The Relative Merit of Reciting the Daimoku and Amida’s Name

The words Nam-myoho-ренge-kyo may be difficult to recite, while recitation of the words Nam Amida Butsu or Namu Yakushi Nyorai may be easier. But although the number of characters in the various formulas is approximately the same, the blessings to be gained through them are vastly different.

Before the Buddha appeared in the world, it was the custom in India to intone the names of the two deities and the three ascetics when praying for rebirth in the heavenly realm. After the appearance of the Buddha, however, people recited the Buddha’s name.

In comparison to the Buddha’s name, however, the names of the two deities and the three ascetics are mere shards and rubble, while the name of the Buddha is comparable to gold or silver, or to the fabulous wish-granting jewel. Likewise, in comparison to the daimoku of Myohō-renge-kyo, the names of the various Buddhas are mere shards and rubble, while the daimoku is comparable to the wish-granting jewel.

Nevertheless, there are some teachers who among the teachings of Buddhism cannot distinguish between Hinayana and Mahayana doctrines, the provisional teachings and the true teaching, but who pretend to understand all about Buddhism. They see the passages of scripture that say that, in comparison to the names of non-Buddhist figures, a Buddha’s name is like the wish-granting jewel; and then, because there are scriptural passages that use the same simile, comparing the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra to the wish-granting jewel, they mistakenly suppose that the Nembutsu, or recitation of the name of Amida Buddha, and the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra are the same thing.

And because they think they are the same, we find persons who are held in high esteem by the world at large reciting only the name of Amida Buddha. And because they do so, all the rest of the people spend their whole lives doing so, reciting the Nembutsu sixty thousand or a hundred thousand times in one day but never once in their lives reciting the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra.

Or again there are certain persons who are thought by the world to be very wise. But although in outward appearance they are persons of wisdom, inwardly they have no real understanding of Buddhism, and therefore they assert that the Nembutsu and the Lotus Sutra are the same thing, and that when one recites the words Namu Amida Butsu, one has...
in effect read the entire Lotus Sutra.³

Nowhere in all the sutras preached during the Buddha’s lifetime is there a single word or phrase to support such a view. Even if such an idea were to be found in the commentaries written by the great Buddhist teachers or eminent leaders of the past, one would have to ask whether it is an interpretation based on true observation of the mind,⁴ or simply a case of guesswork.

With regard to the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, it is persons who in the past have already encountered a hundred thousand million living Buddhas and obtained blessing [by offering alms to them] who are thereafter able at last to hear the five characters of Myoohorenge-kyo and for the first time take faith in them.⁵ When we compare the names of the non-Buddhist deities, the heavenly gods, persons of the two vehicles, or bodhisattvas, with the names of the various Buddhas, then the former are mere shards and rubble, while the latter are comparable to the wish-granting jewel. But in comparison to the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddhas’ names are all mere shards and rubble, while the daimoku is comparable to the wish-granting jewel.

For scholars of the present time to suppose that one may gain the same blessings by reciting the names of the various Buddhas as one gains by reciting the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, and that the two actions are equal, is to suppose that shards and rubble are the same as the wish-granting jewel, that the two are equal.

Volume five of Great Concentration and Insight states: “Even those who turn their backs on the world amuse themselves with an inferior vehicle, clinging to mere branches and leaves. They are like dogs that tag after the servants [forgetting their master]. They pay honor to apes and monkeys, considering them like the god Shakra; they revere shards and rubble, looking on them as bright gems. With such ignorant and benighted persons, how can one discuss the way?”

The gist of this passage is that, though people may become weary of the world and quit the household life, retiring to the mountains and forests, giving up all thought of fame and gain, and praying only for their next existence, if they do not practice the great vehicle set forth in the Lotus Sutra but recite the names of the Buddhas who are described in the inferior vehicles of the provisional teachings, they can only be compared to perverse persons who suppose that shards and rubble are in fact bright jewels, persons who are destined to fall into a dark and evil path.

