddha’s teachings, and the Hinayana doctrines have overwhelmed the doctrines of the Mahayana. Will that happen in Japan as well?

Answer: There are followers of non-Buddhist teachings and Hinayana doctrines in India and China, but there is neither in Japan. We have our doctors of Chinese history and literature, but these constitute no enemy to the Buddhist teachings. In addition, we have three schools of Hinayana teachings, but no one expects to use the teachings of these schools to free himself from the sufferings of birth and death. They are looked on simply as a means to gain a better understanding of Mahayana doctrines.

In effect, all we have in this country are five schools of Mahayana. And because people all aim to free themselves from the sufferings of birth and death through the teachings of one or another of these five schools, many disputes occur as to which school is most suitable. In addition, because the followers and supporters of the various schools are so numerous, there is much greed for profit and support involved.

In this fourth section, I would like to describe the attitude of mind that should characterize the practitioner who strives to propagate the teachings of the Buddha.

One who hopes to propagate the Buddha’s teachings must be aware of the five guides and propagate the correct teaching in accordance with these. These five guides are (i) the teaching, (2) the people’s capacity, (3) the time, (4) the country, and (5) the sequence in which the Buddhist teachings are to be propagated.

As to the first of these, the teaching, the Thus Come One Shakamuni in the course of his fifty years of preaching taught doctrines that fall into various different categories such as Mahayana and Hinayana, provisional and true, exoteric and esoteric teachings. The Flower Garland school speaks of the five teachings, into which it divides all the teachings of the Thus Come One’s lifetime, and among these regards the Flower Garland and Lotus sutras as the highest. And of these two sutras, it places the Flower Garland Sutra in the supreme position. This is the doctrine accepted by the three schools of southern China and the seven schools of northern China, the patriarchs and teachers of the Flower Garland school, and the Great Teacher Kōbō of Tō-ji temple in Japan.

The Dharma Characteristics school divides the teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime into three periods, and among
these three, it regards the Profound Secrets and Lotus sutras as representing the finest among all the sacred teachings of his lifetime. But although both are regarded as “sutras that are complete and final,” the Lotus Sutra is considered to be a “sutra that is not complete and final” among the complete and final sutras, while the Profound Secrets Sutra is looked on as a “sutra that is complete and final” among the complete and final sutras.

The Three Treatises school classifies the teachings into two storehouses and three periods. Among the teachings of the three periods, those of the third period, the teachings of the Middle Way, include the Wisdom sutras and the Lotus Sutra. Of these two, the Wisdom sutras are considered to be higher.

The True Word teaching in Japan is divided into two branches. The branch of Tō-ji temple follows the classification set up by the Great Teacher Kōbō in his “ten stages of the mind,” assigning the Lotus Sutra to the eighth place, the Flower Garland Sutra to the ninth place, and the True Word teachings to the tenth and highest place. Thus it holds that the Lotus Sutra is not only inferior to the Mahāvairochana Sutra, but to the Flower Garland Sutra as well. The branch of True Word that exists within the Tendai school, following the doctrines of the Great Teacher Jikaku and others, holds that the Mahāvairochana and Lotus sutras differ in their degree of thoroughness, the former comprehensive, and the latter abbreviated. Thus the Lotus Sutra represents the esoteric teachings in theory, but the Mahāvairochana Sutra represents the esoteric teachings in both theory and practice.

The Pure Land school sets up the categories of the Sacred Way teachings and the Pure Land teachings, the difficult-to-practice way and the easy-to-practice way, the sundry and the correct practices. According to this view, all sutras other than the three Pure Land sutras, such as the Lotus Sutra, are to be relegated to the categories of the difficult-to-practice way, the Sacred Way teachings, and the sundry practices.

The Zen school is divided into two branches. One branch maintains that all the various sutras and all the profound doctrines of the various schools are included in the Zen school. The other branch holds that all the sacred teachings put forward by the Thus Come One in the course of his lifetime are so many words and explanations, mere expedient devices emerging from the mouth of the Thus Come One. The Zen school, by contrast, represents the secret intention of the Thus Come One, which has never been put into words or explanations. It constitutes a “separate transmission outside the sutras.”

The Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, and Precepts are all Hinayana schools. In India and China, the Hinayana schools often refuted the Mahayana schools, but such is not the case in Japan. [Here I will ask a question.]

Question: All these schools seem to vary in their doctrines. Are we to assume that each of these various doctrines has some logic to it and that they will all lead to enlightenment? Or is there only one school that represents the correct doctrine and are all the other schools in fact slanderers of the Law?

Answer: Though they have their different theories and vary in other ways, we can probably say that all of them lead to enlightenment.

Four hundred years after the death of the Buddha, King Kanishka of Gandhāra, who honored the Buddhist teachings, gathered a group of monks together for the space of a summer, provided them with alms, and ques-
tioned them about the Buddhist teachings. As he listened to each monk's opinion, he found that there were many differences of doctrine. The king, thinking this very strange, said, "Surely there must be one fixed doctrine that the Buddha preached!" Finally, he consulted the Venerable Pārśva.

The Venerable Pārśva replied, "Suppose that you break up a staff of gold and make various different objects out of the pieces. Though the objects differ in shape, they all come from the one staff of gold. Though a person may argue over their differences in shape, there is no arguing about the fact that they are made of gold. Similarly, there are different gateways to understanding. A person may argue over which one is the best to enter, but the truth that he acquires upon entering is the same in all cases." 29

Again, Gunavarman 30 has said: "Though the various teachings differ from one another, the truth that a person reaches through practice of them is one and the same. Because of one-sided attachment, the results may be better or worse in different cases, but a person of true understanding will not argue over such differences."

