QUESTION: In the evil world of the latter age, what should ordinary men and women take as their object of devotion?

Answer: They should make the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra their object of devotion.

Question: In what sutra passage or what commentary of the Buddhist teachers is this view expressed?

Answer: The “Teacher of the Law” chapter in the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states: “Medicine King, in any place whatsoever where this sutra is preached, where it is read, where it is recited, where it is copied, or where a roll of it exists, in all such places there should be erected towers made of the seven kinds of gems, and they should be made very high and broad and well adorned. There is no need to enshrine the relics of the Buddha there. Why? Because in such towers the entire body of the Thus Come One is already present.”

The “Nature of the Thus Come One” chapter in the fourth volume of the Nirvana Sutra states: “And I say this, Kāśyapa. What the Buddhas take as their teacher is the Law. Therefore, the Thus Come Ones honor, respect, and make offerings to it. Since the Law is eternally abiding, the Buddhas [who became enlightened to the Law] are also eternally abiding.”

And the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai in his *Method of Repentance through the Lotus Meditation* says: “In the place of practice one should erect a suitably fashioned dais and place a copy of the Lotus Sutra on it. One need not adorn it with any statues of the Buddha, his relics, or copies of other scriptures. Simply place a copy of the Lotus Sutra there.”

Question: The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai in the second volume of his *Great Concentration and Insight* states that the object of devotion for the four forms of meditation is the Buddha Amida. And the Tripitaka Master Pu-k’ung’s translation of *The Rules of Rituals Based on the Lotus Sutra* says that one should regard Shakyamuni and Many Treasures Buddhas as the object of devotion for the Lotus Sutra. Why do you go against their views in the matter?

Answer: The view I have put forward is not my own invention, but is based on the sutra passages quoted above and the commentary of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai.

When T’ien-t’ai says that the object of devotion for the four forms of meditation is the Buddha Amida, he means that Amida Buddha is the object of devotion for three of the four forms of meditation, constant sitting meditation, constant active meditation, and meditation in an unspecified posture for an
unspecified period, which are based on the Questions of Manjushrī Sutra, the Sutra of Meditation to Behold the Buddhas, and the Invocation of Perceiver of the World's Sounds Sutra. These are classified among the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, in which "the Buddha has not yet revealed the truth."¹

In the case of the fourth form of meditation, half-active and half-sitting meditation, there are two types. The first type has the seven Buddhas and eight bodhisattvas of the Correct and Equal Sutra² as its object of devotion and is based on that sutra. The second type pays honor to the Buddhas Shakyamuni and Many Treasures of the Lotus Sutra. But if we go by what is stated in Method of Repentance, the object of devotion should be the Lotus Sutra itself.

As for the statement in the Triпитaka Master Pu-k'ung’s Rules of Rituals, it is based on the text of the “Treasure Tower” chapter. It asserts that the lord of teachings of the Lotus Sutra [Shakyamuni] should be the object of devotion. But this does not accord with the true intent of the Lotus Sutra. The object of devotion that I have mentioned earlier, the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, is the object of devotion for Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. It represents the true intent of the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

Question: In Japan there are ten Buddhist schools, the Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, Precepts, Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, Flower Garland, True Word, Pure Land, Zen, and Lotus schools. These schools all differ in their object of devotion. The three schools of Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, and Precepts honor the little Shakyamuni of the inferior manifested body. The two schools of Dharma Characteristics and Three Treatises have the big Shakyamuni Buddha [of the superior manifested body] as their object of devotion. The Flower Garland school honors the Shakyamuni Thus Come One of the reward body who is Vairochana on a lotus pedestal.³ The True Word school honors Mahā-vairochana Thus Come One, the Pure Land school honors Amida Buddha, and the Zen school, like some of the other schools, pays honor to Shakyamuni. Why then does the Tendai school alone take the Lotus Sutra as its object of devotion?

Answer: There is a reason why these other schools have a Buddha as their object of devotion, while this school, the Tendai, has a sutra as the object of devotion.

Question: What then is the reason? Which is superior, a Buddha or a sutra?

Answer: As the object of devotion one should select that which is superior. Thus, for example, Confucianism has selected the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors of antiquity as its object of devotion. And in like manner, in Buddhism, Shakyamuni should be regarded as the object of devotion.

Question: If that is so, then why do you not take Shakyamuni as your object of devotion, but instead make the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra the object of devotion?

Answer: You should look at the sutra passages and the commentary that I have quoted earlier. This is not a matter that I have decided for myself. Shakyamuni Buddha and T’ien-t’ai are the ones who have declared that the Lotus Sutra should be the object of devotion. And now, in this latter age, I, Nichiren, too, following the example of the Buddha and T’ien-t’ai, take the Lotus Sutra as the object of devotion.

I do so because the Lotus Sutra is the father and mother of Shakyamuni Buddha, the eye of the Buddhas. Shakyamuni, Mahāvairochana, and all the other Buddhas of the ten direc-
tions were born from the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, as the object of devotion I now take that which is capable of bringing forth such life force.

Question: What proof can you offer to support your view?

Answer: The Universal Worthy Sutra states, “This great vehicle sutra is the treasure storehouse of the Buddhas, the eye of the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three existences, the seed from which spring the Thus Come Ones of the three existences.”