In the first volume of his Annotations on Great Concentration and Insight, the Great Teacher Miao-lo, citing the Sutra of the Heavenly Son Abiding Goodness,⁶ makes clear the heart of the Lotus Sutra when he says, “Those who hear the Law, speak slanderously of it, and fall into hell as a result, are still superior to those who offer alms to Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.” He means that even one who, on hearing the name of the Lotus Sutra, commits the offense of slandering it, is superior to a person who gives alms to Amida Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha, Medicine Master Buddha, and other Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges and recites their names. Since this is so, the Nembutsu followers of our age, though they may recite the Nembutsu sixty thousand or up to one hundred thousand times, can never gain release from the sufferings of birth and death.

If one sees others listening to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, one may declare that “not even one person in a thousand” can be saved by such teachings,⁷ that they represent a “sundry practice,” and that “not a single person has ever attained Buddhahood” through them,⁸ and then thereby urge
them to "abandon" and to "close" the door to the Lotus Sutra. But even if one speaks slanderously of the sutra and as a result falls into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering, in the end one is certain to gain release from the sufferings of birth and death [because of the connection one has formed with the Lotus Sutra]. And since that is the case, how much better it would be if now, in one's present existence, one were to take faith in its teachings!

Question: The Nembutsu believers of the present time say that they surely have no intention of attacking the Lotus Sutra. The reason they recite the Nembutsu is so that they can quickly gain rebirth in the World of Perfect Bliss, and there devote themselves to achieving an understanding of the Lotus Sutra. Moreover, they say that the Lotus Sutra is not suited to persons like them, whose bodies are defiled by impurity, and that it fills them with awe. The Nembutsu, on the other hand, does not discriminate against those who are defiled, and that is why they recite it. How would you reply to these assertions?

Answer: For the past four or five years many persons, both wise and unwise, have expressed agreement with these arguments. But although I, Nichiren, have searched everywhere throughout the teachings set forth by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime, I cannot find any passage that would lend support to these two assertions.

The fact is that in recent years both the Nembutsu priests and the others who are regarded as distinguished Buddhist teachers noted for their wisdom, when the moment of death approached, have been unable to achieve what they had hoped for, and the reason is that they are guilty of great slander of the Law. People believe that by reciting the Nembutsu they can be reborn in the Pure Land and therefore gain an understanding of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, while they are in this land of impurity, they deceive persons who devote themselves to the practice of the Lotus Sutra, causing them to discard such practice and instead to devote themselves to the Nembutsu. The fundamental slander of the Law committed by such persons is based on this argument regarding rebirth in the Pure Land.

The true cause that allows one to leave this land of impurity and gain rebirth in the Pure Land is none other than the Lotus Sutra. The Nembutsu believers base themselves on sutras preached at a time when the Buddha "had not yet revealed the truth," and such sutras cannot constitute the direct cause for rebirth in the Pure Land. To suppose that one can come to understand the Lotus Sutra, which is the true cause for rebirth in the Pure Land, by studying and practicing it after one reaches the World of Perfect Bliss, and to suppose that recitation of the Nembutsu, which is not the direct cause for rebirth in the World of Perfect Bliss, is in fact the true cause for rebirth in the Pure Land, is to be guilty of gross error.

These teachings of the Pure Land are like sowing sand in the spring fields and expecting to harvest rice in the autumn, like turning away from the moon in the sky and instead fixing upon the reflection of the moon in water. These arguments are no more than a grand scheme designed to win over people's hearts and lure them away from the Lotus Sutra.

Turning now to the second point, the assertion that the Nembutsu does not discriminate against persons who are defiled by impurity. The Reverend Shan-tao and the Honorable Hōnen, who are the teachers of all the Nembutsu practitioners, although they made a number of unreasonable pro-
nouncements on other matters, laid down strict prohibitions with regard to this one matter. In his *Teaching on Meditation Sutra*, Shan-tao warns that one must never touch intoxicants, meat, or the five strong-flavored foods with one’s hands or put them in one’s mouth. If one touches them with one’s hands or places them in one’s mouth and then recites the Nembutsu, foul sores will break out on one’s hands and mouth. The Honorable Hōnen in his written invocation\(^{11}\) states, “No one who partakes of sake, meat, or the five strong-flavored foods and then recites the Nembutsu is a disciple of mine!”

For the Nembutsu practitioners of the present time to assert that it is all right to recite the Nembutsu when one has committed acts of bodily impurity is a preposterous lie.

**Question:** You quote the commentaries by the Reverend Shan-tao and the Honorable Hōnen. Does this mean that you approve of their writings?

