

Jissō-ji Temple



IN your New Year's letter, you state that a priest called Āchārya Owari,¹ who resides at Jissō-ji temple in Suruga Province, is claiming that volume four of *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* cites the Nirvana Sutra and says that it is because of ignorance that some refute Mahayana teachings with Hinayana teachings, and others refute Hinayana teachings with Mahayana teachings. Is he really saying that? It is hard to believe.

In countering this interpretation you should ask if it is as he says, that those who refute Hinayana with Mahayana or Mahayana with Hinayana are ignorant, then were the Great Teacher Kōbō, the Great Teacher Jikaku, and the Great Teacher Chishō all ignorant? Press on and ask if he is saying that Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, and Pu-k'ung were ignorant as well.

Volume four of *Profound Meaning* states: "Question: If in the Lotus Sutra the 'rough,' or inferior, teachings² are opened up and merged in the wonderful teaching, then for what reason does the Nirvana Sutra go on to describe, among others, the five successive practices of the bodhisattva?³

"Answer: In the Lotus Sutra the Buddha, for the sake of the people of his time, refuted the provisional teachings and led them to the true teaching.

Thus the rough teachings ceased to exist and the Buddha's labor of leading and converting others was completed. The Buddha knew, however, that ordinary people in the latter age would suffer greatly from the illusions of thought and desire, and that they would adhere to the true teaching alone and speak slanderously of the expedient teachings. Though the sweet dew [of the Lotus Sutra] might fall on them, they would fail to concern themselves with the practice [expounded in the expedient teachings] and to achieve true understanding, thus injuring their lives and dying an untimely death. Therefore in the Nirvana Sutra he recommended precepts, meditation, and wisdom, and expounded the enlightenment of great nirvana. But if one understands the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra, one need not observe the five successive practices of the bodhisattva."

Volume four of *The Annotations on "The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra"* states: "The words 'he recommended precepts, meditation, and wisdom' in the passage under consideration mean that the precepts concerning conduct, the meditations on various phenomena, and the wisdom expounded in the first three of the four teachings can all be used as an aid in understanding the truth. See the detailed discussion on this

in the section of *Great Concentration and Insight* that deals with ‘curing hindrances and assisting enlightenment.’⁴

“At present, however, when one views those who pursue Buddhist practice, one sees that those who concentrate only on theory consider themselves as equals of the sage,⁵ adhering solely to the true teaching and slandering the provisional teachings. Those who concentrate on practice believe that the gaining of merit is reserved for persons advanced in practice, slandering the true teaching and adhering to the provisional teachings. Now that we have entered the latter age and no longer keep the Buddha’s intentions in mind, is there anyone who does not fall into one or the other of these errors? But if one grasps the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra, then one sees that both those at the initial stages of practice and those at the advanced stages can immediately attain enlightenment. I ask that practitioners look into their minds, search their hearts, and waken to the error of their ways.”

Surely he [Āchārya Owari] has mistaken the meaning of these words of commentary. In effect, when the commentary speaks of those who concentrate on theory it is referring to the school of Bodhidharma.⁶ And when it speaks of those who adhere to the true teaching and slander the provisional teachings, it is referring to the Flower Garland and True Word schools. In speaking of those who concentrate on practice, it means the Pure Land and Precepts schools. And in speaking of those who slander the true teaching and adhere to the provisional teachings, it has in mind the Dharma Characteristics school.

The word “wonderful” in the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law has two meanings. One is comparative *myō*, or wonderful,⁷ which indicates refuting the rough teachings and revealing the wonderful teaching. The other is ab-

solute *myō*, which indicates opening up the rough teachings and merging them in the wonderful teaching.

The sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, as well as those preached after it, to a certain extent touch upon refuting the rough teachings and revealing the wonderful teaching. But there is nothing in them about opening up the rough teachings and merging them in the wonderful teaching. Despite this fact, Buddhist teachers who rely upon one or another of these sutras insist that they contain both types of *myō*, that which refutes the rough teachings and reveals the wonderful teaching and that which opens up the rough teachings and merges them in the wonderful teaching. Either they steal the wisdom of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai [in order to support their case], or they behave like private individuals who attempt to lay down rules for the entire nation. Though they claim that such sutras contain the opening up of the rough teachings, what they refer to can hardly be called anything but the refutation of such teachings. This is particularly true in the case of those I mentioned earlier who adhere exclusively to the provisional teachings or who adhere exclusively to the true teaching.

But people like this Āchārya Owari fail to recognize their own faults, and in their jealousy of others they believe that the huge mountain is turning around when it is only their own eyes that are spinning.

To first use the true teaching to refute the provisional teachings, and then to sever people’s attachment to the provisional teachings and lead them to the true teaching—this is the constant procedure of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. If one insists that those who use the true teaching to refute the provisional teachings are blind to the truth, then was Shakyamuni blind to

the truth? Were T'ien-t'ai and Dengyō teachers blind to the truth? Such an assertion is nothing short of laughable!

As for the situation at Shijūku-in temple, such men as its superintendent are persons of no understanding who are fearful of me, and Odaichi-bō and the others also do us harm. This is a sign that the erroneous teachings of these parties will before long be wiped out.

