

Response to the Petition from Gyōbin



THE petition in which the Sage Ryōkan, the foremost upholder of the precepts in present-day Japan, and sages such as Nen'amidabutsu and Dōamidabutsu, second-generation disciples of the Honorable Hōnen, bring action against Nichiren, says: "We wish to have Nichiren summoned immediately and to demolish his erroneous views so that the correct doctrines can flourish."

I say that if erroneous views were demolished so that the correct doctrines could flourish, it would be as if a one-eyed turtle had fit perfectly into a hole in a floating log. It would be a matter of the utmost delight.

The petition says, "Shakyamuni expounded the eighty-four thousand teachings. How could there possibly be any reason for calling one right and the others wrong?"

The Meditation Master Tao-ch'ō wrote, "This Latter Day of the Law we now face is an evil age stained by the five impurities. Only this single doctrine of the Pure Land offers a road by which one can gain admittance."¹

The Reverend Shan-tao said that "not even one person in a thousand"² can be saved through the other teachings. The Honorable Hōnen said that one should discard, close, ignore, and abandon all the other teachings.

The Honorable Nen'amidabutsu and

others say that calling one teaching right and the others wrong is slander of the Law. They are going against the doctrines of the three sages,³ the patriarchs of their own school. How then can they be anything other than members of the Anti-Lokāyata school?⁴ And is it possible that Ninshō, the Sage Ryōkan, can be lending his support to the teaching set forth by them, taking it to be correct?

The petition also says, "Nichiren is attached solely to one sutra, the Lotus, and slanders the other teachings of Mahayana."

The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra says, "In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth." The Lotus Sutra says that the Buddha "now must reveal the truth."⁵ The Lotus Sutra also says that "all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra."⁶ Many Treasures Buddha adds his testimony to the truth of the sutra, saying, "All that you [Shakyamuni] have expounded is the truth!"⁷ Concerning the testimony of the Buddhas of the ten directions, the Lotus Sutra says, "Their tongues reach to the Brahma heaven."⁸

To speak slanderously of the sutras preached in the past, the present, and the future, and to praise one sutra, the Lotus, is the golden instruction of Shakyamuni Buddha, and is what all

the other Buddhas have expressed their agreement to. It is most certainly not an interpretation of my own. Moreover, the Great Teacher Tokuitsu of Nara made that criticism against the Great Teacher Dengyō in the Enryaku, Daidō, and Kōnin eras. That criticism was refuted and the Lotus school established.

The petition also says, "Nichiren claims that all the teachings preached prior to the Lotus Sutra are falsehoods."

This also is not my own personal view. The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra says, "I have not yet revealed the truth." (Having not yet revealed the truth means to have told falsehoods.) The second volume of the Lotus Sutra asks, "Was he guilty of falsehood or not?"⁹ The sixth volume asks, "Can anyone say that this skilled physician is guilty of lying?"¹⁰ The Nirvana Sutra says, "Though the Thus Come One does not speak untruths, if I knew that by speaking falsely [I could help living beings gain the benefits of the Law, then for their sake I would go along with what is best and speak such words as an expedient means]." T'ien-t'ai says, "They are the Thus Come One's ornate false words."¹¹ Designating the sutras of forty and more years as falsehoods is thus not my own private opinion.

The petition also says that I refer to the Nembutsu as a practice leading to the hell of incessant suffering.

In the first volume of the Lotus Sutra it says, "[If I used a lesser vehicle to convert even one person], I would be guilty of stinginess and greed, but such a thing would be impossible."¹² And in the second volume it says, "[If a person fails to have faith but instead slanders this sutra], . . . When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avīchi hell."¹³ These statements mean that if the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment had preached only

such sutras as the Meditation Sutra of the Nembutsu teaching during forty and more years, and had failed to expound the Lotus Sutra, it would have been hard for him to escape the three evil paths. How much truer must this be of ordinary persons in the latter age who follow the single practice of the Nembutsu for their entire lives, even without their recommending it to others? How can they possibly avoid falling into the hell of incessant suffering? It is as if the people were to refuse to obey their sovereign, or children were to refuse to obey their parents.

Then how much truer must this be in the case of such men as Tao-ch'o, Shan-tao, and the Honorable Hōnen, who practiced the Nembutsu teachings? Citing the Lotus Sutra by name, they compared it with the Nembutsu, and argued relative superiority and inferiority, or difficulty and ease of practice. They claimed that not a single person has ever attained Buddhahood through the Lotus, and that ten persons out of ten or a hundred out of a hundred will be reborn in the Pure Land, but with the Lotus, not even one person in a thousand will be saved. How, then, can they fail to bring down on themselves the great fires of the hell of incessant suffering?

The petition also says, "Nichiren claims that the Zen school represents the teaching of Pāpīyas, the heavenly devil."