**Answer:** Not at all. Because these men are the teachers of the Nembutsu practitioners, I have quoted their prohibitions to show how the assertions of the Nembutsu practitioners go against the prohibitions laid down by the patriarchs and teachers of their own school. For example, in a civil lawsuit, one may point out discrepancies between the verbal statements and written documents of persons involved in order to make one’s case.

**Question:** What errors committed by the Reverend Shan-tao and the Honorable Hōnen cause you to reject their writings?

**Answer:** In his dying instructions, the Buddha said that after his passing, there would be four ranks of scholars, or sages to be relied upon. But if their teachings should deviate from those of the Lotus Sutra, they were not to be heeded. The Nirvana Sutra again and again warns against such deviation. In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha states that, after his passing, in the Latter Day of the Law, when the other sutras have ceased to be of benefit, the Lotus Sutra is to be propagated. He makes this statement not just once or twice, but in a great number of places.\(^{12}\) Therefore, in the writings of T’ien-t’ai, Miao-lo, Dengyō, Annen, and others, this point is made perfectly clear.

But Shan-tao and Hōnen base themselves on works such as the Meditation Sutra, preached in the forty and more years when the Buddha had “not yet revealed the truth,” which in comparison to the Lotus Sutra are mere expedient teachings. And when the Meditation Sutra speaks of “reading and reciting the great vehicle [sutras],” they erroneously insist that the Lotus Sutra is included in this category, ignoring the fact that, when the Buddha preached the above phrase, he had yet to expound the Lotus Sutra. They then assert that such sutras, in comparison to the recitation of the Buddha Amida’s name set forth in the Meditation Sutra, are [mere “sundry practices” that should be set aside]. Therefore they declare in their writings that one should “abandon” the Lotus Sutra, “close” the door to its teachings, and that “not even one person in a thousand” can be saved through it. Surely no one who has any eye for the truth would accept the assertions of such perverse men, would he?

**Objection:** The Reverend Shan-tao was a teacher who had gained enlightenment through meditation, a reincarnation of Amida Buddha who could produce magically conjured Buddhas from his mouth. The Honorable Hōnen was a reincarnation of Bodhisattva Great Power\(^{13}\) who, having been born in Japan, propagated the Nembutsu here and manifested a glow of light from his head. How can you speak of such persons as perverse men? Moreover, the Reverend Shan-tao and
the Honorable Hōnen had surely read the Lotus Sutra and all the other sutras as thoroughly as you have. So they must have had reasons for stating the opinions that they did.

Answer: Your objections are typical of the people of our time who suppose that these men had valid reasons for their opinions. This is due solely to the fact that, for many years now, the people have cast aside the Lotus Sutra and the writings of T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo and the others that explain the true sutra and the true doctrine and have instead been deceived by slanderers of the Law such as Shan-tao and Hōnen.

To begin with, if we are to put faith in persons who can exercise supernatural powers, then are we to put faith in non-Buddhists or the heavenly devil? Among the non-Buddhists there are said to have been those who could drink the ocean dry, or could pour the water of the Ganges River into their ear and keep it there for twelve years. And the devil king of the sixth heaven could imitate all the thirty-two features of a Buddha and manifest himself in the form of a Buddha in such a convincing manner that even the Venerable Ananda could not tell whether it was the devil or the Buddha. Even if the supernatural powers of Shan-tao and Hōnen may be worthy of respect, they are no match for the heavenly devil or non-Buddhists. Furthermore, the Buddha in his dying instructions warned that one was not to regard such supernatural powers as of any fundamental importance.

Turning to the next point, you imply that Shan-tao and Hōnen probably read the Lotus Sutra and all the other sutras in a more thorough manner than I have. For one who is a slanderer of the Law, this may seem like a reasonable assumption.

In the years since the Buddha passed away, those living in the earlier part of the period may appear to excel in worth, while those who come after may seem inferior. But there are also cases where, although the persons of the earlier period are generally held to be men of worth, they are in fact undeserving of the name.

In the field of non-Buddhist literature, there are many examples of scholars who were held in high esteem because of their knowledge of the writings pertaining to the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors of ancient China, and the writings of Lao Tzu, Confucius, and the Five Confucian Classics, but whose interpretations have been overthrown by later scholars. The same is true in the case of the Buddhist scriptures.