And it also states: “This correct and equal sutra is the eye of the Buddhas. It is through this sutra that the Buddhas are able to acquire the five types of vision. A Buddha’s three types of bodies are born from this correct and equal sutra, which is the great seal of the Law that assures entry into the sea of nirvana. It is from this sea that a Buddha’s three types of pure bodies are born. These three types of bodies are fields of good fortune for human and heavenly beings and are highest among those worthy of alms.”

These sutra passages indicate that the Buddhas are beings who are given birth, and that the Lotus Sutra is that which is capable of giving birth. The Buddhas are the body and the Lotus Sutra is the soul.

Therefore in the eye-opening ceremony for Buddhist wooden and painted images, only the Lotus Sutra should be used. But nowadays in the True Word school when these two types of images are consecrated the mudras and mantras associated with the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana and the Honored One Buddha Eye are employed for the eye-opening ceremony. This is utterly contrary to reason!

Question: Which is better, to take the Lotus Sutra as one’s object of devotion or to take the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana as one’s object of devotion?

Answer: If we go by the opinion of the Great Teachers Kōbō, Jikaku, and Chishō, the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana is superior and the Lotus Sutra is inferior.

Question: What exactly is their opinion?

Answer: The Great Teacher Kōbō in his Precious Key to the Secret Treasury and Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind says that the Lotus Sutra ranks eighth, the Flower Garland Sutra ranks ninth, and the Mahāvairochana Sutra ranks tenth or highest; thus one starts with the shallower teachings and moves on to those that are deepest. The Great Teacher Jikaku in his commentaries on the Diamond Crown and Susiddhikara sutras, and the Great Teacher Chishō in his Essentials of the Mahāvairochana Sutra, place the Mahāvairochana Sutra first and the Lotus Sutra second.

Question: What is your opinion?

Answer: The concerted judgment of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, the Buddha Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions is that, among all the sutras preached in the past, present, and future, the Lotus Sutra is foremost.

Question: At present the priests of the Tendai, True Word, and other schools throughout Japan, as well as the ruler, his ministers, and the common people, all question whether the priest Nichiren is to be regarded as superior to the Great Teachers Kōbō, Jikaku, and Chishō. What have you to say to that?

Answer: I, Nichiren, would in turn ask them if they think that the Great Teachers Kōbō, Jikaku, and Chishō are to be regarded as superior to Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. This is my first point.

At present in Japan everyone from the ruler on down to the common people is a child of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings. As his dying instructions, Shakyamuni declared that
one should “rely on the Law and not upon persons.” To proclaim that the Lotus Sutra is foremost is to “rely on the Law.” Priests, the ruler and his ministers, the common people, as well as their servants and their oxen and horses—all those who declare that the opinion of these three great teachers is superior to that of the Buddhas are behaving like disobedient children, are they not? This is my second point.

Question: Had the Great Teacher Kōbō never read the Lotus Sutra?

Answer: The Great Teacher Kōbō had read the complete body of sutras. But when he came to evaluate the relative profundity of the Lotus, Flower Garland, and Mahāvairochana sutras and to rank them in terms of superiority, this is how he read the passage [in the “Peaceful Practices” chapter] of the Lotus Sutra: “Manjushrī, this Lotus Sutra is the secret storehouse of the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones. Among the sutras, it holds the lowest place.” And the passage [in the “Teacher of the Law” chapter] he read in this way: “Medicine King, now I say to you, I have preached various sutras, and among those sutras the Lotus is the third in rank.”

And when the Great Teachers Jikaku and Chishō came to read these passages, they read them thus: “Among the sutras the Lotus Sutra holds the middle place” and “The Lotus is the second in rank.”

The Thus Come One Shakyamuni, Many Treasures Buddha, the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana, and all the other Buddhas have declared of the Lotus Sutra as it compares to all the other sutras that “the Lotus is foremost,” and that “the Lotus Sutra holds the highest place.” In the end, then, it is a question of whose opinion one is to regard as authoritative, that of Shakyamuni and the Buddhas of the ten directions, or that of the three great teachers, Kōbō, Jikaku, and Chishō. Just because it happens also to be my opinion, is it right to reject the opinion of Shakyamuni and the Buddhas of the ten directions and instead to go on for so long accepting as authoritative the opinion of these three great teachers?

Question: The Great Teacher Kōbō was a native of the province of Sanuki and a disciple of the Administrator of Priests Gonsō. He mastered the doctrines of the Three Treatises, Dharma Characteristics, and the others of the six schools. In the fifth month of the twenty-third year of Enryaku [804] he embarked for China on the command of Emperor Kammu. In China he was ordered by Emperor Shun-tsung to take up residence in Ch‘ing-lung-ssu temple, where he received the transmission of the great True Word teachings from the Reverend Hui-kuo.

The Reverend Hui-kuo was the seventh in line of those who had received the transmission from theThus Come One Mahāvairochana. But though the persons may differ, the doctrine that is transmitted is always the same, like water that is poured from one vessel to another. The Thus Come One Mahāvairochana, Vajrasattva, Nāgārjuna, Nāgabodhi, Chin-kang-chih, Pu-k‘ung, Hui-kuo, and Kōbō were different vessels, but the water of wisdom that was transmitted from one to the other was the same True Word.

This great teacher, Kōbō, having received instruction in True Word, crossed the three thousand stormy leagues of the sea and returned to the country of Japan, where he offered the doctrine to three sovereigns, Emperors Heizei, Saga, and Junna. On the nineteenth day of the first month in the fourteenth year of Kōnin [823] he received an imperial order to found Tō-ji temple, where he propagated the secret teachings of True Word. Thus, throughout the five areas and seven marches, the sixty-six provinces, and
the two outer islands, there is no one who rings the True Word diamond-bell and grasps the True Word diamond-pounder who is not an heir of his teachings.

