

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,¹ not even to one part in a hundred, thousand, ten thousand.² 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.'³"

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."⁴ 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 Mahākāshyapa; the second, Ānanda; the third, Madhyāntika; the fourth, Shānavāsa; the fifth, Upagupta; the sixth, Dhritaka; the seventh, Mikaka; the eighth, Buddhānanda; the ninth, Buddhamitra; the tenth, Pārshva; the eleventh, Punyayashas; the twelfth, Ashvaghosha; the thirteenth, Kapimāla; the fourteenth, Nāgārjuna; the fifteenth, Āryadeva; the sixteenth, Rāhulābhadrā; the seventeenth, Saṃghanāndi; the eighteenth, Saṃghaya-

shas; the nineteenth, Kumārata; the twentieth, Jayata; the twenty-first, Vasubandhu; the twenty-second, Manorhita; the twenty-third, Haklenayashas; and the twenty-fourth, the Venerable Āryasimha. These twenty-four men are described in the Buddha's Successors Sutra, which records the golden words of the Buddha. They were envoys entrusted with the mission of propagating the Hinayana and provisional Mahayana sutras, however. They were not envoys entrusted with the task of propagating the Lotus Sutra.

The Three Treatises school says, "Tao-lang and Chi-tsang were the Buddha's envoys." The Dharma Characteristics school says, "Hsüan-tsang and Tz'u-en were the Buddha's envoys." The Flower Garland school says, "Fatsang and Ch'eng-kuan were envoys of the Buddha." The True Word school says, "Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chieh, Pu-k'ung, Hui-kuo, and Kōbō were envoys of the Buddha." I have pondered this and declare that they were absolutely not envoys of the Buddha. Nor were they in any way envoys of either 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 explanation, what offense could there possibly be? Moreover, there is a commentary regarding this matter. The Great Teacher Dengyō says, "Could there conceivably be anyone who would abandon blessings and long for punishment?"⁵ "Abandon blessings" refers to those who abandon the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai. "Long for punishment" refers to those who long for the founding patriarchs of the Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, Flower Gar-

land, 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 cluster 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 system. 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, pratyekabuddhas, or bodhisattvas at the stage of near-perfect enlightenment.

Now let us compare this lay supporter with one who offers not the smallest part of the treasures of either the secular or religious world, but upholds one character, one phrase, or one verse of the Lotus Sutra alone, and let us discuss their benefits. The benefits 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



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 eighth-

teenth 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.