This too is not my own personal view. People belonging to that school insist that it represents a separate transmission outside the sutras. The Buddha's final testament¹⁴ states that if someone were to claim that the correct teaching exists outside the sutras, it would be the view of the heavenly devil. How then can the statement about a separate transmission outside the sutras escape this judgment?

The petition also says, "Nichiren

claims that both Hinayana and Mahayana precepts are teachings that deceive and mislead the people of the world.”

I say that the precepts of Hinayana were already refuted during the very lifetime of the Buddha.

In India there were three sorts of temples. There were temples devoted solely to Hinayana, temples devoted solely to Mahayana, and temples devoted to both Hinayana and Mahayana. The exclusive practice of Hinayana and the exclusive practice of Mahayana were as different as fire and water. And even the streets along which these two kinds of practitioners walked were different.

In Japan, during the reigns of Emperor Shōmu and Empress Kōken, Hinayana ordination platforms were built in three places. Later, during the reign of Emperor Kammu, the Great Teacher Dengyō condemned and refuted them. He said that he did so because the Hinayana precepts were unsuited for the capacities of the people of the latter age. Records show not only that Gomyō and Keishin, the leading teachers, lost in that debate, but also that the eminent priests of the six schools presented a letter of apology, became followers of the Great Teacher Dengyō, and received instruction from him in the precepts of perfect and immediate enlightenment.

That letter is still in perfect order. Open it and see for yourselves. And yet the Honorable Ryōkan insists that no faults of the past are to be found in the Hinayana precepts of Japan today.

The petition also accuses us of having burned or cast into the water images of Amida Buddha, Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, and the like that had been revered for many years as objects of devotion.

You must provide credible witnesses with regard to this matter. But if there is no proof, then perhaps the Honorable Ryōkan and his associates, wishing

to place the blame on me, themselves removed the objects of devotion and burned or cast them into the water? The details of this matter will no doubt come to light when it is looked into.

Until an investigation is held, however, I assign responsibility for that grave offense to the Honorable Ryōkan and his associates. No cause is so suited to breaking the two hundred and fifty precepts as this great lie. One need look no further for those who will fall into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering.

The petition also says that Nichiren gathers violent villains about him at his dwelling. The Lotus Sutra reads, “Or there will be forest-dwelling monks.”¹⁵ Miao-lo, *Tung-ch'un*, and *The Supplement to “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra”* offer comments on this matter. When we compare present-day Japan with what the sutra passage and these commentaries say, we find that the temples you mention, such as Kenchō-ji, Jufuku-ji, Gokuraku-ji, Tahō-ji, Daibutsu-den, Chōraku-ji, and Jōkōmyō-ji, are precisely the places of evil of which the Great Teacher Miao-lo speaks when he says, “The third is the most formidable of all.”¹⁶ *Tung-ch'un* says, “[The third part that begins ‘Or there will be forest-dwelling monks’] deals with members of the clergy who act as leaders of all the other evil people.” It also says, “The section that begins [‘Because in the midst of the great assembly . . .’] describes how these men will appeal to the government authorities [slandering the Law and its practitioners].”¹⁷

The petition also accuses me of gathering weapons. But the Nirvana Sutra, T'ien-t'ai, Chang-an, and Miao-lo all say that to take up bows and arrows or sticks and staves to protect the Lotus Sutra is a means provided for in Buddhism. It would be as if one were to collect swords and staves in order to protect the king of the land.

The teaching that the Honorable Ryōkan and his followers are spreading, however, cannot escape criticism from Nichiren. Since this has surely already come to people's attention, to hide his mistaken views, he has been reporting to the constables, stewards, and magistrates of each province that Nichiren and his followers have set fire to and cast into the water images of Amida Buddha. And he tells them that we are their mortal enemy.

Because he urges them to cut off our heads, or banish us from our lands, I have been wounded and several hundred of my followers have been injured or killed. This is entirely due to the great lies of the honorables, priests such as Ryōkan, Nen'amidabutsu, and Dōamidabutsu. Thoughtful persons will surely be dismayed and filled with dread.

King Virūdhaka killed seventy-seven thousand people who had attained the way. King Mihirakula of India destroyed stupas and ruined monasteries numbering nearly one thousand six hundred. In the end, the earth shook and he fell into the hell of incessant suffering. King Virūdhaka captured ninety-nine million nine hundred thousand members of the Shākya clan, lined them up, and slaughtered them. The piles of corpses were as numerous as the grasses, and rivers of blood formed a lake. King Pushyamitra mobilized the four types of troops¹⁸ and dispatched them throughout the entire land of India, killing monks and burning temples and stupas. King Shashānka wiped out Buddhism; King Krita ousted monks and wiped out Buddhism. The three emperors Kimmei, Bidatsu, and Yōmei decreed that Buddhism must be discarded without fail. Two

ministers themselves went to a temple, demolished its halls and pagoda, and destroyed the image of the Buddha. Lighting fires, they set everything aflame. They then took up the scorched image and tossed it into a moat in Naniwa. Furthermore, they summoned three nuns, took away their clerical robes, and subjected them to a whipping.

