

The Portable Shrine Incidents



I WAS pleased to receive your letter as well as the daily records regarding the portable shrine incidents.¹ The burning of the main hall must signify that the end has come for the Buddhism of Mount Hiei. And it must announce that the time has arrived for the ruin of its school. Of course there are good reasons for such occurrences.

Jetavana Monastery and Kukkutārāma Monastery in India, and the temple on Mount T'ien-t'ai in China, fell into ruin in the space of the two-thousand-year period of the Former and Middle Days of the Law. And now, in the Latter Day of the Law, Hiei, the mountain of the T'ien-t'ai teaching, is found in Japan alone. Throughout the entire major world system, it is found in this one place only, is it not?

Can there be any doubt that devils will concentrate their envy on this one spot? And that the followers of Hinayana and the provisional teachings are also jealous of it? As a result, Zen priests, Precepts priests, and Nembutsu priests complain about Mount Hiei to the ruler and his ministers, the three thousand priests on the mountain fail to recognize the root of the ruin of their own school, and both priests and lay supporters alike are deluded about the cause of the destruction of their

country and of the Buddha's teachings.

The only thing we should rely on now is the passage in the seventh volume of the Lotus Sutra that reads, "In the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa,"² is it not?

And we should also rely on the passage of commentary by the Great Teacher Dengyō that reads, "The Former and Middle Days are almost over, and the Latter Day is near at hand. Now indeed is the time when the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra will prove how perfectly it fits the capacities of all people."³

Extinction occurs so that there may be rebirth, and descent so that there may be ascent. Could it be that such difficulties as these have come about so that Mount Hiei may flourish in the future?

It is impossible to put down in a letter all that I might wish to say. I look forward to meeting you at the earliest opportunity.

Respectfully,
Nichiren

The first day of the third month

Written in reply

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Kamakura on the first day of the third month, in answer to a letter and daily records regarding what were known as the portable shrine incidents sent him by his disciple Sammi-bō. The letter was probably written in 1265, though 1264 and 1269 have also been suggested as possible dates. Sammi-bō, who was studying in Kyoto at the time, had reported the news about “the burning of the main hall” at Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei. He had also kept and sent a daily record of events surrounding the portable shrine incidents. The priests of Mount Hiei had pressured the imperial court to accept certain

demands by parading through the streets of Kyoto with a portable shrine from Hie Shrine, which was associated with Enryaku-ji. These actions had intimidated the court and the citizens of the capital. Referring to these incidents and to the burning of the main hall, the Daishonin says that they are proof that “the end has come for the Buddhism of Mount Hiei,” or the Tendai school. In closing, the Daishonin refers to the possibility that Mount Hiei may flourish again in the future, signifying his confidence in the spread of the one vehicle teaching of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law.

Notes

1. A reference to incidents in which the priests of Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei made forcible demands on the imperial court in Kyoto while carrying the

portable shrine of the god of Mount Hiei.

2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.

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