The Great Teacher Jikaku, a native of the province of Shimotsuke, was a disciple of the priest called Bodhisattva Kōchi. In the third year of Daidō [808], when he was fifteen years old, he became a disciple of the Great Teacher Dengyō. Taking up residence on Mount Hiei, he spent the following fifteen years studying and receiving the transmission of the doctrines of the six older schools and of the Lotus and True Word schools.

In the fifth year of Jōwa [838] he went to T'ang China, which was then under the rule of the emperor of the Hui-ch'ang era [Emperor Wu-tsung]. He studied under such outstanding scholars of the T'ien-t'ai and True Word doctrines as Fa-ch'üan, Yüancheng, I-chen, Fa-yüeh, Tsung-jui, and Chih-yüan and gained a thorough understanding of both the exoteric and esoteric teachings. In addition, he spent ten years in detailed study of the True Word secret doctrines, becoming ninth in the line of succession from the Thus Come One Mahāvairocana.

In the first year of Kajō [848] he became a teacher to Emperor Nimmyō. During the Ninju and Saikō eras [851–857] he wrote commentaries on the Diamond Crown and Susiddhikara sutras. He founded Sōji-in hall on Mount Hiei and became the third chief priest of the Tendai school. This marked the beginning of the True Word teaching of the Tendai school.

The Great Teacher Chishō was a native of the province of Sanuki. In the fourth year of Tenchō [827], when he was fourteen, he took up residence on Mount Hiei and became a disciple of the Reverend Gishin. Studying under such eminent teachers in Japan as Gishin, Jikaku, Enchō, and the superiorintendent [Kōjō], he received the transmission of the doctrines of all the eight schools.

In the first year of Ninju [851] he was ordered by Emperor Montoku to journey to China. There during the Ta-chung era of Emperor Hsüan-tsung he studied for seven years under the Reverend Fa-ch'üan, the Reverend Liang-hsiü, and other distinguished teachers, making an exhaustive study of the doctrines of both the exoteric and esoteric teachings.

In the second year of Ten'an [858] he returned to Japan, where he served as a teacher to Emperor Montoku and Emperor Seiwa.

These three great teachers, who shone like the moon or the sun for the sake of present and future ages, have been trusted and revered by generation after generation of enlightened rulers and age after age of their ministers and people, who have unstintingly put faith in them. And as a result the ignorant masses have also all believed in them.

Now as long as their teachings do not violate the golden words of the Buddha, "Rely on the Law and not upon persons," then how can you say that they are based not on the teachings of the Buddhas but are simply an invention of Kōbō and the others? What in the end is the gist of your argument?

Answer: In the one thousand years following the demise of Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, Buddhism spread throughout India. In the first five hundred years it was the Buddhism of the Hinayana, or lesser vehicle, while in the following five hundred years it was that of the Mahayana, or great vehicle. The Hinayana and the Mahayana teachings and the provisional and the true teachings contended with each other, but at that time there was no clear-cut distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric doctrines.
Fifteen years after the beginning of the Middle Day of the Law, Buddhism was introduced to China. At first there was much controversy between the teachings of Shakyamuni and those of the Confucian and Taoist schools of thought and no conclusion had been reached, but little by little Buddhism spread throughout the country. At that time there were controversies over the Hinayana and the Mahayana teachings or the provisional and the true teachings, but no great differences were pointed out.

Six hundred years after Buddhism was introduced to China, in the reign of Emperor Hsiian-tsung, the three Tripitaka Masters Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, and Pu-k’ung came to China from India and established the True Word school. Thereafter the Flower Garland, Lotus, and the other earlier schools were treated with marked dislike, and everyone from the sovereign down to the common people believed that the True Word teachings and the Lotus Sutra are as far apart as clouds and mud.

Later, in the reign of Emperor Tsetsung, a man called the Great Teacher Miao-lo perceived that the True Word teachings are vastly inferior to the Lotus Sutra, but he did not express his opinion persistently, and thereafter there was no one who attempted to establish the relative worth of the Lotus Sutra and the True Word teachings.

In Japan in the time of the thirtieth sovereign, Emperor Kimmei, Buddhism was first introduced from the Korean kingdom of Paekche. At first there was violent controversy between Buddhism and the indigenous belief in gods that continued for more than thirty years. Then, in the reign of the thirty-fourth sovereign, Empress Suiko, Prince Shōtoku first propagated the Buddhist teachings throughout the country.

At that time two honorable priests from the state of Paekche, Ekan and Kanroku, disseminated the doctrines of the Three Treatises school. In the reign of Emperor Kōtoku, Dōshō introduced the Zen school, and in that of Emperor Mommu the priest Chihō from the Korean kingdom of Silla introduced the Dharmacharaka Characteristics school.

In the reign of the forty-fourth sovereign, Empress Genshō, the Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei brought the Mahāvairochana Sutra to Japan, but he did not remain to propagate its teachings. In the reign of Emperor Shōmu the Preceptor Shinjō and the Administrator of Priests Rōben introduced the Flower Garland school.

In the reign of the forty-sixth sovereign, Empress Kōken, the Reverend Ganjin from T’ang China introduced the Precepts school and the Lotus Sutra. He worked to propagate the doctrines of the Precepts school but not those of the Lotus Sutra.

