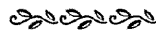
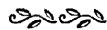


The Thus Come One Shakyamuni



THE Thus Come One Shakyamuni has stated in the Lotus Sutra: “In the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law if there is someone who can uphold this sutra, . . .”¹ And yet Shan-tao states that “not even one person in a thousand”² [can be saved in that way]. Which statement are we to believe?

Or would one argue that Shan-tao and the Honorable Hōnen could not possibly have failed to see the passages in the sutras and treatises that Nichiren has seen? But if one takes this line in arguing, then does one assume that those who come after must never correct the errors of men of former ages?



Background

This is a fragment of a letter, and its date and recipient are unknown.

Nichiren Daishonin first asks whether one should believe the words of the Buddha in the Lotus Sutra, or the words of Shan-tao, a Buddhist teacher of a much later time. In the ellipsis of the quotation from the “Distinctions in Benefits” (17th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha describes the immeasurable benefits of “someone who can uphold this sutra.” Shan-tao, however, asserted that not one person in a thousand can gain salvation through the Lotus Sutra.

Nembutsu priests had criticized the Daishonin, claiming that patriarchs of their school such as Shan-tao in China and Hōnen in Japan had certainly read the same scriptures the Daishonin had, but concluded that the Lotus Sutra should be rejected. What right had he, a priest of later times, to question the wisdom of such venerable teachers of the past? The Daishonin counters that, if one were to follow such reasoning, no one could question the doctrines of past teachers, even if they contradicted the Buddha’s teachings.

Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 17.
2. *Praising Rebirth in the Pure Land*.