Moreover, the five hundred arhats all had different causes that led them to become arhats, but they all alike attained an understanding of the sacred truth. Among the [Buddha's] four ways of preaching described in Great Perfection of Wisdom there is that known as "preaching by seeing the vices of the hearers." 31 And among the [Buddha's] four intentions of preaching 32 described in The Summary of the Mahayana is that known as "the intention of according with the desires of all living beings." According to these, the Buddha will at one time disparage a certain type of good action and at another time will praise it. Likewise, the Buddha at times condemns this or that of the six pāramitās such as the pāramitās of almsgiving, of keeping the precepts, and of assiduousness, and at other times praises them. Thus he leads all to enlightenment.

If we stop to consider it in this way, then we may say that the dispute between Dharmapāla and Bhāvaviveka, 33 the difference of opinion between Jñānaprabha and Shīlabhadra over the principles of non-substanciality and the Middle Way, 34 the dispute among the three schools of southern China and the seven schools of northern China over the doctrines such as the sudden, gradual, and indeterminate teachings, the divisions of the Buddha's teachings into one period, two periods, three periods, four periods, or five periods, and the divisions of the four doctrine schools, the five doctrine school, and the six doctrine school; the Tendai doctrine of the five periods; the Flower Garland doctrine of the five teachings; the dispute between the Tō-ji and the Tendai versions of the True Word teachings; 35 the Pure Land school's doctrine of the Sacred Way teachings and the Pure Land teachings; the Zen school's doctrine of the teachings that are outside the scriptures and those that are inside the scriptures 36—all of these approaches differ, but they are all alike in that they lead to the truth.

Objection: The five teachings of the Flower Garland school, the three periods of the Dharma Characteristics and Three Treatises schools, the Zen school's doctrine of the teachings that are outside the scriptures, the Pure Land school's categories of the difficult-to-practice and easy-to-practice ways, and the five periods of the three schools of southern China and the seven schools of northern China, and other doctrines—if you say that these doctrines, though they differ from one another, are all alike in that they lead to the truth and that all accord with the Buddha's intentions and do not constitute slandering of the Law, then is
there in fact no such thing as slander of the Law?

To slander the Law means to turn against the Law. To turn against the Law means that, in the case of the Hinayana, one turns against the Hinayana sutras, and in the case of the Mahayana, one turns against the Mahayana sutras. If one turns against the Law, then how can one not be slandering the Law? And if one slanders the Law, how can one fail to call down upon oneself some bitter retribution? But what you have just said contradicts this principle of truth. This is my first objection.

The Great Wisdom Sutra says, “Those who slander the perfection of wisdom will fall into the Avīci hells in the ten directions.” The Lotus Sutra says, “If a person fails to have faith but instead slanders this sutra, . . . When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avīci hell.” And the Nirvana Sutra says, “In this world there are three kinds of illness that are difficult to cure. The first is violation of the four grave prohibitions, the second is commission of the five cardinal sins, and the third is slander of the Mahayana.” How could these passages from the sutras be dismissed as invalid? Here we have textual proof of what I am saying.

The Scholar Vimalamitra, the Great Arrogant Brahman, the Meditation Master Hsi-lien, and the Dharma Teacher Sung-ling slandered the correct teaching and, while still alive, fell into the Avīci hell and their tongues festered in their mouths. This is actual proof of what I am saying.

Bodhisattva Vasubandhu wrote a treatise on the Hinayana teachings in which he contradicted the teachings of the Mahayana sutras. But later, as he confessed to Bodhisattva Asanga, he repented so deeply of the fault he had committed that in his chagrin he came close to cutting out his own tongue. If slander the Law is no fault, then why should this man, a scholar who had written a thousand treatises, be so filled with remorse?

The Indian word “icchantika” is translated as “unbeliever.” An unbeliever is someone who does not believe that “all living beings alike possess the Buddha nature,” and that is what an icchantika is.

One who is an unbeliever is a slandering of the Law. Of the seven types of living beings in the Ganges River, the first is the icchantika, or person of incorrigible disbelief, who slanders the Law and hence is constantly sunk in the river, and the second is the person who commits the five cardinal sins or slanders the Law and hence is constantly sunk. How then can one not be fearful of slandering the Law?

Answer: Slander the Law means speaking ill of the Buddhist teachings for no reason. When one speaks ill of other doctrines in order to urge the validity of the doctrines of his own school, I do not think that this constitutes slander of the Law.

Among the four intentions of preaching described in Summary of the Mahayana, you have mentioned that known as “the intention of according with the desires of all living beings.” Now suppose that there is a person who has not done one single good thing in his life so far, but has done only evil. Now suppose that, through some slight influence in that direction, he should do some good thing. Regardless of just what the good thing was, we should surely rejoice and praise him for it. On the other hand, suppose there is a good person who in the course of his life so far has done only one type of good deed. In order to encourage him to do other kinds of good deeds as well, we may well criticize his one type of good deed. Thus the doing of a good deed will in some cases cause us to scold and in other cases cause us to praise. And the same
applies to the method of "preaching by seeing the vices of the hearers" included among the four ways of preaching in Great Perfection of Wisdom. Thus the condemnations found in the Vimalakīrti Sutra are directed at those doctrines that during the period of the Āgama sutras were the object of praise.