During the first five hundred years following the introduction of Buddhism to China, the country was replete with brilliant masters of the doctrine, but none could surpass Fa-yün of Kuang-che-ssu temple and Hui-kuan of Tao-ch'ang-ssu temple. The fame of these two men resounded throughout the world, and their wisdom enriched the country. But the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-che, though a man of a later period, pointed out the places where the doctrines of these earlier masters were faulty, and though his opinions were at first not heeded, eventually they gained acceptance, and people for the first time realized that, even in the doctrines pronounced by the teachers of the earlier five-hundred-year period, there were points that were in error.

In the case of Japan too, during the first two hundred or more years following the introduction of Buddhism, various different interpretations were put forth, and it was impossible to determine just which was correct. But then the Great Teacher Dengyō appeared and pointed out what was erroneous in the various interpretations advanced in the preceding two-hundred-year period.
At that time the people voiced the same objections as are offered by people today. "Did the men of earlier times not read the Lotus Sutra and all the other sutras? Surely they had reasons for stating the opinions they did!" they said. But those earlier interpretations proved invalid, for in principle they ran counter to the sutra texts and in the end were refuted and set aside.

The situation is much the same today. During these last fifty or more years, the assertions of Shan-tao that "not even one person in a thousand" can be saved by the Lotus Sutra, or the four injunctions by Hōnen to "discard, close, ignore, and abandon" the Lotus Sutra, appear in the commentaries of men who are believed to be reincarnations of Amida and Great Power, and for that reason people suppose that they must be reliable and proceed to put all their faith in them.

I have accordingly quoted the passages from the Lotus Sutra that read, "In the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law if there is someone who can uphold this sutra . . . ,"17 "in the latter age hereafter, when the Law is about to perish . . . ,"18 and "they [the Buddhas] make certain that the Law will long endure,"19 in order to demonstrate the error [of believing that the Lotus Sutra has lost its effectiveness]. When I do so, these people begin to doubt the one-sided doctrines of their teachers Shan-tao and Hōnen and hence cast them aside.

In effect, the situation is just as the Lotus Sutra predicted it would be in this, the "last five-hundred-year period"20 after the Buddha's passing. The Nembutsu believers have been trying to use the Nembutsu practice to overthrow the Lotus Sutra. But on the contrary, they only demonstrate thereby that the time has come for the wide propagation of the Lotus Sutra.

So that people may better understand me, however, I would like to point out the following facts. There are evil persons in the world today who keep themselves alive by killing fish, birds, deer, and other such beings. Though this is a sin, it is not one that is directly injurious to the Buddhist teachings. Nevertheless, if they do not repent of it, they will in their next existence fall into the three evil paths of existence. Again, there are persons who kill fish, birds, deer, and so forth, and sell these to others, but in the course of doing so, they may carry out acts of goodness.

These persons are doing what the world regards as evil, but in the long run may also be doing good. But when someone uses the Buddhist teachings to do harm to the Buddhist teachings, though the person who does so may not think that he is doing wrong but may merely suppose he is practicing goodness, and though those around him may likewise suppose that he is practicing goodness, contrary to his expectation, in his next life he may end up falling into the evil paths. And these days, there are Nembutsu practitioners who, because I remonstrated with them in this matter, have come to realize that in fact they are slanderers of the Law.

But the real slanderers of the Law are to be found among the priests of the Sacred Way teachings.21 They declare that the Nembutsu practitioners who denigrate the Lotus Sutra are acting unreasonably, but then they say that Nichiren is equally peculiar for denigrating the Nembutsu practitioners. The Nembutsu and the Lotus Sutra, they declare, are in fact a single entity, and for this reason, to read the Lotus Sutra is none other than to recite the Nembutsu, and to recite the Nembutsu is none other than to read the Lotus Sutra.

From what I hear, there are many among the priests of the Sacred Way teachings who voice such opinions.
And as a result, the lay supporters of these men, accepting their view of the matter, ridicule both Nichiren and the Nembutsu practitioners.

First, only a fool would suppose that I am not aware of the following facts.

Buddhism was first introduced to China during the Yung-p'ing era [58–75] of the Latter Han dynasty, and its introduction continued until the eighteenth year of the K'ai-yüan era [730] in the reign of Emperor Hsüan-tsung of the T'ang dynasty. The works were in the three categories of sustras, rules of monastic discipline, and treatises, amounting to 5,048 volumes, translated by 176 translators.