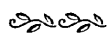
Emperor Wu-tsung of T'ang China destroyed over forty-six hundred temples and monasteries and forced two hundred and sixty thousand five hundred priests and nuns to return to secular life.

In the Eihō era [1081-1084], the priests of Mount Hiei burned down Onjō-ji temple. Fifteen buildings dedicated to prayers for the security of the imperial family, ninety halls, four pagodas, six bell towers, twenty sutra storehouses, thirteen shrines, some eight hundred priests' dwellings, and some three thousand other dwellings were burnt to the ground.

On the twenty-second day of the twelfth month in the fourth year of the Jishō era [1180], the grand minister and lay priest Jōkai¹⁹ destroyed by fire both Tōdai-ji and Kōfuku-ji temples and killed their priests and nuns.

The Buddha says in a prediction that the enemies of his teachings will not be evil men like the ones involved in these incidents. He states that it will be monks who resemble arhats with the three insights and six transcendental powers who will destroy his correct teachings. He speaks of this matter in the Protection Sutra and in the Nirvana Sutra.

Nichiren



Background

It is thought that this document is either one Nichiren Daishonin submitted to the Kamakura shogunate in what was probably the seventh month of 1271, or its draft. It is the Daishonin's response to a petition of complaint against his teachings submitted to the government by Gyōbin, a Nembutsu priest acting on behalf of Ryōkan of Gokuraku-ji temple, and of the Nembutsu priests Nen'amidabutsu, also known as Ryōchū, and Dōamidabutsu, also known as Dōkyō, all three of whom were influential figures in the religious world of the time.

Gyōbin had sent a private letter, dated the eighth day of the seventh month of that year, to the Daishonin requesting a debate with him. In the letter, Gyōbin insisted that the Daishonin's criticisms of sutras other than the Lotus, of the Hinayana and Mahayana precepts, of the Pure Land, or Nembutsu, teaching, and of the Zen doctrine were irrelevant. The Daishonin sent a letter in reply, dated the thirteenth day of the same month (*see* p. 384), stating his wish that Gyōbin refer the matter to the shogunate and request a public debate.

The complaints raised in the petition

that arrived next were of two types. The first was criticisms of the Daishonin's teachings. These were the same as those made in Gyōbin's private letter. The second was criticisms made in connection with criminal acts allegedly committed by the Daishonin and his followers.

In his response, the Daishonin, quoting not only the Lotus Sutra, the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, the Nirvana Sutra, and others, but also such scholars as T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo, clearly refutes each of the criticisms. With regard to the alleged criminal acts, the Daishonin urges his accusers to provide credible witnesses. In closing, he cites historical cases of rulers who attempted to destroy Buddhism and points out that the true enemies of Buddhism are not men such as these but highly respected priests who aim to destroy the correct teaching.

As no record whatsoever exists of any public debate having taken place, it can be assumed that Ryōkan and the others failed to submit a second petition to the government, which meant in effect a withdrawal of the petition of complaint from Gyōbin.

Notes

1. *The Collected Essays on the World of Peace and Delight*.

2. *Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land*.

3. The "three sages" refers to Tao-ch'ō, Shan-tao, and Hōnen, who are mentioned above.

4. The "Anti-Lokāyata school" refers to a non-Buddhist school in ancient India that is thought to have arisen in opposition to the Lokāyata school. In this sense, the Anti-Lokāyata school is often referred to as representing those who betray their teachers.

5. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

6. *Ibid.*, chap. 21.

7. *Ibid.*, chap. 11.

8. *Ibid.*, chap. 21.

9. *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

10. *Ibid.*, chap. 16.

11. Source unknown.

12. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

13. *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

14. Nirvana Sutra. What follows here is a paraphrasing of a passage in that sutra.

15. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13. The passage reads, "Or there will be forest-dwelling monks wearing clothing of patched rags and living in retirement, who will claim they are practicing the true way, despising and looking down on all humankind. Greedy for profit and support, they will preach the Law to white-robed laymen and will be respected and revered by the world

as though they were arhats who possess the six transcendental powers. . . . Because in the midst of the great assembly they constantly try to defame us, they will address the rulers, high ministers, Brahmans, and householders, as well as the other monks, slandering and speaking evil of us, saying, "These are men of perverted views who preach non-Buddhist doctrines!" But because we revere the Buddha we will bear all these evils." This passage refers to the third of the three powerful enemies (*see* Glossary), who instigates secular rulers to perse-

cute those who propagate the Lotus Sutra in the evil age after Shakyamuni Buddha's death.

16. *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra."* "The third" in this passage refers to the third of the three powerful enemies mentioned in n. 15.

17. "Because in the midst of the great assembly . . ." is a part of the passage from the Lotus Sutra that appears in n. 15.

18. Troops that travel by foot, horse, elephant, and chariot.

19. Taira no Kiyomori (*see* Glossary).