From this we can see that, if there are many persons who have capacities that fit them for the Hinayana teachings, then we will speak ill of the Mahayana teachings in order to encourage more people to take faith in the Hinayana sutras. On the other hand, if there are many persons who have capacities that fit them for the Mahayana teachings, we will criticize the Hinayana teachings and seek to encourage faith in the Mahayana. Or, if people seem to have an affinity with Amida Buddha, then we may criticize the other Buddhas in order to encourage faith in Amida. If many people seem to have an affinity with Bodhisattva Earth Repository, then we may criticize the other bodhisattvas and speak highly of Earth Repository. If many people have an affinity with the Flower Garland Sutra, we may criticize the other sutras and speak highly of the Flower Garland; if people have an affinity with the Great Wisdom Sutra, we may criticize the other sutras and praise the Great Wisdom; and we will proceed in the same fashion if people show an affinity for the Lotus Sutra, the Mahāvairocana Sutra, or some other sutra.

To observe the capacities of people and praise or censure accordingly does not constitute slander of the Law. If, however, a person who has no understanding of capacities should set about praising or censuring in an irresponsible manner, then I think that would constitute slander of the Law. But I do not think that, for example, when the teachers of the Flower Garland, Three Treatises, Dharma Characteristics, Tendai, True Word, Zen, or Pure Land schools seek to refute each other’s sutras in order to establish the teachings of their own school, this constitutes slander of the Law.

Objection: You say that there is nothing wrong in attacking other sutras and other schools in order to urge the doctrines of one’s own school and sutra, in attacking other Buddhas and bodhisattvas in order to render praise to the particular Buddha or bodhisattva that one favors, or in attacking certain roots of good because one wishes to encourage other roots of good. If so, then in the Āgama sutras of the Hinayana, do we find passages that attack the Flower Garland Sutra or the other Mahayana sutras? Or in the Flower Garland Sutra, do we find passages that attack the Lotus, the Mahāvairocana, or the other sutras of that class?

Answer: It is true that there are no passages in the Āgama sutras of the Hinayana that attack the Mahayana sutras. But the Flower Garland Sutra mentions the two vehicles, the great vehicle, and the one vehicle, and attacks the two vehicles and the great vehicle, and the Nirvana Sutra mentions the various sutras of the great vehicle and expresses opposition to them. The Secret Solemnity Sutra declares that it is the king of all the sutras, the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra says that, in the more than forty years, the Buddha had not yet revealed the truth, and the Amida Sutra says that, in comparison to the Nembutsu, the practices set forth in the other sutras are means to plant only “minor roots of good.” And these are not the only examples that could be cited. In addition, we may consequently assume that the teachers who base their doctrines on these various sutras likewise support the assertions I have cited.

If we stop to consider this, it would seem to me that, when one is expounding the views of one's own parti-
cular school, there should be nothing wrong in criticizing the various sutras where they differ from the view of one’s own school.

Objection: The Flower Garland Sutra does indeed mention the lesser vehicle, the great vehicle, and the one vehicle, and the Secret Solemnity Sutra, as you say, describes itself as the “king of all the sutras.” The Nirvana Sutra mentions “the various sutras of the great vehicle,” and the Amida Sutra says that, in comparison to the Nembutsu, the practices set forth in the other sutras are only “minor roots of good.” But there is no other work that, like the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra in the passage about the sutras preached “in the more than forty years,” designates a specific period of time, mentions the various major sutras such as the Ágama, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, and Flower Garland sutras preached during that period, and indicates their inferiority to that sutra.

The Nirvana Sutra does indeed have the passage about “the various sutras of the great vehicle.” And since the Nirvana Sutra was the last sutra the Buddha preached, when he was in the grove of sal trees, one would perhaps suppose that, when it speaks of “the various sutras of the great vehicle,” it is speaking disparagingly of all the sutras other than the Nirvana Sutra. But if we examine the list of sutras that is given after the mention of “the various sutras of the great vehicle,” we see that it includes “the twelve divisions of discourse,” “the sutras,” “the correct and equal sutras,” and “the doctrine of the perfection of wisdom.”12 But it makes no mention of the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra or the Lotus Sutra. And the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra itself, in its mention of sutras preached in the more than forty years, simply lists the Ágama, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, and Flower Garland sutras. It gives no indication of the relative merits of the Lotus and Nirvana sutras.

The Secret Solemnity Sutra describes itself as the “king of all the sutras.” But when it comes to describing what it means by “all the sutras,” it mentions such sutras as the Flower Garland Sutra and the Shrîmâlâ Sutra, indicating that it is the king of all these sutras, but we find no mention of the Lotus Sutra. And when the Amida Sutra speaks of “minor roots of good,” it gives no indication of what period it is speaking about, or just what sort of good roots it means. When it speaks of “minor roots of good,” is it perhaps using the term to designate the Hinayana sutras? Or by “minor roots of good” does it mean the good practices that pertain to the two realms of human and heavenly beings? Or by “minor roots of good” does it mean the various good practices described in the Meditation Sutra and the Two-Volumed Sutra? Who knows? It is nowhere explained which of the practices advocated by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime are “minor roots of good” when compared to the Nembutsu.