In the reign of the fiftieth sovereign, Emperor Kammu, in the seventh month of the twenty-third year of Enryaku [804] the Great Teacher Dengyō journeyed to China on imperial command. There he met with Tao-sui and Hsing-man, who were disciples of the Great Teacher Miao-lo, and received from them the teachings pertaining to the meditation and wisdom of the Lotus school. From the Discipline Master Tao-hsüan he received the bodhisattva precepts, and from a priest called the Reverend Shun-hsiao he received instruction in the secret teachings of True Word, after which he returned to Japan.

On the basis of the instruction he had received from his teachers in China, Dengyō felt that it was difficult to determine the relative superiority of the True Word and Lotus Sutra doctrines. He therefore undertook to compare the Mahāvairochana Sutra and the Lotus Sutra with each other, as well as the commentaries on the two sutras,
in order to determine their relative worth. He not only came to the conclusion that the Mahāvairochana Sutra is inferior to the Lotus Sutra, but he also pointed out that [the author of] The Annotations on the Mahāvairochana Sutra had appropriated key concepts from the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai and incorporated them in the teachings of his own school.

Later the Great Teacher Kōbō, disgruntled that the True Word sutras had been assigned to an inferior position, worked to establish the True Word school, which regards the Lotus Sutra as inferior not only to the Mahāvairochana Sutra, but inferior to the Flower Garland Sutra as well.

Alas, if Jikaku and Chishō had not allowed this interpretation to be accepted at Mount Hiei and Onjō-ji, then these mistaken views of the Great Teacher Kōbō would never have spread throughout Japan. These two great teachers, Jikaku and Chishō, did not go along with Kōbō’s assessment of the Lotus Sutra as inferior to the Flower Garland Sutra. But they fully agreed with his view that the Lotus Sutra is inferior to the True Word teachings, and thus, astounding as it may seem, acted as archenemies of the founder of their school, the Great Teacher Dengyō.

In the ages that followed, though among the eminent Buddhist priests of Japan there were some who were very wise and learned, none could match the three great teachers [Kōbō, Jikaku, and Chishō]. Thus, for over four hundred years now everyone in Japan has accepted the opinion that the True Word teachings are superior to the Lotus Sutra.

To be sure, at times there have been persons who, in studying the doctrines of the Tendai school, have come to realize that the True Word teachings can never measure up to the Lotus Sutra. But out of fear of offending the chief priests of the Tendai school or the prelates of Ninna-ji temple, they have refrained from speaking out. Others, though not as discerning as they should have been, have ventured to suggest that the True Word teachings and the Lotus Sutra should be regarded as of equal worth. But the True Word teachers have uniformly condemned this view as absurd and laughed it to scorn.

As a result, all of the several hundred thousand temples and shrines throughout Japan have come to belong to the True Word school. Even in the rare cases where a temple honors the Lotus school along with the True Word school, the latter is regarded as the lord and the former as a retainer of the lord. And if persons study the doctrines of the two schools, at heart they uniformly consider themselves belonging to the True Word persuasion.

Whether the position is that of chief priest, chief official, temple supervisor, or superintendent, the persons occupying such positions are all True Word teachers, and since those in inferior positions all customarily imitate the preferences of their superiors, there is not one person in an inferior position who is not a True Word priest.

Hence throughout Japan, though people may recite with their mouths the words “The Lotus Sutra is foremost,” in their minds they think, “It is the second in rank” or “It is the third in rank.” Or they will affirm with body, mouth, and mind together that it is second or third in rank.

For the past four hundred years and more, there has not been a single person who, as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, has affirmed with all three categories of action, those of body, mouth, and mind, that the Lotus Sutra holds the highest place. And much less has there been any practitioner who, as the Lotus Sutra says, “can uphold this sutra.”14 The sutra states, “Since hatred
and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?" All living beings in this age "after his passing," from the supreme ruler down to the multitude of common people, are archenemies of the Lotus Sutra.

I, Nichiren, was born in the province of Awa, the twelfth of the fifteen provinces of Tōkaidō, the son of a fisherman in Kataumi in the village of Tōjō, the district of Nagasa. At the age of twelve I was sent to the mountain temple called Seichō-ji in the same village, where I took up residence. But though it was called a temple, since it was located in such a distant and outlying province, there was no one there who was capable of giving me proper instruction. I thereupon took it upon myself to go about to various other provinces, studying as I went along. Being a person of limited abilities, however, and having no one to teach me, I found it difficult to determine the exact origin of the ten schools of Buddhism and their relative worth.

As it happened, I prayed to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas that I would gain an understanding of these matters and made a thorough study of all the sutras and treatises, and on that basis examined the doctrines of the ten schools. As a result, I may state that the Dharma Characteristics school was originally a shallow and inferior doctrine derived from the sutras of provisional Mahayana. But it gradually developed and expanded until it stood side by side with the other schools of provisional and true Mahayana, and even attempted to defeat the other schools. It is like the military leaders Masakado and Sumitomo of Japan, men of inferior rank who attempted to overthrow their superiors.

The Three Treatises school is likewise a type of provisional Mahayana, teaching a version of the doctrine of non-substantiality, though it thinks of itself as representing true Mahayana.

The Flower Garland school is also a type of provisional Mahayana, but superior to the other schools mentioned, being comparable in rank to the regent or prime minister in the imperial government. But because it is founded on doctrines that are inimical to the Lotus Sutra, it is like a subject or government official who attempts to rank with the sovereign.