Among all these sutras, there is not a single volume or chapter of a sutra that says that Namu Amida Butsu is the same as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Moreover, the name of Amida Buddha is mentioned here and there in the sutras preached during the first forty-two years of the Buddha's preaching life, beginning with the Flower Garland Sutra and continuing up through the Wisdom sutras, with the exception of the Ågama sutras. The persons who listened to the Buddha's lifetime preaching were already familiar with this time with the name of Amida.

But the title of the Lotus Sutra, Myoho-renge-kyo, was not mentioned until Shakyamuni Buddha's seventy-second year, forty-two years after he first began to preach. At that time on Eagle Peak the Buddha entered into the meditation of the origin of immeasurable meanings. Manjushrî, replying to a question from Maitreya, said that in the distant past a Buddha named Sun Moon Bright, addressing the assembly, displayed these same auspicious portents, and that therefore the Buddha must be preparing to preach the Lotus Sutra. When Manjushrî cited this example from the past, the living beings in this southern continent of Jambudvîpa for the first time heard the name of the Lotus Sutra [Myoho-renge-kyo].

From the third volume of the Lotus Sutra, we learn that Amida Buddha was one of sixteen Buddhas who attained Buddhahood in the time of Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Buddha, being one of sixteen princes who, on learning and carrying out the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, gained correct enlightenment.

When this Amida Buddha was still an ordinary mortal, it was through practicing the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo that he was able to attain Buddhahood. It is nowhere stated that he gained correct enlightenment by reciting Namu Amida Butsu.

Myoho-renge-kyo is what opens up [and merges other sutras], and Namu Amida Butsu is what is opened up [and merged in the Lotus Sutra]. Only someone who cannot distinguish between that which opens up and that which is opened up could assert with a knowing air that Namu Amida Butsu and Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are the same thing.

When I was young, I was taught certain poorly founded interpretations of the Tendai and True Word schools, and for several decades subscribed to this same doctrine [that the Nembutsu and the Lotus Sutra are the same thing]. But in fact this is an utterly fallacious view.

To be sure, there are in the commentaries of the Buddhist teachers certain passages that suggest that the two are indeed the same. But these passages refer to interpretations based on true observation of the mind or doctrines that proceed from the ultimate enlightenment of the Buddha. People nowadays, however, fail to understand this distinction and suppose that such passages mean that the two [the Nembutsu and the Lotus Sutra] are in all respects the same thing. They think that I am a "perversive person" for ques-
tioning such beliefs, but they would do well to look more carefully into the matter.

If the Buddha had really meant that the Nembutsu and the Lotus Sutra are the same, then when he expounded the Nembutsu in the Meditation Sutra and the other Pure Land sutras, he should have stated that these represented the true purpose of the Buddha's appearance in the world. The Buddha did not regard these sutras as representing his true purpose or intent. Instead the Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra in order to make clear the true reason for his appearance in the world, and therefore it is perfectly obvious that the Lotus Sutra and the Nembutsu cannot be the same thing.

Moreover, when I have met with persons of the True Word and Tendai schools and explained to them my view of this matter, many of them agree with me that this is a wholly fallacious assertion. If passages of proof cannot be found in the texts of the sutras to support assertions of this kind, then one should never accept them. For to do so is the root from which springs slander of the Law.

Respectfully,
Nichiren

Background

Neither the date of this letter nor its recipient is known. But because it primarily addresses the errors of the Pure Land, or Nembutsu, school, it was probably written during the earlier years of his teaching life when Nichiren Daishonin focused on refuting the Nembutsu.

In this letter, the Daishonin refutes two assertions of the leaders of the Pure Land school concerning the Lotus Sutra. One is that reciting the name of Amida Buddha (the invocation of "Namu Amida Butsu") constitutes an easy practice that is suitable to the people of the Latter Day of the Law, and that enables them to gain rebirth in Amida Buddha's pure land. In contrast, recitation of the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, or Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they claim, constitutes a difficult practice that is beyond the people's capacities and thus cannot gain them rebirth in the Pure Land.