Again, in the various esoteric teachings such as the Mahâvairochana Sutra and the Six Pâramitâs Sutra we do not find any passages that disparage all of the other sutras preached in the lifetime of the Buddha and praise only that particular sutra. The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, however, in the passage concerning the sutras preached in the preceding more than forty years, does disparage all those sutras. And in the case of the Lotus Sutra alone, we find a passage that disparages all the sutras preached in the more than forty years preceding the Lotus Sutra, the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra that was being preached concurrently, and the Nirvana Sutra that was to be preached in the future, praise being reserved solely for the Lotus Sutra. Thus we see that when Shakyamuni or any of the
other various Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future make their appearances in the world and preach all the various sutras, they all accord the highest place to the Lotus Sutra.

It is like the terms "lord" and "underlings," which have no fixed meaning. In the countryside, the peasants and the attendants of the samurai refer to the samurai as "lords." But in the capital, even the members of the Minamoto and Taira families are called "underlings," while the term "lords" is reserved for members of the three families of court nobles. Or it is like the term "king" when used to refer to a head or leader. Even a peasant can be king in his own home, while a steward, a lord of the manor, or a constable will be king of his particular hamlet or village or district or province. But none of these is a great king, a ruler of a nation.

In the Hinayana sutras, the principle of nirvana of no remainder is "king," and in comparison to the Hinayana precepts and meditation, the Hinayana wisdom is king. In the Mahayana sutras, the principle of the Middle Way is king. In the Flower Garland Sutra, the principle of the perfect fusion and unity of all phenomena is king. In the Wisdom sutras the principle of non-substantiality is king, while in the Great Collection Sutra the guarding of the correct Law is king. The Medicine Master Sutra is king among the sutras that describe the special vows taken by the Buddha Medicine Master; the Two-Volumed Sutra is king among the sutras that describe the forty-eight vows of the Buddha Amida; and the Mahāvairochana Sutra is king among the sutras that describe mudras and mantras. But none of these is the king of all the sutras preached during the Buddha's lifetime. The Lotus Sutra is the great king of all the ultimate doctrines expounded in all the sutras, such as supreme truth and worldly truth, the three truths of non-substantiality, temporary existence, and the Middle Way, mudras and mantras, the principle of the unconditioned, the twelve great vows, and forty-eight vows. To understand this is to understand the teachings.

Thus Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, Pu-k'ung, Fa-tsang, Ch'eng-kuan, Tz'u-en, Chia-hsiang, the teachers of the three schools of southern China and the seven schools of northern China, T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o, Shan-tao, Bodhidharma, and all the others, when they claimed that the particular sutra that they based their own doctrines on is first among all the sutras preached during the Buddha's lifetime, were indicating that they did not understand the teachings. Among all the teachers of the various schools, only the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-che can be said to have understood the teachings.

The Sacred Way and Pure Land teachings, the difficult-to-practice way and easy-to-practice way, correct and sundry practices expounded by T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o, and the others are derived originally from The Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra. But to conclude that the Lotus Sutra and True Word teachings are included among the difficult-to-practice way described in Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra is a highly erroneous view. To put forward such a view is to mistake the intent of the author of this commentary and the steps of its argument.

Tz'u-en, on the basis of the Profound Secrets Sutra, postulated three periods that included all of the teachings of the Buddha's lifetime. But he erred when he failed to understand that the three periods described in the Profound Secrets Sutra itself do not include all the various sutras.

When Fa-tsang, Ch'eng-kuan, and others divided all the teachings of the
Buddha’s lifetime up into the so-called five teachings, they assigned the Lotus Sutra and the Flower Garland Sutra to the category known as the perfect teaching and held the opinion that the Flower Garland Sutra is superior to the Lotus Sutra. Although the Flower Garland Sutra, which they favored, contains no mention of the fact that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood or that the Buddha attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past, they believed that it did in fact teach these two doctrines. Hence, though the Lotus Sutra is superior to the Flower Garland Sutra in this respect, they asserted that it is inferior to the Flower Garland Sutra, a view that is highly erroneous. Similarly, Chia-hsiang of the Three Treatises school, in expounding his doctrine of the two storehouses, asserted that the Wisdom sutras are superior to the Lotus Sutra, which is likewise an erroneous view. And when Shan-wu-wei and the others claimed that the Mahāvairochana Sutra is superior to the Lotus Sutra, they showed that they not only did not understand the real meaning of the Lotus Sutra, but did not really understand the Mahāvairochana Sutra either.

Question: If all these actions do in fact constitute slanders of the Law, then have the persons who committed them fallen into the evil paths of existence? What is your opinion on this?

Answer: The act of slandering the Law may belong to any of four categories, namely, those of upper, middle, lower, and miscellaneous slanders. The slander of the Law committed by men like Tz’u-en, Chia-hsiang, and Ch’eng-kuan would seem to fall into the upper or middle categories. In addition, probably because they themselves were aware that they had slandered the Law, they left writings in which they recanted their earlier views. Again, there are two categories of rejection directed against the views of other teachers, apparent rejection and actual rejection. Sometimes one may be aware that the other person’s doctrine is superior, but for the sake of clarifying the issue, one appears to attack his teachings. This is what is called apparent rejection. Actual rejection is of two kinds. If one mistakenly believes that a superior sutra is in fact inferior and directs a refutation at it, this is actual rejection of the bad kind. But if one directs a refutation at a sutra that actually is inferior, this is actual rejection of the good kind.

