

Errors of the True Word and Other Schools



To Toki and my other followers
Nichiren

COMMIT this to memory and explain it to the older persons in detail.

You must not lament the fact that I have not speedily been granted pardon from my sentence of exile. Undoubtedly the heavenly gods are delaying such a pardon. You will understand this if you consider the case of the lay priest Fujikawa.¹ If he had been exiled last year, this year he would not have met with an untimely death. Use his case to understand mine, though ignorant persons may not be able to see the parallel.

You must not behave as though you are anxious for me to be pardoned. If you do so, you will be no proper disciples of mine, and I cannot aid you in your next existence.

Each of you must understand what I have said here.

The True Word school never existed in India. Early in the K'ai-yüan era [713–741] in China, the Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei, the Tripitaka Master Chin-kang-chih, and the Tripitaka Master Pu-k'ung stole the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which had been expounded earlier by the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, and read it into the Ma-

hāvairochana Sutra, thus establishing what they called the True Word school.

The Flower Garland school first appeared in the reign of Empress Wu [r. 690–705] of China. Ch'eng-kuan and others stole T'ien-t'ai's ten meditations and applied them to the Flower Garland Sutra, thus establishing what is called the Flower Garland school.

The Dharma Characteristics school and the Three Treatises school are not important enough to discuss here.

The Zen school appeared during the Liang dynasty [502–557] in China when the Great Teacher Bodhidharma, basing himself on the Lankāvātāra and other sutras, propounded a small portion of the Mahayana doctrine of non-substantiality. The exponents of this school are very arrogant, claiming to possess a "separate transmission outside the sutras," and look with contempt on all the sutras. This school is the invention of the heavenly devil.

With regard to the Pure Land school, Shan-tao and others, on reading the Meditation Sutra, were moved by certain paltry feelings of pity and compassion and, addressing the teachers of the Summary of the Mahayana school and the Treatise on the Ten Stages Sutra school, urged them to devote themselves to the single-minded invocation of Amida's name. In Japan,

Hōnen, misinterpreting their doctrine,² declared that the Tendai and True Word schools belong to the category of sundry practices and opined that they do not accord with the capacities of the people in this latter age. Thus he confused and deceived the entire country, leading it astray into the long night of the sufferings of birth and death.

I, Nichiren, am the only guide and teacher who has exposed the errors of these schools.

The Nirvana Sutra states: "If even a good monk sees someone destroying the teaching and disregards him, failing to reproach him, to oust him, or to punish him for his offense, then you should realize that that monk is betraying the Buddha's teaching."

Kuan-ting, or the Great Teacher Chang-an, states: "One who destroys or brings confusion to the Buddha's teachings is betraying them. If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy. One who rids the offender of evil is acting as his parent."³

Hōnen called upon people to "discard, close, ignore, and abandon" [all sutras other than the Pure Land sutras], and the Zen school claims that it represents a "separate transmission outside the sutras." If these pronouncements go against the intention of the Buddha, then I [in denouncing them] am acting as a wise father, a sage parent, a guide and teacher for the people of Japan. But if I do not speak out against these things, then how can I escape being charged with the grave error that Chang-an described in these words "If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy"?

For the sake of the ruler, high ministers, and common people of Japan, I have endeavored to be "one who rids the offender of evil [and who] is acting as his parent." But this country has already committed the three car-

dinal sins.⁴ How could Heaven not send down punishment upon it?

The Nirvana Sutra states: "At that time the World-Honored One picked up a bit of dirt from the ground, placed it on top of his fingernail, and said to Kāshyapa, 'Which are more numerous, these bits of dirt or the dirt in all the worlds in the ten directions?'

"Bodhisattva Kāshyapa replied to the Buddha, 'World-Honored One, the specks of dirt on a fingernail could not possibly compare to the dirt in all the worlds in the ten directions!' . . .

"[The Buddha said], 'Those who commit the four grave offenses or are guilty of the five cardinal sins, . . . who become icchantikas, cutting off all their roots of goodness and failing to take faith in this sutra, are as numerous as the dirt in all the worlds in the ten directions. Those who refrain from committing the five cardinal sins, . . . who do not act as an icchantika or cut off the roots of goodness but thus are able to take faith in works such as this Nirvana Sutra are as few as the particles of dirt that can be placed on a fingernail.'"

If we go by this sutra passage, then the people of Japan at the present time are comparable to the dirt in the lands in the ten directions, while I, Nichiren, am comparable to the dirt on top of a fingernail.