The other assertion is that the daimoku, or title, of the Lotus Sutra and the invocation of Amida Buddha's name are equal in terms of value and benefit. Since calling on the name of Amida is an easier practice, they argue, it is ideally suited for those in the Latter Day of the Law.

The Daishonin begins by comparing the recitation of the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra with recitation of the name of Amida Buddha. The latter is to the former as shards and rubble are to a wish-granting jewel, and the difference in benefit is likewise vast.

Respected teachers of Buddhism failed to grasp this distinction, he says, holding the two to be equivalent, and chose the Nembutsu rather than the daimoku. As a result, their present-day followers slander the Lotus Sutra.

To the first question, he says that reciting Amida Buddha's name actually does not lead people to gain rebirth in his paradise. Respected leaders of the Nembutsu school have met their end "unable to achieve what they had hoped for." This, he says, is due to their slander of the Lotus Sutra. On the other hand, he says, "The true cause
that allows one to leave this land of impurity and gain rebirth in the Pure Land is none other than the Lotus Sutra.”

Concerning the second point of the question, the Daishonin highlights discrepancies between what the patriarchs of the Pure Land school set down in writing and what contemporary adherents of the school claim. The present adherents, he states, assert that anyone, no matter how impure his behavior, can be saved through the Nembutsu, while the patriarchs strictly prohibited behavior such as drinking alcohol as being incompatible with rebirth in the Pure Land.

Next he refutes the errors of the Pure Land patriarchs Shan-tao of China and Hōnen of Japan, stating that they erred in basing their teachings on sutras expounded during the first forty-two years of the Buddha’s preaching life, a time when, as the Buddha himself stated, he had “not yet revealed the truth.” Further, they interpret the phrase “reading and reciting the great vehicle [sutras]” from one of those sutras as referring to the Lotus Sutra, using it to justify their instructions to reject the Lotus Sutra as a “sundry practice.” The Daishonin counters by saying that the Lotus Sutra had not yet been preached at the time those sutras were expounded, and thus their claims are unfounded.

To the argument that Shan-tao and Hōnen were reincarnations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and could perform supernatural acts, he replies that non-Buddhists and devils are said to have performed far greater feats. If such powers are the criteria, why do not the Pure Land believers follow such persons and devils instead? Shakyamuni Buddha, he affirms, denied occult or supernatural acts as acceptable criteria.

Next, the Daishonin addresses the contention that the patriarchs of the Nembutsu school were no less versed in the Lotus Sutra and the other sutras than the Daishonin, and thus had good reasons for their views. Even in secular scholarship, he argues, there are cases where those who came later have overturned the views of past masters. In Buddhism, T’ien-t’ai in China and Dengyō in Japan refuted the contentions of earlier teachers, for which they were criticized, but were proven right in the long run.

He then quotes from the Lotus Sutra passages that overturn the Pure Land assertion that the Lotus Sutra is inappropriate for the Latter Day of the Law. Though the Pure Land followers believe they are doing good, he says, the cause they make by slandering the Lotus Sutra destines them for the evil paths.

Finally, he turns his attention to the claims of the priests of the esoteric True Word school and the esoteric tradition in the Tendai school, who criticize the Daishonin for pointing out errors in the Pure Land teachings. They assert that the Lotus Sutra and the Pure Land teachings are one entity, but the Daishonin says there is no statement in any sutra to suggest that the two are the same. He concludes that one should not give credence to the assertions of Buddhist teachers unless they are clearly supported by the sutras themselves. To do so results in slandering the Buddhist Law.

Notes

1. Namu Amida Butsu and Namu Yakushi Nyorai are respectively “Homage to Amida Buddha” and “Homage to Medicine Master Thus Come One.” See Amida and Medicine Master in Glossary.

2. “Two deities” refers to Shiva and Vishnu, and “three ascetics” to Kapila, Ulūka, and Rishabha. Shiva and Vishnu are
the main deities of Hinduism. Shiva was incorporated into Buddhism as Maheshvara, a god who is said to reign over the major world system. For three ascetics, see Glossary.

3. Such a view was prevalent in the Daishonin's time, as clearly stated in On Practicing the Buddha's Teachings: "The Japanese people of this age are one in their opinion of what practice accords with the Buddha's teachings. They believe that, since all vehicles are opened up and incorporated in the one vehicle of Buddhahood, no teaching is superior or inferior, shallow or profound, but all are equal to the Lotus Sutra. Hence the belief that chanting the Nembutsu, embracing the True Word teaching, practicing Zen meditation, or professing and reciting any sutra or the name of any Buddha or bodhisattva equals following the Lotus Sutra" (I, pp. 392–93).