With regard to the simile of the golden staff put forward by the Venerable Pārshva, it means that, though there are numerous different Hinayana sutras, they are alike in expounding the principles of suffering, non-substantiality, impermanence, and non-self. All the supporters of the Hinayana sutras subscribe to these doctrines, and although there are controversies among the eighteen or twenty Hinayana schools, these are controversies over the approach to the truth, not over the truth itself. Therefore these persons are not guilty of slandering the Law when they attack each other. But when the non-Buddhist believers attack the Hinayana sutras, they do so on the basis of non-Buddhist principles of permanence and existence, while the Hinayana sutras expound the principles of impermanence and non-substantiality. Therefore, when the non-Buddhists attack the Hinayana sutras, this constitutes a slandering of the Law.

The Mahayana sutras teach the principle of the Middle Way, while the Hinayana sutras teach that of non-substantiality. Therefore, when the supporters of the Hinayana sutras attack the Mahayana sutras, they are slandering the Law, but when the supporters of the Mahayana sutras attack the Hinayana sutras, they are not slandering the Law.
The truth expounded in most of the Mahayana sutras has yet to be opened up and merged into the truth revealed in the Lotus Sutra because it does not make clear that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood and that the Buddha gained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past. The truth expounded in the Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, opens up and merges the truth in the other sutras with itself because it does make clear these two facts. Therefore, when supporters of the other Mahayana sutras attack the Lotus Sutra, they are slandering the Law, but when supporters of the Lotus Sutra attack the other Mahayana sutras, they are not slandering the Law.

Thus, the Mahâvairochana Sutra and the teachings of the True Word school are regarded as teachings that have yet to be opened up and merged, because they do not reveal the two facts just mentioned concerning persons of the two vehicles and the time when the Buddha gained enlightenment. Hence they are classified as works and doctrines preached before the Lotus Sutra. If the Mahâvairochana Sutra were opened up and merged [with the Lotus Sutra] and revealed these two facts, then it would be in the same category as the Nirvana Sutra. But the doctrines of the evil element inherent in the Buddha’s life50 and of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which were propounded by the Tripitaka Masters Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, Pu-k’ung, and I-hsing, would appear to have been stolen from the teachings of T’ien-t’ai Chih-che. If so, then the slanders of the Law committed by Shan-wu-wei and these other men would belong to the category of apparent rejection or of miscellaneous slander of the Law.

In the case of the five hundred arhats, the reason for their attaining enlightenment is to be found in the twelve-linked chain of causation expounded in the Hinayana teachings. Through ignorance, action, and the other links in the chain they were able to attain an understanding of the principle of non-substantiality. Thus, though one may argue over which particular approach to take, this does not constitute slandering of the Law.

As for the four intentions of preaching described in Summary of the Mahayana and the four ways of preaching described in Great Perfection of Wisdom—the authors of these treatises, Asanga and Vasubandhu, were scholars who lived after the passing of the Buddha and understood that the Lotus Sutra constitutes the heart of all the sutras preached by the Buddha. Hence they employed these categories of four intentions of preaching and four ways of preaching in order to reveal the meaning of the doctrines contained in the sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra. But if one takes the four intentions of preaching and four ways of preaching that are based on an understanding that has been opened up and merged, and confuses them with the four intentions of preaching and four ways of preaching that are based on an understanding that has yet to be opened up and merged, how can this be anything but slander of the Law?

Someone who is perfectly clear in his understanding of these various points may be said to understand the teaching.

There are four phrases concerning faith or belief: first, to believe but not understand; second, to understand but not believe; third, to both believe and understand; and fourth, to neither believe nor understand.

Question: If a person believes but does not understand, should he be called a slanderer of the Law?

Answer: The Lotus Sutra says that one can “gain entrance through faith alone,”51 and the ninth volume of the Nirvana Sutra says the same thing.52

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[Hence he is not to be regarded as a slanderer of the Law.]

Objection: The thirty-sixth volume of the Nirvana Sutra says: “I have explained in the sutras that there are two types of people who slander the Buddha, the Law, and the Buddhist Order. First are those who do not believe and whose hearts are filled with hatred and anger. Second are those who, although they believe, do not understand the doctrines. Good man, if a person has a believing heart but lacks wisdom, he will simply fall into greater and greater ignorance. And if a person has wisdom but lacks a believing heart, he will simply become more and more enmeshed in erroneous views. Good man, because the person who does not believe has hatred and anger in his heart, he will deny the existence of the Buddha, the Law, and the Buddhist Order. And because the person who believes is lacking in wisdom, his understanding of the doctrines will be topsy-turvy and he will cause those who hear the Law to slander the Buddha, the Law, and the Buddhist Order.” This passage seems to be saying that, with these two types of persons, the one who believes but does not understand is a slanderer of the Law. What is your opinion on this?

Answer: This person who believes but does not understand corresponds to the second of the seven types of persons in the Ganges River as described in the thirty-sixth volume of the Nirvana Sutra. A person such as this, when he hears the Nirvana Sutra expound the doctrine that “all living beings alike possess the Buddha nature,” will believe and yet again he will not believe.

Question: What do you mean by believing and yet not believing?

Answer: When he hears the doctrine that all living beings possess the Buddha nature expounded, he believes it, and yet in his heart he continues to give credence to the views expounded in the sutras that preceded the Lotus Sutra, believing that there is a certain type of human being who does not possess the Buddha nature. This is what is meant by believing and yet not believing.

Question: What scriptural proof do you have of this?

Answer: The Nirvana Sutra, speaking of the second type of persons in the Ganges River, says: “Thus when such a person hears this Great Nirvana Sutra, he is able to conceive a believing heart. So he is named among those who are able to get out of the river.” But it also says, “Though one believes that living beings possess the Buddha nature, one supposes this does not mean that all of them invariably do. This is called the state of insufficient belief.”