The Lotus Sutra says, "There will be many ignorant people who will curse and speak ill of us."⁵

In the Decline of the Law Sutra we read: "After I have entered nirvana, in the troubled times when the five cardinal sins prevail, the way of the devil will flourish. The devil will appear in the form of Buddhist monks and attempt to confuse and destroy my teachings. . . . Those who do evil will become as numerous as the sands of the ocean. When the kalpa is about to end, the light of the sun and moon will become of shorter and shorter dura-

tion, while the good will be extremely few, perhaps no more than one or two persons.”

And the same sutra says, “After the life span of these devil monks has come to an end, their spirits will fall into the hell of incessant suffering.”

Now Dōryū and his supporters, Ryōkan and his supporters, Shōichi and his supporters, and in fact all the four kinds of Buddhist believers in this country of Japan are persons such as these sutra passages describe.

The Lotus Sutra states: “If, when the fires come at the end of the kalpa, one can load dry grass on his back and enter the fire without being burned, that would not be difficult. But after I have passed into extinction if one can embrace this sutra and expound it to even one person, that will be difficult indeed!”⁶

I, Nichiren, am the kind of person referred to in this sutra passage.

The Lotus Sutra says, “There will be many ignorant people who will curse and speak ill of us and will attack us with swords and staves.”

The Buddha prophesied that after his passing, in the last five-hundred-year period, the votaries of the Lotus Sutra would invariably be cursed and spoken ill of by many ignorant people, and that they would be attacked with swords and staves, tiles and stones, and would be condemned to exile or death.

If it were not for Nichiren, then these prophecies for the future made by Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions would be nothing but great lies!

Objection: You say that you are superior to the other people of the time, and to some degree this may be so. But to say that you are superior to the founding patriarchs of the True Word, Flower Garland, Three Treatises, Dharma Characteristics, and the other schools is to be guilty of the arrogance of claiming to be superior to those

who are in fact superior to oneself, is it not? This is what is meant by the offense of making false claims to spiritual attainment.⁷ You are certain to fall into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering as a result!

Thus the Shūramgama Sutra tells us: “If an impoverished person falsely calls himself a king, then he brings chastisement and destruction upon himself. How much more so, then, is this true in matters relating to the Buddha, the king of the Law! If one falsely lays claim to spiritual attainment that one does not actually possess, then one calls forth only lame and crooked results.”

The Nirvana Sutra states: “What sort of monks may be said to be guilty of the offense of false claims to spiritual attainment? . . . Such a monk has not attained the four stages⁸ attainable by monks, and yet he always thinks how he can manage to make the people of his time believe he has already attained them.”

Answer: The Lotus Sutra states, “And as the heavenly king, great Brahmā, is the father of all living beings, [so this sutra likewise is father of all sages . . .]”⁹ It also states, “This sutra . . . is king among all the sutras. . . . This sutra likewise is foremost . . . A person who can accept and uphold this sutra is likewise foremost among all living beings.”¹⁰

The Great Teacher Dengyō in *The Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra* writes: “The Tendai Lotus school is superior to the other schools because of the sutra that it is founded on. Therefore, in declaring its superiority, it is not simply praising itself and disparaging others. I hope that gentlemen of wisdom will examine the matter of sutras and on that basis decide which school they will follow.”

Among the heavenly bodies, the moon is superior to the stars, and the sun is superior to both the stars and the moon. A high minister of a small state

ranks below an official of a great state who holds no ministerial rank at all. Similarly a disciple of the Buddha, a Hinayana follower at the three stages of worthiness, even though he cannot command one or another of the five transcendental powers, is as far above a non-Buddhist believer who commands all of the five transcendental powers as heaven is above the earth. The great bodhisattvas of the sutras other than the Lotus Sutra are inferior even to those ordinary mortals who have only reached the stage of hearing the name and words of the truth in the practice of the Lotus Sutra.

Why should you be surprised at my assertions? It is possible to determine which persons are superior and which inferior according to which teachings they embrace. But unless one first knows which sutra is superior and which inferior, how is it possible to determine whether the persons who follow those sutras are to be assigned high rank or low?

Question: If you are the votary of the Lotus Sutra, then why doesn't Heaven guard and protect you?

Answer: The Lotus Sutra says, "Evil demons will take possession of others."¹¹

The Shūramgama Sutra states: "There is the king of the asuras who tries to gain control of the world. He struggles for power with the heavenly lords Brahmā and Shakra and the four heavenly kings. This asura king, depending upon the transformations he undergoes, is sometimes included among the beings of the heavenly realm."

This great king of the asuras, who battles with the great heavenly lords Brahmā and Shakra and with the four heavenly kings, has taken possession of the leaders of the Zen, Nembutsu, and Precepts schools, and then has gradually extended his control to the rulers

and people of the nation, hoping thus to defeat worthy persons. Even Brahmā and Shakra find it difficult to defend the people against this great evil, so what sort of defense can be expected from the lesser gods of Japan? Only if one can count on the protection of the great bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds who sprang up from the earth, and upon that of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the other Buddhas, is there any hope of success.