The school known as Pure Land is a division of provisional Mahayana. But Shan-tao and Hōnen cleverly deceived people by relegating the other sutras to an impossibly exalted position and declaring the Meditation and other Pure Land sutras to be easily accessible, relegating the capacities of the people of the Former and Middle Days of the Law to an exalted position and those of the people of the Latter Day of the Law to a subordinate position. They declared that the Nembutsu practice is suitable to the capacities of people of the Latter Day of the Law, catering to the people's capacity and destroying the message of the sutras. They ignored the true meaning of the sacred teachings expounded by the Buddha during his lifetime and reduced all to the one practice of the Nembutsu. The school is thus comparable to a person of clever mind but lowly position who attempts
to elevate his position, who pays respect to those who are foolish but ignores persons of real worth.

The school known as Zen claims that there is a doctrine of truth that is separate from the sacred teachings of the Buddha's lifetime. It is like a person who slays the father but makes use of the son, or like a retainer who slays his lord and then usurps the lord's position.

The school known as True Word is one great fabric of lies. But because it has gone to such lengths to conceal its origins, people of shallow capacity have difficulty in perceiving this fact. Thus for many years now they have been deceived and misled by it. To begin with, there is no school called True Word in India, although the proponents of True Word claim that there is. If so, they should produce proof to support their claim.

In any event, the Mahāvairocana Sutra has been transmitted to Japan. If we compare it with the Lotus Sutra and ask what are their relative merits, we find that the Mahāvairocana Sutra ranks seven levels lower than the Lotus Sutra. The proofs are clearly seen when we put the two sutras side by side.18 (I will not bother to cite them here.)

Despite all this, some proponents of the True Word school claim that the Mahāvairocana Sutra is thrice the sovereign the Lotus Sutra is, and some claim that it is twice the sovereign. This is an absurdly mistaken view. It is like the case of Liu Ts'ung who, though a person of lowly station, forced Emperor Min to lead his horse for him.19 Or like Chao Kao who, though a mere subject, unjustly usurped the throne. Or again it is like the Great Arrogant Brahman of India who fashioned a dais with a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha as one of its legs and used it to sit on.

Yet for the past more than four hundred years, there has been no one in China who realized all this, and no one in Japan who doubted these claims of the True Word school.

Because correct and incorrect with regard to the doctrines of Buddhism are in such confusion, the authority of the ruler too must bit by bit decline, until in the end this country of ours will be attacked by another country and destroyed. And because I, Nichiren, alone realized this, for the sake of the Buddhist Law and the authority of the ruler I gathered together crucial passages from the sutras and composed a document that I submitted to the lay priest of Saimyō-ji, who is now deceased. I entitled it On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land.

In that document I discussed the matter in detail. But because ignorant persons have had difficulty understanding its contents, I will here present the pertinent arguments and the factual proofs supporting them.

There is the case of [Emperor Goto-ba] the eighty-second human sovereign, known as the Retired Emperor of Oki. In the third year of Jōkyū [1221], the year with the cyclical sign kanotomi, on the fifteenth day of the fifth month, his forces attacked and killed Iga Tarō Hōgan Mitsusue.20 Thereupon they took the field against Yoshitoki of the Kamakura shogunate.

The retired emperor in time called out all the warriors of the five regions around the capital and the seven marches in an effort to defeat the Acting Administrator Yoshitoki of Kamakura in Sagami Province, but on the contrary his own forces were defeated by Yoshitoki. In the end the retired emperor himself was exiled to the island province of Oki, his two imperial sons21 were exiled to the provinces of Sado and Awa respectively, and seven high-ranking officials in the imperial court were summarily beheaded.

Why did this come about? For the emperor, the ruler of the nation, to
attack Yoshitoki, a mere subject, would seem to be as easy as for a hawk to seize a pheasant or a cat to devour a mouse. And yet in this case, the cat was devoured by the mouse, the hawk was seized by the pheasant.

In addition to its military activities, the imperial court exerted utmost effort in carrying out prayers to defeat the shogunate. Those conducting such prayers included the Administrator of Priests Jien, chief priest of the Tendai school, as well as the chief priest of Tō-ji temple of the True Word school, the prelate of Ninna-ji temple, the chief official of Onjō-ji temple, and eminent priests of the seven major temples of Nara and the fifteen great temples, all as brilliant as the sun and moon in their wisdom and observance of the precepts.

The ceremonies of esoteric Buddhism carried out included the fifteen secret ceremonies, the great ceremonies of profound secret kept in the minds of the three great teachers, Kōbō, Jikaku, and Chishō. From the nineteenth day of the fifth month until the fourteenth day of the sixth month the participants poured out sweat and all but split their heads open in their exertions.

Finally the prelate of Ninna-ji at the Shishin-den hall of the imperial palace conducted the great ceremony, a ceremony that had not been performed three times since its introduction to Japan.

This last ceremony was begun on the eighth day of the sixth month, yet on the fourteenth day of the month the armed forces dispatched by the shogunate in Kanto in one swoop crossed the Uji and Seta rivers and fought their way into Kyoto. The three retired emperors [Gotoba and his two sons] were taken prisoner, and the imperial palace, put to the torch, in one stroke was reduced to ashes.

