A long time ago there was a country called Shantīrṇa, and its ruler was called King Uncontentious Mind. This king had a thousand princely sons. His foremost minister was a Brahman named Treasure Sea, and he had a son named Treasure Storehouse.

The thousand princely sons of King Uncontentious Mind cast aside this impure land and went off to seek a pure land. And as a result, what became of this sahā world of ours? In all the other worlds in the ten directions, if there were persons who murdered their parents, slandered the correct teaching, or put to death the sages, these persons were taken from their respective lands and banished to this sahā world. It was comparable to the way in which here in Japan those guilty of committing major crimes are thrown into prison.

Because the king’s sons had no power to remedy the situation, they did not take merciful action but instead abandoned this world and went elsewhere. Only one person, the Brahman Treasure Sea, resolved to take action and to become the teacher of this sahā world. The Brahman Treasure Sea made a vow, saying, “I vow that in a future existence I will become a Buddha in this impure and evil world. Then I will gather together the living beings who have been excluded from the pure lands in the ten directions and will lead them to salvation.”

Now King Uncontentious Mind was the Buddha Amida, and his thousand princely sons were those we now know as the bodhisattvas Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, Great Power, Universal Worthy, Manjushrī, and so forth. And the Brahman Treasure Sea we now know as the Thus Come One Shakyamuni. All the living beings of this sahā world, who have been abandoned by the Buddhas of the ten directions—it is Shakyamuni alone who can save them. He has said, “I am the only person who can rescue and protect others.”

Nichiren

To Matsuno
Background

This letter was sent to the lay priest Matsuno Rokurō Saemon of Suruga Province. It is thought to have been written at Minobu in 1276. In it, Nichiren Daishonin refers to events described in the Compassionate White Lotus Flower Sutra. The sutra illustrates the contrast between Shakyamuni's attainment of Buddhahood in the impure sahā world and his compassionate practice to save the people there from sufferings, and Amida's attainment of Buddhahood in a remote pure land. It depicts Shakyamuni in a past existence as the Brahman Treasure Sea, a minister of the king Uncontentious Mind, whom it identifies as Amida Buddha in a past life. The king and his thousand princes attain rebirth in pure lands and become Buddhas. The minister, however, vows to be reborn in the sahā world, attain Buddhahood, and there strive to relieve the people of their sufferings. This behavior of the Brahman Treasure Sea, the Daishonin concludes, accords with Shakyamuni's statement in the Lotus Sutra, "I am the only person who can rescue and protect others."

The Pure Land, or Nembutsu, teaching advocates calling on the name of Amida Buddha to be reborn in his Pure Land of Perfect Bliss. The above story from the sutra illustrates a point the Daishonin often made, that Amida is a Buddha who has no connection with this real world, and is thus unable to save the people here. In contrast, Shakyamuni Buddha is "the only person who can rescue and protect others."

Note

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.