LISTING THE SUCCESSORS OF THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING

I have received one quilted robe and three sets of upper garments and trousers. The quilted robe is worth seven thousand coins, and the upper garments and trousers ten thousand coins, so the total comes to seventeen thousand coins.

When I examine the matter, I find that in the preface to *Great Concentration and Insight*, which is found in the first volume of this work, the Great Teacher Chang-an speaks of the stage of practice attained by the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai as follows: “T’ien-t’ai calmly entered meditation and then passed away. He had mastered the five stages of practice. And the sutra says that even if a person were to present each of the people of four hundred ten thousand million nayuta worlds with seven kinds of gems, and instruct and enable them to gain six transcendental powers, he would still not match a person at the first stage of hearing the sutra and responding with joy, not even to one part in a hundred, thousand, ten thousand. How much truer must this be, then, of one who has mastered the five stages of practice! A passage from the sutra states that such a person ‘is the envoy of the Thus Come One. He has been dispatched by the Thus Come One and carries out the Thus Come One’s work.’

The Great Teacher Dengyō says of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai, “Now the founder of our school, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai, preached the Lotus Sutra and interpreted the Lotus Sutra in a way that placed him far above the crowd; in all of China, he stood alone.” He goes on to say, “One should clearly understand that he was a messenger of the Thus Come One. Those who praise him will receive blessings that will pile up as high as Mount Calm and Bright, while those who slander him will be committing a fault that will condemn them to the hell of incessant suffering.”

But let us set these matters aside for the moment. From the first day after the Buddha’s passing through the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law there have been twenty-four envoys of the Buddha. The first was Mahākāśyapa; the second, Ānanda; the third, Madhyāntika; the fourth, Shānavāsa; the fifth, Upagupta; the sixth, Dhrītaka; the seventh, Mikkaka; the eighth, Buddhananda; the ninth, Buddhāmitra; the tenth, Pārśva; the eleventh, Punyayashas; the twelfth, Ashvaghosa; the thirteenth, Kapimala; the fourteenth, Nāgārjuna; the fifteenth, Āryadeva; the sixteenth, Rāhulabhadra; the seventeenth, Samghanandi; the eighteenth, Samghaya-
shas; the nineteenth, Kumārata; the twentieth, Jayata; the twenty-first, Va- 
subandhu; the twenty-second, Manor- 
hita; the twenty-third, Haklenayashas; 
and the twenty-fourth, the Venerable 
Āryasimha. These twenty-four men 
are described in the Buddha’s Success-
sors Sutra, which records the golden 
words of the Buddha. They were en-
voys entrusted with the mission of 
propagating the Hinayana and provi-
sional Mahayana sutras, however. They 
were not envos entrusted with the task 
of propagating the Lotus Sutra.

The Three Treatises school says, 
“Tao-lang and Chi-tsang were the Bu-
dha’s envos.” The Dharma Charac-
teristics school says, “Hsūan-tsang and 
Tz’u-en were the Buddha’s envos.” 
The Flower Garland school says, “Fa-
tsang and Ch’eng-kuan were envos of 
the Buddha.” The True Word school 
says, “Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, 
Pu-k’ung, Hui-kuo, and Köbō were 
envos of the Buddha.” I have pon-
dered this and declare that they were 
absolutely not envos of the Buddha. 
Nor were they in any way envos of ei-
ther Hinayana or Mahayana teachings. 
If one were to make offerings to them, 
one would be inviting disaster, but if 
one were to rebuke them, one would 
gain blessings.

Question: Is this not your personal 
interpretation of the matter?

Answer: Even if it were my personal 
interpretation, when there is both 
scriptural proof and a rational explana-
tion, what offense could there possi-
bly be? Moreover, there is a comen-
tary regarding this matter. The Great 
Teacher Dengyō says, “Could there 
conceivably be anyone who would 
abandon blessings and long for punish-
ment?” “Abandon blessings” refers to 
those who abandon the Great Teacher 
T’ien-t’ai. “Long for punishment” 
refers to those who long for the found-
ing patriarchs of the Dharma Charac-
teristics, Three Treatises, Flower Gar-

dland, and True Word schools, whom 
I referred to earlier.

I will now describe the blessings to 
be gained by one who abandons those 
teachers and makes offerings solely to 
the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai. What is a 
major world system comprised of? The 
four directions of east and west, south 
and north, one Mount Sumeru, the 
six heavens of the world of desire, and 
the Brahma heaven together make up 
one world of four continents. A clus-
ter of ten million Mount Sumerus and 
worlds of four continents is known as 
a minor world system. A cluster of 
one thousand minor world systems is 
known as an intermediate world sys-
tem. And a cluster of one thousand 
intermediate world systems is known 
as a major world system.

Imagine that in one major world 
system there is a lay supporter who 
makes offerings for a period of eighty 
years to the living beings of the six 
paths in four hundred ten thousand 
million nayuta worlds. This person 
causes each of these people to read all 
the sutras preached in the past, now 
being preached, or to be preached in 
the future, except the Lotus Sutra, thus 
enabling all of them to become either 
arhats with the three insights and six 
transcendental powers, prayekabud-
dhas, or bodhisattvas at the stage of 
near-perfect enlightenment.

Now let us compare this lay sup-
porter with one who offers not the 
smallest part of the treasures of either 
the secular or religious world, but up-
holds one character, one phrase, or one 
verse of the Lotus Sutra alone, and 
let us discuss their benefits. The bene-
fits gained by the practitioner of the 
Lotus Sutra will exceed the other’s 
benefits by a hundred, thousand, ten 
thousand, million times.

And the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai 
exceeds this practitioner by five times. 
Thus the Great Teacher Dengyō is 
plainly saying that making offerings to
such a great teacher will lead to an accumulation of blessings as high as Mount Sumeru.

Please be sure to explain this principle to your wife.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

Reply to Tayū no Sakan

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**Background**

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in 1280 at Minobu to Tayū no Sakan, or Ikegami Munenaka, to thank him for his offering of a quilted robe and three sets of upper garments and trousers. The Daishonin lists the names of the twenty-four successors of Shakyamuni Buddha, who are considered envoys of the Buddha. But, says the Daishonin, these were envoys who propagated the Hinayana and provisional Mahayana sutras, not the Lotus Sutra. And thus the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai, who propagated the Lotus Sutra, is far superior to them, not to mention the patriarchs of the other schools.

**Notes**

1. The first stage of hearing the sutra and responding with joy constitutes the first of the five stages of practice, which are referred to in the preceding sentence.
2. This statement is found in the eighteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra.
3. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.
4. *A Clarification of the Schools Based on T’ien-t’ai’s Doctrine.*
5. Ibid.