The forces of the shogunate ban-ished the three retired emperors to three different provinces and summarily beheaded seven of the high court officials. And that was not all. They broke into the residence of the prelate of Ninna-ji and seized his most beloved disciple, the page Setaka, and in the end beheaded him as well. The prelate, unable to bear the grief, died, and the mother of the page as well joined her son in death.

Those who relied on these prayers, how many thousands or ten thousands no one knows, all died, and the few who happened to be spared no longer found it worth living. And from the time the prelate began his prayers on the eighth day of the sixth month until the imperial defeat on the fourteenth day of the same month was, if we reckon it, an interval of barely seven full days!

The fifteen ceremonies, which I mentioned earlier, include the one-character gold-wheel ceremony, the ceremony of the four heavenly kings, the ceremony of the wisdom king Immovable, the Great Awesome Virtue ceremony, the ceremony of the wheel-turning king, the ceremony of Wish-Granting Wheel, the ceremony of the wisdom king Craving-Filled, the ceremony of the Buddha Eye, the ceremony of the six characters, the ceremony of the boy Diamond Pounder, the ceremony of the Honorable Star King, the ceremony of the wisdom king Great Commander, and the ceremony of the Protection Sutra. The purpose of the ceremonies is to overpower all those who act as enemies of the nation or enemies of the ruler, to call away their lives from them, and to send their spirits to the pure land of Secret Solmnity. And those who performed them were none other than Jien, chief priest of the Tendai school, and the administrators of priests and other high-ranking priests of Tō-ji, Ninna-ji, and the Jōjū-in hall of Onjō-ji, forty-
one eminent persons, as well as various assistant priests, over three hundred persons in all.

With such ceremonies, such celebrants, and such an age of such emperors and retired emperors, how could the imperial forces have been defeated? Even if they had not been victorious, how could they have been defeated so quickly and in such a shameful manner? I dare say that no one but I understands the reason.

For the ruler of a nation to attack one of his subjects is like a hawk seizing a small bird. Even if the ruler should in the end suffer defeat, one would expect the defeat to come only after one or two years, or after ten or twenty years. Yet in this case the attack began on the fifteenth day of the fifth month and ended in defeat on the fourteenth day of the sixth month, a period of barely thirty days or more. And the Acting Administrator Yoshitoki did not know beforehand that such an attack would take place, so he had no time to offer up his own prayers for victory or to make other preparations.

But I, Nichiren, employing the little wisdom I possess, can perceive the cause for all this. It is to be found in the erroneous rites of the True Word school. Mistaken activities carried out by one person can call down calamity on ten thousand states. Even one person performing them can bring about the destruction of one or two countries. How much more so, then, if three hundred or more priests join with the ruler of the nation to act as archenemies of the Lotus Sutra! How could the nation fail to be destroyed?

These grossly erroneous rites have over the years gradually made their way to the Kanto region. True Word followers now act as superintendents or attendant priests of various temples there and again and again perform such ceremonies. The men of this area, being warriors from the outlying regions, are incapable of judging what is correct or incorrect in matters of Buddhist doctrine, but simply believe that anything that pays honor to the three treasures is acceptable. It is quite natural, therefore, that they have taken up these True Word rites.

This situation has prevailed for some years, till it has come to the point where our country has been attacked from abroad and is on the verge of being destroyed.

Now not only the priests of the eight provinces of the Kanto region but the chief priests and superintendents of Mount Hiei, Tō-ji, Onjō-ji, and the seven major temples of Nara have all come under the jurisdiction of the Kamakura shogunate. The shogunate has thus become a patron of the very same kind of grossly erroneous rites that were earlier favored by the retired emperor who was exiled to Oki.

One becomes the ruler of a nation, whether a large or a small one, due to the design of Brahmā, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings. If the ruler should act as archenemy of the Lotus Sutra, these deities have vowed to mete out immediate punishment.

For example, when the grand minister of state and lay priest [Taira no Kiyomori] and his clan undertook to support the eighty-first sovereign, Emperor Antoku, and to overthrow Minamoto no Yoritomo, they chose Mount Hiei as their clan temple and the Mountain King as their clan god, relying on their assistance. The result was that Emperor Antoku was drowned in the sea of western Japan [the chief priest of Mount Hiei] was killed by Minamoto no Yoshinaka, and the entire Taira clan was wiped out in one stroke.

Later there was a second occurrence of this type, and now there is about to be a third.
If my warnings are ignored and the evil ceremonies of the True Word school are employed in an attempt to overcome the forces of the great Mongol Empire, it will on the contrary be the country of Japan that is overcome; as the Lotus Sutra says, “the injury will rebound upon the originator.”

If we stop to consider the benefits of the Lotus Sutra in the light of the punishments [suffered by those who turned against it], then we will realize that there is no path to the attainment of Buddhahood that surpasses the Lotus Sutra. And if we wish to see how prayers based upon it are answered in this present world, the proof lies in the fact that Minamoto no Yoritomo read and recited the Lotus Sutra.

I am indebted to my parents and to my teacher for an understanding of these principles. But my parents passed away some time ago.

The late priest Dōzen-bō was my teacher. In his heart he felt kindly toward me. But he was afraid that some trouble might arise between himself and the steward of the region because of the Lotus Sutra, and therefore he acted outwardly as though he were my enemy. I heard later that he seemed to manifest a certain degree of faith in the Lotus Sutra. But I do not know just what his condition was when he was on the point of death. I surely do not think that he was reborn in hell, but neither do I believe that he was able to escape the sufferings of birth and death. Sad to say, he is probably wandering in some intermediate state between death and rebirth.

