On Sun of Wisdom and the Sun Goddess

Thus they may gouge out the eyes of all those who live in Jam-budvīpā?

As for the names of Shakyamuni Buddha, his childhood name was Sun Seed. Later, when he grew up, he went by a different name, Sun of Wisdom. This country of ours is called Japan, or Sun Source, and its lord is the Sun Goddess.

Background

This is a fragment of a letter by Nichiren Daishonin. The date and the recipient are unknown. By the words “gouge out the eyes,” the Daishonin is referring to the actions of those who mislead the people with false teachings. In The Unity of Husband and Wife, for example, he says, “As for false teachings that gouge out the eyes and delude the minds of the entire Japanese populace, in the final analysis, there is none more mistaken than that upheld by the teachers of the True Word school” (I, p. 463).

He then mentions the significance of the word “sun” in the names given to Shakyamuni Buddha and in the name of Japan. In other writings, he uses “sun” as a component of his own name, Nichiren, which means Sun Lotus, and compares the teaching he spreads to a sun that will illuminate humankind in the Latter Day of the Law.

Notes

1. The name described in the Sutra of the Collected Stories of the Buddha’s Deeds in Past Lives. When Shakyamuni was born, his father had a Brahman make a prophecy concerning the child’s future. At that time the Brahman named the baby Sun Seed.

2. Chapter two of the Lotus Sutra says, “At that time Śāriputra, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying: ‘Sun of Wisdom, great sage and venerable one, at long last you preach this Law.’”