4. "Observation of the mind" means to perceive the truth within one's own life through the practice of meditation.

5. Chapter ten of the Lotus Sutra says, "If there are persons who embrace, read, recite, expound, and copy the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, even only one verse . . . then, Medicine King, you should understand that such persons have already offered alms to a hundred thousand million Buddhas and in the place of the Buddhas have fulfilled their great vow, and because they take pity on living beings they have been born in this human world."

6. A sutra translated by Dharmagupta (d. 619) that consists of questions and answers between Bodhisattva Manjushri and the heavenly son Abiding Goodness, a god said to live in the Hall of the Good Law to the southwest of the dwelling of the lord Shakra on the peak of Mount Sumeru.

7. This statement appears in Shan-tao's Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land. The "sundry practice" mentioned immediately after refers to all Buddhist practices not directed toward Amida Buddha, which Shan-tao defined in his Commentary on the Meditation on the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra. See also sundry practices in Glossary.

8. This statement appears in Tao-ch'o's Collected Essays on the World of Peace and Delight.

9. This statement is based on the assertion of Honen in The Nembutsu Chosen above All that one should discard, close, ignore, and abandon all teachings and practices other than those relating to Amida Buddha and his Pure Land.

10. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra.

11. A reference to the seven-article document compiled by Honen in 1204 in defense of the Pure Land teachings.

12. To cite a few such passages, chapter fourteen states, "In the latter age hereafter, when the Law is about to perish . . ."; chapter twenty-three, "After I have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off"; and chapter twenty-eight, "After the Thus Come One has entered extinction, I will cause it [the Lotus Sutra] to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvīpa and will see that it never comes to an end."

13. According to the Meditation Sutra and others, a bodhisattva who attends Amida Buddha together with Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds.

14. The Nirvana Sutra describes various ascetics of Brahmanism. The ascetic Jinu drank the great ocean dry in a single day. The ascetic Agastya poured the water of the Ganges River into one ear and kept it there for twelve years.

15. This statement is based on a passage in the Nirvana Sutra that describes how Ananda, one of Shakyamuni's ten major disciples, could not see through the disguise of devils who appeared in the form of the Buddha.

16. The Five Confucian Classics are the Book of Changes; the Book of History; the Book of Odes; the Book of Rites; and the Spring and Autumn Annuals.

17. Lotus Sutra, chap. 17.


19. Ibid., chap. 11.

20. Ibid., chap. 23. It reads, "After I have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off."

21. The term "Sacred Way" was coined by Tao-ch'AO (562–645), the second of the five patriarchs of the Pure Land school in China, to describe all Buddhist teachings other than the Pure Land, or Nembutsu, teachings, but the Daishonin uses the term here to allude to the doctrines of the esoteric True Word school and the esoteric tradition within the Tendai school.

22. The meditation into which Shaky-
muni Buddha entered before preaching the sutra, as mentioned in the “Introduction” (1st) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

23. This statement appears in the first chapter of the Lotus Sutra. According to this chapter, the Buddha has already preached the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra and then entered into profound meditation. At that time, four kinds of exquisite flowers rain down from the heavens, and the earth trembles in six different ways. The whole assembly gain what they have never had before, are filled with joy. The entire assembly is astonished at these fabulous portents. Bodhisattva Maitreyā then speaks on behalf of them all, asking Bodhisattva Manjushrī, who has already practiced under incalculable Buddhas, to explain their meaning. Manjushrī says, “I saw how the Buddha Sun Moon Bright earlier manifested an auspicious portent like this. And so I know that now this present Buddha is about to preach the Lotus Sutra.”

24. A reference to the following account from the “Parable of the Phantom City” (7th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In the inconceivably distant past, Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra at the request of his sixteen sons. Each of the sixteen sons preached the sutra in his stead, enabling innumerable people to set their minds upon enlightenment. All sixteen sons later became Buddhas and taught the Law in various lands in the ten directions of the universe. The ninth was reborn in the west as Amida, and the sixteenth in this sahā world as Shakyamuni.