At the time when the steward displayed his anger toward me, you, Jōken-bō, along with Gijō-bō, helped me to escape from Seichō-ji unharmed. Without doing anything fur-

ther, you have already performed a service for the Lotus Sutra. I hope you will therefore take this opportunity to free yourselves from the sufferings of birth and death.

In the more than 2,230 years since the World-Honored One expounded this object of devotion, there has been no one who has propagated it throughout the continent of Jambudvīpa. T’ien-t’ai in China and Dengyō in Japan understood it to some extent but did nothing to propagate it. But now the time has come for its propagation. According to the Lotus Sutra, Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, and other bodhisattvas should now come forth to propagate it, but they have yet to make their appearance.

I, Nichiren, am not one of their group, but to some extent I understand what is to be done and so, until those bodhisattvas who sprang up from the earth make their appearance in the world, I have busied myself proclaiming their message as best I can. And, as the Lotus Sutra predicts when it says “how much more will this be so after his [the Buddha’s] passing,” I have met with the difficulties one may expect when propagating the sutra.

I earnestly pray that the blessings deriving from such activities may be transferred to my parents, my teacher, and to all living beings. I am writing you to inform you of this and to answer the questions that you have raised. I hope that you will set aside all other practices and will address yourself to this object of devotion, praying wholeheartedly for your next life.

I will be writing you again later about this matter. Please give my greetings to the other priests.

Nichiren
Background

Known as one of the ten major writings of Nichiren Daishonin, this letter was sent to Jōken-bō, a priest at Seichō-ji temple in the province of Awa. The Daishonin as a youth entered the priesthood at Seichō-ji under the tutelage of a senior priest named Dōzen-bō.

Jōken-bō, also a disciple of Dōzen-bō at the same temple, had studied there alongside the Daishonin. In 1253 when the Daishonin first declared his teaching of Nam-myoho-reno-kyo at that temple, criticizing the Nembutsu, or Pure Land, and other schools, Jōken-bō with a fellow disciple Gijō-bō helped the Daishonin escape attack by the steward of the area, Tōjō Kaganebō, who was an ardent Pure Land believer.

This letter, written in the ninth month of 1278, represents the Daishonin’s answers to questions raised by Jōken-bō concerning the object of devotion, or Gohonzon.

First, citing passages from the sutras and commentaries, the Daishonin explains that the object of devotion for ordinary people in the Latter Day of the Law should be the daimoku, or title, of the Lotus Sutra. Then he demonstrates the erroneous nature of the objects of devotion adopted by the other major Buddhist schools of his day. With regard to the object of devotion of the True Word school and of the True Word tradition within the Tendai school, he refutes it with particular strictness, revealing the fundamental errors made by the three great teachers, Kōbō, the founder of the True Word school, and Jikaku and Chishō, the patriarchs of the Esoteric tradition of the Tendai school.

Next, he cites from history the case of the eighty-second sovereign of Japan, Emperor Gotoba. Gotōba continued to hold power as retired emperor and attempted a military coup against the Kamakura shogunate headed by Hōjō Yoshitoki in what is known as the Jōkyū Disturbance. Gotōba and his supporters were defeated, however, though they had prestigious True Word priests pray for victory over Kamakura. Gotōba was exiled to the island of Oki and came to be called the Retired Emperor of Oki. The Daishonin also recounts the case of the earlier battle between the Taira clan and the Minamoto clan. The Taira clan had Emperor Antoku on their side (Antoku was a grandson of Taira no Kiyomori) and had eminent priests of Tendai Esotericism pray for the defeat of the Minamoto clan, but they were eventually destroyed.

With these factual proofs, the Daishonin says that if his warnings are ignored and the True Word ceremonies are employed in an attempt to overcome the Mongol forces, “it will on the contrary be the country of Japan that is overcome; as the Lotus Sutra says, ‘the injury will rebound upon the originator.’” This will become, he says, a third proof of the destruction brought about by True Word prayers.

The Daishonin closes by stating that this object of devotion, which embodies the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, had never appeared before, and that he has accomplished what the bodhisattvas Superior Practices and Boundless Practices were called upon to accomplish.

Notes

1. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra.
2. The Correct and Equal Sutra is an abbreviated form of the Great Correct and Equal Dhāranī Sutra. The seven Buddhas refer to the seven Buddhas of the past (see Glossary). The eight bodhisattvas are Man-

3. Vairochana is the central Buddha of the Flower Garland Sutra. Though Vairochana is interpreted differently according to the various schools, the Flower Garland school identifies it as another name for Shakyamuni Buddha and, among the three bodies, as the reward body.

4. “This great vehicle sutra” and “this correct and equal sutra” mentioned in the following paragraph refer to the Lotus Sutra.

5. The Dharma body, the reward body, and the manifested body. See three bodies in Glossary.

6. The ceremony for imbuing a newly made Buddha image with spiritual properties, thus making it an object of devotion. The Honored One Buddha Eye, described in the esoteric True Word teaching, represents the virtues of the five types of vision (see Glossary). The eye-opening ceremony is conducted with the mudra of the Honored One Buddha Eye and the mantra of the Buddha Mahavairochana. One view holds that the Honored One Buddha Eye is Mahavairochana Buddha in a different form and a personification of the Buddha's supreme wisdom.