According to these passages, though such a person declares with his lips that he believes in the Nirvana Sutra, in his heart he continues to give credence to the doctrines of the earlier sutras. As we have seen, the Nirvana Sutra says of such a person of this second type, “Because the person who believes is lacking in wisdom, his understanding of the doctrines will be topsy-turvy.” To understand the doctrines in a topsy-turvy fashion means to read a passage from the true sutra but interpret it in accordance with the doctrines of the provisional sutras.

Question: What passages of scripture can you cite to support your contention that the person who believes but does not understand can attain the way?

Answer: The thirty-second volume of the Nirvana Sutra says, “Although there are innumerable causes that lead to enlightenment, if one teaches faith, then that includes all those causes.” And in volume nine of the same sutra, we read: “Once you have finished listening to this sutra, then you will possess all of the various causes and
conditions leading to enlightenment. When the voice of the Law and the Buddha’s shining light have entered into a person’s pores, then he will be certain to attain supreme enlightenment.” And the Lotus Sutra, as we have seen, says that one can “gain entrance through faith alone.”

Question: What about those who understand but do not believe? Are they slanderers of the Law?

Answer: They belong to the first type of persons in the Ganges River.

Question: What scriptural passages can you cite?

Answer: Volume thirty-six of the Nirvana Sutra, speaking of persons of this first type, says: “If a person listens to the Great Nirvana Sutra describing the Buddha who is permanently abiding, knows no change, and enjoys the virtues of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity, and yet in the end that person fails to believe that all living beings alike possess the Buddha nature, he is an icchantika. A person may slander the correct and equal sutas, commit the five cardinal sins, and go against the four grave prohibitions, and yet in the end he will attain enlightenment. Persons who have reached the stage of stream-winner, the stage of the once-returner, the stage of the non-returner, or the stage of arhat, and pratyekabuddhas will invariably attain supreme perfect enlightenment. But one who is an icchantika, when he hears these facts expounded, will give way to disbelief in his heart.”

Question: This passage deals with those who do not believe, but it does not say anything about those who understand but do not believe. What passage can you cite that pertains to the latter?

Answer: The passage from the Nirvana Sutra cited above that deals with the first type of person concludes by saying, “If a person has wisdom but lacks a believing heart, he will simply become more and more enmeshed in erroneous views.”

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**Background**

Nichiren Daishonin wrote *What It Means to Slander the Law* in 1262, while in exile in Itō on the Izu Peninsula. In this work he addresses the subject of slander of the Law, an essential issue of Buddhist faith.

Generally speaking, the people of Japan in the Daishonin’s time believed that all the Buddhist teachings represented a single truth, and that no matter what school one followed, if one studied and practiced that “truth,” one could free oneself from the sufferings of birth and death. But the Daishonin declared that those schools that contradicted or rejected the Lotus Sutra, the only sutra in which the Buddha revealed the ultimate truth, were in fact committing slander of the Law.

The present work is divided into four sections. In the first, the Daishonin outlines the nature of, and the causality pertaining to, the eight great hells described in Buddhist scriptures. His intention is to emphasize the degree of suffering in the Avichi hell, also known as the hell of incessant suffering, and to prevent people from committing slander of the Law, which dooms them to rebirth in this hell.

In the second section, he points out that slander of the Law is far greater than the five cardinal sins that were generally regarded as the major cause for falling into the Avichi hell.

In the third section, the Daishonin
employs a question-and-answer format, and though usually in such cases the “opponent” asks the questions and the Daishonin supplies the answers, in one part the Daishonin acts as the questioner. (In this translation, the shift in perspective is indicated.) The Daishonin defines the act of slander as follows: turning one’s back on the Law, or the correct teaching, hating the Law, or causing others to reject it. Moreover, he explains, “Although one may simply be following the teachings of the sutra that one believes in, if one attempts to use that sutra to refute a sutra that is superior to it, then one will be slandering the Law.”

Next he discusses various aspects of slander. He distinguishes the true teaching from the provisional teachings, in which, as Shakyamuni declared, the truth has not yet been revealed. And he refutes the arguments of the Pure Land and Flower Garland schools that their doctrines do not belong to the category of teachings that have not yet revealed the truth. Then he answers these questions: Why did Shakyamuni expound the provisional teachings, which do not lead to Buddhahood, and why does he himself not preach the provisional teachings as Shakyamuni did? He says that this seeming discrepancy may be explained by the difference in the capacities of the people being instructed.

He concludes that the founders and patriarchs of the various schools have surely fallen into the evil paths because they failed to turn their hearts to the Lotus Sutra. Then, citing the Nirvana Sutra, he warns of the pitfall of allowing oneself to be influenced by erroneous teachers, who are described here as evil friends.

In the fourth section, he refers to what he calls the five guides for propagation—the teaching, the people’s capacity, the time, the country, and the sequence in which the Buddhist teachings are to be propagated—as a guideline that practitioners who aspire to propagate Buddhism should always bear in mind. Among other issues, he discusses what it means to know the teaching. Though the various schools assert that their teachings may differ but that they nevertheless constitute the path to enlightenment, the Daishonin says that if what they insist were true, there would be no slander of the Law, something to which many sutras refer. He demonstrates the superiority of the Lotus Sutra, citing a passage from the Lotus that places it above any other sutra among Shakyamuni’s lifetime teachings. He states that the essential doctrines of the sutra are the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles and Shakyamuni Buddha’s original enlightenment in the remote past, and that these doctrines are not found in any other sutra.

