

## Eternity, Happiness, True Self, and Purity



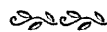
WHEN he [Ashvaghosha] appeared in the world, he studied the various Mahayana sutras and taught that there are pure lands in all ten directions and that all phenomena are characterized by eternity, happiness, true self, and purity.

At that time the congregations of monks in the countless Hinayana temples in the five regions of India, its sixteen great states, its five hundred middle-sized states, its ten thousand small states, and its other numberless states that were as tiny as millet seeds, all at the same instant rose up like hornets, swarmed together like ants, and cried out with a voice like thunder.

All gathering around at one time, they put their heads together and lamented: “When the Buddha was in

the world, the non-Buddhist teachers of the five regions of India contended with our teacher, Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings. The Buddha was a single individual, while the leaders of the non-Buddhist teachings were many in number. But the non-Buddhist teachers were like so many ants, while the Buddha was like a dragon or like a lion. Therefore he was able to confront them and prevail.

“Now, however, the situation is quite different. Ashvaghosha, it is true, is only a single individual, while we are many. But because this is a latter age, the forces of evil are strong and those of good are weak. When the Buddha was in the world, the non-Buddhist teachings and the teachings of the Buddha were like fire and water. . . .”



### Background

Both the opening and ending portions of this letter are missing, and its date and addressee are unknown. The letter is entitled *Eternity, Happiness, True Self, and Purity* because it refers to these four virtues of the Buddha’s life. The four virtues represent a Mahayana concept that contrasts with the Hinayana concept of impermanence, suffering, non-self, and impurity.

Nichiren Daishonin describes the reactions of Hinayana Buddhist monks in India to efforts by Ashvaghosha to disseminate the Mahayana teachings. Ashvaghosha had referred to the presence of Buddha lands in the ten directions, implying the possibility of anyone attaining Buddhahood anywhere. But the Hinayana teachings spoke of only one Buddha, Shakyamuni, in the

sahā world, denying Buddhahood to anyone else.

The non-Buddhist teachers of Shakyamuni's time argued that this world is characterized by the virtues of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity, but the Buddha pointed out their error and called on them to look at the realities of impermanence, suffering, non-self, and impurity. Thus the Hinayana followers denounced Ashvaghosha when he expounded the four virtues of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity. They failed to recognize the dif-

ference between the two categories of four virtues. In Buddhism the four virtues of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity are attributed to the enlightened state of the Buddha, while the non-Buddhist teachers pursued them in the unenlightened realm. Only when one attains enlightenment can one perceive that all phenomena are characterized by the four virtues.

The fragment ends with Hinayana Buddhists complaining of the strength of Ashvaghosha, who was spreading the Mahayana teachings.