

On the Great Teacher Jikaku



I HAVE received the three thousand coins and the priest's surplice of silk that you sent.

I have explained matters of doctrine in some detail in the reply I wrote to Akimoto Tarō Hyōe-no-jō.¹ Please read what I have said there.

It is most rare for one to be born in a human body, and rare to encounter the Buddhist teaching. In this five-foot body, the face occupies one foot, and three inches of the face are taken up by the two eyes. And of all the many sights the eyes behold from the age of one to the age of sixty, the most joyful of all is that of the sutra passages that demonstrate the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra.

How deplorable is the way that the Great Teacher Jikaku interprets the word "Crown" in the title of the Diamond Crown Sutra! He states: "The word 'Crown' means that, among all the doctrines of the great vehicle, this one is the finest of all. Nothing can surpass it, and therefore it is called the Crown. . . . Just as in the human body, the crown or head is the most superior part. . . . The Lotus Sutra says, 'These phenomena are part of an abiding Law'²—now this secret principle is herein clearly explained. Therefore it is called the Diamond Crown Sutra."³

And he also says, "Just as diamonds are the most precious of all jewels, so is

this sutra among all the sutras. Among all the sutra doctrines, it is the foremost, the jewel in the topknot of the Thus Come Ones of the three existences."⁴

The meaning of this interpretation is that the Lotus Sutra is to be robbed of its title as foremost among all the sutra doctrines and that that title is to be bestowed upon the Diamond Crown Sutra. Not only that, but the assertion that the crown or head is the most superior part of the human body means that the head of the Lotus Sutra is to be cut off and the head of this True Word sutra accepted in its place. This is like cutting off the head of a crane and substituting the head of a frog. And if this is done, one will see that the frog that is the True Word has died, and the crane that is the Lotus Sutra has been left headless.

This interpretation [of Jikaku] appears strange to the eyes of one who has been born in a human body. The udumbara flower, which blooms only once in three thousand years, can only be recognized by a wheel-turning king. Unless one is a Buddha who has reached the stage of ultimate enlightenment, one cannot recognize these enemies of the Lotus Sutra. But I have come to discern the foes of the one vehicle as though they were revealed to me in a dream.

Just where the grave of the Great Teacher Jikaku is located is a matter of uncertainty. Popular accounts say that his head is buried at the temple Rishaku-ji⁵ in the province of Dewa. If this is so, it would seem that his head and his body are buried in different places. One may recall that the chief priest Myōun had his head cut off by Minamoto no Yoshinaka.

Regarding the chief priests of the Tendai school, nothing need be said here about the Great Teacher Dengyō, the founder of the school. Following him, the first chief priest, Gishin, and the second chief priest, Enchō, both regarded the Lotus Sutra as the correct or principal doctrine and the True Word teachings as subsidiary. But the third chief priest, the Great Teacher Jikaku, viewed the True Word as the correct doctrine and the Lotus Sutra as subsidiary. The various chief priests who succeeded him in the years following debated the matter but came to no fixed conclusion.

The General Administrator of Priests Myōun served two terms, as the fifty-fifth and the fifty-seventh chief priest of the Tendai school. On a certain day in the fifth month of the third year of Angen [1177] he incurred the wrath of the Retired Emperor Goshirakawa and was ordered into exile in the province of Izu. He was rescued at Ōtsu by priests of Mount Hiei, however, and thereafter became chief priest once more in the eleventh month of the third year of Jishō [1179]. But because he engaged in activities designed to overthrow the General of the Right Minamoto no Yoritomo, on the nineteenth day of the eleventh month of the second year of Juei [1183] he was

attacked by Minamoto no Yoshinaka.

This man encountered great troubles twice, once when he was alive and again at the time of his death. The troubles he met when he was alive were the kind that customarily go with practice of the Buddhist teaching, adornments to the activities and achievements of a sage or worthy man. But the humiliations he suffered in his manner of death and thereafter were the type of disgrace invited by an evil or a foolish man, one who slanders the correct Law. He was like the Great Arrogant Brahman or Shuri.⁶

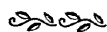
From all of this it is fairly evident that, from the time of Myōun and thereafter, the chief priests have all favored the True Word teachings. This situation has continued down to the present, a period of over a hundred years, or the terms of more than thirty chief priests. During that whole time, True Word chief priests have stolen the position that rightfully belongs to the Lotus Sutra.

It is evident as well that these men are great enemies of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. And they are also foes of Brahmā, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, the four heavenly kings, the Sun Goddess, and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman. You who are disciples of mine, you must keep this matter in mind when you consider the Buddhist doctrine.

Respectfully,
Nichiren

The twenty-seventh day of the first month

Reply to the lay priest Ōta



Background

This is a reply to Ōta Jōmyō of Shimōsa Province, who had sent donations of money and a priest's surplice to Nichiren Daishonin at Minobu. It is dated simply the twenty-seventh day of the first month, but it is thought to have been written in 1280.

Acknowledging receipt of Ōta's offerings, the Daishonin refers Ōta to another letter, which he wrote to a follower named Akimoto, for doctrinal details. He then expresses delight at the rare opportunity of having encountered the Lotus Sutra and grasped the supremacy of its teaching. Next he addresses the erroneous interpretation of Jikaku, the third chief priest of Enryaku-ji, the head temple of the Tendai school, which held that the esoteric Diamond Crown Sutra is the "crown," or supreme, among sutras, ranking above the Lotus Sutra. The Daishonin compares Jikaku's usurping of the Lotus Sutra's supreme status and assigning it to the True Word sutras to cutting off the head of a crane and trying to substitute the head of a frog,

which ends in the death of both. He indicates that it appears that the head and the body of Jikaku are buried in different places, and that that reminds one of the fact that Myōun, who was both the fifty-fifth and the fifty-seventh chief priest of Enryaku-ji, had been killed.

Dengyō, the founder, and his two successors, Gishin and Enchō, respectively the first and second chief priests of Enryaku-ji, regarded the Lotus Sutra as the primary teaching and the True Word sutras as subordinate, but this view was inverted by Jikaku, the third chief priest. Since the time of Myōun, a latter-day successor of Jikaku, all the chief priests of the Tendai school became chief priests of the True Word teaching, the Daishonin says. In closing he admonishes his disciples to be aware of this fault within the Tendai school, and to bear in mind that those chief priests who upheld the True Word doctrines are the enemies of all the Buddhas and gods.

Notes

1. A lay follower of the Daishonin. He was on friendly terms with Ōta Jōmyō and Soya Kyōshin, who lived in the same province of Shimōsa and took faith around the same time, 1260. This is a reference to *Letter to Akimoto*, a letter of the same date as this one addressed to Ōta, in which the Daishonin addresses the slander committed by Jikaku and others.

2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

3. *A Commentary on the Diamond Crown Sutra*.

4. *Ibid.*

5. A temple of the Tendai school, which Jikaku founded in 860 as an annex to its head temple Enryaku-ji.

6. For Great Arrogant Brahman, see Glossary. It is uncertain to whom the name Shuri refers, though it appears to be a part of a Sanskrit name.