7. Chapter ten of the Lotus Sutra reads, “Among the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach, this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand.” “Concerted judgment” refers to the testimony given in the Lotus Sutra, chapter eleven, by Many Treasures Buddha who states that what Shakyamuni had expounded in the sutra is the truth, and to that of the Buddhas of the ten directions who, in chapter twenty-one, extended their long broad tongues up to the Brahma heaven in testament.

8. Nirvana Sutra.

9. The five areas and seven marches indicate the whole of ancient Japan (see Glossary under five provinces and seven marches). The sixty-six provinces also refer to the entire country of Japan. This division of the country was in force from 813 until the Meiji Restoration in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The two outer islands are Iki and Tsushima off the coast of Kyushu in southern Japan.

10. A diamond-pounder refers to what in Sanskrit is called a waja, originally a kind of weapon used in ancient India. It is so called because of its legendary hardness. In the rituals of Esoteric Buddhism, the diamond-pounder is used to symbolize the resolve to attain enlightenment that is firm enough to destroy all illusions.

11. Emperor Kimmei is now regarded as the twenty-ninth emperor of Japan, because the administration of the fifteenth ruler, Empress Jingū, is no longer considered a formal reign. In Nichiren Daishonin's time, however, she was included in the lineage, so Emperor Kimmei was counted as the thirtieth sovereign.

12. Mention of Shan-wu-wei's stay in Japan appears in A Brief History of Japan by the priest Kōen (12th century) of Mount Hiei, and The Genkō Era Biographies of Eminent Priests by the Zen priest Kokan Shiren (1278–1346). Though no conclusive proof exists that Shan-wu-wei actually journeyed to Japan, this tradition is thought to have been widely accepted in the Daishonin's time.

13. Meditation and wisdom are two of the three types of learning (see Glossary), the other being precepts.


15. Ibid., chap. 10.

16. Tōkaidō was one of the seven outlying regions, which was made up of fifteen provinces.

17. The Precepts school established by Dengyō is interpreted to mean that Dengyō set aside the Hinayana precepts and established the Mahayana precepts. During his time, all priests were ordained exclusively in the Hinayana precepts. Dengyō wished to ordain his disciples with Mahayana precepts and made repeated efforts to obtain imperial permission for the building of a Mahayana ordination center on Mount Hiei.

18. The proofs for the statement that the Mahāvairochana Sutra ranks seven levels lower than the Lotus Sutra are described in On the Relative Superiority of the True Word and Tendai Schools (p. 364).

19. Emperor Min was the fourth ruler of the Western Chin dynasty. When his uncle, Emperor Huai, was killed in Loyang by Liu Ts‘ung, the third ruler of the Former Chao, he escaped to Ch‘ang-an and then became emperor in 313. But he was captured by General Liu Yao, a subject of Liu Ts‘ung, in 316, and the following
year, one year after he had been forced to work as a menial laborer, he was killed.

20. In 1219 Iga Mitsusue became a military governor of Rokuhara in Kyoto whose duties included supervision of the political, military, and judicial affairs of the southwestern half of Japan. During the Jōkyū Disturbance of 1221, he refused to join forces with the Retired Emperor Gotoba.

21. The Retired Emperors Tsuchimikado and Juntoku.

22. The fifteen great temples are the seven major temples of Nara (see Glossary) plus eight other important temples in the Nara, Osaka, and Kyoto areas.

23. In the fourth month of 1221—around the time of the disturbance between the court and the Kamakura warriors—by command of the Retired Emperor of Oki, altars were set up, and fifteen secret ceremonies were carried out for the first time by forty-one practitioners in an attempt to overthrow the Kamakura shogunate through the power of incantation. The fifteen secret ceremonies are referred to later in this text.

24. The Uji River is the name of the middle reaches of the Seta River, which originates at the southern edge of Lake Biwa and flows through Kyoto Prefecture, eventually emptying into Osaka Bay. In former times, it marked the southeastern line of defense for Kyoto, the capital, and was the site of several famous battles. Because of its strategic importance, whether or not one succeeded in crossing the Uji River determined victory or defeat of one’s troops. Seta, the area facing the site where this river emerges from the lake, was another strategic point of defense.

25. Setaka (d. 1221) was a son of Sasaki Hirotsuna, the constable of Ōmi who rallied to the imperial cause during the Jōkyū Disturbance. Setaka served Prince Dōjō, the prelate of Ninna-ji temple. When the imperial forces were defeated he was killed.

26. This refers to the Pure Land of Mahāvairocana Buddha.

27. Sagami, Musashi, Awa, Kazusa, Shimōsa, Hitachi, Kōzuke, and Shimotsuke.

28. Antoku, still a child at the time, drowned in 1185 during a sea battle at Dannoura, where the Taira clan met their final defeat at the hands of the Minamoto.

29. A reference to the Jōkyū Disturbance of 1221. The Retired Emperor Gotoba played a leading role in a struggle for power between the imperial court in Kyoto and the Hōjō clan in Kamakura. The imperial forces were defeated, and he and two other retired emperors, his sons, were sent into exile.

30. Lotus Sutra, chap. 25.

31. A reference to Tōjō Kagenobu, the steward of Tōjō Village in Nagasa District of Awa Province and a passionate believer in the Pure Land teachings. When Nichiren Daishonin first declared his teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo at Seichō-ji temple in 1233, Tōjō Kagenobu was so infuriated by the Daishonin’s severe criticism of the Pure Land school that he attempted to attack him.