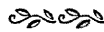
When the roots are laid bare, the branches will wither, and when the spring dries up, the river will cease to flow.⁸ This is no empty saying. For four hundred years and more the great offence of slandering the Lotus Sutra committed by the three great teachers, Kōbō, Jikaku, and Chishō, has remained hidden, but now its roots have

been laid bare and its branches will wither. I, Nichiren, have now made the facts clear. The non-Buddhist leader Ulūka turned himself into a stone, and remained a stone for several hundred years. But when Bodhisattva Dignāga berated him, the stone turned to water. Ashvaghosha caused the stupa built by Nirgrantha Jnātaputra to collapse.⁹ This is what is meant by the saying "Touch a sleeping lion and rouse its anger."

Nichiren

The sixteenth day of the first month in the fourth year of Kenji [1278]

Reply to the priest Buzen-kō of Jissō-ji in Suruga Province



Background

This letter was written in reply to New Year's greetings from the priest Buzen-kō, also called Buzen-bō, of Jissō-ji temple. Buzen-bō had apparently informed Nichiren Daishonin of criticism aimed at him and his followers by Āchārya Owari, another priest of Jissō-ji. The Daishonin's reply, written from Minobu, is dated the sixteenth day of the first month in 1278.

It is thought that Buzen-bō became a follower of the Daishonin through the efforts of Nikkō, but few details are available. According to Buzen-bō, Āchārya Owari was claiming that the Daishonin's propagation efforts were contrary to the intent of T'ien-t'ai's work *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*.

In answer, the Daishonin asserts that Owari is clearly wrong and that to use the true teaching to refute the provisional teachings, and then to sever people's attachment to those teachings and lead them to the true teaching, is the regular procedure of the Buddhas. He points out that if this procedure is incorrect, then Shakyamuni Buddha and the Great Teachers T'ien-t'ai and Dengyō must also have been in error.

In the last part of this letter, he notes that attempts by priests of Shijūku-in, a temple nearby Jissō-ji, to discredit the Daishonin and his followers signal the decline of the mistaken teachings they represent.

Notes

1. A priest of the Tendai school temple Jissō-ji who slandered and harassed the disciples of Nichiren Daishonin.

2. Teachings that are rough in nature, and are thus imperfect or faulty in the expression of the truth. The term "rough

teachings” is used in contrast to “wonderful teaching,” or the teaching that is perfect in its expression of the truth. In T’ien-t’ai’s view, among the four teachings of doctrine—the Tripitaka teaching, the connecting teaching, the specific teaching, and the perfect teaching—the first three are “rough teachings,” and the last, the perfect teaching, is the “wonderful teaching.” Likewise, the Hinayana teachings and the Mahayana teachings expounded prior to the Lotus Sutra are regarded as “rough teachings,” and the Lotus Sutra as the “wonderful teaching.”

3. Practices found in the Nirvana Sutra. They are (1) to devote oneself to the three types of learning—precepts, meditation, and wisdom; (2) to instruct and save people with a pure heart; (3) to carry out one’s practice based on the highest principle, or the principle of the universe; (4) to instruct and save human beings, heavenly beings, voice-hearers, and pratyekabuddhas with the same compassion as parents show their infants; and (5) to instruct and save people while sharing in their sufferings stemming from delusion, birth, aging, sickness, and death. “Successive” means that these practices are carried out one after another.

4. “Curing hindrances and assisting enlightenment” is the seventh of the ten meditations set forth by T’ien-t’ai in his *Great Concentration and Insight* as a way to observe the truth of life. The seventh is the meditation to remove obstacles to enlightenment by practicing the six pāramitās.

5. “Sage” here refers to Shakyamuni Buddha.

6. The school of Bodhidharma refers to

the Zen school. The Zen school is based upon what it calls a “separate transmission outside the sutras” and emphasizes the practice of meditation in order to gain insight and realize the true nature of the mind.

7. The terms “comparative *myō*” and “absolute *myō*” indicate two contrasting perspectives that highlight the profundity of the Lotus Sutra. Comparative *myō* means that the Lotus Sutra is wonderful because, in comparison with all other teachings, it is superior. Absolute *myō* means that the Lotus Sutra cannot be compared with any other teaching because it encompasses and integrates all other teachings; no teaching exists outside it, and thus none can be called either superior or inferior to it. From this viewpoint, all teachings express various aspects of the ultimate truth.

8. This statement is found in *Great Concentration and Insight*.

9. A similar story appears in the section about Ashvaghosha in *A History of the Buddha’s Successors*. Once when King Kanishka happened to pass by a non-Buddhist stupa adorned with seven kinds of treasures, he mistook it for a stupa of the Buddha and prayed there, whereupon the stupa collapsed. The king’s retainers dug up the ground and found the remains of Nirgrantha Jnātaputra, one of the six non-Buddhist teachers and the founder of Jainism. The Daishonin says that Ashvaghosha was the one who caused the stupa to collapse, perhaps because Ashvaghosha propagated Buddhism under the patronage of King Kanishka.