The sun and moon are bright mirrors that reflect all that happens in the four quarters of the sky, and therefore the heavenly gods must surely know and understand me! The sun and moon are bright mirrors that reflect all that happens in the worlds in the ten directions, and therefore the Buddhas must surely know and understand me! There should be no particle of doubt [as to whether they will guard me].

It is just that some of my karma from previous existences has yet to be expiated. But when I was condemned to exile, did not Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, cover me with his robe? And last year, on the night of the twelfth day of the ninth month, did I not escape when I was on the very point of losing my life?¹² This is what is meant by the passage "If one's mind is strong, the protection of the gods also is sure to be firm."¹³

You must never doubt this for a moment. Under no circumstances must you give way to doubt!

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The fifth day of the fifth month

Do not show this letter to persons other than my followers, for they might be angered by the contents.

To Toki

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter on the fifth day of the fifth month in 1272, while in exile on Sado, and sent it to Toki Jōnin and other followers living in Shimōsa Province.

He begins by suggesting that his continued exile on Sado may be due to the design of the Buddha; that is, it can be regarded as a form of protection, possibly sparing him from an untimely death. He writes in a letter to Shijō Kingo, “Had I not been exiled, but remained in Kamakura, I would certainly have been killed in the battle” (I, p. 824). The battle the Daishonin refers to is a revolt that took place within the ruling Hōjō clan, which corresponded to his prediction in *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* that Japan would face what the sutras describe as “the calamity of revolt within one’s own domain.” Thus acknowledging the meaning of his continued exile, the Daishonin prohibits his followers from petitioning the government to grant him a pardon.

The Daishonin then addresses the errors of the various schools of Buddhism in Japan—the True Word, Flower Garland, Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, Zen, and Pure Land schools. In a statement similar to one he made in *The Opening of the Eyes* several months before, he declares, “Hōnen called upon people to ‘discard, close, ignore, and abandon’ [all sutras other than the Pure Land sutras], and the Zen school claims that it represents a ‘separate transmission outside the sutras.’ If these pronouncements go against the intention of the Buddha, then I [in denouncing them] am acting as a wise father, a sage parent, a guide

and teacher for the people of Japan.”

He then quotes the Nirvana Sutra, where the Buddha likens the number of persons who lack faith and commit offenses to the number of particles of dirt in the worlds of the ten directions, and those who take faith in the sutra to the particles of dirt that can be placed on a fingernail. Because of his faith in the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin compares himself to the dirt on a fingernail, and those many others in Japan who disbelieve the sutra to the particles of dirt in the universe.

Citing sutra passages, he states that respected priests in Japan such as Dōryū, Ryōkan, and Shōichi accord with the sutra descriptions of devil monks. He declares that he is the votary of the Lotus Sutra described in the sutra, and were it not for him and the persecutions he faces on its account, the sutra prophecies of Shakyamuni would be false.

Next, the Daishonin asks why he, the votary of the Lotus Sutra, has not enjoyed the protection of the heavenly deities as promised in the sutra. In answer, he says that evil demons have gained strength and taken possession of the leaders of Buddhist schools, extending their control to the rulers and the people. Though his persecutions have been due to the effects of bad karma he created in past lives, the failure of the attempt to behead him was due solely to the protection promised in the Lotus Sutra. Admonishing his followers again not to succumb to doubt, he concludes with Miao-lo’s words “If one’s mind is strong, the protection of the gods also is sure to be firm.”

Notes

1. Little is known about the lay priest Fujikawa (d. 1272), including whether or

not he was a follower of the Daishonin. The text here suggests that he was known

by the recipients, and that he had faced a threat or sentence of exile that had been suspended.

2. Here the Daishonin is saying that Shan-tao and other Chinese patriarchs of the Pure Land school excluded the Lotus Sutra when they established the categories of the Pure Land teachings and the Sacred Way teachings, the correct practice and the sundry practices, etc., but that Hōnen misinterpreted their doctrine and included the Lotus Sutra in the category of sundry practices.

3. *The Annotations on the Nirvana Sutra.*

4. The three cardinal sins refer here to the offenses of killing one's own father, killing one's mother, and killing an arhat, or a Buddhist teacher. The statement that

these had been committed in Japan is a reference to the 1271 attempt to behead the Daishonin, who acted as parent and teacher for the people of Japan.

5. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

6. Ibid., chap. 11.

7. One of the four major offenses (*see Glossary*).

8. "The four stages" refers to the four stages of Hinayana enlightenment (*see Glossary*).

9. Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., chap. 13.

12. This refers to the Tatsunokuchi Persecution of 1271.

13. *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight."*