In conclusion, the Daishonin cites a sutra passage describing the mutual possession of the Buddha nature by all living beings, and says that while believing in this and in the true sutra enables one to attain Buddhahood, wisdom without faith in the true sutra characterizes one as an icchantika, or slanderer of the Law.

Notes

1. The liver, lungs, heart, kidneys, and spleen.
2. The Commentary on Bodhisattva Precepts Established by T’ien-t’ai, a work by Ming-K’uang of the T’ang dynasty.
3. “One man” probably refers to Genshin, a priest of the Tendai school. A similar statement is found in Genshin’s Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land. For Genshin, see Glossary.
4. This statement appears in the Meditation on the Correct Teaching Sutra.
5. The Dharma Analysis Treasury explains the offenses similar to the five cardinal sins.
For example, destroying the buildings and facilities of the Buddhist Order may eventually result in the dispersion of the Order's members; hence it amounts to the sin of causing disunity in the Buddhist Order. Destroying a Buddha's stupa is equivalent to shedding the blood of a Buddha.

6. The sixteen separate places are enumerated in the Meditation on the Correct Teaching Sutra.

7. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

8. Ibid., chap. 20.

9. Ibid., chap. 3.

10. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra.

11. The classification into nine grades, according to the natures and qualities of the people who attain rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha. People are of superior, medium, or inferior capacity. Each of these three grades is in turn of superior, medium, or inferior quality and merit. According to which grade people belong to, differences arise in how Amida Buddha comes down to this world to lead them at the moment of death to the Pure Land.

12. Tokuitsu, a priest of the Dharma Characteristics school, is associated with the eastern region because he was active in eastern Japan, in areas such as Kanto and Ōshū. His statement in the next sentence is quoted in Dengyo's *Essay on the Protection of the Nation*. For Tokuitsu, see Glossary.

13. This statement is found in *The Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra*.


15. The Japanese term *jīji* is translated as "pity and compassion." Usually, as is described in *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, *ji*, or "pity," is taken to mean bringing happiness to people and *hi*, or "compassion," is taken to mean relieving them of their sufferings. Here, however, Nichiren Daishonin uses the definition of the Nirvana Sutra that defines the character *ji* (pity) as relieving suffering, and *hi* (compassion) as bringing happiness.

16. In *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight,"* this is quoted as a passage from the Sutra of the Heavenly Son Abiding Goodness.

17. A reference to Tendai Esotericism. Jikaku and Chishō, the third and fifth chief priests of Enryaku-ji temple, incorporated the esoteric teachings into the Tendai doctrines and promoted them.

18. The four were the monks Shore of Suffering, Sawata, Shōkō, and Batsunanda. (The last three are Japanese readings of the Chinese names.) See Great Adornment (i) in Glossary.

19. A reference to King Shashânka who appears subsequently. According to *The Record of the Western Regions*, he became the king of Karnasuvarna in the early seventh century and adhered to the non-Buddhist teachings. He was defeated by King Shihāditya of Kanyākubja.

20. A reference to Emperor Wu (543–578), who was responsible for persecutions of Buddhism in 574. Wu valued Confucianism and tried to abolish the Buddhist teachings.

21. The Dharma Analysis Treasury school, the Establishment of Truth school, and the Precepts school.

22. The Flower Garland school, the Three Treatises school, the Dharma Characteristics school, the Tendai school, and the True Word school.

23. The five teachings are the Hinayana teaching, the elementary Mahayana teaching, the final Mahayana teaching, the sudden teaching, and the perfect teaching. The perfect teaching indicates the Flower Garland and Lotus sutras.

24. The three periods are the periods of (1) the teaching that the elements of existence are real as taught in the Hinayana, or Âgama, sutras; (2) the teaching that all is non-substantial as taught in the Wisdom sutras; and (3) the teaching of the Middle Way. The third period corresponds to the Flower Garland Sutra, the Profound Secrets Sutra, and the Lotus Sutra.

25. The two storehouses are teachings for voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones, which correspond to the Hinayana teachings, and teachings for bodhisattvas, which correspond to the Mahayana teachings. The three periods refer to the preaching of (1) the doctrine that both the mind and objective reality are real; (2) the doctrine that the mind alone is real; and (3) the doctrine that both the mind and objective reality are without substance. The first period corresponds to the Hinayana teachings, and the second and third periods to the Mahayana teachings.

26. In his *Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind*, Kōbō classified the various Buddhist teachings as corresponding to ten stages of the mind's development. See ten stages of the mind in Glossary.

27. A reference to those teachings that
can be defined as esoteric teachings in terms of theory, but fail to describe mudras (hand gestures) and mantras (mystic formulas), which constitute esoteric practice.

28. Kanishka was the third and most influential king of the Kushan dynasty, which ruled over northern India including Kashmir. He is generally thought to have reigned during the second century. He studied Buddhism under the Buddhist poet Ashvaghosha and convened the Fourth Buddhist Council in Kashmir with five hundred monks, including Pārshva. “The space of a summer” is about ninety days from the mid-fourth month through the mid-seventh month.

29. This statement is found in The Annotations on the Verses of “The Dharma Analysis Treasury,” written by Yūn-hui, a priest of the T’ang dynasty.

30. A monk (367–431) from Kashmir who was active in China as a translator. The statement attributed to him here appears in The Biographies of Eminent Priests.

