On the Nation's Slander of the Law

If one does not touch the sleeping lion, one will suffer no anger. If one does not plant the pole in the stream, one will raise no waves. And if one does not reproach those who slander the Law, one will undergo no hardship.

"If even a good monk sees someone destroying the teaching and disregards him, failing to reproach him..." If you have no qualms about the word "disregard," then all may be fine for you at present, but you may be certain that later you will fall into the hell of incessant suffering!

That is why the Great Teacher Nan-yüeh in his Four Peaceful Practices states: "If there should be a bodhisattva who protects evil persons and fails to chastise them, thereby prolonging evil, bringing distress to good people, and destroying the correct teaching, then such a person is no true bodhisattva. Before others he puts a lying face upon his behavior, always insisting that 'I am practicing the virtue of forbearance!' But when his life comes to an end, he will fall into hell along with those evil persons."

And the Ten Kinds of Wheels Sutra says: "If there are slanderers of the Law, one should not dwell with them nor draw near them. If one draws near them and dwells with them, one will be bound for the Avīci hell."

If one enters a grove of sandalwood trees, though one may not even touch the trees, one's whole person becomes imbued with their scent. And similarly, if one draws near to those who slander the Law, the good roots that one has gained through religious practice will be totally destroyed and one will fall with the slanderers into hell. That is the reason volume four of The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight" says: "Though one may not be evil to begin with, if one associates with and is friendly with evil persons, one is bound in time to become an evil person oneself, and one's evil reputation will spread throughout the world."

Within the nation there are two types of slanderers of the Law, those in the outer branches of government, and those within the central government. Those in the outer branches are the slanderers of the Law in the sixty-six provinces that make up Japan. Those in the central government are the slanderers within the ninefold bastions of the ruler's city. If one does not take measures to control and outlaw these two types of slanderers in the inner and outer branches of government, then the gods who protect the nation's ancestral shrines and the altars of the soil and grain will cease to do so, and the nation will face inevitable ruin. Why? Because the ancestral shrines are where the gods of the nation are worshiped,
the altars of the soil honor the earth gods, and the altars of grain honor the gods of the five kinds of grain.\textsuperscript{3}

Now these two types of gods, the gods of the nation and those of the soil and grain, are starved for the flavor of the Law and they have abandoned the nation. Hence the nation has day by day fallen into a more ruinous state of decay.

Therefore On “Great Concentration and Insight” says: “The earth is so broad that one cannot pay proper respect to it all. Hence one marks off a certain area to create an altar of the soil. ‘Grain’ is the general term by which the five kinds of grain are known; it refers to the gods of the five kinds of grain. Thus in the place where the Son of Heaven dwells, the ancestral shrines are placed on the left, and the altars of the soil and grain on the right, and offerings are made to them in accordance with the four seasons and the five agents.\textsuperscript{4} Hence to bring ruin to the nation is to destroy the altars of the soil and grain.”

And therefore the great teacher of the Mountain school\textsuperscript{5} says: “In the nation when there are voices slandering the Law, the people will be reduced in number. But when in the family honor is paid diligently to the teachings, the seven disasters will most certainly be banished.”\textsuperscript{6}

These are the respective results that come from slander of the Law in the inner and outer branches of government.

Nichiren

The sixteenth day of the fifth month

To Nambu Rokurō

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**Background**

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to Nambu Rokurō, also known as Hakiri Rokurō Sanenaga. Neither the year nor the place of writing is known. The Daishonin explains first that no hardships will arise if one avoids rebuking slander of the true teachings of Buddhism. But such a lack of difficulties is only temporary, he says, pointing out that one who sees and ignores such slander will eventually experience the sufferings of hell. He also cautions against associating with persons who perpetrate slander, because this will eventually lead to one’s becoming similarly evil.

The Daishonin then details the two types of slanderers of the Law, those in the outer branches of the government, or the people who make up the population of the nation, and those in the central government, or the rulers and the officials around them. Unless slander is prevented in both these areas, he warns, all of the protective gods will abandon the nation, and it will enter a downward spiral of ruin.

In closing, the Daishonin refers to the words of the Great Teacher Dengyō, who stated that in a nation where slander of the correct teaching occurs, the population will decline, but in a family where the correct teaching is honored, disaster may be avoided.

**Notes**

1. Nirvana Sutra. This passage reads as follows: “If even a good monk sees someone destroying the teaching and disregards him, failing to reproach him, to oust him, or to punish him for his offense, then you should realize that that monk is betraying
the Buddha’s teaching. But if he ousts the destroyer of the Law, reproaches him, or punishes him, then he is my disciple and a true voice-hearer.”

2. “The ninefold bastions of the ruler’s city” describes the solidly fortified city of a ruler.

3. Wheat, rice, beans, and two types of millet. Also a generic term for all grains, which is the meaning here.

4. The five primary elements in ancient Chinese cosmology: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water.

5. Refers to Dengyō, the founder of the Tendai school, based at Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei in Japan. This school was also known as “the Mountain school.”

6. An Essay on the Protection of the Nation. The wording of the portion quoted here differs slightly from that of the extant edition of this work.