31. This refers to the method of helping people abandon their illusions and free themselves from the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness.

32. Four intentions that the Buddha has when he preaches his teachings. They are to preach on the equality of all Buddhhas; to preach with a perspective on attainment at some other time in the future; to preach with some other intent; and to preach in accordance with the desires of all living beings.

33. Bhāviveka (c. 490–570) of the Madhyamika (Middle Way) philosophy took the position that all phenomena are interdependent and have no independent existence of their own, or are non-substantial in nature. Dharmapāla (530–561) of the Consciousness-Only school asserted that phenomena arise from consciousness (vijñāna), which is the only reality.

34. Jñānaprabha (n.d.) is a leading disciple of Shīlābhadra who lived in the state of Magadha around the seventh century. Well versed in both Hinayana and Mahayana teachings and non-Buddhist literature, he was famous throughout India. He is said to have later followed Nāgārjuna’s doctrine of the Middle Way and debated with his former teacher Shīlābhadra, who belonged to the Consciousness-Only school.

35. A reference to the esoteric teachings of the True Word school and those of the Tendai school. For example, the former holds that the lord of teachings is Mahāvairocana Buddha, but the latter that Shakyamuni and Mahāvairocana are two aspects of the same Buddha.

36. The Zen school asserts that the Buddha’s enlightenment and his true teaching have been transmitted apart from the scriptures.

37. This quotation is not found in the extant Chinese versions of the Nirvana Sutra, but it is probably a paraphrase of passages in the sutra.

38. Hsi-lien is a Chinese priest of the Sui dynasty (581–618), described in Den-gyō’s Essay on the Protection of the Nation. He valued the worldly truth and slandered the Buddhist doctrines, such as the three-fold contemplation in a single mind set forth by T’ien-t’ai. Sung-ling is identified with Wei Yūn-sung, a Chinese priest who returned to lay life and in 567 exhorted Emperor Wu of the Northern Chou dynasty to abolish Buddhism. For Vimalakītī and the Great Arrogant Brahman, see Glossary.

39. Vasubandhu is said to have written a thousand works, five hundred related to Hinayana and five hundred to Mahayana.

40. Nirvana Sutra.

41. The Nirvana Sutra lists seven types of living beings in a parable pertaining to the Ganges River. See p. 567.

42. Based on the passage of the Nirvana Sutra (see I, p. 267), T’ien-t’ai established a classification of the five periods and defined “the twelve divisions of discourse” as the Flower Garland Sutra, “the sutras” as the Āgama sutras, “the correct and equal sutras” as the provisional Mahayana sutras such as the Vimalakītī Sutra, and “the doctrine of the perfection of wisdom” as the Wisdom sutras.

43. Three families permitted to advance to the highest post in the imperial government, that of grand minister of state. They belong to the imperial lineage of Emperor Murakami, the Fujiwara, and Emperor Kazan.

44. The state of nirvana in which, at death, both body and mind—the sources of suffering—are extinguished. Hinayana Buddhism teaches that the ultimate goal of practice can only be achieved at death, that is, in “reducing the body to ashes and annihilating consciousness.”

45. The teaching that all phenomena
and things constantly interrelate and give rise to one another, that one permeates all and all are contained in one.

46. A reference to the twelve vows that Medicine Master made prior to his enlightenment in order to cure all illnesses and lead all people to enlightenment.

47. This question is posed in relation to the Daishonin's objection. Hence at this point the roles of questioner and answerer revert to their original form, the Daishonin answering the questions.

48. A classification of false views set forth by T'ien-t'ai in *The Commentary on the Meaning of Bodhisattva Precepts*. The category of upper slander is denial of the law of cause and effect; that of middle slander is the view that the three treasures of Buddhism are inferior to the non-Buddhist teachings; that of lower slander is the view that one should discard the Mahayana in favor of the Hinayana; and that of miscellaneous slander is further divided into four: (1) the view that the Mahayana is the Buddha's teaching, while the Hinayana is not or that some of the Mahayana teachings are not the Buddha's teachings, (2) the view that, while the Mahayana teachings are beneficent, so are the non-Buddhist teachings and even the teachings of demons, (3) attachment to the Hinayana, and (4) setting forth an erroneous view on the basis of one's own shallow understanding.

49. Hinayana schools formed by schisms in the Buddhist Order after Shakyamuni's death. Around one hundred years after Shakyamuni's death, the first schism occurred in the Buddhist Order and produced the Sthaviravāda and Mahāsamghika schools. Later, the eight schools derived from the Mahāsamghika school and the ten schools from the Sthaviravāda, together constituting the eighteen schools. If the original two schools, Sthaviravāda and Mahāsamghika, are added to the eighteen schools, then they form twenty Hinayana schools.

50. A concept set forth by T'ien-t'ai in *The Profound Meaning of the "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" Chapter*. He says, "The icchantika has eliminated good as an acquired quality and only retains good as an intrinsic quality, whereas the Buddha has eliminated evil as an acquired quality and only retains evil as an intrinsic quality." This last quality is described as "the evil element inherent in the Buddha's life," which means that the Buddha understands the nature of evil, controls it, and uses it to lead all living beings to Buddhahood.

51. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

52. The passage of the ninth volume of the Nirvana Sutra says, "Once you have finished listening to this sutra, then you will possess all of the various causes and conditions leading to enlightenment." This passage is cited later.

53. A reference to Bodhisattva Kāshyapa.

54. A reference to the four stages of Hinayana enlightenment. See Glossary.